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"You hold your life in your hands until you arrive in another country": young Afghans seeking onward mobility from Greece

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ABSTRACT
This article considers the interplay between mobility and immobility in the everyday lives of young people on the move. It looks at the ways interactions with and categorisations by protection structures and restrictive border and migration regimes lead to diverse trajectories. The article is based on research with young men from Afghanistan mostly classified as unaccompanied minors. Some of the young men were seeking to continue their journeys from Greece and others had managed and had arrived in Norway. The young people's trajectories were marked by uneven rhythms and multiple forms of movement and stasis with various effects on the body and the intimate. Whether they were categorised as accompanied or unaccompanied children or as adults also governed their spatiotemporal mobility and led to different, partly contradictory, temporalities. Moreover, imagination, desire, and conditions endured in the places they had left and moved through interacted and encouraged onward mobility.

Introduction

More than 850,000 people arrived by sea to Greece in 2015. Most were from war-torn Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. When Germany and Austria opened their borders that August, a humanitarian corridor allowed passage through the Western Balkans. This exception to restrictive border regimes drastically changed with the subsequent border closures by countries

further north and the successive domino effect. It left thousands stuck in sites of migration management and was cemented with the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. I was nearing the end of my fieldwork among young Afghans on the move in the Greek port city of Patra in early 2015. The place felt far removed from the ensuing exception, but I heard more talk of people heading from this western sea border to the northern *rāh-e zamini,* Persian for land route. This eventually also encouraged me to leave. I first left for Thessaloniki. Then, during the "long summer of migration" (Kasparek and Speer 2015 as cited in Rozakou 2021, 23), for additional fieldwork on the island of Lesvos and in Athens. I returned to Patra as well that summer. I also found this place changed. I encountered very few people on the move but among them was Yawar.[1] He was a key interlocutor I had gotten to know some eight months prior. Yawar was still trying to continue his journey from Patra despite "shifting temporal rhythms on the border" and a rapidly changing migratory landscape (Rozakou 2021, 35).

The young Afghan men who participated in my research arrived in Greece between 2007 and 2015. They generally spent extended time there and had confronted a broken and arbitrary system. Different protection standards across the EU, insufficiencies of and difficulties accessing the Greek reception and asylum systems, extremely lengthy processes, and high rejection rates did not go unnoticed (Dimitriadi 2018; Cabot 2014).[2] In addition, following the 2009 financial crisis, years with austerity measures, civic unrest, and increased incidences of xenophobic violence followed. In 2011, MSS v. Belgium and Greece became an ECHR landmark judgement on deficiencies in the Greek asylum system, detention, and living conditions. Return under the Dublin Regulation, which states that responsibility for an asylum claim lies with the first Member State entered, was suspended for several years. This meant that for a time, asylum seekers arriving in other Member States would not be returned to Greece.

My interlocutors were determined to stay outside the Greek system, but injuries, exhaustion, and lack of options caused them to seek relief within it. Frequent apprehensions and detention also compelled them to engage with formal structures. They mostly sought access to basic services, such as a hot shower, food, sleeping bags, clothes, the internet, emergency health care, and legal assistance. I met Mukhtar in one place offering such services. Some friends of his had opted for the land route. Having been apprehended, they were held at a police station in Northern Greece. They were minors and he was seeking help for their release. It was a particularly cold day, but the chill of winter could be temporarily eased with the readily available hot sweetened tea we could serve ourselves. Mukhtar had been in Patra for three months. He said he had seen me several times at the port. Shifting from the situation of his friends, he dwelled on a feeling of multiple borders closing in on him. He stated it as a fact, saying, "*Marz baste ast* [the border

is closed]". He added, "The border *out* is closed". And continued by asking rhetorically, "What can I do?" Mukhtar was steadfast, showing no sign of seeking a reply or expecting an answer by anyone of us who had gathered in a group. Like most, he had a *khartí* – Greek for paper – signifying the administrative deportation order given to those apprehended upon unauthorised entry or stay. He had not managed to leave within the given 30 days. The police had issued another one after he was apprehended anew. This too had expired. Mukhtar lacked legal status and talked about the risk of prolonged detention. Unlike his friends, who could make a case for release based on being underage, he could not as he was over 18. He was well-aware of his options: persistence and patience in his attempts to leave, to stay in Greece, or opt for return. "I cannot return to Afghanistan. To remain here is impossible but the border is closed", he said. His words conveyed a lingering sense of entrapment.

From the late 1990s, Patra increasingly became one gateway to a Europe perceived otherwise. Mukhtar's and Yawar's situations were typical for many people on the move there: facing the risk of detention, finding it potentially impossible to cross to Italy, and articulating this as an intention, a necessity, and a hope. Almost everyone I met in Patra was young, physically able, and male. Most were Afghan and belonged to the Hazara ethnic group. They generally found shelter in abandoned buildings and sought places to hide within these to escape police raids. In fact, one of Mukhtar's peers insisted on showing me photographs and videos from the settlements that cold day. The images displayed rows of men with blankets and sleeping bags on a floor with puddles. They urged me to visit. When I did, the cold, damp air, pools of water, and burnt-out fires attested to conditions evoked but incompletely sensorily conveyed by those images. With the demolition of a large makeshift camp in 2009, and the opening of the new, technologically upgraded port at the city's outskirts in 2011, dilapidated industrial buildings close to it commonly became shelters. While around 2,000 Afghans lived in the old camp, including an estimated 250 unaccompanied minors (Human Rights Watch 2008), the informal settlements by the new port were much smaller.

The young people explained that you could either be placed by a smuggler in a ferry-bound lorry or try your luck hiding in one. Arash, another interlocutor, positioned Patra in a hierarchy of exit points. "If you have money, go to Komunisia [the port city, Igoumenitsa, he said,] but I didn't have money, so I had to come to Patra". Arash had counted on a transfer to facilitate his onward journey, but the money had not been sent. This also points to how class shapes and affects access to different forms of mobility (Van Hear 2006). Time spent in Patra varied among my interlocutors. For a few it was brief, but for many it extended for months, and for some people on the move, even years. It can be understood as a time of being involuntarily

stuck. Feeling stuck does not mean that people do not move geographically. It can entail various forms of movement and stasis with different effects on onward mobility, the body, and the intimate.

This article considers such experiences. Through an ethnography of mobilities and immobilities experienced by young people on the move, it pays attention to the consequences of protection structures and restrictive border and migration regimes on their everyday lives. It draws on research with young Afghan men in Greece and Norway. It therefore zooms in on a larger trajectory among a group with shared national origin but with different backgrounds and at various stages of their migration journey. Next, I continue to build on the study's ethnographic context. This is followed by perspectives on transit, journeys, and mobility. Then, I consider the interplay between mobility and immobility as I unpack my interlocutors' diverse spatiotemporal and embodied trajectories, and how these intertwined with categorisation based on age and status as accompanied or unaccompanied, and imaginings of a sustainable future elsewhere.

Ethnographic context

This article draws on research with 15- to 24-year-old unaccompanied young men from Afghanistan who arrived in Greece between 2007 and 2015. It builds on empirical material from life history, semi-structured and informal interviews, and participant observation between 2012 and 2015. It also draws on various sources of knowing and understanding collected along the migration trail, such as maps, photo diaries, written accounts, drawings, and graffiti. The research encouraged me to travel to Patra, Athens, Piraeus, Chios, Lesvos, Thessaloniki, Idomeni, and the Evros region in Greece. I visited some locations several times and others once. I occasionally encountered people across sites. For instance, on Lesvos around the then, First Reception Centre of Moria, Kara Tepe, and Mytilene port, in Athens around Victoria Square, and in Patra. These places concerned routes and, by implication, followed people. I also carried out interviews in Norway and undertook shorter trips to Italy and Turkey. The field was therefore multi-sited (Marcus 1995) and multi-temporal (Jacobsen and Karlsen 2021).

Patra was my main field site and I spent five months there. The city is marked by the omnipresence of mobilities and a "border spectacle", that is, the enactment of enforcement at the border that makes irregularised individuals visible through practices of exclusion (De Genova 2002). In such places, divergent spatiotemporal and sociolegal trajectories intersect, including by bringing together those who anticipate migrating, those who have failed to do so, and the returned. I initially arrived in Patra in 2012, when Operation *Xenios Zeus* was extended to the city. Named after the ancient Greek god of hospitality, this operation was the authorities' plan to identify, detain, and

return irregularised migrants. It included large-scale identity checks targeting individuals with a visible migrant background. The migratory landscape in Patra, with adhering policies and formal and informal practices, deeply impacted the empirical material. Still, it is beyond this article's scope to give a full overview of changing national and subnational Greek migration policies and practices, as well as those operating on the supranational level.

The decision to focus on Patra was based on insights from interviews for my master's dissertation with unaccompanied young Afghans in Norway, who had embarked on their journeys as minors, and was reinforced when I continued interviewing this group for my doctoral research.[3] My fieldwork centred around spending time with young people on the move. I spent months getting to know some, while others were encountered briefly. Not all who shared their experiences wanted to participate in research, and I was careful not to include them in "my book", as they called it. I came to know around 50 Afghan boys and young men during my main fieldwork (2014–2015). Our daily interactions were primarily in Persian. They showed great patience with my requests to repeat, rephrase, and speak slower, and adjusted their accents and modes of communication to facilitate my comprehension. This effort became important in building research relationships. Formal interviews in Greece were conducted with the help of an interpreter.

My research took place within spaces that can be classified as "humanitarian", "restrictive", and "informal". Humanitarian spaces include the premises of an organisation assisting unaccompanied minors where I was granted permission to hang-out and engage in activities, and where I also had access to a more private space for interviews. Restrictive spaces concern places such as the port of Patra where struggles over movement played out. There, I observed and engaged in briefer conversations. And informal spaces were made up by neighbourhood spots and informal settlements, where I also became a guest. These spaces included multiple power imbalances and vulnerabilities based on how people were positioned within them, for example in terms of legal status, age, gender, and class (Lønning and Uzureau 2022).

In this article, I mostly draw on the experiences of five interlocutors in Greece who arrived there in 2014 and six interlocutors in Norway who arrived there between 2008 and 2012. It is not my aim to address the experiences of Afghans who have settled in Greece. On the one hand, my interlocutors in Norway had managed to leave Greece following a period of less than a month to around three years. On the other hand, my interlocutors in Greece emphasised an intention to continue their journeys further north and westward. Among them, I received news that some managed to do so, but I remain unaware of others' whereabouts. As such, there is a bias towards onward mobility in this article engaged from the perspective of actual and sought migration. Through this, I am not trying to portray Greece as solely a country of in-between and linear South–North and East–West trajectories. I

carried out my main research prior to the so-called "migration crisis". Since then, increasingly restrictive migration regimes have, for instance, compelled many Afghans in Scandinavia to leave for elsewhere in Europe in search of protection and confront new temporalities, precariousness, and uncertainties (Lønning 2020). Now that I have given an overview of the ethnographic context, I next turn to the article's analytical perspective.

Transit, journeys, and mobility

Countries and whole regions have progressively introduced measures that limit the arrival of those deemed undesirable. This has led to a range of border management tools and the externalisation (outsourcing) and internalisation (insourcing) of border regimes aimed at deterring and preventing entry and continued movement. Borders are accordingly militarised, with the building of fences and walls, and the army and navy employed for patrolling purposes. However, rather than stemming arrivals, they divert routes taken and fuel the migration industry. Therefore, journeys become longer, increasingly dangerous, and more costly.

The term "transit" is used to describe one ensuing migratory pattern resulting from such measures. It can be understood as a temporary stay prior to moving to a perceived preferable destination. However, the concept remains blurred and politicised with no agreed definition (Düvell 2012). Transit is often equated to an in-between phase of "[b]eing neither here nor there" (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008, 148). Coutin (2005, 196) describes it as "a liminal state that positions migrants simultaneously outside (in transition, not yet arrived), yet inside (traveling through), national spaces". Transit is also described as "a poorly marked transition" that can result in a fracture of self when a disconnect ensues between the present and an envisioned future (Rousseau et al. 1998, 394). Nevertheless, even if it structures it, an in-between phase does not preclude engagement with life or present context, new relationships, and important transitions (Sampson, Gifford, and Taylor 2016). Transit can also be a time to earn money, gather information, and wait for favourable conditions to leave (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008).

Transit relies on the logic of a start and an end to a journey, and on one in-between phase. It therefore fails to include the multiple directions and re-routing of many migration journeys (Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2021). It also remains a criticised concept (Collyer and de Haas 2012). As with other terms embedded in policy frameworks, such as "secondary movements" and "onward migration", it shares an assumption of linearity and directionality (Schapendonk 2021). This can leave people's complex social realities across space and time unacknowledged. Since a place may only become "in-between" in retrospect, there is heightened risk of reducing multi-layered lives across multiple places into linear processes premised on

migration, when movement may not be linear or a given (Crawley and Jones 2021). The term "fragmented journeys" encapsulates more complicated migration processes. It accounts for journeys "broken into a number of separate stages, involving varied motivations, legal statuses and living and employment conditions", blurring places of origin and destination (Collyer 2010, 275).

A focus on journeys draws attention to mobility. A mobilities perspective sees mobility as fundamental to social life and is about "tracking the power of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis" (Sheller and Urry 2006, 211). It is not about binaries but relationality, the interplay between mobility and immobility, and how different forms of movement and stasis are structured by formations of power. Furthermore, mobilities and immobilities can be differently embodied. There may be stillness within mobility and waiting during journeys (Yildiz and Sert 2021), that may be characterised by immobility (Kaytaz 2016). A feeling of immobility can also be prevalent despite moving physically across borders (Schapendonk 2012). Waiting is therefore multiple and relationally constituted, and as Jacobsen and Karlsen (2021, 6) also draw attention to, "beyond questions of exceptionality and methodological nationalism, [it is important] to consider how waiting is deeply enmeshed in modern conceptions about linear time and progress".

When faced with structural barriers and precarious legal status, mobility can become a means to temporarily meet needs and avoid detention and deportation (Wyss 2019). It can also result in recurring movement through non-status, return, and re-migration. Mobility includes shifting temporalities and may simultaneously be a reason for and technique of government (Tazzioli 2020). It is caused by a range of situations, being "enforced [...], appropriated [...], or provoked" (Wyss 2019, 90). What is at stake might be stability and implications of legal status, hinged neither on the presence or absence of movement as such but on the ability to decide when to move and when not. Hage (2009) relates the significance of movement to "stuckedness" and existential movement, the feeling of going somewhere. As such, different forms of mobilities and immobilities co-exist. Mukhtar, as quoted in the introduction, poignantly expressed feeling stuck: "I cannot return to Afghanistan. To remain here is impossible but the border is closed". Although most of my interlocutors eventually managed to continue their journeys, this is not guaranteed, nor that physical, legal, or social arrival will be achieved elsewhere (Lønning 2020). I now turn to the young people's trajectories.

Interplay between mobility and immobility in migration journeys

Arriving in Greece presented a new phase in my interlocutors' journeys. They had survived the crossing of the Aegean Sea or the Evros riverbed, and had

arrived in Europe, the EU, and the Schengen Area. However, Greece was not a country where they expressed an intention to remain. They would say things like "[making it to] Italy is on my mind". Drawn maps and routes that I found along the migration trail also revealed a vision of the journey extending beyond this border. While physically present, efforts and hopes were on arrival elsewhere. Although this phase of the journey was commonly articulated as an "in-between", it was the lack of access to migrate legally and independently that structured trajectories.

The young Afghan men's trajectories were affected by numerous factors resulting from the pursuit of onward mobility in environments where efforts were made to restrict, impede, and manage movement, divergent policies and practices, and imaginings of a better future elsewhere. They were dictated by intersecting power relations, uneven rhythms, and different, partly contradictory, temporalities. Some experienced a great deal of geographical mobility, travelled to various exit points, were transferred between structures of control and protection, and successfully crossed to other countries but were returned to Greece. Others remained in one location and tried to leave from there. Some experienced temporary embodied immobility or were subjected to temporal uncertainty in detention or protective custody, immobile in restricted spaces. Yet others waited at informal guesthouses and in facilities designated by smugglers or found work that in turn might facilitate their migration. As such, their journeys involved a "motion within motion [in …] environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move [people …] as [they …] move along" (Vigh 2009, 420). They required "re-routing" and revealed "a process of continuous adjustments and navigations" (Schapendonk et al. 2020, 212), and a reality that implied that they repeatedly had to improvise.

In what follows, I first explore the trajectories' diverse spatiotemporal and embodied nature. Second, I consider the implications of policies and practices regarding age and status as accompanied or unaccompanied. And finally, I turn to how imaginings of a better future elsewhere and conditions endured interacted and encouraged onward mobility.

Diverse spatiotemporal and embodied trajectories

I met Yawar, introduced above, and Kamran in Patra. They had lived in Iran prior to arriving in Europe, accessed services for unaccompanied minors in Greece and, eventually, managed to continue their journeys. Apart from these similarities, their trajectories evolved differently, as did our interaction. Yawar spent around 16 months on the move. He stayed two months in Istanbul and lived 14 months in an informal settlement in Patra. I encountered him more than twenty times across an eight-month period. In contrast, Kamran spent around eight months on the move. His journey included five countries

and two expulsions. Kamran had stayed in a park in Istanbul for five months, was detained, and attempted crossing the Aegean Sea six times. Upon successfully reaching a Greek Island, he made his way to Athens and continued to Northern Greece. He managed to cross to North Macedonia but was returned. Kamran travelled anew to Athens and left next for Igoumenitsa. There, he was placed by a smuggler in a ferry-bound lorry but was returned upon being discovered at the Italian port (Human Rights Watch 2013). Back in Greece, Kamran was administered through structures of control and protection. He was held in different closed facilities and was transferred to an accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors from which he ran away. As he said: "I didn't have a choice. They just sent me". I interviewed Kamran about a week after we first met. He left later that day and our paths did not cross again.

While Yawar mostly remained in two locations, Kamran experienced a great deal of geographical mobility. He consistently returned to specific locations to reorient his trajectory, cities such as Athens and Istanbul. This entailed physical movement away from his expressed aspiration of moving onward but were places to access resources. Although Kamran willingly travelled there, the reorientation itself was forced upon him through unsuccessful border crossings, expulsions, and formal structures. Kamran's and Yawar's journeys exemplify in their own ways how structures of control and protection intertwine and lead to diverse spatiotemporal trajectories. Waiting and immobility can permeate parts of the journey. Movement can also occur suddenly as dictated by uneven rhythms and temporalities embedded within multiple, unequal formations of power. As such, vast distances may be travelled in a short period and short distances may be almost insurmountable and may result in immobility, or recurrent and circular journeys.

Complex trajectories also mean that people may not remain together. Still, they may encounter and reencounter each other. Such encounters may occur physically but also through written traces along the migration trail that connect people who have never met. Kamran first became aware of another same-aged unaccompanied Afghan, who later became part of his peer group, through a memento on the wall of a police cell in Igoumenitsa. I assumed that they had been detained together and asked about this. Kamran explained: "When I was detained, I saw his *yādegāri* [memento]. He had written on the wall inside the cell". The memento therefore connected them before meeting. Given their non-linear trajectories, they might also meet again, as Kamran travelled to Athens for a third time to reorient his journey and the other young person left to engage in agricultural work to try to save money that in turn might facilitate his onward journey from Greece.

The interplay between mobility and immobility in the young people's trajectories also became ascribed and embodied given conditions and

regulations, impacting the body and the intimate. In one encounter at the border, the young man's body turned on him. The build-up of lactic acid in his muscles was so severe. Coupled with dehydration and lack of sleep and nourishment, it placed him in a state of immobility. His body "froze", it succumbed and came to embody, although temporarily, the logic of immobility advocated by border regimes. The same temporary embodied immobility appeared in accounts of inability to move following long periods of hiding. Noor Mohammad, who I interviewed in Norway, recounted his experience inside a lorry onboard a ferry crossing the Adriatic Sea.

> It was a box with just enough space to fit us, but we couldn't move. […] That feeling when you come out of that box … It was cold. I couldn't stand, I couldn't sit, I couldn't move my back, nothing. I just threw myself and fell on the ground.

My interlocutors spoke of how extended confinement to one position resulted in their bodies collapsing. It was their defiance of the border that caused it. Such "immobility, including paralysis and betrayal of […] own body" is also described by others (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016, 420). As Brigden and Mainwaring (2016, 416) observe, strategies of concealment and giving up control emerge in the search for onward mobility, and are "a complex negotiation of risk, agency and visibility". Still, while Noor Mohammad could not physically move his body within the box or immediately after, he had moved geographically from Greece to Italy.

> It's a small distance when you look at the map. [Noor Mohammad points to the map I had given him. He continued,] It's a very small distance between Greece and Italy but when you spend [almost 30] hours without anything to eat, without peeing, without being able to move …

Such trajectories transform the correlation between spatial and temporal dimensions. The accounts also spoke to physiology, such as efforts to control body functions and heightened sense of sound and motion.

> We didn't eat or drink anything because we were scared that we would need to use the toilet, but even if we didn't drink, we still needed to pee. […] We could hear the waves and the rain. Guards knocked on the box and we didn't breathe because we were scared that they would hear our breath …

While around three years had passed since Noor Mohammad arrived in Norway, remembering this crossing still evoked physical pain: "I get physical pain from just thinking about it". His memories were sensuously embodied. The body also holds scars and physical injuries from the journey, as Ata explained with reference to incidents at the port of Patra: "Many boys get hurt and have wounds on their arms and legs. Many also broke their limbs trying to escape". Coming to Greece had not been part of Ata's plan. He had been returned to Turkey from Bulgaria, was separated from his family,

and arrived in Greece following this. Ata spent much time at the port. There, depending on ferry departures, long lines of lorries queue up. The sound of engines is interrupted by sirens and speeding motorbikes, cars, and dogs used by the coast guard, the police, and a security company. I met Ata two weeks after his arrival and encountered him regularly for a month and a half. He explained how leaving from Patra required another skill set than prior border crossings – that of hiding in lorries.

> My first morning, I saw what the other boys were doing and asked them how to get to Italy. "You first need to climb the fence", [they said …] We arrived at the fence. It was […] very difficult to climb. "The *komando* [guards] mustn't see you", [they said …] We approached [the second] barbed wire fence and climbed it. […] Then, suddenly, guards chased us, and we had to climb back.

People can usually be seen outside the port waiting for a moment to escape the surveillance, including from abandoned buildings opposite it, where Ata also lived. They climb the fence, run, alternatively try to not walk too fast to avoid drawing attention, gather or split up into smaller groups around lorries, take their chances and crawl under. Generally, others are also present – exercising, walking their dogs, visiting the harbour café – offering a bizarre contrast to the spectacle at the border (De Genova 2002). As such, the port displays the hierarchy emerging from mobility regimes. It offers the view of the "tourist" and the "vagabond" to draw on Bauman's (1998) illustrative figures.

After a month, Ata explained: "I still haven't reached the ferry, but I've learnt what I need to manage one day. How to climb to the lorry's roof, underneath it and such". Others, who had managed, spoke about its physicality, like the heat from the motor, the gravel and water hitting their bodies when the vehicle is in motion, their fears of the wheels being raised and crushing them or of falling off. The young people would learn ferry schedules and durations to read time with motion as a marker for different Italian ports and as such, keep track of movement. They described their efforts at leaving as ceaseless and as an activity orienting their daily routine. Their waiting was therefore not passive time (Jacobsen and Karlsen 2021). Next, I discuss the ways my interlocutors' journeys were further impacted by whether formal structures categorised them as accompanied or unaccompanied children or as adults.

Implications of age and (un)accompanied status

Administrative structures in the migratory process seek to separate accompanied persons from unaccompanied ones and children from adults. Kamran was one interlocutor wrongly but contentedly registered as an accompanied child upon arrival in Greece. Most of the others had sought

to register as adults. Looking back on his arrival about a year and a half earlier, Rozbeh, who had been six months in Greece, explained: "We were told to say we are older because if we say we're [unaccompanied] minors, we must wait 3–4 months". Those identified as unaccompanied or separated children were kept within closed structures, based upon a normative logic of protection and the idea that children should not migrate independently. As some young people explained, this can also lead to separation from older travel companions who are not immediate family members. Rozbeh continued: "The interpreter insisted I was 15 but I said no". Although his declared age was disbelieved, Rozbeh was still able to register as an adult. As such, authorities may take heed of young age. Authorities may also register incorrect age and fail to identify whether a person is accompanied or unaccompanied and the nature of the relationship between those who travel together (Human Rights Watch 2008).

Rozbeh's registration as an adult ensured his earlier release with a deportation order. Contrary to what its name suggests, at the time, this order made it possible to purchase a ticket for a mainland-bound ferry. It "*de jure* expelled [him …] from Greek territory but *de facto* set [him …] free to make arrangements for 'voluntary departure' elsewhere" (Franck 2017, 879). This situation stands in stark contrast to people being prevented from leaving Greek Islands in later years. The deportation order was nonetheless generally geographically restricted and entailed prohibition of presence in places such as Achaia (Patra), Thesprotia (Igoumenitsa), Kilkis (bordering North Macedonia) and Corfu (Ionian Island). The carrier was thus expected to leave Greece, usually within a month, or regularise their status. At the same time, they were prohibited from being present in locations to seek exit by land and sea. The document was sometimes disregarded or torn up by officials but also renewed. Ghazwan, who I also interviewed in Norway, had stayed 11 months in Greece. Reflecting on his lack of legal status there, he said: "I had the notice I was given at the [government] camp with me, even if it had expired. I kept it because maybe it would help. I trusted that piece of paper". As also noted by others, Ghazwan perceived the document as providing a sense of safety and not predominantly opening for deportation by a specified deadline (Cabot 2014; Dimitriadi 2018). In line with this, people took great care by placing them in plastic sleeves and keeping them despite expiry.

In contrast to predominant preference to be registered as adults upon detection of unauthorised entry, my interlocutors emphasised the importance of being assessed as under 18 when detected within Greece to avoid detention. Accordingly, implications following age can be changing and contradictory (Scalettaris, Monsutti, and Donini 2021). Initially registered as an accompanied child, Kamran was disbelieved about his age when apprehended unaccompanied a second time.

> They placed me in a cell. I told them I'm a minor, but they said: "No, you're not".
> […] Eventually they did an age assessment. Five of us were declared minors. The
> rest were sent to detention for 18 months.

Detention is regulated by the Return Directive. As Dimitriadi (2018, 128) notes, by "mid-2009, legislative amendments prolonged the maximum period of administrative detention on account of illegal entry or residence from three to six months and under certain circumstances to twelve months". Then, in 2012, the government "applied the 18-month maximum detention time for deportable migrants and asylum seekers" (Dimitriadi 2018, 109). And in 2014, an advisory opinion (44/2014) opened for indefinite detention. In January 2015, the "election of SYRIZA [again] changed the landscape" (Dimitriadi 2018, 149).

Kamran was first held by the coast guard for three weeks, from which he shared:

> We were 27 people in a small room. We didn't have a shower and they only
> gave us food twice a day. Once a week, if you pleaded a lot for your mobile
> to call your family, they would give it to you.

Kamran was then held at a police station for about two weeks. With reference to the material situation, he said: "We had a toilet and a shower, but the blankets smelt awful, and it was very cold. […] There were two adults held with us". Then, he was transferred to a detention centre, where he was held for about a week, and did not have access to a phone, leaving his family unaware of his whereabouts.

Kamran's experience was not unique. I met young people detained for up to seven months. They had been held at detention centres and in police cells unfit for longer stays, in facilities for children, families, or adult men, and in mixed areas with no regard for age, gender, or (un)accompanied status. However, while Kamran's assessment as a minor resulted in his transfer to an accommodation centre, Lotfullah, also assessed as a minor, who spent 14 months in Greece, was simply released onto the streets.

> I was kept in the police cell for ten days. I was so scared thinking about what
> they would do. If they were going to deport me. They didn't give any infor-
> mation, just checked that my passport was fake and my *khartía* [deportation
> order]. After ten days, I was provided with a lawyer because I was a minor.
> […] I was brought twice to the courthouse. The second time they released
> me because I was a minor. They released me and said: "Just go".

Such practices may intertwine with local, temporal procedures. For instance, apprehension in Patra also resulted in detention but, as Yawar shared from regular police raids of the informal settlements, there were exceptions.

> They wake us, place us in handcuffs, and bring us to the police station. We're
> made to wait from maybe 6 am to 12 pm without anything to eat or drink

[…]. If you're under 18, they call [organisation]. The rest, they send to[ward] Athens.

Research highlights the unreliability of age assessment methods (Noll 2016) and their intrusive nature, ranging from x-rays of teeth and/or wrists, as was the case for my interlocutors in Norway, to genital examination and psychosocial assessment (NOAS 2016). Kamran said that a doctor assessed his age but neither he nor Lotfullah detailed its content. Several also spoke about how their ability to access assistance during the journey had been based on others' assessments of their immediate physical appearance as "children" or "adults", and therefore on signs of time as supposedly objectively readable on their bodies. Such reading is layered by gendered, racialised, and aesthetic norms (Cabot 2014). I also witnessed on-the-spot assessments which infantilised certain features, drew on stereotypes, and entailed a negotiation of "dominant images of deservingness, victimhood, and vulnerability" (Cabot 2014, 112). These assessments redefined the meaning the young people attached to being a minor or an adult. While they generally presented themselves to me as capable, framed according to being a man and not a child, they also drew attention to challenges with living up to normative ideas about manhood, vulnerabilities, and need for support and recognition within regimes that repeatedly classified and reclassified them, and inadequately responded to their needs and priorities.

Detention, including protective custody for minors in police stations which was formally abolished in Greece in late 2020 (Cossé 2020), leave people bereft of opportunities to pursue their migration projects. The resulting enforced spatial immobility can be detrimental to coping. It can also increase motivation to leave when the present condition is rejected. In his study on perilous journeys to Israel among Ethiopian Jews, BenEzer (2002) draws attention to young people's pain emanating from family separation and prolonged stays in refugee camps in Sudan. It combined anticipation of moving with an unknown temporality of waiting and extremely challenging and even fatal camp conditions. As the stay prolonged, previous difficulties and the pain of separation were exacerbated. My interlocutors also experienced an uncertain temporality between a hope of arrival elsewhere and their ability or inability to achieve this. They shared how the journey's many strains can be reinforced when feeling stuck. The resulting mental pain can be understood as a form of violence and feeds into what Ansems de Vries and Guild term (2019, 2157) a "politics of exhaustion", that is "the felt effects of the stretching over time of a combination of fractured mobility, daily violence and fundamental uncertainty". While the young Afghans described several factors, including physical, temporal, psychological, and financial ones that threatened onward mobility, they also conveyed a strong potentiality of a viable future elsewhere, as discussed next.

Imaginings of a sustainable future elsewhere

Most of my interlocutors in Greece seemed to hold on to a hope that they would eventually manage to leave. Those in Norway also retrospectively generally described their orientation to keep moving as a "powerful […] commitment to an imagined future" elsewhere (Collyer 2010, 288). For instance, Yonos, who spent several days in a Turkish hospital after being rescued in the Aegean Sea, said: "I found the strength to continue in my head and in my heart. My heart was heavy but if I don't die, I must continue". This was resonated by Ghazwan: "I had to continue despite all the difficulties, regardless, I had to". His journey had lasted for about a year and a half. Watters (2008, 31) observes, among young people undertaking perilous journeys from North Africa, that there may be "a transcendent goal that sustains them to go through the harsh immediacy of their everyday existences, the vision and goal of a life worth living in another place". My interlocutors also dreamt of arrival elsewhere and that there, life would be better.

> You bet everything, 100 percent. I'll get a better life or die but it's better than to be in Afghanistan, to live in the same situation as before … I think it's the same the whole way. […] It depends on whether you're lucky or you're … (Lotfullah).

The alternative of not being one of the "lucky" ones lingered as Lotfullah spoke, but a mere possibility was generally narrated as outweighing the great uncertainty that they also emphasised in undertaking such high-risk journeys, as captured by Yonos: "You hold your life in your hands until you arrive in another country. I died many times on the road [to Europe]". As such, hope for a better life and conditions both at origins and along the way compelled a continued effort. The hardships young people accept to endure are therefore also linked to the suffering they try to escape. In other words, imagination, desire, and conditions in the place of departure and on the move interact.

Yonos, Ghazwan, and Lotfullah had been granted international protection in Norway. Through accounts of hardships and risks, they also spoke to qualities and endurance. At the same time, Lotfullah shared that the journey had led to distressing memories and difficulties sleeping. And Ghazwan spoke about how being stuck in Patra, repeatedly failing to move onward, had led to exhaustion. As he remembered: "I was so tired that I thought it would be the last time I would try [to hide in a lorry …] I was exhausted and felt like it was impossible". As such, they also raised some psychological traces of their experiences and effects of migration regimes. The young Afghans in Greece, on their part, spoke of a sense of failure, profound loss, and the death of friends and fellow travellers. Although circumstances differed, challenging and traumatic experiences were common. The suffering such experiences resulted in were, however, seldom presented as

a reason to discontinue the journey. Sometimes young people in Patra would proclaim, "Today I am leaving!", as a possible manifestation and assurance that their crossing would *eventually* be successful.

The framework of "involuntary immobility", developed in research on migration from Cape Verde, points to the important distinction between aspiration and ability to migrate, and the effect of migration regimes as a barrier (Carling 2002). In unpacking specific experiences of involuntary immobility, location emerges as important. My interlocutors lived under precarious conditions and expressed little attachment to Patra. This increased the need to leave. They did not have the legal or necessarily the financial means to migrate but likewise perceived that those required to stay were lacking. They were thus pushed by their situations and aspirations, in addition to other factors such as peer pressure, quest for social recognition, and strive to fulfil family expectations (Scalettaris, Monsutti, and Donini 2021; Belloni 2019). They did not seem to let structural constraints stop their efforts and remained active in the pursuit of onward mobility despite experiences of extreme vulnerability. They sought to respond to their immobility and were encouraged by the news of others succeeding. Those who had succeeded could therefore symbolise a hope and act as a reminder of perceived failure, as Kamran hinted at: "All my mates who were in Turkey [with me], they're now in Sweden, Germany and such and I'm here [in Greece]". Beyond migration policies, personal characteristics, and resources (Carling 2002) such as money, information, and bravery, putting themselves in life-threatening situations became a crucial aspect of their journeys.

In her study on perilous journeys to Turkey among Afghans, Kaytaz (2016, 294) found common idioms emphasising "confronting fear, suffering and even death on the road" and writes about an acceptance of dangers. Moreover, Belloni (2019, 128) approaches high-risk journeys among young Eritreans as "a sequential, cumulative process" of stepwise migration. She shows how the notion of entrapment, from gambling theory, provides a lens to understand how onward mobility is pursued when too much has been invested and endured to give up. Some may only give up if forced to do so by injuries or exhaustion. Long recovery processes can also lead to settlement, as people are compelled to engage with local contexts, acquire language skills, or form attachments. It may not only be what happens during recovery that influences willingness to stay but injuries and risks. Conditions endured can make further migration unwanted (Kaytaz 2016). Furthermore, migration aspirations and ability change over time and depend on numerous factors (Carling 2002). Ability may result from considerable investments in a place but can also transform aspirations towards staying.

I met some young people who contemplated other options or were awaiting family reunification according to the Dublin III Regulation, but I rarely came across those willing to engage with measures that limited their migration to

Greece. Although this tendency cannot be divorced from the locations and temporality of my research, it suggests that priorities were seldom expressed as met by the available structures. A further explanation for the general lack of restructuring effect may be that once in Greece, and perhaps increasingly so in an environment marked by mobility such as Patra, they were that much closer. Ramin, who had been three months in Greece, tried to make sense of high-risk journeys retrospectively: "When you've had so many difficult experiences and you arrive, it's only a 'river' that stands in your way. So, you say to yourself, I can manage to cross this one too". Coupled with difficult living conditions, insufficient asylum and reception systems, pressures or expectations (Dimitriadi 2018), and "the cumulative impact of previous emotional and material investments" (Belloni 2019, 2), the threshold for giving up may become higher the closer one is to a destination where one envisions, hopes, and dreams that a better future awaits, however that future is imagined.

Conclusion

This article has considered the interplay between mobility and immobility in the everyday lives of young people on the move. It has looked at unfolding trajectories among some young Afghan men aspiring to continue their journeys from Greece and retrospective accounts by others who had managed to do so and who had arrived in Norway. While migration is governed as a linear phenomenon, journeys in search of protection, refuge, and a sustainable future are often not. In adopting a mobilities perspective, it has been possible to consider intersecting power relations and complex, overlapping processes of movement and stasis. These shape trajectories with different consequences, spatiotemporally, for the body, and for the intimate. By focusing on unaccompanied minors, it has also been possible to consider mobilities and immobilities resulting from administrative categorisations based on age and status as accompanied or unaccompanied. My interlocutors' lives were variously marked by inconsistent practices and different, partly contradictory, temporalities. Time affected their trajectories in multiple ways. Even if they experienced being stuck geographically and in specific living conditions, time was simultaneously being fast forward and backward in the ways they were classified and reclassified as accompanied or unaccompanied children or as adults. As such, they were exposed to time, while also actively and relationally working with time according to their specific circumstances and the actors involved in shaping these. This in turn had multiple consequences for onward mobility. Their experiences, moreover, speak to an orientation and commitment, a hope and a dream, and the potentiality of a sustainable future which they located in a Europe envisioned elsewhere than Greece. Imagination, desire, and conditions endured in the places they had left and moved through therefore also interacted and influenced their trajectories.

The young people continuously navigated in response to how they moved and were moved by what and whom they encountered along the way (Vigh 2009), forms of visibility, and governance mechanisms. This points to the importance of improvisation in their lives. Although they showed great perseverance in their encounters with a wide range of border and protection frames and restraints, it is important to not romanticise their mobility and endurance. Their experiences also point to suffering, the threat of exhaustion, and some effects of violent and discriminatory borders and migration regimes, visible also beyond the migration journey.

There has been an increase in sites of migration management in Greece since the EU-Turkey Statement, such as Moria (now 2.0) camp on Lesvos. As Cabot (2014, 24) observes, situations people on the move encounter "must be understood within the broader context of European governance mechanisms […]; regional histories of displacement; and often more global forms of violence and inequality that have positioned Greece on the margins of Europe". In this article I have engaged particularly with the situation in the port city of Patra. Migration to Greece has received widespread attention since 2015 but it is not a new phenomenon. Greece also has a refugee past – the 1923 Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations. Memories of the population exchange have fostered deep sympathy and solidarity with those displaced (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008), not least witnessed during the so-called "migration crisis" (Papataxiarchis 2016). While those who have arrived may be framed as temporary guests (Dimitriadi 2018), and the situation has changed in profound ways since my last field trip, people continue to seek shelter in Patra's abandoned buildings as they successively try to hide in lorries with the hope of crossing to Italy and beyond.

Notes

1. Everyone has been given pseudonyms.
2. The police were responsible for processing asylum claims until the new Asylum Service began operating in June 2013.
3. My research was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. I also spent a period in Greece prior to admission as a doctoral candidate and carried out an exploratory phase according to recognised ethical norms and guidelines.

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