Youth Migration and the Politics of Wellbeing

Stories of life in transition

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Introduction

‘I don’t know what to do, I’m walking round like a wild chicken.’ These were Dan’s words, blurted down the phone. He had just heard that the United Kingdom (UK) Home Office had finally agreed to give him indefinite leave to remain. For nine years he had been stuck, his life defined by a legal status that variably categorized him as ‘failed asylum-seeker’, ‘appeal rights exhausted’ and ‘undocumented’. During this time, he was unable to study or work and had no secure place in which to live. He did not know where he would next find food or a way of clothing himself and he was unable to make any plans for the future. He was, as one young person in our study described his similar experience of life without documents, living ‘life with the pause button on’. Being finally recognized as a bona fide human being has transformed Dan. He is happy, he looks different and he has acquired an air of confidence and calm. In less than a year, he has a job, somewhere to live, has been able to visit family in Europe, is making plans for university and is having fun. When we catch up on the phone, Dan chats about day-to-day occurrences at work and his plans for the weekend with friends: normal stuff, unclouded by the status issue that has dogged him for so much of his life. These used to be such different conversations: no matter how hard we tried, we would inevitably circle back to the corrosive effects of his precarious immigration status. Finally, though, he has found what he came in search of: the elusive *netsanet*, a word meaning freedom in Tigrinya, one of the languages spoken in his native Eritrea.

During a research project lasting more than three years and directly involving over 100 unaccompanied young refugees and migrants, the majority of whom had come to England and Italy to flee persecution, violence and other extreme hardships, we encountered many young people living in situations of protracted limbo that lasted many years. We witnessed

the profound impact this had on them. Even when young people were granted leave to remain, the transition to adulthood was not plain sailing. After being defined for so long by their 'status', the sudden reversal of their situation could be overwhelming. Exercising new freedoms to make plans and look forward demanded a determination to accept that the system was not fair, and not to let the past losses, impossibilities, limitations and sheer waste of life cloud the moment and hold them back.

The starting point: life projects and dreams in transition

At a conference in Brussels in 2010 on irregular youth migration from Africa to Europe, because of visa restrictions just a single African delegate was able to attend. When asked by a European participant why people were not responsive to the warnings and propaganda regarding the risks of irregular migration from Africa, the woman's response was mocked for being overly simple. 'The thing is', she remarked, 'migration is about dreams.' She continued: 'Until we can find a way to get inside these young people's heads and reprogramme their dreams, we will struggle to ever fully control migration. Dreams', she concluded, 'are the hardest thing to regulate of all.'

One respected policy expert at the time tweeted in response to these comments, 'It's guff like this that gets in the way of evidence-based policy making.'

So, what have life projects – the stuff of dreams – got to do with controlling irregular migratory movements? The answer, we argue, is that the policy context in which substantial amounts of money are spent on managing irregular migration is often as poorly researched as it is cash rich. Certainly, youth migration needs to be understood in

relation to its negative drivers of persecution, violence and unsustainable lives in countries of origin, factors that motivated the flights of many young people in this research. But at the same time, there is a need to recognize that such adversity also fuels individual and collective dreams and aspirations for better lives. Without acknowledging this, politicians will, as our African colleague stated so powerfully, struggle to formulate meaningful and workable asylum and immigration policies.

Some migration and refugee studies scholars have considered how to match the skill sets and career pathways of economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees with the economic needs of host states (for example, Ruhs 2013; Betts and Collier 2017). The migrants' quest for a viable future of their own making beyond this economic frame is, however, largely dismissed by politicians as too perplexing to engage with. So, while the real-life Odyssey is staged repeatedly at our shores, migration policy makers claim to get on with the 'serious work' of controlling borders through increased investments in fences and militarism. This book pushes back against the dominant paradigms driving migration governance and instead considers youth migration through the realities of young people's lives: why they left and what they strive for through their mobility. Such an analysis reveals a profound disconnect between policy intentions and their real-world relevance, and raises questions as to why policy makers continue to ignore the significance of dreams for evidence-based policy.

In placing the life projects of young people at the centre of its analysis, this book takes seriously the intentions – mistaken as they may or may not have been – of the thousands of young people who have died in or crossed the Mediterranean, fleeing violence and seeking better futures in Europe. We also recognize the 10,000 unaccompanied children registered as 'missing' from institutional care in 2016 (ECRE 2016), and the hundreds more who are

moving across Europe's borders as we write in March 2020, seeking better opportunities. In starting with the notion of dreams, this book remembers all those who have died and celebrates the achievements of those who succeeded against the odds.

The book draws on retrospective accounts gathered through the Becoming Adult project,[1] a longitudinal study of the wellbeing outcomes of those who arrived on their own in England and Italy as children (defined as 'unaccompanied minors') and then made the transition to institutional adulthood at the age of 18.[2] In the UK, the research was conducted in four cities across England and involved working with young people from Afghanistan, Albania and Eritrea.[3] In Italy, unaccompanied migrant young people from a wider range of countries of origin took part in the research, all based in one major city where they were either living or were in transit to other parts of Europe. The work captured the varying trajectories of young people between the ages of 16 and 25. For some, this meant being granted temporary or permanent legal status. For others, it involved being forcibly removed to countries of origin, becoming forced to live illegally or continuing to face extended periods of waiting for a decision to be made either on an asylum application or on a claim for extended leave to remain in their European host state. For the sake of consistency and comparability, this book includes primarily the experiences of participants in Italy who originated from Afghanistan, Albania and Eritrea. Where relevant, some experiences of young people from other origin countries are included to illuminate differences and commonalities across immigration control and social care systems in England and Italy, and to elucidate the importance of cross-cultural and transnational social ties to young people's wellbeing. While, for reasons we go on to explain, most of the young people included in the research were male, around 10 per cent were female.

Having life put on hold is one of a number of outcomes for young people in the study. At the time of writing, some participants continue to live through an endless process of rejection, onward migration and increasing isolation and detachment. Others are thriving in their new lives in the UK, Italy and further afield. This book explores the impact of these diverse trajectories on young people's wellbeing and considers what might constitute a meaningful policy response.

<H1>Migrant children arriving in Europe, the UK and Italy</H1>

Sparked by growing instability and conflict in North Africa, the Middle East and surrounding regions, the year 2015 heralded what became known as a global refugee crisis. Europe, like many regions, experienced a rapid increase in arrivals of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. The official number rose from an average of some 12,000 a year to almost 90,000 (Eurostat 2016a). The UK received just over 3,000 applications for asylum from unaccompanied children in 2015, the majority aged 16–17 (57 per cent) and 91 per cent of them boys and young men (Eurostat 2016a), while in the same year Italy received 3,958 (Italian Ministry of Work and Social Policy 2016). At the time of this research, unlike in the UK, unaccompanied children arriving in Italy could be categorised as asylum-seeking or non-asylum-seeking minors, with the opportunity to regularize their status through the asylum system and/or the labour market under certain conditions. A total of 62,672 unaccompanied minors were recorded as arriving in Italy between 2011 and 2016, in the main from Eritrea, Egypt, Gambia, Nigeria and Syria. Despite the different asylum options available to them, most minors transit through Italy to other European Union (EU) member states (Save the Children 2017). By way of example, during our research in a transit centre for migrants in Italy between July 2015 and February 2016, 15,000 unaccompanied minors – mostly from

Eritrea – were counted as having passed through the city en route to other European destinations, including England.

An unknown number of unaccompanied children arrive in Europe undetected, coming to live in private fostering arrangements or to work in the irregular economy (European Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009, 2011). These children, who may be survivors of human trafficking (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009; Anderson 2012), commonly originate from low income or war-affected countries, including Albania, Bangladesh and Vietnam. Previous research has shown that across these sub-groups (asylum-seeking minors, non-asylum-seeking minors known to the authorities and undetected minors), children come to Europe unaccompanied for a combination of reasons beyond their primary search for safety (Hopkins and Hill 2008; Kanics et al 2010), including education (Gladwell and Elwyn 2012; Refugee Support Network 2012), to support their families financially (Nicolini 2010) and in the hope that they will be able to build a better future (Brighter Futures 2013).

Whether or not children migrating alone into Europe are granted refugee status is in theory determined by the specifics of their claim to asylum and their ability to articulate a credible account of having a 'well-founded fear of persecution' in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. However, our work confirms past research that indicates young people's country of origin, ethnicity and gender, and not just individual claims to asylum, are highly significant in predicting the outcomes of asylum claims. Hence, overall, outcomes for young people from Afghanistan are demonstrably different from those for young Eritreans. The challenges faced by young Albanians in having their asylum claims recognized are often even more complex.

This research also notes important differences between England and Italy. Despite attempts at EU level to harmonize policies with respect to asylum processing and reception and care arrangements for unaccompanied migrant children and young people, Italy had at the time of this research a higher protection rate than England for asylum seekers, especially from certain countries such as Afghanistan. This is largely because Italy was also more likely to grant humanitarian protection (not refugee status but leave to remain owing to recognition of the fact that it would be unsafe to return someone to the country from which they had migrated). In England, meanwhile, most unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors were granted time-limited discretionary leave to remain, which expired at the age of 17½. This was rarely extended. Unlike in Italy, return to war-torn Afghanistan after the age of 18 was, as we shall see, a reality for many young people in England. Wherever the young people end up, immigration and welfare structures and systems have the power to directly impair or enhance their wellbeing outcomes. Such institutions and their protagonists categorize young people into 'deserving' or 'undeserving', 'bona fide' or 'bogus', 'legal' or 'illegal'. The way these systems were experienced by many young people in this study – arbitrary for some, impenetrable for others – raises fundamental questions of social justice, human rights and equality.

Migrant children becoming 'adult'

That the UK accords most 'unaccompanied minors' one of a number of time-limited periods of discretionary leave until they turn 18, rather than refugee status, stems from a shared commitment to international policy frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that children migrating alone are vulnerable and require protection. However, such discursive frames largely ignore the imminent transition to institutional 'adulthood' for most young people soon after they arrive in Europe. As argued elsewhere

(Chase 2016), it is paradoxically at this juncture that migrant young people often become increasingly exposed to risks and adversity and potentially more vulnerable than during their childhood. Given the concentration of previous research and policy on the unaccompanied migrant child, this work purposefully shifts the emphasis towards young people's outcomes after 18, a time when the political and social commitment to the refugee child typically wanes and they become subsumed within adult asylum and immigration procedures and the largely negative and xenophobic discourses surrounding these.

At the time of the research, Italy, unlike the UK, provided a legal alternative to the asylum system, enabling unaccompanied minors to regularize their status at the point when they turned 18. The distinct configuration of immigration, welfare and labour market policies in Italy relative to the UK creates a different political and policy climate for the reception and treatment of young people, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Whether they turn 18 in England or Italy, without secure legal status, young people's access to a range of rights and protections are diminished. Becoming 'adult' can signify losing access to education, a reduction or total withdrawal of social care support, financial insecurity, no eligibility for accommodation and the end of access to legal support. At the same time, former cared for migrant children may be confronted with new risks and uncertainties, such as the possibility of forced repatriation or the prospect of being forced to live 'illegally'. Conversely, being granted the right to remain through one of a number of possible legal statuses can be transformative, creating both a secure basis for wellbeing and possibilities to fulfil the sorts of futures that young people aspire to for themselves and family members.

The central importance of legal status aside, as this book explores, young people's migratory trajectories and outcomes are also shaped by their own interrelated and mutable

considerations pertaining to safety, work, education, perceived level of welfare and protection, language, family decisions, as well as social networks and intimate relationships.

Equally, young people's histories and identities, including age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and socio-economic status prior to migrating to Europe, all influence what happens to them post-18. Child migration is intrinsically gendered, the large majority of minors migrating alone to Europe being boys and young men. While there are some important experiences of girls and young women included in this work, these are somewhat muted by the many more perspectives from boys and young men. Nonetheless, the book does highlight differences in how girls and boys are received, perceived and treated within asylum, immigration and related systems, as well as some of the fallible assumptions underpinning these. For example, at a high-level gathering in 2017, it was asked whether the nine countries of the EU (including Italy), which at the time practised genital examinations as a component of age assessment procedures for unaccompanied minors, had adopted any gender-sensitive guidelines in this regard. One official commented, 'Well of course, no one should put *a girl* through that.' Such examinations were, however, deemed largely unproblematic for boys, despite growing awareness of the sexual violence experienced by boys and young men as well as girls on the move (IFRC 2018; Women's Refugee Commission 2019). We consider other gendered and often intersecting racialized experiences of transitioning to institutional adulthood throughout this book, and seek to capture some of the plurality of young people's experiences accordingly.

Importantly, the outcomes for young people in the study are not entirely negative. Amid accounts of marginalization, exclusion and despair, the book incorporates examples of human flourishing. Such accounts illustrate how young people frequently refuse to passively accept

the hand dealt them by migration governance systems and instead reclaim control over whatever aspects of their lives they can in order to construct their own futures within the constraints imposed upon them.

The politics of definition

As reflected elsewhere (an example being Lems et al 2019), the language surrounding child and youth migration fundamentally frames how the issue is understood and shapes the policy response. Roger Zetter (1991; 2007) in particular has drawn attention to the importance of bureaucratic labelling practices in determining policy pathways and wellbeing outcomes for different institutionally defined 'types' of refugees and migrants. Such procedures with respect to separated migrant children and young people include the social care and support categories to which young people are bureaucratically assigned, the management of transitions between these policy categories over time (and especially as young people move between the institutional classifications of 'child' to 'adult') and the ways in which migrant children and young people are spoken and written about in the media and in policy and public discourses. Later in the book (see in particular Chapter 6), we explore further how these policy and discursive constructions of young people are juxtaposed with young people's own conceptions of themselves, the realities of their day-to-day lives, their identities and the sorts of futures to which they aspire.

The term 'migrant young people' used in various forms in this book and elsewhere is problematic and inherently political. The same goes for the variety of other bureaucratic tags used to define children and young people who arrive in Europe alone. The 'asylum-seeking', the 'unaccompanied', the 'separated' child – or commonly the institutional code UASC (unaccompanied asylum-seeking child) – are all used to distinguish such children from others

within social care, health and education systems and to differentiate them in immigration and asylum statistics. These terms all have political underpinnings, whether normative in the sense of providing markers of bureaucratic processes or in the sense of being designed to humanize the discourse surrounding migrant children and young people, as in the term 'separated child', used widely by non-governmental and civil society organizations (Separated Child in Europe Programme 2010). Irrespective of their ideological roots, the terms fundamentally essentialize young people's migratory trajectories, largely ignoring other aspects of their lives and identities.

Our research began as the contestations around the variably termed refugee or migration 'crisis' (Baldwin-Edwards et al 2019) peaked in 2015. While humanitarian concern shone the spotlight on the number of refugees dying in the Mediterranean, other agendas directed attention to the numbers (the 'floods' and the 'waves') of migrants threatening the status quo within nation states and across Europe as a whole. The response to the crisis, however construed, was what has come to be known as the New European Agenda on Migration. This well-invested and consolidated strategy constituted a swathe of Europe-wide policies that largely prioritized the fortification of Europe over concerns to protect the rights or wellbeing of those on the move (Baldwin-Edwards et al 2019). The Agenda has increasingly given licence to Europe to extend its tendrils of immigration control into Libya, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and Turkey through a series of bilateral and ad hoc arrangements with these countries and regions, in the name of securitizing Europe and protecting its interests. The lessons of this book therefore transcend Europe. The outsourcing of immigration controls beyond the borders of Europe has created a network of sorting spaces that divide people into the bona fide and the bogus, the good and the bad, the deserving and undeserving refugee.

These tropes were used repeatedly to define and categorize the young people in this study within Europe's borders.

The young people in the current study are all protagonists in one way or another of the crisis of migration management (Collyer and King 2016; Crawley 2016; Allen et al 2018; Baldwin-Edwards et al 2019), in that their hopes and dreams were frequently thwarted by, and sometimes hard won in the face of, mechanisms designed to strengthen borders around Europe and externalize border controls beyond the continent. In this book, we meet Jamal and Abdul, previously unaccompanied migrant children in the UK and at the time of writing held in Indonesia, after having tried to remigrate towards Australia following deportation once they turned 18. We also meet Bashir, who continues to seek out a future for himself by moving between Europe's borders, and Noor, who, after being forcibly returned from Britain, now struggles to sustain himself in Afghanistan. These life trajectories, shaped by immigration control policies and the various forms of violence that they mete out, epitomize what De Vries and Guild (2019) have termed the politics of exhaustion. The net result for many is child migration, culminating in protracted limbo in young adulthood. Such embodied liminality often stretches for as long as and beyond a decade, having individual and collective impacts. And while we can trace the immediate effects on the individual (and consider how these interact with a young person's own sense of agency, resourcefulness, networks and opportunities), we need also to consider the collective impacts of such uncertainty over time and on wider communities.

Differing journeys, convergent experiences

This book is primarily concerned with how young people have fared after arriving in Europe, and not with the journeys they took in order to arrive there or the horrors that drove them to

leave their homes in the first place. These are topics that have attracted much previous research attention. Nonetheless, it is useful by way of background to enquire into the general patterns that emerged in terms of travel from different countries of origin and the sorts of reasons known to have influenced young people's migratory decisions.

<H2>Journeys from Eritrea</H2>

The early discussions with young people from Eritrea began in 2015 against a backdrop of daily news stories of unprecedented numbers of people, many of whom were their compatriots, drowning in the Mediterranean Sea as they attempted to make their way to Europe. With rare exceptions, such as Helen, who had travelled to the UK by plane at the age of 14 several years previously, most young people had travelled across land and sea. Several young Eritreans we spoke with had arrived within the previous months, their migratory experiences still raw. Journeys typically involved crossing the border into Ethiopia and then continuing through Sudan and on to Libya. Young people faced the sequential hazards of the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, of periods of imprisonment, of destitution and frequent episodes of police brutality and gang violence.

The overriding reason for young people leaving Eritrea was to avoid enforced and indefinite military service, known as *Sawa*. At the time of writing, the expectation by the Eritrean government is that as soon as their formal education comes to an end, all young men and women must enter military service for an unlimited period of time. Aaron, aged 21, explained the system:

> ‘We know that we study until 10th grade … 11th grade and then in 12th grade you have to go to, it’s called *Sawa* [Defence Training Centre] … it’s a military training. So everyone starts 11th grade but then some people they don’t want to go there so they run away. So I was studying 8th grade … so I had three years more to study and then go to *Sawa* … so I will decide like, you know, I don’t need to go there … better to leave, you know, then maybe survive you know.’

Aaron spoke of the horrific conditions in the military training camps, where young people were expected to work in 40-degree heat with inadequate food or water and where many reportedly died without their families ever knowing that they had done so. Besides the inevitability of their own forced conscription, young people spoke about the impact of having fathers whom they never saw or got to know because they were forced to work indefinitely for the military away from home. Aaron spoke angrily of how his father was enslaved to the military while they struggled. With his father absent, like many others, he was forced to leave school and find work to support his family. In doing so, he risked being conscripted indefinitely into the army himself.

Young people spoke of how they had developed imaginaries about how they would travel to Europe before they left Eritrea; for example, they had heard of the desert and the sea they would need to cross, yet they had no real sense of the scale or significance of these phenomena. As David commented, ‘they are just ideas, you don’t know what they are’. An Eritrean elder volunteering in a migrant camp in Italy captured the fantasy thus: ‘They go [to Europe in their minds], even before they leave.’ Most young people we spoke with said they had not consulted families or even said goodbye before leaving Eritrea, calculating that it was

easier just to go rather than raise the fears of loved ones about what might happen to them on the journey.

David was 17 and close to his 18th birthday when we first met him, just eight months after he had arrived in England. He described elements of his journey, including three months in a Libyan prison: there he was locked up for most of the day in a stifling container with little food and under constant armed guard. He described how a group of them took their chances and ran from the prison compound with the guards firing at them. One of the girls he was with was shot in the leg. David eventually arrived at the coast, where he secured a place in a small boat across the Mediterranean that was paid for by family members back in Eritrea. After several days at sea, the boat was intercepted by a large Italian shipping vessel, which took them aboard before handing them over to the Italian immigration authorities. Reflecting on his journey and how his siblings back in Eritrea were likely to follow him, David commented:

> ‘You can’t even wish this to my enemy, let alone on my brother and sister, yeah? Because we came through the Sahara where you can die in Sahara. We came through the Mediterranean Sea when you can die in Mediterranean Sea. We crossed a lot of difficulties. We crossed a lot of death and like tragedy so, I can’t wish them that. But if they decide to come, then there is no way to go back … that’s the problem. That’s why I can’t tell them to come. I know they are facing a lot of difficulty in Eritrea but I can’t tell them to come through because I know when they come out there, I know there is lots of risks … it’s very difficult.’

David was among several Eritrean men who spoke of the specific risks facing girls who crossed the Sahara. A young woman at one of the UK youth groups where we conducted ethnography for this research told us that she had been raped during this passage. Meanwhile, a group of three young Eritrean women in transit in Italy spoke of multiple experiences of sexual violence during the journey – and not just in Libya, though they did not wish for the details to be on the record and so had not reported these attacks. One youth worker explained to us that 'with the girls, you almost assume it'.

The 'Jungle' in Calais, France, was a key landmark in the journey for those who had passed through Italy and a place where young people often spent significant periods of time before finally managing to smuggle themselves into a lorry heading to the UK. Almaz described spending almost two months sleeping in a small container with five other young Eritreans, trying her luck each night to get to the UK and eventually arriving in England aged 16 with three other girls, whom she had met in Calais. For her, the most distressing aspect of the journey was having been separated from her 11-year-old brother who, at the time of the research, she had still not managed to locate.

From Italy, where he was fingerprinted, Aaron similarly travelled through France and then by lorry to England. When he arrived aged 17, he was unlawfully detained for a period of three months before his case for asylum was accepted and he was given five years leave to remain in the UK. Others came to Italy and took onward trains to complete their journeys. Alan, for example, spoke of how he spent time sleeping in the train station in Venice before managing to take trains to Nice and then on to Paris. Two young people from Eritrea participating in the study in England had previously spent time in the transit camp in which the Italian fieldwork was conducted.

Eritreans in Italy spoke of how they were reluctant to stay in the country because of a combination of the poor living conditions, the fact that they had English language skills they wanted to use, social networks elsewhere and also the relative likelihood, compared with other nationalities, of being granted asylum elsewhere in light of the widely recognised human rights violations in Eritrea. There is, however, at the time of writing, evidence that a growing number of Eritrean young people are applying for asylum in Italy. This may be influenced by increased restrictions at Europe's borders, which make it harder to seek sanctuary elsewhere. It may also be in part because they have heard of friends being refused asylum or facing difficult living conditions in other countries.

It is important to note that for many Eritreans, as for Afghans, the journey onwards to the UK from other parts of Europe was motivated by a desire to reunite with family members. This is something to which they had a legal right under the Dublin III regulation,[4] and yet the mechanism was poorly operational at the time of research across most EU countries (Starfield 2018). In 2016, the average time necessary to process cases under Dublin III was reported to be ten or eleven months (Red Cross 2016). In the space of a single year, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Calais reported that three boys with a legal right to be reunited with family members in the UK had died while trying to travel illegally after becoming frustrated with long delays in the system, coupled with the appalling conditions in the Calais camp (Safe Passage 2018).

Journeys from Afghanistan

Unlike young people from Eritrea who, on the whole, claimed they themselves took the decision to leave, young people from Afghanistan, or neighbouring Iran or Pakistan, spoke of how it was normally an adult that made the decision for them to leave and found the resources to fund their transit in order to protect them from or get them out of dangerous situations. At the age of 15, Noor faced forced conscription into the Taliban. He was taken to a nearby camp where he was given military training, taught how to use an AK47 and shown anti-American propaganda videos. After ten days, he fled back home where a relative, recognizing that Noor's life was in danger, sold some land to raise enough money to pay intermediaries to take him to the UK.

Journeys were routinely described as difficult, involving many borders and many dangers. Memories of the 'Jungle' evoked particularly fearful memories. Ahmad associated it with large animals he had never seen before and the beatings he received as he repeatedly attempted to board a lorry to cross the Channel: 'one day my nose was bloody, one day mouth bleeding, one day I had like a bloody arm wound', he explained. It had taken him more than a month and half of regular attacks, being pepper sprayed by police and kicked as he slept on the streets before he was finally able to make the journey. Noor attempted to board a lorry 20 times. Each time he was found by French police, put in prison for the night and the next day released. On his 21st attempt, he successfully managed to cross the Channel.

Kamran reflected on how, despite such hazards, people would continue to make the journey from Afghanistan to have 'a better life, to save themselves, you know, to come and educate themselves, people take the risk'. He had witnessed several people die on the way, either in the boat or being hit by cars, but those who arrived safely at least had the possibility of a life,

something that he contrasted sharply with existing in Afghanistan. It was, he said, a choice between ‘no life and a good life’.

Journeys to England were described in sometimes mythical ways. In one discussion, Janan and Habib laughed about how people in Afghanistan evoked the imaginary of London. Janan commented, ‘London is the furthest country in the world … you can’t reach London, like you can’t reach the moon.’ To which Habib replied, ‘It’s like a golden ticket you know?’ Janan then explained how London was used in dialogue the same way in the UK we threaten to send someone ‘to Coventry’ (stop talking to them) if they do or say something upsetting. He explained, ‘I say to you, “I’m going to London, you can’t reach me” … it means, just respect me like a good friend.’

Overall, Italy was perceived by young Afghans as a ‘lesser’ alternative to the opportunities offered in England, even if it might be easier to obtain papers. Some young Afghans had, however, claimed asylum in Italy and succeeded with varying degrees to integrate, usually with the legal status of humanitarian leave. Among these was Erfanullah, who was aged 26 when we spoke with him and 13 when he arrived in Italy. He was granted asylum and has since set up a successful sushi business with his family, whom he was able to have resettled in Italy. He now offers traineeships to unaccompanied minors to help them regularize their status through finding a job and financial independence when they turn 18. Another Afghan in Italy, Hal, explained that though the process of getting papers had been slow and difficult and the welfare system was scant in comparison with the UK and other European countries, now he was doing ‘OK’. Alongside finding work, he had been able to develop his creative side through volunteering with an NGO as a videographer.

Another dimension of the journeys from Afghanistan concerned a relatively small but nevertheless important movement of Afghans who feared detention in and deportation from the UK going *back* to Italy. 'In Italy, it's not like the UK with CCTV', explained Izatullah, aged 23, who had twice been detained in and then deported from England. In Italy, he said, 'it's easier to be invisible'. Takir, a 24-year-old Afghan who arrived in England aged 14 to seek asylum and was refused, was able in the end to secure humanitarian leave in Italy after, in his words, 'fleeing' the risk in England of detention and deportation to Afghanistan. As a representative from the Italian Ministry of the Interior also conceded in an interview for this research, 'The difference with the UK, what is it? That [here] if they have no documents no one will escort these lads to the border.' These different welfare and protection opportunities in Italy and the UK for unaccompanied migrants post-18 are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Finally, some young Afghans were making the journey to Europe for a second time, after having been forcibly removed to Afghanistan. At the time of research, neither the UK nor Italy was forcibly returning people to Eritrea. The situation for Albanian young people was more complex, and while our research revealed their frequent disappearance in order to avoid forced removal from the UK, we were unable to follow individuals who had returned to Albania or capture examples of return migration to England after deportation.

Of those young people who migrated a second time from Afghanistan, their opinions varied in terms of which journey had been the most difficult. Bashir unhesitatingly said that the second journey had been toughest because the first had been arranged and supported by family members and he had been much younger – most decisions were therefore out of his hands. The second time he had little money and no agent to negotiate the way for him. He relied mainly on a global positioning system (GPS) phone application, which he said

eventually got him to his destination. The advantages were not having to pay anyone and a shorter sea crossing, although the GPS route was longer. The disadvantage was the possibility of losing his way, which inevitably happened. Bashir recounted his journey in detail and jokingly recalled all the countries he had passed through:

> 'How many borders? You count them. From Afghanistan to Pakistan, from Pakistan to Iran, from Iran to Turkey, from Turkey to Greece, Greece to Macedonia, from Macedonia to Serbia, from Serbia to Hungary, from Hungary to Czechoslovakia, from there to Austria, from Austria to coming here (Italy) [he laughs] … like more than like eight, nine countries.'

Jamal spoke about the high expectations and hopes he had of his first journey to the UK, believing that his life would from then on be 'sorted'. As we will see in later chapters, this was far from the case. Similarly, Noor endured five months on a dangerous journey to get to England, during which he risked his life many times. After finding safety and a new life, he was put on a plane in the middle of the night to the place he feared the most: Afghanistan. This is where he remains, despite having made several unsuccessful attempts to leave again.

<H2>Journeys from Albania</H2>

Though it is arguably easier to travel from Albania to Italy and on to England, the most striking aspect regarding the journeys narrated by young Albanians was the less obvious, and frequently unrecognized, forms of persecution that had sometimes sparked their flight (Allsopp et al 2018). Indeed, children and young people from Albania form the third largest group of asylum-seeking children in the UK (Eurostat 2016b). Reasons for flight regularly

include blood feuds and familial conflict, often associated with the centuries-old Kanun of Lek Dukagjin, known widely as Kanun Law. Blood feuds in Albania are an historic and often intergenerational phenomenon: they stem from a dispute between families that may relate to an accident, a perceived insult, a property ownership disagreement, a conflict over access to electricity, water, fuel or similar. Where this dispute leads to a death, the other family is said to be 'owed blood', and a feud can be passed down through generations.

In the north of Albania in particular, blood feuds are reportedly still often managed according to Kanun Law, a system described by the UK Home Office as 'a primitive constitution regulating not only their community life, but also their private lives' (Home Office 2016). The Kanun is implemented by elders, sometimes with the assistance of negotiators. Recent reports by the UK Home Office, NGOs and international organizations have stressed that such feuds are increasingly affecting girls as well as boys (Home Office 2016; Shpresa et al 2017).

Apart from Kanun Law and family conflicts, Albanians in the research also reported facing persecution based on their sexual orientation, that they had been or were at risk of trafficking or domestic violence and, to a smaller degree, were at risk of religious radicalization (Shpresa et al 2017). The Kanun Law was the reason Idriz gave for fleeing Albania when he was 15. He recounted how it took five days to travel to the UK, where he arrived exhausted and dehydrated on the outskirts of a city. He hadn't eaten for the duration of the journey. Idriz travelled illegally with two other young people in the back of a lorry carrying cars to Europe. The lorry was intercepted in France, at which point they were taken out of the lorry, registered by immigration officers and then allowed to leave. Through the support of a cousin of one of his companion's, Idriz then took another lorry and eventually arrived in the UK.

Besmir similarly spoke of how his parents were insistent that he left Albania at the age of 16½ because he was 'in danger', but it was never explained to him why. Through his uncle, they arranged for him to travel in the back of a lorry, and he was eventually dropped, disorientated, on the high street of a city in southern England. It was only after his arrival that he began to fully understand the 'traditional law' that put his life at risk and why his parents had been so keen to get him out of the country.

The story of Antigona, a young Muslim woman, was one of trafficking, sexual abuse, being forced to sell drugs and multiple journeys between Albania and other countries in Europe. She ended up in the UK after being raped by the driver of the lorry who brought her to the city in the Midlands where she was living at the time of the research. For a long time, Antigona was too worried to recount these experiences because she feared the repercussions of her involvement in illegal work and thought it likely she would be imprisoned or forcibly removed to Albania as a result.

The evidential base on which asylum decisions are made for young people from Albania in Britain has been highly criticized as patchy and inconclusive. At two events organized by Shpresa (an Albanian community-based organization in London) and the Becoming Adult project at the UK's Parliament and University College London, it was concluded that a significant dearth of evidence exists regarding the threats facing Albanian youth in their country of origin. Policy and practice implications are hard to conclude, it was argued, without a stronger 'research and evidence base' (Shpresa et al 2017: 5) about the reasons for flight. This theme permeated our research with young Albanians in England, who repeatedly spoke of not being believed and their claims to asylum being rejected.

Unaccompanied young Albanians in Italy combined those who sought to stay for work and education and others, seeking protection from harm, who tended to transit through Italy towards the UK or other parts of Europe. Kil, aged 17, for example, explained:

> 'I'm currently working, let's say "informally", but it's not a fixed job. For now, my main priority is school and other things, I'm getting support with that for now. Then after that, they'll even give me a hand getting set up with a proper job.'

Young people such as Kil were sometimes able to make the most of the structural opportunities that existed for acquiring documents and training and employment post-18 outside the asylum system. They typically intended to stay in Italy for a few years before returning to Albania with new skills, which they hoped would expand their employment opportunities. The Albanian migrant population in Italy and historic ties between the two countries facilitate their absorption into the job market. At the time of the research, there was a growing political backlash against unaccompanied Albanians coming to Italy to study and receive free accommodation and schooling.

By contrast, young Albanians fleeing violence often chose to carry on to England, where it might be easier to go undetected and where there was a perception of a greater level of protection. The pre-established Albanian community in Italy and its perceived links with corruption and criminal gangs, including the Mafia, was one reason given by Albanian young people as to why they wanted to move on to England.

Another important difference was that, unlike young Albanians in the UK who usually described being on their own in the country, in Italy, young people could frequently draw on

pre-existing social networks of distant family members or friends of friends who were able to set them up with work. Nevertheless, they were usually still classified as 'unaccompanied' since, as discussed in Chapter 11, for various reasons they were often unwilling or unable to disclose these contacts to the authorities.

Aims and structure of the book

In the remainder of this book, we focus on how asylum, immigration and social care procedures are operationalized once unaccompanied children and young people arrive in the UK and Italy, and the impact that these bureaucratic processes have on them over time. The aims of this book are threefold. First, to conceptualize subjective wellbeing through the voices and narratives of young people experiencing migration and who are making the life course transition to 'adulthood' within the contemporary geopolitical landscape. Second, to revisit existing conceptualizations of wellbeing from a range of disciplines and consider their usefulness and limitations in the contexts of the migratory experiences of the young people studied. And third, to foreground the inherently political nature of wellbeing and its implications for how we respond appropriately to the needs of migrant and refugee young people undergoing multiple and simultaneous transitions in their lives. Bearing in mind the words of the late Barbara-Harrell Bond,[5] that refugees are 'ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances', a final aim of this book is to capture the human faces, warmth, humour and bravery of the young people behind the bureaucratic labels.

Chapter 2 offers a conceptual framework for rethinking wellbeing through a political economy lens in the context of migration and multiple transitions. After we have examined the methodology for the research in England and Italy in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 elaborates core differences in how young people experienced the asylum/immigration and social care nexus

in Italy and the UK. Subsequent chapters focus thematically on the core aspects of wellbeing identified by young people as those that they most valued. Chapter 5 considers the fundamental need for safety and freedom. Chapter 6 examines the centrality of legal status as a building block for security and constructing a future in Europe. Chapter 7 explores identity and belonging as central tenets to young people's subjective wellbeing. Chapter 8 considers how young people seek to construct viable futures through the process of migration. Chapter 9 engages with the central importance of health, and in particular mental health, to a sense of wellbeing. Chapters 10 and 11 focus on how social ties and networks both in host countries and transnationally provide the connectedness that is so vital to young people sustaining their sense of feeling well. The Conclusion returns to the core questions addressed through the research and considers the implications of the findings for rethinking policy and practice.

Chapter 12- Conclusion

As the public watched the so-called refugee crisis unfold across Europe in 2015, increasing awareness and public debate emerged about what the policy response should be for those children arriving without any adult and for whom the international community had a duty of care. Since that time, interest in the wellbeing of these children has waxed and waned in tune to the shifting policy, media and public discourses surrounding immigration and asylum laws and practices. Such discourses, we argue, have consistently adopted a myopic view of migrant children, situating them in some Peter Pan Neverland and refusing to acknowledge that many are on the cusp of adulthood. This is a term that, despite its multifarious cultural and social meanings, is very strictly defined in institutional terms as reaching the age of 18. This book has exposed a dearth of policy engagement with the question of what should and does happen to unaccompanied young people subject to immigration control once they cease to be children. The current research set out to uniquely better understand the outcomes of former unaccompanied migrant young people who find themselves in this policy vacuum. We have brought to this debate a new way of looking at the issue through a longitudinal and participatory research approach and documented how transition to adulthood for many means being thrown back into the precarity of a migrant status, which is unbounded in terms of time and undefined in relation to what it brings with respect to rights, citizenship and opportunities for a viable future.

In this final chapter, we reflect back on ideas associated with wellbeing in the context of migration, such as life satisfaction, happiness and quality of life in ways that capture their temporal and spatial dynamics. Above all, we reiterate the case for considering wellbeing not

as a neutral objective state but as something that is inherently political and ultimately demands a political response.

Currently, migrant young people becoming adult frequently encounter policy systems and structures that are inadequate, violent and discriminatory. Our call is to consider how these structures can become more conducive not only to the wellbeing of migrant young people but also to society as a whole. Extant policies are built on normative assumptions that are often in direct opposition to how young people live and aspire to live their lives. As such, they are unworkable. If this book aims to do one thing, it is to unsettle such assumptions and to encourage a rethink of how we might better respond to a growing number of young people across the United Kingdom (UK), Italy, Europe and the world who will, despite the legal and political constraints on them, continue to strive for viable futures for themselves and the significant others in their lives. As noted by our colleague from Africa speaking in Europe, 'migration is about dreams'. Contemporary policy responses to migrant young people becoming adult, we argue, struggle to grapple with notions of best interests, rights or meaningful durable solutions, let alone the stuff of dreams. Instead, such policies are straitjacketed by global, international and national discourses on migration that perpetuate a crisis frame of reference and sustain the primary objective of controlling borders rather than enabling human flourishing.

Wellbeing as politically undermined

Young people make the journey to Europe without an accompanying adult for many complex reasons. We live in a world in which lives can become unsustainable overnight as a result of persecution, conflict, war, famine, drought or a whole range of other economic, social and political factors that play out at individual, family and community levels, as well as on a

national and global scale. Despite Italy and the UK being adherents to the same relevant European Union (EU) policy frameworks in relation to unaccompanied migrant children, across all chapters, and in Chapter 4 in particular, we have observed their markedly different enactment and application, and discussed the implications of the diverse trajectories for young people that are consequently constructed.

To recapitulate, all children arriving in the UK unaccompanied and without any relevant documentation are obliged to claim asylum. This process involves being able to prove a well-founded fear of persecution in accordance with the Refugee Convention. This requires a level of proof and documentary evidence as testimony to persecution that most children migrating alone are unlikely to be able to access. As a result, most are not granted refugee status but instead some form of discretionary or time-limited leave to remain while they are children, since it is considered unsafe to send them back to their countries of origin. Since 2013, there has existed a new form of time limited leave called unaccompanied asylum-seeking child leave. This is a less secure status than asylum or humanitarian protection – and once young people turn 18, it is increasingly difficult for them to claim extended leave to remain.

In Italy, meanwhile, unaccompanied children are more likely to be granted a form of humanitarian protection and have the option of passing through an asylum-seeking route or a second route for non-asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors. At the same time, unlike in the UK, where minors are integrated into the care system for all children, across Italy, at the time of research, most regions operated a separate care pathway for unaccompanied migrant minors aged 16 and over.

The UK's treatment of migrant children and young people involves the policing of eligibility to welfare support and the right to reside in the UK according to very strict rules and boundaries – referred to in this work as 'iron rod' welfare. The jurisdiction of these rules is, nonetheless, left to the discretion of a wide range of actors. This paradox of stringent regulation combined with flexibility in its interpretation introduces a high degree of ambiguity and serendipity in terms of outcomes, resulting in young people frequently falling off a metaphorical cliff edge in terms of support once they reach the age of 18 and are considered no longer eligible. This can result in catastrophic outcomes, such as sudden homelessness, destitution, possible detention or deportation, or becoming 'illegal' in order to avoid other adverse outcomes.

Italy, by contrast, has invested nowhere near the same resources for care and support of migrant children, meaning that they arguably receive less care when within the system – what we refer to in this book as 'colander' welfare. However, the openness of the asylum and care systems, particularly the fact that children arriving unaccompanied in Italy are not obliged to seek asylum in order to receive support, means that as they 'age out', a wider range of options are on offer – including certain pathways towards regularization that are unavailable to those going through the UK system. While the situation in Italy still has many flaws, it does suggest alternative ways of enacting policy that may be more conducive to the realities and aspirations of migrant young adults. And there are similar models across Europe that policy makers could look to, such as the Contrat Jeune Majeure, or young people's contract, which provides transitional support to young people up to the age of 21 years in France.

Turning 18 in both contexts is a pivotal point in migrant young people's lives, when multiple factors contrive to unsettle their lives – in some ways irrespective of their legal status. In the

UK, if the decision from the Home Office is that they are appeal rights exhausted, all social care support can be stopped, sometimes abruptly. We have spoken to young people who have been made homeless from one day to the next as they turn 18 since, based on the decision from the Home Office, the local authority in which they are residing is no longer funded to continue providing support to them. Some authorities may in fact continue to provide some basic support based on a statutory human rights assessment, although this is a discretionary rather than universal concession.

Sometimes further claims to remain in the UK are successfully made on human rights grounds, such as Article 8 (a right to private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights, for example, when young people have been in the country for a number of years and can prove that they have established a family life. However, making such a claim is complex and requires a high degree of costly legal expertise to which few young people have access. In Italy, we have also reported the stories of individuals forced to leave accommodation in the early hours of their 18th birthday. In the words of Abil, from Albania, who had been staying in a *casa famiglia* (family home) for over a year since his arrival in Italy, '*What* happy birthday?' Moreover, those seeking residence at 18 through the alternative work or education integration pathway face another set of challenges. They need to secure a work sponsor as well as the necessary proof of residence in Italy for long enough at the time of application to be eligible for this.

In the wider scheme of things, the rules and procedures governing what *should* happen to migrant young people becoming adult are prone to constant shifts and changes and applied in seemingly arbitrary and inconsistent ways. In Italy, at the time of writing in 2019, the separate pathway to temporary integration into education or the labour market outside the

asylum system is in jeopardy. This was because Italy was facing growing right-wing pressure, led by former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, to drastically reduce such legal pathways to work and protection. Additionally, new immigration control measures have been implemented, including the 'hotspot approach' proposed in the European Agenda on Migration, by which unaccompanied children as young as 12 are now routinely detained in conditions that have been documented as seriously violating their rights. This includes being routinely placed with adults in 'closed' detention and reception centres, in clear violation of constitutional law, and being subjected to coercive methods used by the Italian police to obtain fingerprints (Amnesty International 2019). At the same time, protections on offer from humanitarian and community assistance are increasingly policed and criminalized (Carrera et al 2018a; Allsopp et al 2020).

As we have seen, young people may be forcibly removed to countries such as Afghanistan and Albania by the UK, or alternatively, as was the case with Izat documented in Chapter 4 and Rasheed in Chapter 8, encouraged to agree to 'voluntary' return. When it is not legally possible to deport them, as is the case with Eritrea at the time of writing, individuals may be transferred to the adult National Asylum Support Service – this usually means dispersal away from community, friends, educational opportunities – and so young people may resist this. The fear of deportation at this point of transition is real and generates immense anxiety. It is estimated that more than 2,000 former unaccompanied minors were forcibly removed to Afghanistan from the UK between 2007 and 2015 (and close to a further 700 former minors returned to other countries such as Iraq, Iran and Syria over the same period). Limited research in terms of how young people have managed after deportation depicts extremely difficult circumstances and poor outcomes for most (Gladwell et al 2016). Our research indicates that the very real fear of deportation is arguably the main cause of unaccompanied

young people going missing across northern Europe, since they are left with no pathways to regularization, diminished appeal rights and no future in their country of origin.

Previous studies of mobility in the lives of refugee youth have tended to focus on retrospective narratives drawn from one point in time (Eastmond 2007), frequently concentrating on past trauma and flight experience. There has equally been much previous work exploring refugees' narratives of journeys and how they make sense of these (Zetter 2007; Sigona 2014). With respect to the health and wellbeing literature noted in Chapter 2 and unpicked in more detail in Chapter 8, there has tended to be a dominance of medicalized evaluations of how past trauma impacts directly on young people's present lives and abilities to cope. This book has refocused the debate on how the systems and structures encountered through the course of their migration often impact more directly on young people's health and wellbeing than whatever has happened in the past. This observation has profound implications for how we consider wellbeing in transition.

We have seen how young people's wellbeing is profoundly undermined through processes of real and symbolic violence played out at local, national and global levels. Moreover, we have observed how the services that previously 'cared' for them often end up being the greatest perpetrators of such violence. Young people spoke of how, over a short space of time, they went from being told they would be cared for to, in the phrase of one young person, 'rejection, rejection, rejection'. The symbolic and institutional violence they experience through these systems and structures leave many living in perpetual fear and anxiety. Whether forced into homelessness, experiencing the indignities of intrusive age assessments or being made to feel that, despite all the efforts they have made to integrate and belong, they

are no longer valued or wanted, are just a few of the ways in which young people experienced such assaults.

At the wider societal level, young people are subjected to other forms of violence through the racist and discriminatory caricatures banded across the media. As the policy-induced hostile environment came increasingly to the fore throughout the course of our research, we witnessed the vilification and taunting of unaccompanied young people in the media. For instance, young people arriving from Calais under the Dubs Amendment, designed to facilitate the reunification of minors with other family members in the UK, were exposed to public assault in the media for not fulfilling some idealized stereotypical image of the 'innocent child'. Images of young people were plastered across tabloid newspapers, buying into tropes of the deserving/undeserving and genuine/phony child. There is a profound irony in the fact that many young people in our study fled different forms of explicit violence and witnessed further violence through their journeys, only to then be subjected to the insidious forms of violence that infiltrate the systems and structures they became bound by, and that they believed were there to provide care and security.

Meanwhile, as this book has documented, many young people arrive with ideas of realizing human rights and with a will to citizenship. Refugee status can be seen as a repair in ruptured relationships of trust between the state and citizen; many refugees go on to become citizens of the states that receive them. In contrast to the expanding literature on the opportunities generated by mobility for more privileged youth (Holmegaard et al 2015), studies on refugee youth tend to assume a negative relationship between mobility and choice. So while mobility is rightly, in many cases, recognized as a pathway to safety, often young refugees are assumed to be vulnerable passengers who have little or no choice or agency in the context of

their own migration. The current research has presented a more nuanced picture of how young people caught up in the vagaries of migratory processes may simultaneously or sequentially be made vulnerable and be agentic. Throughout, we have avoided ideas of vulnerability that are directly linked to particular identities (such as child, migrant child, unaccompanied child) and instead engaged with the idea that vulnerability is politically induced, the result of often deliberate policy structures and systems that place young people, or mean that young people have no choice but to place themselves, in situations of apparent risk. This is indicative of what Beck et al (1992) refer to as the uneven spread of risks throughout society and the fact that such risks have social, political and ecological causes.

Notions of inherent vulnerability are intentionally solidified in discourses surrounding young people seeking asylum in Europe – and this is, in itself, a political process. In essence, it absolves governments and policy makers of the responsibility for causing or failing to respond to such precariousness other than relieving its symptoms at the point of crisis – for example, by conducting human rights assessments with no long-term response when young people hit a crisis of destitution in the UK, or through a biomedical or pharmaceutical response when they experience a crisis in mental health. Acknowledging that legislation, policies and practice decisions are not apolitical, but in fact perpetuate these different forms of precarity, has multiple implications.

Policy perspectives and responses are often devised in relation to specific peoples deemed to be vulnerable who as a result demand a more specialized or targeted response. Social work practice, health care provision, public health initiatives and other facilities, such as housing, are frequently designed according to a matrix of needs assessment, prioritizing concerns and then designing appropriate interventions accordingly. Much less is written or said about the

imposed vulnerability by welfare systems and structures working in tandem with immigration control procedures, which simultaneously respond to politically viable forms of 'vulnerability' in one space while reconstituting new forms of vulnerability in another (Fassin 2011; Anderson 2013).

When many young people first arrive in Europe, they experience and are encouraged to make the most of more expansive possibilities for their lives than may have previously been entertained. Yet such opportunities are then often abruptly blocked once children reach adulthood. Hence, the social care and immigration and asylum systems serve to contain them and seemingly grind them down rather than offer any longer-term viable futures. There is, we suggest, an inherent cruelty in how they are encouraged to throw themselves into these new lives and make the best of their opportunities, only to have these taken away again. While Adnan described this sudden abandonment after having been previously praised for his achievements as akin to being 'stabbed in the back', another story reported by a non-governmental organization worker hauntingly captures the sinister effects of such abrupt abandonment. She explained:

> <EXT>'Paradoxically, it was the brace that he'd had fitted in England that became such a problem for him after he was deported. It needed tweaking every few months, you see, and then expertly removing. When I next saw him, it had been left unattended for well over a year. It had started to deform his teeth and it pained him so badly he'd tried to chisel it off himself with a stone. Well, you can imagine.'</EXT>

Reclaiming wellbeing

Many young people refuse to become passive recipients of what the system metes out to them and instead strive to build a sense of wellbeing through moving forward with their lives as best they can. Our research consolidates a previous body of work demonstrating how unaccompanied young migrants' pursuit of subjective wellbeing consists of strategies to secure a modicum of material welfare in the short term while securing ontological security in the longer term (Chase 2020; Allsopp et al 2015). The search for what we have defined, according to Wolff and De Shalit's definition, as 'genuine opportunities for secure functionings' (2007, p.84) often entails sacrificing one functioning for others and making decisions based on knowledge of policy opportunity structures that are often in themselves geographically shifting, time-limited, risky and insecure. As we have argued, immigration regimes, labour markets and welfare regimes interact to shape the opportunity structures and outcomes of migrant young people in convoluted ways over time.

Wellbeing and 'becoming' are conceptually linked through ideas of human flourishing and eudemonic notions of deriving life satisfaction through having and pursuing a purpose in life. We have illustrated how the futures that young people aspire to are bordered in multiple ways and, as a result, are constantly having to morph and be readjusted to the opportunities and possibilities at hand. As a result, such futures typically take longer to achieve and are more tortuous and open to abandonment, but nonetheless may still remain attainable and intact – particularly given the powerful determination we have witnessed throughout this work.

Evidence of young people's efforts to evade the law and state structures, including their embedded processes of surveillance, through secondary migration or through making themselves undetectable by 'disappearing', raises a series of uncomfortable research, practice and, above all else, policy questions. The discord between lived reality and political

intentions has been previously observed. Castles (2011: 311) explains that, from a 'bottom-up migrant view', immigration policies are seen as 'setting opportunity structures' whose potentialities for migrants may differ from the intentions of government:

> People lucky enough to enjoy a middle class position in developed countries tend to have a positive view of the state and the law. The majority of the world's population, who live in inefficient, corrupt and sometimes violent states, may see things differently. They have to cope despite the state, not because of it. From this perspective migration rules become just another barrier to be overcome in order to survive. Potential migrants do not decide to stay put simply because the receiving state says they are not welcome – especially if the labour market tells a different story. Policies become opportunity structures to be negotiated … migrants have developed forms of collective, individual and community resistance that undermine top down migration management

Sometimes, bottom-up perceptions of potential harms wielded by the institutions claiming to act in their best interests – and consequent justifications for breaking the law – have been vindicated. This was the case of *Tarakhel vs. Switzerland* (November 2014) in which the European Court of Human Rights agreed that individualized guarantees were required to protect vulnerable categories of refugees from potential harm prior to being transferred to Italy (Peers 2014). It is also arguably evidenced in the case of Takir and four other Afghans interviewed for this research who had remigrated to Italy following deportation from England to Afghanistan.

The idea that youth migration constitutes a linear movement from 'a' to 'b' still dominates much literature – as does the policy discourse that young people unable to establish a well-founded fear of persecution can be returned from 'b' to 'a'. Migration is considered an occurrence at a particular point in time in a person's life history. While this may be the case for some, this research demonstrates that, for many others, migration becomes part of the life course, particularly when it is associated with the search for ever elusive and imaginary sustainable futures. The current work, and other work too (examples being Sigona 2014; Gonzales 2015), has given greater attention to young people's own narratives and how mobility may be integral to the process of shaping their own lives over substantial periods of time. We set out to engage with articulations of futures and, where possible, to capture these in real time within unfolding contexts and constantly shifting circumstances. As we have seen, the process of creating such futures rests, in many cases, on continued movement, not least in order to circumnavigate the legal and institutional blocks and borders they encounter. This dynamic is akin to what De Vries and Guild (2019, p. 2156) have termed the 'politics of exhaustion'. An alternative, more positive rendering of this mobility might draw instead on Katy Long's work on facilitated mobility as a positive capability, and a fourth possible 'durable solution' to displacement (2014, p. 475).

Wellbeing as a collective pursuit

This book has taken understandings of wellbeing beyond the individual and engaged with it as a collective pursuit. This is in contrast to the current dominant public and media discourses, which are prone to pitch the wellbeing needs of some against those of others (Anderson 2013; Jones et al 2017). Throughout this work, it was evident that young people's embodied wellbeing and converse insecurity were intrinsically bound to the wellbeing of

other family and community members wherever they were in the world (Morrow 2013), and that individual experience was embedded within dynamic configurations of self in relation to others (Archer 2007).

Our research has revealed that the very word 'unaccompanied', in itself an institutional categorization, is hugely problematic. Instead, we have emphasized the value in understanding young people as relational and networked beings. The very word unaccompanied has got in the way of our ability to see young people holistically, witnessed by the examples of rich and dutiful relationships and bonds explored throughout this book, and especially in Chapters 10 and 11. Yet, at the same time, it is important not to put too much store and expectation in the strengths of bonds of support: they all have their limitations, and over-romanticizing such generosity of spirit risks brushing over the harshness of young people's circumstances. This includes the persistent lack of basic resources, the grind of having to sleep on people's floors, feeling embarrassed and ashamed at not being able to contribute and being perpetually concerned with how long it is possible to remain in one place before being asked to move on, or feeling so uncomfortable that you move on anyway.

Nonetheless, this work emphasizes the mutually constitutive elements of how individuals are bounded by and connected to others – at local, national and transnational levels. Turner's (2006) theory of ontological frailty as a universalizing concept has particular resonance in this regard. Turner highlights the dynamic relationship between human vulnerability and the precarious character of social institutions. All human beings are therefore ontologically members of a community of suffering: 'human frailty is a universal feature of human existence' (504). And with this frailty comes the possibility for collective or moral sympathy:

people have an awareness of their own frailty and so the strong can empathize with the weak, something that Douzinas (2009) refers to as the pursuit of a shared universal moral code. So, too, we need to be mindful of the intrinsically historical dimensions to migration and refugee histories. As Dawn Chatty's (2017) work has clearly illustrated, tables turn over years, decades and even centuries, and yesterday's refugees become contemporary hosts and vice versa. Moreover, there are complex historical and political links between sending and receiving countries – Italy with Eritrea and Albania; the UK with Afghanistan, for example (see Chapter 7), all of which speak to not only collective moral sympathy but to collective responsibility and accountability. Most young people in our study, without intending to canonize them in any way, demonstrated a profound sense of community and collective responsibility, a deep sense of shared universal moral code. They sought to contribute and give back to society and communities in any way they could, this sense of belonging and contribution being an important dimension to their wellbeing.

We are conscious about reflecting on how we have highlighted the intricate national and international ties and connections between young people that can both facilitate or inadvertently impede the lives they aspire to, often influencing ongoing migration across Europe. In doing so, we are mindful of the need to distance these findings from the policy rhetoric of 'asylum shopping', which offers a top-down explanation for such movements. Our work emphasizes the strength and power of social networks and how young people seek out and use these in their search for security and a sense of wellbeing. We have seen how young people engage with real spaces to come together and connect, such as places of worship, football pitches or youth centres and/or create virtual spaces of safety and comfort, where they share hopes and dreams and unpack the events affecting their lives (from where they have come, where they are and where they are going) as they unfold. In such spaces, they

share stories of the past and co-create possibilities for the future in which onward migration may be the option for some, stagnation for others.

Ultimately, the situations of migrant young people and what should happen to them raise critical questions of what constitutes a healthy society and how it should engage with the fundamentals of humanity, diversity, integration and living well together. In the current European policy-orchestrated 'hostile environment', there has been an increasing criminalization of civil society actors assisting migrant communities (Carrera et al 2018a) and a pervasive devolution of immigration control across all services and structures, such as health, education and social care (Yuval-Davis 2011, 2018). The perpetuation of these policies is pathogenic to society. It undermines trust and generates anxiety and xenophobia. Rarely does media and public attention focus on the multiple contributions to society of migrant communities, whether in terms of net economic gains (Dustmann and Frattini 2014), or more fundamentally the richness and depth to the fabric of society. If we could bottle just some of the strength, tenacity, creativity and sheer gumption evidenced through the lived experiences cited here, the capacity for collective flourishing would be vast. Even if we put aside feelings, emotions, ideas of rights and humanity – which we would argue are the mainstay of any viable society – and stick to questions of utility and human capital, in a context of ageing Europe, why would a government dispose of such a rich resource of infinite youthful talent, particularly after having invested vast sums of money in fulfilling their international duties of care and protection? We hope that many of the insights in this book will be of more general relevance to debates on the sociologies of health and wellbeing, ideas about integration and practices of citizenship, and conceptualizations of wellbeing that are collective rather than individualized.

Making personal troubles policy issues

The findings of this research suggest that we need a radical rethink of what should happen to children and young people who have arrived on their own into Europe as they transition to the status of young adults. At the start of this book, we drew on C. Wright Mills's view (1959) of the role of the social scientist as being about translating personal problems into policy issues. Through the many individualized troubles illuminated through our work, we believe we have highlighted a number of specific issues requiring urgent political action. One factor that fudges rather than illuminates a realistic policy agenda for migrant children is the constant reference to 'influx', 'flood' and 'tide' of child migrant arrivals. While there has certainly been an increase in applications for asylum from unaccompanied children in the UK (and Europe as a whole) since 2010, taking a longer view tells a story of increases and decreases over time, and in fact the number of applications in the past few years is very similar to the number in the 2000s. Furthermore, to dispel any doubt concerning the capacity of an EU country to cope with current numbers of unaccompanied children, Sweden alone received in 2015 more unaccompanied asylum seeking children (about 35,000) than the UK received over the ten years 2006–15 (about 23,000). A global perspective, meanwhile, is also illuminating. Since 2012, over 800,000 undocumented youth in the United States alone received just one of a number of possible legal residence permits in the form of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, many of them fearing that they would be sent to situations of precarity and danger in Central America and Asia, among other regions. The Syrian refugee crisis remains the largest displacement crisis in the world at the time of writing, with over 5.6 million registered refugees, including over 2.5 million children living in neighbouring developing countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

However we look at it, the fact that several thousand children will arrive on their own each year, despite annual fluctuations, is a phenomenon that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Moreover, a significant number of minors are aged 16–17 on arrival. This has important policy implications, since this makes them close to becoming legally adult, a point at which their position in the EU states in which they reside needs to be reassessed. The fact that under the current system only a proportion of these children will be granted asylum, and that a significant number will become young adults with uncertain legal status, is a policy issue that has been ignored for too long and continues to have, as we have shown, widespread personal and collective impacts.

Within England, the inability of local authorities to cope with the scale of new arrivals and the respective needs of unaccompanied children has led, we would argue, to a process of political scapegoating. In reality, the failure to respond to the needs of these children is more the result of draconian budget cuts imposed by the UK government than about the number of newly arriving unaccompanied minors, which remains at a level at which services were able to cope in the recent past. Italy has faced a different challenge in a context with fewer resources and higher numbers. Through other aspects of the current study, not reported on in detail in this volume, we have highlighted the impact of austerity measures on those working on the frontline of services with minimal resources and support in both country sites (Humphris and Sigona 2018; Meloni and Humphris 2019) and the failures of local authorities to follow up on what actually happens to young people once they lose any eligibility to publicly funded support (Sigona and Humphris 2016). Instead of investing further in support services (something that, it should be said, has worked to the detriment of all looked after children – not just unaccompanied minors), both governments have sought to spread the load for care and responsibility. The UK's recent transfer protocol, for example, means that

children arriving on their own are placed outside local authorities that have typically accommodated large numbers of unaccompanied migrant children (mainly in London and the South-East of England). In Italy, meanwhile, unaccompanied minors may be transferred directly from the new 'hot spot' centres in the South to one of a number of regions, with little say as to when or where. Many continue to be warehoused in large centres on the periphery of cities and services and held in hot spots for indefinite periods. Such measures fail to engage with the importance of young people's connections and needs, and the fact that many authorities with no history of accommodating unaccompanied minors lack the experience or resources to do this adequately.

Given the uncertainties of immigration control processes and their notoriously protracted nature, they impose an expectation that, as they approach adulthood, young people have to formulate a range of plans for different eventualities (Wade 2011). They are thus required to embody what Heinz (2009) has referred to as a prevailing norm of flexibility. Yet such flexibility is policy driven, intended to render people more malleable to structures and systems of control that rarely hold their best interests or rights as paramount. Rather than adhering to such expectations, young people respond in ways that enable them to retain a sense of control over their circumstances and elements of choice – processes that generate their own risks and sometimes also unintended consequences, which may be deemed detrimental to their wellbeing overall.

Nowhere is the expectation of embodied flexibility more evident than in the European policy architecture of the Life Project Planning Framework for migrant young people approaching the age of 18. This has been applied in different ways in countries around Europe. In England, for example, it takes the form of Pathway Plans; in Italy, unaccompanied minors are

supposed to co-develop *percorsi* (pathways). Such plans are in theory intended to be a negotiated strategy for the young person's future. However, the current research has largely confirmed our previous analysis of their utility, in brief that they fall short of really engaging with young people's lived circumstances and concerns. As argued elsewhere (Allsopp and Chase 2019), the EU framework and its application in Europe holds three key flawed assumptions. First, the notion of durable solutions for young people turning 18 is either integration (if they have indefinite leave to remain in the host country); resettlement to a third country (for example, in the case where they may have family in another country in Europe); or repatriation. In practice, the emphasis and financial investment has been largely placed on the latter – repatriation. Millions of Euros have been invested in trying to make repatriation and return more straightforward. The idea that forced return is a durable solution for young people and guarantees them a better future is, in our view, profoundly flawed. All evidence emerging for example from Afghanistan indicates that it is extremely difficult to return and reintegrate. Of the more than a dozen young men in this study who were forcibly returned to Afghanistan after having spent time in local authority care in the UK as children, only one of them, Noor, remained there by the end of the study and through choice. As for the others, they have become in some ways global nobodies, unrecognized or living under the radar in places as diverse as Pakistan, Germany, Italy, Serbia, the UK and, as we have seen with Jamal and Abdul in Chapters 5 and 7, Indonesia. There is no evidence in this study that return is a durable solution of any sort, and our findings have been corroborated by other work (see Schuster and Majidi 2015; Refugee Support Network 2017).

Moreover, the focus on return assumes that young people belong in their countries of origin, even when they have spent their formative years in the UK or in other parts of Europe. As we have seen in Chapter 7, they talk about growing up in cities; their reference points are

different; they describe themselves as different young people from when they arrived; they have often had learning and education opportunities previously denied them and have begun to imagine futures that were previously unimaginable. They have regional accents and favourite regional foods. As detailed in Chapters 10 and 11, they have also established strong friendship and community networks and have established relationships with partners. In these multiple ways, young people contest this notion that they automatically belong to countries in which they were born many years previously.

The final assumption that this book has challenged is that young people can and will be made to comply with institutional processes. There is ample evidence here of how young people, fearful of removal and deportation, will do anything they can to avoid this, including disappearing from statutory services and support so that they cannot be monitored and face the risk of deportation.

At a macro-level, at the time of writing Europe has become distracted by the intra-EU mobility question, the Brexit furore and the rise of populism in Italy as elsewhere. It has neglected to effectively engage with the ripple effects of its migration control policies beyond its borders – including the hand it is playing in the hardships suffered by young people even before they reach Europe through a number of bilateral and international deals, such as the EU–Turkey deal, which sees asylum seekers from certain countries returned to Turkey, and Europe's support to the Libyan Coast Guard, which keeps people inside the county in weakly monitored situations of slavery and destitution. Yet, as we have seen, immigration control policies in Europe are part of a global phenomenon of the border as site of privilege or exclusion; of growing border externalization and poor accountability. In Australia, for example, the so-called Pacific Solution consists of outsourcing border control responsibilities

to territories with fewer resources, such as Indonesia. After spending several years in one such detention centre, Jamal has now, like Abdul, been granted refugee status. He has reached the next stage of the waiting game, housed in a hostel in the city, unable to work or move forward with his life. He, like Abdul, is likely to wait for several more years before any durable solution transpires. The connection between the European and the Pacific 'solutions' to managing migration takes us back again to Wright Mills's personal struggles (1959) – individuals subjected to the vagaries of these different solutions and, as a result, may end up being shunted between them. A striking finding in our work is that as young people actively search for the ever elusive 'better life' – one that can offer safety, peace, economic survival and freedom – they actually join the dots between these different geopolitical systems and their apparently regionally devised immigration control policies. Finding themselves rejected in one region of the globe, others, such as Jamal and Abdul, may seek such security in another.

In previous work, we rejected the notion that unaccompanied young people, in light of their mobility trajectories, should, or indeed could, be framed as citizens of the world (Drammeh 2010). We felt that such framing undermined responsibility for them on the part of individual nation states, and moreover risked romanticizing journeys that are often fraught with trauma and ended in the form of a limbo state of torturous illegality, which was often framed and experienced by young people as a form of 'anti-citizenship' – the feeling of belonging not everywhere but nowhere (Chase and Allsopp 2014). It is, nevertheless, the case that in their mobile trajectories, these young people are at the vanguard of a growingly recognized holistic ecological world view where 'here' and 'there' are forever more connected in real, affective and symbolic ways. In this vein, in speaking across the disciplines of public health, geography and youth studies, this book can be read in the context of a growing environmental

consciousness that transcends borders, but in which human rights and national accountability remain key to the delivery of human dignity. This counter-punctual perspective (Said 1993) sees humans as part of a network of global relations that are at once diachronic and synchronic. As several young people repeated to us during the research, 'We are here because you [the proverbial you of the colonial West] were/are there.'

At the heart of young people's notions of futures is not only what they aspire to do but also who they aspire to be and become. In chapters 1 and 2 of this book, we considered the idea of 'becoming' within the framework of the capability approach and the notion of capability expansion, or widened opportunities to be and do what a person most values. We have considered how, for most young people, such capability expansion is not sought after as an individual pursuit but is about what can be achieved collectively. Through their narratives, most young people see their own futures as situated in relation to the futures of others and the futures of communities they are now part of and/or which remain in their countries of origin. They often imagine how they might, one day, be in a position to contribute to these shared prospective futures in ways that uphold rather than infringe the rights and opportunities of others. Yet notions of 'becoming' are strikingly absent in relevant policy discourses, which treat migrant children and young people as fixed and determined entities on arrival. The implication is that, irrespective of the amount of time spent in their European host states, regardless of the new contexts, opportunities and lifestyles they engage with, and ignoring the cultural and societal norms and influences that begin to shape them, at the end of that period, if unable to secure legal status, young people in their 'fixed' forms can be returned whence they came and pick up from where they left off. The simplicity of these assumptions is staggering, yet they pervade policy discourses surrounding child and youth migration. As discussed in Chapter 7, while most young people hold strong connections and ties to their

lives prior to migration, simultaneously becoming other is at the essence of their migratory experiences.

Conclusion

Throughout, our research context epitomized what Thomson (2011, p. vi) refers to as a 'moveable feast'. It encompassed multiple changes in policies, public responses, evolving theories and technologies as well as constant changes in the biographies of research participants and researchers alike. Life transitions are hence about the interplay of personal, social and historical processes. This work has situated these processes within a global and geopolitical frame, considering how transitions for young people in the current study were determined largely by immigration policies and systems that are interconnected and global in nature. At the same time, young people are subjected to highly complex systems of immigration control intertwined with social support – these are always changing – depending on their age, their status on the micro-level and, at the macro-level, a constantly shifting political landscape. Despite these constant shifts, the broad direction of the policy response has remained fairly constant. It persists in being shaped by statecentric views of migration, static conceptions of belonging and a bias towards a political preference for return. Such path dependency, it is argued, underestimates young people's agency and willingness to embrace risk in their efforts to secure viable futures. They are prepared to walk the line between legality and irregularity and to jeopardize orthodox ideas about wellbeing in the short term in order to take the longer view. The net result is a set of policies that fail to offer a durable solution or act in the best interests of either individual migrant young people themselves or society as a whole.

Unaccompanied children becoming adult is a global issue, a highly political issue and one that needs to be brought further to the fore in contemporary politics. It raises huge questions of responsibility and care for these young people in an increasingly globalized and connected world. Yet the policy backdrop against which we are publishing this book in 2020 is in constant transition and change. It is nigh on impossible to know where to hang these ideas and what to try to influence. We are conscious of the pitfalls of tagging these findings against specific policy recommendations since, experience tells us, this leaves them prone to being rapidly dismissed as irrelevant or outdated. Instead, we conclude with some key questions that can be used to interrogate how policies are framed, structured and delivered into the foreseeable future and become points of reference as national governments and the international community continue to grapple with notions of best interests, durable solutions and viable futures for unaccompanied migrant children and young people.

1. What would durable solutions, best interests and viable futures look like if they were co-designed with young people subject to immigration control?

2. How can policies best plan for migrant and refugee young people's transition to adulthood in ways that really uphold their best interests and meaningfully engage with the realities of their circumstances and the sorts of futures they aspire to?

3. Will the policy proposed recognize or undermine the capacities and capabilities for young people to pursue futures that are collective – involving responsibilities and obligations to family and community – as well as individual?

4. What are the benefits of forcing all unaccompanied migrant children to make a claim for asylum, and what other pathways to regularization could be put in place to enable young people to remain in their host countries once they turn 18?

5. What (if any) are the real benefits of forced removal of young people to countries of origin after they become adult, and what alternatives might they be offered?

As we conclude, we leave Jamal and Abdul in Indonesia, Malek in Germany but poised to move on if he has to, Bashir somewhere in Eastern Europe and Bilal living in constant hope of one day being able to take the London Underground to work without the fear of being stopped by the police. And what of so many others, such as Dan and Janan, who have spent a decade in a state of what Honwana (2012), in the African context, has referred to as 'waithood' – wasted time that has delayed their transition to their own notions and understandings of adulthood and left them feeling as though they will never quite catch up? Such delayed transitions (Enria 2018) have profound effects on sense of self-worth, day-to-day wellbeing and ability to reach one's own markers of adult life or the expectations of significant others.

There are of course many others in our research who have fared well and have received amazing support throughout, despite the constant hacking away at resources for social workers and other frontline workers responsible for their care. Erfanullah is employing people in his food business in Italy and welcoming a new child, and Loni just held his first solo art exhibition. Having finally tracked down his mother and brothers in a neighbouring European country after ten long years, Abugul and his family are looking forward to spending Ramadan together once more. Yet too many others remain in the quagmire of

uncertainty and insecurity. Those who have shared their own personal stories here provide just a glimpse of the richness and potential of the countless others – all formerly migrant children who set off in search of a better future and now not so young adults who are still searching.

Becoming adult in many cases means becoming forgotten – left to the vagaries of systems and structures that have done their bit for the migrant child and then, amid the rising tide of the xenophobic hostile environment, has spat them out into the stormy sea. To continue the metaphor, they become flotsam and jetsam in the tides of immigration control. There is no accountability for the actions of European governments for shirking their responsibility for the wellbeing and futures of young people who were previously in their care. These are the same governments that claim to be working to the principles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child or under the guise of human rights. We hope this work invigorates critical reflection on what might constitute meaningful pathways to wellbeing in the context of youth migration, and what political responses are required to enable these to emerge.

<NN>Chapter 1</NN>

[1] www.becomingadult.net.

[2] In this context, we mean without identified adult family members or legal guardians. Even though young people arrive alone, they sometimes leave their country of origin with other family members but become separated during their migration.

[3] We refer interchangeably to the UK and England throughout this book when referring to common welfare and immigration policy frameworks – as most young people in the research did – but we also identify devolved policies where relevant.

[4] Under the Dublin III regulation, unaccompanied children can apply to claim asylum in a country other than the one they have arrived in, if they have a close family member who has claimed or been granted asylum in that country.

[5] Barbara Harrell-Bond was a British–American social scientist who founded Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre and fought tirelessly for the rights and dignity of refugees.