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Relational ethics of care in research with young people: reflections from a study with young refugees and their families

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ABSTRACT

This article presents reflections on research ethics beyond the boundaries of procedural requirements. It focuses on a doctoral study investigating how young refugees encountered England's education system and discusses the relational ethics approach adopted throughout the research. A critical ethnography was conducted using arts-based participatory elements, semi-structured interviews and school-based observations at a secondary school in the south of England. The study's goals were to amplify participants' experiences by listening to the young people and their families, building trust with them, setting realistic expectations related to the research and engaging them in discussions about research dissemination plans. The adopted methodological choices showed that relational ethics is essential to creating an equitable and ethical research process by centring participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's. This article aims to demonstrate that conducting ethical research with refugees requires researchers to go beyond procedural ethics by enacting anti-exploitative research practices.

1. Introduction

Researchers and organisations based in the global north wield the power to dominate discourse about people in migration contexts in global majority countries[*], often using apolitical deficit-based language homogenising and portraying them as living dysfunctional lives in permanent crises. There has been less research and policy focus on the precarity, as well as institutional racism(s) and exclusions, experienced by people in migration contexts living in global north countries, where institutional practices towards (im)migrant populations are less often held up to scrutiny. This double standard reflects asymmetrical power dynamics and colonial hierarchies that still dictate relations between

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[*]While global majority provides a numerical representation of global diversity, global south is favoured in this paper to recognise historical injustices and the struggles shared by people in this region.

global north and global south countries. Similarly, research practices have contributed to the reproduction and sustaining of an exploitative system of knowledge production based on extracting resources, artefacts and knowledge from the so-called global south. Tuhiwai Smith (2005) asserted that research is 'not just a highly moral and civilized search for knowledge;' it reproduces 'particular social relations of power' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 88). Decolonial critique has pointed out that 'for decades, white and settler privilege have shaped how research methodologies were conceptualized and used in the field' (Lenette, 2022, p. 24), with Western-centric frameworks systematically disregarding and dismissing Eastern, African, Latin American, Pacific/Pasifika, and Indigenous research paradigms and ways of knowing (Lenette, 2022, p. 24). Research has often amplified researchers expertise instead of participants' perspectives.

This article presents my multi-method qualitative study that investigated participants' *lived experiences* while centring their knowledge(s) and experiences of education and migration. As a qualitative researcher and ethnographer, I argue that ethical considerations are not merely administrative and bureaucratic work. Ethics is also praxis throughout any study, including dissemination, publications and recommendations, which are also 'an issue of ethics' (Abu Moghli, 2023, p. 683). There are abundant ethical dilemmas in doing research in contexts of migration, including ensuring that participation will not cause harm to participants or their families' migration statuses (Morrice, 2011, p. 14). Even when people in contexts of migration, including refugees, are over-researched, the research is often shaped by procedural ethics prioritising 'consent, harm and anonymity' (Abu Moghli, 2023, p. 681). Institutional practices and ethics committees still appear to prioritise procedural ethics rather than encouraging researchers to adopt relational ethics beyond institutional requirements.

As I designed this study, I noticed that the literature focusing on ethical considerations for doing research with (often on) people in contexts of migration had proliferated. However, I found that relational ethics remains less prioritised than procedural ethics, and perhaps less understood (Clark-Kazak, 2017). To mitigate hierarchies in knowledge production, researchers must 'reverse their gaze before embarking on new research projects' (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2022). In this study, gaze reversal included adopting anticolonial (Cabral, 2008; Fanon, 2004), critical and asset-based perspectives based on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 1998; Hooks, 1994) and funds of knowledge (Moll, 2019) (see section 2). The adopted theoretical framework guided me towards relational ethics and required me to acknowledge that ethnography 'grew out of a master discourse of colonisation' (Clair, 2003, p. 3). Ethnographers, such as anthropologists and historians, have legitimised colonisation and privileged Anglo and Eurocentric perspectives, subjugating all cultures from that centre. Anthropologist Henry Lewis Morgan[1] 'believed that cultures evidenced different stages of *development* moving from savage to barbaric to civilized' (Clair, 2003, p. 6 – emphasis added). His beliefs not only shaped the field, but also served to legitimise colonisation as beneficial in transforming 'savages' into 'civilised' people. Thereafter, different approaches to ethnography[2] have emerged due to several scholars' attempts to reflect and recognise past biases and injustices, in addition to increased recognition by researchers of their own biases and assumptions. From critical and Marxist traditions, critical ethnography[3] emerged, seeking to expose oppressive practices. In this study, England's immigration and asylum systems are understood as extensions of its colonial and imperial practices; thus, I prioritised a critical ethnographic

methodology to address the related social injustices and exclusions. In this article, I argue that relational ethics supported mutual trust and respect and yielded in-depth and complex qualitative data about participants' encounters with England's institutions. I aim to demonstrate how I employed relational ethics as an anti-extractive research practice to understand young refugees' education and displacement experiences within a *hostile environment*[4] sponsored by England's institutions.

The following sections present the adopted theoretical framework and methodological decisions. Participants are introduced as well as the adopted approach to relational ethics that guided this study, including their involvement in data analysis and research dissemination decisions.

2. Theoretical perspectives and underpinnings of the research design

Knowledge production in migration and refugee studies research have been dominated by scholars based in global north countries with privileged passports and secure migration statuses. The term *research* is 'inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 1). According to Chilisa (2009), researchers from the global north have the responsibility to deconstruct and reframe colonial epistemologies when relating to researchers and participants 'from former colonized societies' (p. 2). I argue that researchers in the global south have a similar responsibility to transform exploitative research practices and challenge the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives, which continue to shape academic knowledge production in the geographical south (*colonialismo interno*).[5] Decolonising scientific knowledge and research practices serves to address epistemological injustices. In addition to epistemological critique, this study was concerned with political criticism by drawing from anticolonial theory and praxis. As a *Latina* scholar, I identify with Aníbal Quijano's and Enrique Dussel's concerns about rectifying social injustices. My reservations about decoloniality as an academic epistemic intervention is that it offers an epistemological perspective that embraces relativism.

The decolonial concept incorporated by Latin American intellectuals (Dussel, 1985; Grosfoguel, 2013; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2007) is the systematisation of centuries-old grassroots struggles for liberation by Indigenous and Black movements and all oppressed peoples in the colonies as well as, later, in the new nations that emerged after colonial powers were expelled or purged. The following critique by the Bolivian scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui illustrates some of my own reservations towards the decolonial trend,

> A jargon, a conceptual apparatus, and forms of reference and counterreference that have isolated academic treatises from any obligation to or dialogue with insurgent social forces. Walter Mignolo and company have built a small empire within an empire, strategically appropriating the contributions of the subaltern studies school of India and the various Latin American variants of critical reflection on colonization and decolonization . . .. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 98)

The issue was not that other knowledges had not been or were not being produced in *Abya Yala*,[6] *but that they were either ignored or appropriated by scholars.* Moreover, Mignolo wrote that there is 'no universal common ground of experiences' (2011, p. 191). Is the subaltern then paralysed to make analyses beyond their own subjectivities?

Relativism appears to sabotage decolonial epistemology's own aspirations for liberation. While I embrace epistemological criticism, the adopted theoretical framework is most aligned with anticolonialism, as it furthers political criticism. Anticolonialism, also associated with antiracism, is a struggle against colonial and imperial oppression. Anticolonial thinking helped me reflect on Great Britain's immigration system, 'whether in the form of the hostile environment, visa requirements or other external border controls' as 'ongoing expressions of empire [. . .] part of an attempt to control access to the spoils of empire which are located in Britain' (El-Enany, 2020, p. 9). An anticolonial approach holds me politically accountable to my reality, as a migrant on a precarious visa and work conditions, and to my interlocutors, refugees and asylum seekers, contributing to the struggle for liberation of all people who endure oppression, regardless of their geographical location.

In consideration of the role of research in legitimising and reproducing injustices, I prioritised adopting anti-oppressive research practices by employing relational care ethics, focusing on *actively caring* in this study with young refugees and their families. Care ethics and its relational ontology 'is situated within relational ethics and is often explicitly feminist in its orientation' (Clark-Kazak, 2023, pp. 1152–1153). Nonetheless, I drew on an ethics of care based on Marxist, anticolonial and antiracist perspectives for a more radical approach to *care*, moving away from saviourist and (neo)liberal feminism. According to Clark-Kazak (2023):

> A care-ful researcher acknowledges that we depend on the people and communities with whom we work, just as research participants rely on researchers' long-term commitment to sustained relationships and allyship. Indeed, Indigenous scholars have long called for reciprocity as a key ontological principle in respectful research that values and respects the contributions of different knowledge creators. . . . Situated within critical epistemologies that acknowledge power relations in the (re)production of knowledge, radical care ethics requires researchers to seek explicitly and intentionally to dismantle harmful power structures as part of research design. (pp. 1152–1153)

Clark-Kazak (2023) highlights the relational and ethical dimensions of conducting research, such as the mutual reliance between researchers and participants, underscoring the importance of ethical considerations in research. As Indigenous scholars argue, reciprocity is an essential principle to move away from extractive research practices by acknowledging that participants' knowledge(s) is equally as important, if not more, than that of the researchers. Although researchers and participants are embedded in a hierarchical dynamic, asymmetrical power relations are intensified when researchers act as if they are the *superior knower*, like *the coloniser* (Thiong O, 1986 - emphasis added). Instead, I argue that researchers ought to view participants through an asset-based lens, acknowledging that they are the experts of their lived experiences. Considering this, an anti-oppressive approach to research was adopted in this research due to my understanding that (1) I had to consider how colonial epistemologies may influence my research, (2) I had the responsibility to mitigate power differentials, and (3) shift the ownership of knowledge from me, the researcher, to the young people and their families who had lived experience of the phenomena being studied (Potts & Brown, 2008). Young refugees 'have been identified as the most socially and economically subjugated and are often valued less than adults' (Bilotta, 2020, p. 398). This reality combined with my critical consciousness alerted me that I ought to centre young refugees and their families' experiences and perspectives, which required me to understand their context and to engage with England's colonial past and present through critical epistemologies. Adopting critical

frameworks guided me to examine how knowledge is created, who decides what knowledge is valid, who benefits from its creation, and the underlying power dynamics involved.

Critical ethnography aligned with my study's aims to work with refugee learners through participatory activities. As a critical ethnographer, I started from the premise of ethical responsibility to address the inequalities and injustices within the context of *refuge* in England. Madison (2020) argues that 'ethical responsibility' means 'a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings' (Madison, 2020, p. 4). As their conditions are not as 'they could be', I felt an 'ethical obligation' to contribute to improving or highlighting their experiences and the barriers they encountered. Critical ethnography is 'a methodology that strives to unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces' (Crotty, 1998, p. 12). In other words, critical ethnography is the doing of critical theory; it is critical theory in action by disrupting the status quo and neutrality while bringing to light underlying power, coercion and control operations. Nevertheless, Noblit et al. (2004) argue that 'critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their acts of studying phenomena and representing people are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study' (p. 3). Positionality is vital in acknowledging 'our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our interlocutors' (Madison, 2020, p. 6). As reflected on my positionality, I recognised that despite being a migrant from the global south navigating the global north's immigration systems, similarly to the families participating in this study, there were inherited power imbalances in the researcher–participant dynamic: I have a platform to write about participants and tell their stories. Therefore, I adopted participatory elements where participants' views and agency were welcomed and encouraged in an attempt to counter asymmetrical power imbalances.

This eight-month study consisted of audio-recorded semi-structured interviews conducted online and in person with three refugee families. Interviews were audio-recorded and complemented with arts-based activities and participatory elements: drawing, journaling and photovoice. Once schools physically reopened during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was invited to observe a secondary school I refer to as Mountain View, as well as observe a student in Year 9 (Muhammad) and another student in Year 10 (Temesghen). The participatory activities were drawn from Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. PAR's 'theoretical and ideological origins emerged ... through participatory and action-oriented research and scholarship in majority-world countries, as a way to disrupt theoretical and cultural hegemony' (Lenette, 2022, p. 23). PAR is 'largely situated within the principles of critical pedagogy and adult education, based on Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's use of participatory methods with' Brazilians living on the periphery of Brazilian society 'to explore factors shaping their oppression' (Freire, 1970, 1985; Lenette, 2022, pp. 22–23). Current applications of PAR are built on Freire's radical vision of social change and his concept of *conscientização* (conscientization) "(i.e., the development of critical awareness of the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural structures that create one's oppression)" and his radical vision of social change underpin current applications of PAR" (ibid).
Freire's critical pedagogy supports counterhegemonic practices to knowledge creation with people who live under systemic oppression. Freire's and bell hook's work shaped my methodological decisions to adopt methods with participatory elements given their focus

on relational dynamics, trauma-informed practices, diverse ways of knowing and a critical stance towards Western norms (Datta et al., 2015). Similarly, funds of knowledge served to acknowledge the resources and knowledge(s) held by participants as essential to understanding their trajectories and aspirations. Given its roots in counter-hegemonic scholarship and practice, participatory research can potentially disrupt entrenched 'colonial power dynamics and dominant structures that persist within research methodologies and knowledge systems' (Lenette, 2022, p. 27). I kept in mind that research and its epistemological foundations 'can also be described as "a corporate institution" that has made statements about Indigenous peoples, "authorising views" of us, "describing [us], teaching about [us], settling [us] and ruling over [us]"' (Tuhiwai Smith – elaborating on Edward Said, Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 88). Refugee studies have been criticised for being depoliticised and ahistorical (Chimni, 1998; El-Enany, 2020; Mayblin, 2017), often neglecting to critically address Europe's colonial history and ongoing imperialism. Abdelnour and Abu Moghli (2021) point out that 'postcolonial, feminist, and decolonial researchers have long understood that the production of knowledge is a political act that can serve powerful interests, objectify people, subjugate alternative ways of knowing, and legitimate violence' (2021, p. 10). Similarly, education literature and practice suffer from an apolitical and ahistorical framing (Sriprakash et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2019, 2021). This study addressed this by acknowledging how a historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism may shape young refugees' experiences of education and (im)migration (Chimni, 1998). The British empire may have formally ended; nevertheless, its coloniality has endured in policy and practice in language, education, culture and socioeconomic domains.

2.1. Participants

I met the families who participated in this study through my engagement with the refugee community. I volunteered to support refugee families by fundraising to facilitate their access to essential services and as an English as an Additional Language (EAL) tutor for young people in the south of England. Due to my building these connections for two years, some refugee families expressed to me their interest in participating in my research. Participants were invited by me, through a secondary school, Mountain View, as well as local organisations that shared information about my study with them. Permissions to access the school and ethical approvals to conduct the study were gained from Mountain View, where the EAL staff welcomed the research being conducted at their school, as well as from the University of Bristol's School of Education Ethics Committee.

All invited refugee participants willingly participated in the project and expressed interest in its relevance to their lived experiences (Tables 1 and 2):

- Fatima has four children, two of whom participated in this research: Amira and Muhammad. They speak Arabic and English.
- Maria and her two sons, Leonardo and Luca, speak English and Spanish.
- Rivkah has three children, two of whom participated in this study: Temesghen and Olivia Sarah. They speak English and Bilen. Rivkah also speaks Tigrinya.
- Amal and Maya are two young women from Sudan and Syria, respectively, who also participated in this study.

Table 1. Young people.

Name (pseudonym)	Age	School year	Year of arrival
Temesghen	15	10	2017
Muhammad	14	9	2018
Olivia Sarah	11	7	2017
Amira	16	11	2018
Luca	7	3	2018
Leonardo	7	3	2018
Maya	13	9	2017
Amal	14	10	2017

Table 2. Mothers.

Name (pseudonym)	Year of arrival	Education
Maria	2018	ESOL student
Fatima	2018	ESOL student
Rivkah	2017	ESOL student

*English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

3. Methodological decisions

I employed an interview-based method to understand and describe participants' lived experiences, their views of the world around them and their relation to it (Kvale, 1996). My methodology was guided by questions such as *how do I collect data ethically to respect my participants' time and voices?* These considerations steered me towards semi-structured interviews to provide a more detailed and in-depth understanding (Baum, 2008) of participants' experiences through dialogue, which is relevant to discussing sensitive topics. I did observations at Mountain View, a non-selective secondary school with an Academy status and approximately 1000 young people from diverse nationalities and ethnicities on the roll. During observations, I noted descriptions and accounts based on what I had observed (Emerson et al., 2011). Visual methodologies such as photovoice, drawing and journaling with participatory elements provided additional insights into the lived experiences of young people by highlighting that they are knowledgeable and active social actors.

Moreover, I sought consent from parents and young people for their participation. Considering that 'parents, guardians, teachers and social workers all act as gate-keepers who mediate researchers' access to children' (Valentine, 1999, p. 141), it is often adults who may decide 'whether or not a child will take part in research' (Emond, 2005, p. 128). I consulted with young people on their interests and availability to participate in this study by asking each young person why they had agreed to participate. Their responses included, 'It is interesting', 'I like to talk about school' and 'To help refugee education'. I appreciated their answers, but also had to disclose that many barriers impede research from directly improving refugee education in England. As part of my relational ethics practices, I went beyond discussing the purposes and potential uses of the study with participants by identifying and managing their expectations to prevent disappointments. I prioritised clarifying that I would earn a PhD from this research, which would benefit me directly.

A manageable expectation from the study would be that the study would make a novel contribution to the growing body of knowledge on the intersecting areas of education

and migration scholarship. I explained that the research would lead to publications that could contribute towards improving educational experiences for young refugees. After the young people and their families agreed to participate, I invited them to decide how to communicate the research findings to the public. Considering that we were engaging in arts-based activities during the research and that a few of the young people enjoyed reading comic books, I asked them for ideas on communicating their lived experiences and perspectives creatively and visually. Olivia and Temesghen were eager to collaborate, and we started brainstorming ideas with Muhammad, Amal, Maya, Amira, Leo and Luca. Once we agreed to collaborate to create a zine, comic book or a short animation film, I applied and successfully secured funding from the University of Bristol to co-create a research-based resource to communicate research findings. The funding also allowed me to provide an honorarium to each young person for their contributions to the artistic project (see Appendix).

3.1. Positionality

As a researcher, I understand that data collection and analysis 'are always presented through the "lens" of the researcher' (Emond, 2005, p. 126). Researchers impact the production of the data and shape its interpretation. The modernist and imperialist discourse of research *discovery* 'speaks of globalization and the marketplace of knowledge', where *gathering* is 'about winning' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 85 – emphasis added). I approached this study from the perspective that research, a corporate institution, and the epistemological foundations 'from which it springs', are colonial in nature (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 88). In other words, 'the data is gold, and we are the gold-diggers' (Marchais et al., 2020, p. 372). My methodological approach detailed in this article aims to demonstrate how I have attempted to overcome the inherent asymmetrical power dynamics in research, particularly by adopting anticolonial and critical theoretical frameworks.

3.2. Data collection

This sub-section features samples of the data gathered by this multi-method study, incorporating diverse sources (Table 3). In addition to interviews and observations, the analysis included 20 photographs, 44 drawings and 12 journal entries. These sources were combined to supplement each other, enriching the findings and providing a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena.

Table 3. Overview of the data collected over a period of eight months.

Data sources	Quantity
• Semi-structured interviews with refugee participants, individually and with the family as a group, in their homes, neighbourhoods and Mountain View.	60 hours
• Semi-structured interviews with school staff: six subject teachers, three EAL specialists and one safeguarding lead.	7 hours
• School-based observations in Year 9 and Year 10, including 12 subjects, and in the EAL department.	26 hours
• Photos	20
• Drawings	44
• Writings	12

3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

I used a semi-structured interview guide to create an environment where participants could also steer the direction of our conversation. I avoided using strictly structured interviews, as I wanted to prevent the interviews from resembling an immigration or asylum-process interrogation. I drew on my personal experiences as a migrant from the global south living through global north immigration systems to ensure participants did not feel under pressure to respond to strict questioning. The interviews were conversational, and participants had the opportunity to discuss the issues they perceived to be most relevant to their educational and living experiences in England. Due to the COVID-19 context, I also conducted online interviews with families. Muhammad and Temesghen suggested using applications such as Mural and Padlet to make our online conversations more interactive, which they enjoyed (Figure 1). In the yellow sticky note (Figure 1), Muhammad reflected on his challenges to continue learning during remote schooling, as tech poverty experienced by the refugee families contributed to interrupting his education in England (Câmara, 2021).

3.2.2. Arts-based methods

This study used participatory elements rather than a full PAR methodology due to constraints related to time inherent to a PhD degree requirement, limited resources and the COVID-19 global pandemic. For photovoice, I provided them with disposable cameras, and after each photographic mission, a discussion stage followed where participants contributed to data analysis by discussing how they made sense of their social worlds. In Figure 2, Muhammad wanted to show his family's garden after cleaning it. He was responsible for tidying it up weekly as part of his commitment to help his mother.

3.3. Data analysis

Young people's participation in research tends to be limited to data gathering, but not analysis or dissemination of findings (Alderson, 2000). In this study, the young people analysed their drawings, photography and writing. The collaborative analysis centred on participants' perspectives, experiences and aspirations, involving reflective

Muhammad

Is there something you dislike about school?

Muhammad: Using gest a phone to do homework during lockdown: cant type fa st with a phone

Muhammad: I don't like some of the topics that you have to learn in a subject. Like here you gest learn history about Europe. I don't like to learn history gest about Europe because we have to learn about other countries' histories and cultures too
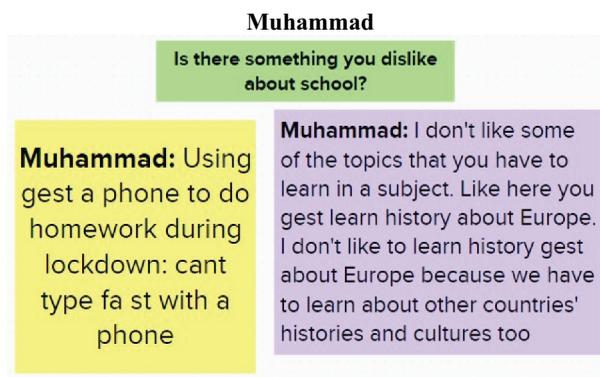
Figure 1. Discussion on mural.

Figure 2. Muhammad took a photo of his family's garden. Reprinted with permission.

questioning during the discussion. Our discussions focused on their artwork and took place one-on-one in their living rooms, with their mothers always present in the home. Sometimes the mothers would be in the same room, while other times they wandered from the living room to the kitchen to grab food or tend to chores. At Olivia's home, her mother, Rivkah, would often move between the living room and the kitchen. We began our discussions with the young participants showing me their artwork, which I would follow up with by asking: *Please tell me more about your drawing/photography/journal entry. What does it mean to you?* As illustrated in Figure 3, Olivia drew a self-portrait reflecting on her initial educational experiences in England.

Olivia Sarah

> Most everyone is smarter than you at your first year because they had better and way more education and they have time to progress everything. You have to learn everything you missed out in not being in school and in addition to that you also have to learn what everyone is learning and on top of that you have not learnt the basics such as the alphabet and you have to learn and process everything really fast and like if you have missed the what of year one and two and they were important because year one helps you get used to school and year two teaches you the basics. – Olivia Sarah

Olivia Sarah explained that she always felt that she had to 'catch up' and that it made her feel like she was not as knowledgeable as her classmates. Her education was frequently interrupted, causing delays that affected her confidence and made it challenging to learn English and other subjects at her desired pace. Olivia Sarah's reflections and analysis contributed to this study's findings by emphasising that deficit-based perspectives of young refugees, along with the neglect of their knowledge(s) by their schools, can have profound negative effects on their learning experiences and identities. As demonstrated by Olivia Sarah, the young people analysed their drawings, photographs and writings and
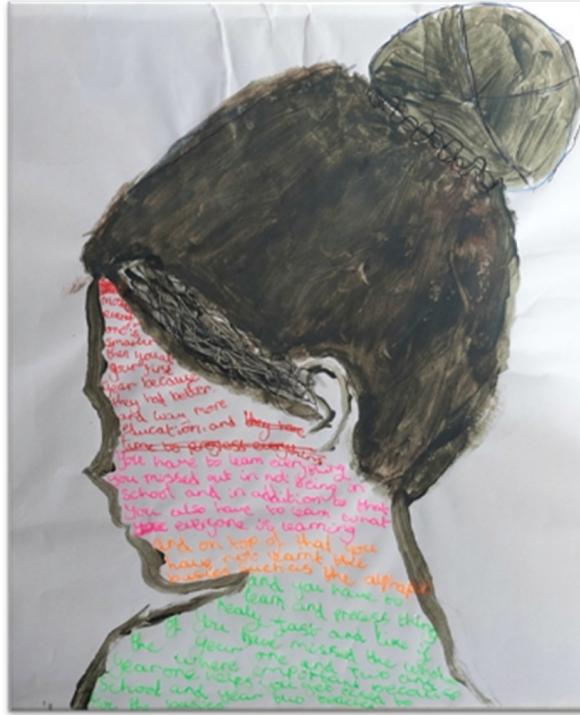
Olivia Sarah

Figure 3. Olivia's reflections on schooling in England. Reprinted with permission.

drew relevant themes from them. I combined their analysis of the arts-based activities with the emerging themes from the interview transcripts and school-based observations. Data was analysed across the family unit, including for mothers and young people. The data analysis also included looking at issues around household practices and funds of knowledge (Câmara, 2023; Moll, 2019).

In an effort to foreground the young people's lived experiences, I invited them to reflect on their memories of living across distinct countries, experiences of migration and future aspirations. They wrote their mini biographies in their own time at their homes and later shared them with me during home visits or at Mountain View. The young people's narratives are presented in the following section, where Olivia Sarah, Temesghen, Amira, Muhammad, Maya, Amal, Luca and Leo speak from a first-person point of view.

3.4. Young people's narratives

Olivia Sarah. I'm from Eritrea (Figure 4); I am 11 years old and am nearly a teenager. I went to Sudan for about 9 months and could speak Arabic then I went on the plane to England on my birthday and went to a house that was shared with like four or three people. I went to school, but the house was too small, and we moved houses.

Figure 4. Illustration from Refugee Stories: Education, Obstacles and Aspirations, edited by Câmara (2023) and illustrated by ARC studio. Reprinted with permission.

Temesghen. I live in England for four years (Figure 5). I started school at the end of Year 5 and was so hard to speak and write. It was a bit sad when you don't know what everyone is talking about. After I finished Year 5, I had to move school because we moved house and had to start a new school from the start. I still did not know how to speak or write in English. The first day of school was bit scary at first when you don't know how to speak and write. And it was hard in class when you don't know what to do ...

In Eritrea, we used to go out a lot (Figure 6). Being outside, doing things outside. It seems like here children spend more time inside the homes and inside buildings (Figure 7). You have to be inside all the time. It's really boring. In Eritrea, we go outside like an hour during night-time to play hide and seek at like 8 or 9 or 10 pm because it's not dark at 10, because it would be light. It's safe to play outside in our village. There was more freedom to be outside and play on the street. There isn't many cars there so it's safe to play on the street.

Amira. I am from Iraq, and I am in Year 11. I speak Arabic and English. I live in England with my mother, father and three brothers. I am the first [oldest] and the only girl. After we left my country, we went to Jordan. We lived there and I went to school there. It was ok in Jordan, but I was sad at school. The other students make fun of how I talk. I speak Arabic and in Jordan they speak Arabic but it's different Arabic. So, they laugh at my accent because it is different from their Arabic. So, I didn't like to go to school there.

Muhammad. I am in Year 9, and I live here since 2018. Iraq is my country (Figure 8) ... I like to talk about Iraq because sometimes people in England don't

Figure 5. Temesghen's self-portrait dressed for school. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 6. Temesghen: I took this photo like some days before someone stole my bike. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 7. Temesghen caring for his family's animals in his village in Eritrea. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 8. Illustration from Refugee Stories: Education, Obstacles and Aspirations, edited by Câmara (2023) and illustrated by ARC studio. Reprinted with permission.

know about it. There's people from all over the world in Iraq … I hope we can study about other countries like Iraq and everything that happen there because [of] U.S. But we only study about Europe and World War II. Only in Iraq we study about our country and what happen to us.

Maya. In Syria, my country, I was 4 years old when I went out [left Syria]. I like the place where I live in now [in the south of England]. The area it's like White people, there's not different cultures and things. Only me, my sister and my mum with the hijab (Figure 9). I feel like they look at me weird, so I just feel uncomfortable. But one time I'm on the bus with my mother and some people were rude, making rude comments and looking weird at us.

Figure 9. Maya: I am wearing the hijab, walking to school and thinking about my country. Reprinted with permission.

Amal. I have been at this school since Year 7 (Figure 10). I am now in Year 10. I am from Sudan, and I lived there before coming to England. I went to school in Sudan, and I knew Arabic very well both reading and writing. Me as a Black person, I'm scared to go to play with people I didn't know. It scares me because I am afraid, I'm going to find racists. Since before I came, I didn't imagine 'there's a lot of Black people there', so I thought like everyone is just White. So, I was like a bit nervous how they're going to treat me. In my area, there's no Black people so it is harder for me to make friends.

Luca. I live here in England with my mother and brother (Figure 11). I like going to school but I don't like reading and writing so much. I prefer Maths. On the computer, I try to solve my Maths problems at the highest level ('spicy') just to see how much I know. Some of the difficult problems are so easy for me now.

Leonardo. I like reading Shakespeare and I read a lot (Figure 12). I read Romeo and Juliet, about Robin Hood and about the Queen. Now I study French on Duolingo. I want to go to Disneyland Paris one day and I read that they speak French there. I really like drawing dinosaurs, playing football with my brother and friends.

The young participants were all multilingual people who were invited to write and communicate in their preferred languages. However, they often chose to speak and write in English, even when I could communicate with them in their first language. From our conversations, I understood that the education system in England instilled in them the belief that speaking in their first languages would disrupt their learning of English and,

Figure 10. Amal: I drew me being an actress and a surgeon. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 11. Luca attending college in the future. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 12. Leonardo attending high school in the future. Reprinted with permission.

consequently, their ability to fit in at school. This belief led them to favour English over their other languages.

Moreover, this study presented an opportunity for children and young people to exercise their rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Articles 12 and 13. The active participation of young people in the research reflected their roles as agents within their families, social networks and as knowledge creators. This study's alignment with international standards underscores the importance of children and young people's active involvement in research and enhances the relevance and validity of its findings.

4. Ethics of actively caring in research with young people and families

Institutional ethics approval, confidentiality and privacy, informed consent, ethical codes and the right to withdrawal are essential social-science research protocols (Clark-Kazak, 2017). They are only the initial steps in a complex and ongoing ethical research journey. These standardised procedures and the doctoral training I received did not prepare me for all the ethical questions and conundrums I encountered before, during and after data collection. As I navigated the terrain of respectful and reciprocal relationships in research with young refugees in England, I discovered that despite having developed stable communication with the refugee families, the ethical considerations raised by my university's ethics committee did not prepare me for the complex realities encountered by young people and their families, including their limited financial ability to buy food, clothes and school uniforms, as well as to pay for transportation and data for their phones

to be able to attend remote schooling during the COVID-19 lockdowns in England. In order to prevent extractive research practices in this study, I understood that it would be vital to establish and sustain trust (*confiança – confianza*),[7] respect and reciprocity with the refugee families. Relational ethics in research requires reciprocity, respect and dismantling of the researcher's power and positionality (Chilisa, 2012; Marmo, 2013; Vervliet et al., 2015).

Reflecting on how I could make research relevant and beneficial to participants, I built on the care ethics literature but also departed from it by recognising that *care* is not neutral. Critical, anticolonial and antiracist theoretical framings guided me towards a more radical and *actively* caring approach to relational ethics than liberal feminist framings. Despite the abundancy of research focusing 'on the complex realities of refugee young people', including educational research, 'minimal scholarship illustrates' how refugee young people 'negotiate or conceptualize the process of research' (Bilotta, 2020, p. 397). As a critical ethnographer, I was concerned with conducting the study ethically and ensuring that it could be beneficial to the participants. Considering this, I strived to be self-aware and to foster collaboration with the families. To avoid researching to merely create policy reports, evaluation and monitoring and prevent 'the objectification of participants' (Abu Moghli, 2023, p. 683), I focused on highlighting that the young people and their families were active agents and creators of knowledge. They often led the discussions during data collection, allowing me to access their insightful reflections, which I may not have been able to learn had I followed a rigid research plan. Olivia Sarah often engaged me in her reflections about life in England and how she made sense of her experiences compared to her life in Eritrea. She explained that in England, she learned about the concept of property based on the dynamics between neighbours she had witnessed.

> Olivia Sarah: I like how houses are set up here [England] but when you have less, you don't really want anything and now you have more, you want more. In Eritrea . . . like your own house, sometimes you're like: This is my house, but like in the gardens and the outside everything you share. Property there is different from here. Here property is more important, you don't share [emphasis added]. I miss sharing the garden with the neighbours and playing with the other children. Here there are too many walls you can't see your neighbour. Just maybe 'hello' and then you are always locked inside a building like at school and at home.

Olivia Sarah and her family also contemplated the fact that they had a fenced garden (Figure 13), which meant only they could easily access it. In England's context, each family having a fenced garden is preferred for reasons related to privacy, status and safety. While Olivia Sarah and her family appreciated having access to this extra space, they wished they could share it with more people.

Olivia Sarah and her family appeared to struggle adjusting to life in England after coming from a cultural context that prioritised collective well-being over individualistic preferences. Inviting families to participate in the research, especially mothers, helped contextualise how families face intersectional barriers with implications for young people's living, learning and belonging. Dialogic ethics (Freire, 1970) guided me to reflect on the theoretical and methodological assumptions that guided my PhD by questioning *who benefits from the research and its findings?*

Figure 13. Olivia Sarah's family's garden. Reprinted with permission.

4.1. Reciprocity and mutual active care between researcher and participants

Due to the unprecedented circumstances caused by COVID-19 in England, I recognised that conducting research may not have been viable or appropriate. The pandemic exacerbated the exclusions experienced by refugee families and affected their social and material conditions. Dialogue is relational and as my conversations with the three families progressed, I listened and learned more about the daily barriers they had been encountering. I reflected on the following question: *How would conducting the study during the COVID-19 pandemic be appropriate?* I decided that the study could be conducted if it engaged with the barriers participants encountered. In addition to observing families' practices and learning about their circumstances, I had the ethical responsibility to try and facilitate their access to vital information and resources. Refugees and asylum-seekers 'have long experienced limited digital mobility and segregation associated with a digital divide' (Câmara, 2021, p. 68). The DfE's provision of technology during the pandemic was based on young people's eligibility for free school meals (Department for Education, 2021); however, asylum-seeking families are not eligible for free meals because they have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF), preventing their access both to much-needed technology and food (Câmara & Maria, 2020).

Exclusionary (im)migration and education policies and practices 'further marginalized asylum seekers and refugees in England' as they 'struggled to access digital devices, broadband and language support during remote schooling' (Câmara, 2021, p. 68). All three families faced barriers to accessing remote schooling due to limited access to technology at their homes. The mothers also attended college and were required to access remote schooling, making it particularly challenging for Maria to

afford sufficient data for their needs. Maria initially had only one phone to share between her and her two sons, who needed to attend online lessons simultaneously. Maria, an asylum-seeker, received a limited weekly allowance from the Home Office and was not allowed to work. Only listening and chronicling their predicaments was insufficient and I knew I had to act by advocating for the families. As the young people's and their parents' education was being disrupted due to poverty and exclusionary asylum policies, I began to think of ways to facilitate their access to those vital resources. Due to my own resources being limited, I sought support from friends, colleagues and strangers to fundraise enough resources to facilitate the families' access to digital devices and phone data to continue their education during remote schooling. Moreover, I partnered with a local organisation that served the refugee community and organised a fundraiser that resulted in raising over £1000 to support refugees' access to digital devices and data. Actively caring by advocating for the families became essential to my critical ethnographic method. I rejected being in the position of a mere observer of their circumstances, and, instead, I prioritised supporting their access to remote schooling and tech literacy.

Rivkah and Fatima often asked if I could support their children with schoolwork. Once young people started accessing remote schooling, they encountered new hurdles, as they had never had to rely on technology to study, complete schoolwork online and access other vital services digitally. I dedicated time weekly to teaching Temesghen, Olivia Sarah and Muhammad how to use a new laptop, including software and platforms like MS Teams, which they were required to use for remote schooling. Rivkah and her family appeared to be isolated from their school. Temesghen faced difficulties completing his schoolwork, causing Rivkah to feel concerned about his education. Although she would tell me her concerns, she felt unsure how to communicate them with Mountain View, which seemed unresponsive to her attempts to speak to them. However, I started advocating for Rivkah through the contacts I had at the school and asking them to return her calls. In similar encounters, the allowance Maria received from the Home Office could only be used in specific shops. Although it may seem subtle, she was prohibited from working, and this type of migration-regulation surveillance not only resulted in her family receiving an insufficient allowance, but also controlled what on and where they could spend their money. Maria explained that her children's school implemented a policy that uniforms could only be bought with card payments. The school policy posed a significant barrier for Maria since asylum seekers could not open bank accounts in England, and she could not pay for their uniforms with cash. Maria demonstrated she had an interest in amplifying the exclusions asylum seekers face in and outside school settings, and I facilitated her writing an op-ed for openDemocracy to share insights into the lived experiences of asylum seekers in England and challenge mainstream media's portrayal of refugees (Câmara & Maria, 2020).

Olivia Sarah, always resourceful, communicated to me that she enjoyed reading but had limited access to books at home. I started collating the names of the books, art supplies and games they were interested in and organised a fundraising campaign to facilitate their access to those resources. The fundraising campaign yielded far more books, games, activity books and art supplies than anticipated, and every young person participating in the study received an item they wanted (Figure 14).

Figure 14. The books I purchased with fundraised resources.

The three families and I developed a communication based on *mutual* and *active* care. The young people and their families wanted to learn more about me and my nationality, languages, favourite foods, immigration status, education and work. They listened to my stories of migration and my living away from my family. They always showed care and kindness towards me. Rivkah often awaited me with a traditional Eritrean meal whenever I met them at their home (Figure 15). She still often invites me to have a meal with her family at their home.

Figure 15. Photo taken by me at Rivkah's home.

Figure 16. Eritrean food to take home.

Rivkah would always pack me some food to take home for dinner or lunch the following day (Figure 16). She knew that I was away from my family, and this was her way of helping me have a 'healthy' home-cooked meal.

Rivkah often set up her living room coffee station to make Eritrean coffee for us (Figures 17 and 18). She took this photograph to show me how she prepares Eritrean coffee using a clay pot.

Figure 17. Coffee station at Rivkah's home. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 18. Eritrean coffee (milk, sugar, ginger) and Eritrean bread prepared by Rivkah.

Similarly, Maria's love of cooking and baking meant that she often wanted to prepare food for me, including a cake to celebrate my birthday (Figure 19).

The young people were also very caring and kind, often writing me thank you notes (Figure 20).

The mutual exchange of care between us demonstrated our agencies throughout the research. The young people and their families were resourceful and active creators of knowledge in a hostile policy and political discourse context. The mothers pursued their college education and dreamt of having careers in teaching,

Figure 19. Chocoflan prepared by Maria.

Figure 20. A 'thank you' letter from Leo and Luca written to me. Reprinted with permission.

nursing and caring. They made cakes and breads to sell and sold beauty products to support their families. As a PhD researcher, living with my precarious employment and visa, I could relate to several of their struggles and supported their work by buying from them and referring their products to colleagues and friends as another way of actively caring.

5. Recommendations for collaborating with young refugees and their families

Relational ethics is essential for all researchers to create a more equitable and ethical research process by fragmenting their power in knowledge production. I have argued in favour of relational ethics in research with refugees based on counter-hegemonic perspectives. Throughout this study I have often asked myself the following questions: *What right have I got to tell refugee people's stories? Why do they participate in research? To what extent are refugees benefitted by research focused on their predicaments?* The methodological choices I have made showed me that while relational ethics is insufficient to overcome all asymmetrical power relations inherent in research, it served to shift some of the power imbalances and to centre refugee-led decisions in the research. Based on the methodological decisions presented in this

article, I propose the following recommendations to researchers working with refugee young people and adults:

Establish long-term relationships to counter parachute and parasitic science. Build connections with refugee communities and support refugee-led initiatives. Understand their circumstances and needs to ensure the research is more beneficial than burdensome.

Seek informed consent from young people in addition to their guardians or families and be aware of any circumstances where young people are likely to feel pressured to participate in a study (e.g. access mediated through organisations they may rely on for essential services).

Listen to participants and communicate research aims and plans with them in their preferred language to receive feedback from them and, when possible, collaborate with participants to define the research aims and plans. They are the experts of their experiences.

Consult with participants regarding methodological choices and data analyses; give them access to any materials produced during the study, including their interview transcripts, particularly if they wish to have their transcripts partially or entirely withdrawn from the study.

Participants have a say in how they are represented in the research to ensure that representation reflects the reality of their experiences and perspectives.

These recommendations are not exhaustive, and researchers should be aware that even in collaborative projects, participants may be unavailable to continuously engage with the research beyond data collection and initial dissemination efforts as they pursue other priorities. Nevertheless, researchers can create an environment where participants have space to engage before, during and after the study. Despite living in England with refugee status, all of the three families had diverse perspectives and cultural understandings. Considering the context of each family, I adapted my methodological approach according to their circumstances, expectations and cultural practices. Our co-created zine is a valuable resource to showcase the obstacles young people and their families face encountering institutions in a global north country, their aspirations and their recommendations to create a more inclusive England. *Refugee Stories'* visual representations have allowed refugee youth and their families to express themselves in a more accessible format than traditional scholarly publications and share research findings beyond academic settings (See Appendix: *Refugee Stories: Education, Obstacles and Aspirations*).

Notes

1. US anthropologist Henry Lewis Morgan and British anthropologist Edward Tyler greatly shaped the field. They have been criticised for their biases and for their work based on academic anthropological racism.
2. See W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).
3. Paul Willis's (1977) case study of working-class boys in England is an example of critical ethnography.
4. UK's 'Hostile Environment' Policy.
5. Fausto Reinaga.
6. Abya Yala: the Indigenous name for the 'Americas'.

7. Firm belief in someone or something and familiarity. *Confianza* was often used by Maria to illustrate the basis of relationships between teachers and families in her home country, as opposed to what she perceived as distant and shallow communication she had with her children's teachers in England. In Latin America, having *confianza/confiança* is essential for personal relationships; it is a bond built or earned over time.

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APPENDIX

Appendix: Refugee Stories: Education, Obstacles and Aspirations

Developing mutually respectful relationships with the participating families led to less exploitative research praxis and yielded in-depth and complex qualitative data. To fulfil this study's aim to collaborate with the families, I applied for funding and received £6000 from Bristol University to combine critical ethnographic research and art. The funding allowed me to collaborate with two artists from ARC Studio and the three families, with each young person receiving an honorarium for their contributions. We created a zine, *Refugee Stories: Education, Obstacles and Aspirations* (Temesghen et al., 2023), to share this study's findings creatively and visually with audiences beyond academic settings. The young people and their mothers helped organise the zine, including choosing the excerpts they wanted to include and how they wanted to be portrayed in the publication. The artists collaborated with us to create an artwork that reflected the participants' expectations to raise awareness about the barriers and inequalities they faced and counter the deficit-based views often portrayed about refugees.

In the following excerpt from the zine, Olivia Sarah shares her journey from Eritrea to Sudan and eventually to England (Figure A1).

Olivia Sarah

Figure A1. Illustration from *Refugee Stories: Education, Obstacles and Aspirations*, edited by Câmara (2023) and illustrated by ARC studio. Reprinted with permission.