DECOLONIZATION AS A CULTURAL ORDER: EXPLORING THE NEW FRONTIERS OF EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN REFUGEE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the ethical lives of humanitarian educators by focusing on how they articulate social justice norms in early childhood education policies and programs for refugees. Conducted as an international, multi-sited ethnography, the study involved 12 months of participant observations across three NGOs, 42 semi-structured interviews with teachers, policymakers, aid workers, and government officials, and a review of relevant documents. The research seeks to understand how nonformal early childhood educators of refugees conceptualize educational justice, how these beliefs are articulated in refugee educational inclusion policy and practice, and what implications, if any, changing ethical norms in the field may have on refugees' cultural expression and self-determination in classroom settings.

Findings reveal that educators generally agree on the importance of early learning programs for achieving social justice for refugees. However, there is disagreement about whether educational justice should be primarily understood as an issue of equal representation or cultural tolerance. Historically, policymakers have focused on refugees' equal access to host-country educational services, seeing schooling as a universal human right. But more recently, there is a growing expectation for educators to consider how the relationships conditioned by educational aid programming might contribute to refugee forced assimilation and social oppression. Reflecting demands for a more relationally just sector, this study shows educators are beginning to experiment with decolonizing their work, hoping to eliminate instances of hegemonic Eurocentricity in educational aid.

Decolonizing educators engage in two main processes: first, they seek to expand the epistemic tolerance of the field by challenging European knowledge hierarchies and promoting non-European knowledge traditions in classrooms. Second, they aim to strengthen Global South representation in humanitarian aid architecture by confronting the concentration of financial power and decision-making in Global North organizations. The study highlights tensions between universalizing human rights approaches and decolonizing approaches to educational aid, as well as tensions between the two decolonizing approaches, the combination of which causes ethically motivated humanitarian educators significant angst.

I end the paper with my own vision for educational aid reform. While I maintain decolonization as an important aspiration, I break with anticolonial scholars of education who assert that any and all knowledge with European origins should be eliminated from educational aid, advocating instead for a *colonially sensitive rights-based approach*. This approach encourages humanitarian educators to value knowledge based on its outcomes rather than its origins and to appreciate any socially situated emancipatory knowledge regardless of its cultural source. I argue that this dedication to ideological openness is an important ethical obligation for humanitarian educators, as it pushes them to attend to the immediate political needs of refugee communities alongside seeking to address the relational harms common to the global education sector.

This research provides valuable insights for early childhood educators in emergency contexts, policymakers, and donors by offering empirical support for relational justice reform efforts and providing recommendations for balancing decolonized education with standardized schooling. By highlighting the potential trade-offs these normative interpretations have on policymaking and programming, the study helps educators navigate the conflicting ethical demands of the field. Also, by emphasizing the ethical dimensions of educational aid, this paper helps guide policymakers and practitioners through making morally informed decisions that can enhance the well-being and emancipation of refugee children and their communities.

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation (D*ecolonization as a cultural order: Exploring the new frontiers of educational justice in refugee early childhood education)* has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BLM - Black Lives Matter

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CSRP – Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy

DSM - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

ECD - Early Childhood Development

ECE - Early Childhood Education

ECEiE - Early Childhood Education in Emergencies

EiE - Education in Emergencies

GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Society for International Cooperation)

INEE - Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization

LMIC - Low- and Middle-Income Countries

MMA – Moving Minds Alliance

NCF – Nurturing Care Framework

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

PTSD - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RHN – Refugee Healing Network

SEL - Social and Emotional Learning

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

TAN – Transnational Advocacy Network

TEEP - Turkish Early Enrichment Project

UK - United Kingdom

UN - United Nations

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WHO - World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In May 2023, a group of approximately 50 global early childhood education in emergencies (ECEiE) educators and policymakers came together for the annual Moving Minds Alliance meeting in Amman, Jordan. The only meeting of its kind, the Moving Minds Alliance (MMA) is a collection of early childhood education funders, teachers, and policymakers who are dedicated to improving the lives of young children around the world and they convened that day to advocate for early childhood education in humanitarian settings. It was a well-attended meeting and nearly all the key organizational actors in the field of ECEiE were in attendance.

During the Meeting, aid workers from organizations like UNICEF, The World Bank, Sesame Workshop, and others had come together to begin the task of mapping out the current humanitarian aid system and building a shared theory of change on how to promote early learning and responsive care globally. But to the surprise of some attendees, discussions at the meeting did not focus on 'leverage points' for the inclusion of early learning in the existing humanitarian system, but instead, discussions began to focus on the unethical effects of *coloniality* in the humanitarian system. In the presentation, MMA leadership rallied members to decolonize the field, defining coloniality as,

> *"The enduring legacies of colonialism in social, economic, cultural, and political systems, even after the formal end of colonial rule. It is the set of relationships and structures of power that emerge from colonialism and shape the way societies and individuals are organized and interact with each other."*
>
> *(Moving Minds Alliance 2023)*

MMA leadership went on to say,

> *"When crisis-affected people's dignity and power are undermined, it perpetuates and strengthens the dynamics of coloniality. Coloniality reinforces power imbalances between humanitarian actors and crisis affected people, and the power*

> *concentration in UN agencies and INGOs. Besides it perpetuates a saviorism mindset. Coloniality can also be seen as constitutive of modernity. Modernity is characterized as a particular perspective on how the world should be understood and organized that is based on the idea that European culture, science, and technology are superior."*
>
> *(Moving Minds Alliance 2023)*

The stated goal of those involved in the fledgling coalition to decolonize ECEiE was to "change the humanitarian system" by reducing the reproduction of powerlessness and cultural imperialism endemic to the current system, including criticizing aspects of European science and conceptions of modernity. Like many other global interagency meetings, MMA ended the meeting with a series of advocacy 'take aways'; they asked members to raise global awareness around the deleterious effects of colonialism on achieving refugees' educational justice, increase accountability for their elimination, mobilize resources to correct colonial violations, and develop a community of practice where knowledge on decolonizing ECEiE can be shared. These educators were engaged in establishing a new international norm in early child educational aid, namely, a norm around what it means to be an ethical humanitarian educator.

This study takes advantage of this novel era of decolonization to explore what it means to be an ethical actor in an unethical humanitarian aid system. Using the case of early childhood education in emergencies, this research investigates humanitarian educators' efforts to overcome systemic barriers and navigate the conflicting ethical demands of the ECEiE field in pursuit of refugee educational justice. To do this I begin by demonstrating that the field of early childhood education in emergencies is undergoing a normative shift that pushes practitioners to move beyond the goal of education for all and to instead address how educational aid creates and maintains unequal power relationships between refugees and Global North educators. Most notably, this focus on the unethical relational harms of ECEiE programming has culminated in a ‘decolonizing turn’ which seeks to eliminate any and all forms of ‘Eurocentricity’ in the sector. To understand the impact of these shifting social justice conceptions on ECEiE programming and policymaking, I qualitatively examine how three humanitarian organizations and their members implement refugee inclusion programs, with each organization exhibiting unique ethical and social justice goals. Unlike other studies that examine the 'life cycles' of more specified norms (e.g., Lerch 2017 on the rise of education in emergencies or Kapit 2015 on the evolution of protecting education from attack), this study focuses heavily on the norm of decolonization, which is largely unspecified, semiotically flexible, and conceptually broad, and yet emotionally valent. This ideological capaciousness of decolonization creates ethical challenges and psychological angst for ECEiE educators who are deeply dedicated to pursuing refugee educational justice.

This research also goes beyond the individual psychological effects of an ethical obligation to decolonize to explore how different conceptions of refugee educational justice result in different educational beliefs and practices. By framing decolonization as a process of global norm diffusion and local adaptation this study helps reveal how local implementation of global decolonizing norms can evolve, fail, or result in context-specific hybrids. This empirical process offers lessons for future policymaking and implementation strategies that seek to create a more robust bottom-up educational aid system.

Key definitions: Educational Justice and Authority

This project aims to describe humanitarian educators’ beliefs and practices around their ethical responsibility to condition the material and epistemic power relationship between systems of schooling and refugee communities. As such, the key terms ‘educational justice’ and ‘authority’ require further elaboration.

Educational Justice: Dispositions of justice are longstanding cultural expectations for humanitarians and educators alike, but conceptions of educational justice are varied and manifest in diverse policymaking and programming agendas. In its most basic articulation, educational justice refers to the equitable distribution of educational access, participation, and outcomes. Policymakers and educators who demand education equity often call for a society that prioritizes the interests of children and families who are disadvantaged by poverty, racism, ableism, sexism, or any other characteristic that creates barriers to flourishing and is beyond the control of the individual. This conceptualization of educational equity as prioritizing the needs and interests of the less advantaged over those of others can be seen in a variety of educational policies and programs and is especially prominent in early childhood education in emergencies programming where young refugee children are seen as some of the ‘most vulnerable populations on Earth’, creating a moral imperative for their support.

A challenge with this approach is that it can be difficult for educators to determine *how* to prioritize the less advantaged at the school level or in classroom practice. It is impossible for educators to know every relevant thing to know about how comparatively advantaged or disadvantaged a learner might be. Mental health, cultural standing, fear of deportation, or social isolation are all learner characteristics that have implications for a student’s disadvantage but may be invisible to even the most attentive of teachers.

Complicating the educational justice as educational equity discussion, Levinson et al. (2022) points out, that equity, as it is commonly used and understood, is not actually about comparative advantage at all, but rather a lack of adequate schooling, "If children are all achieving and thriving at an appropriately high level—in other words, above the threshold for adequacy—then differences among them are often not described as "inequitable" precisely because they do not generate much moral concern" (p. 6). This articulation of educational justice therefore moves away from equity and comparative advantage towards conceptions of *adequacy*. Naming educational justice as an issue of the just distribution of educational adequacy allows educators and policymakers to move away from comparing learner's levels of comparative disadvantage, towards a more universalizing framework where all children who are receiving an inadequate education deserve better (Levinson et al. 2022).

This heuristic, however, does not fully eliminate complexity, as framing educational justice as achieving universal educational adequacy presents its own challenges. For example—adequate for what? What criteria should be used to determine when standards for adequacy have been met? Some policymakers and practitioners understand adequacy in terms of individual lifetime earnings, others, in terms of basic education like literacy and numeracy. What's more, there are times when educational adequacy advocates have cause to prioritize other values, such as democracy, merit, care, liberty, and safety over demands for equity.

In the last five years, a new "reparative" approach to educational justice has expanded conceptions of educational adequacy to include educational policies and programming that repay a "moral debt" of colonial and capitalist extraction and to undo what Olufemi O. Taio has termed the "global racial empire" (see Sriprakash et al. 2022; Sriprakash, Nally, Myers, & Pinto 2020). A useful reference point for the reparative approach to educational justice comes from Sriprakash (2023) who, while recognizing the capacious promise of the reparative approach, lays out three domains for reparative education as a means for educational justice: *material reparations, epistemic reparations, and reparative pedagogies.*

Sriprakash's conception of a *material* reparative approach draws on Marxist conception of material distribution and calls for the creation of new educational political economies which refuse to perpetuate systems of colonial and capitalist exploitation, instead prioritizing a more 'humanizing educational system' that enables collective agency and reduces the material power actors from the Global North are afforded over the rest of the world. Alternatively, e*pistemic* reparative approaches seek to recognize and reverse the role education has played in perpetuating racial hierarchies, white supremacy, and cultural imperialism, pointing to the ways that education can simultaneously perpetuate and reverse forces that 'colonize the mind' (Fanon 1969; Ngũgĩ 1986). Finally, in the classroom, reparative *pedagogies* seek to foster dialogue and inspire an imagination of new social possibilities in pursuit of educational justice, including the recognition and 'marking for death' of some social arrangements that are perceived as perpetuating oppression. To do this, reparative, decolonizing educators have called for the correction of 'faulty thinking' and the 'emotional attachments' of White settlers dedicated to dominant narratives and their concomitant material benefits, which reparative educators see as part of the 'moral wrongs' of the current education system. In this way, reparative forms of educational justice reject justice praxis as simply removing distributional barriers for marginalized groups and allowing them to compete equally with their majority peers. Instead, reparative, decolonizing approaches to educational justice aim to change the rules of the game, calling for a more radical emphasis on liberatory tolerance rather than adequate access to education services.

In sum, “What is educational justice?” does not have a simple answer. There are numerous, evolving values and goals at stake when decisions must be made about how to achieve educational justice. For this study, I take advantage of this normative heterogeneity to conduct a study that unpacks educators’ beliefs around the morality of their work and what they believe ethical global education programming should look like in the future.

Authority

This study asks ECEiE educators about their beliefs around educational justice as a matter of tolerance and participation. I ask educators dedicated to the equal distribution of schooling, which parts of schooling they think should be justly distributed and I ask more relationally-oriented educators, what exactly they think should be tolerated? The answers educators give to these questions have repercussions for the manner and degree to which they feel legitimated to intervene in the lives of refugee communities. Predictably, therefore, another key concept in this study that must be carefully considered is authority. For this study, I draw on a sociological understanding of authority, which differs from the colloquial perspective of authority used in political science. Max Weber, an early pioneer in thinking around the social construction of authority, suggested that authority is understood as a form of socially accepted power that is based not only on material conditions, but also by coercive “ideas, perceptions, forms of reasoning, emotional states, and a broad social ontology which legitimates those hierarchies” (Haugaard 2018, p.105). For this dissertation, I borrow from Weber the insight that individuals who are legitimated with authority have power based upon their way of life and their rationalization, which is converted into an institutionalized command (Weber 1978). Power that is a result of authority is therefore distinct from a political science conception of power, which is understood as the probability that an individual will carry out her own will in a social relationship (the extent to which A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do) (Dahl 1957, pp. 202-203).

Instead, this study draws on Weber's definition of authoritative power as "the probability that a command with a given *specific content* will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (Weber 1978, pp. 53 emphasis added). *Specific content* in this case refers to the scope of the authority and results in a certain scope of power concomitant to the form of authority an actor is legitimated with. For example, the scope of power of a prime minister of a country is not the same as that of librarian, though each has domains (a country and a library, respectively) in which their authoritative power is activated. Weber's conceptualization of authority and its relationships to scopes of power is useful for this dissertation as I draw on data to show how educators who subscribe to various normative frameworks around educational justice tend to draw on different types of authority when implementing ECEiE programming—each of which have different implications for their power over the futures of refugees and the options offered to refugees as they face seek to overcome the challenges of displacement.

Theoretical Framework

Norms are generally understood as modes of behavior, rules, and regulations attributable to actors with a given identity and can encompass a range of beliefs, regulations, or procedures, from international laws to general principles of organizational behavior (Betts & Orchard 2014; Keck & Sikkink 1998). To theoretically frame this study, I draw on Betts and Orchard's (2014) concepts of "norm institutionalization" and "norm implementation" to differentiate between activities at the transnational and local levels. Institutionalization of decolonizing norms occurs at the institutional level and includes advocacy efforts by humanitarian practitioners, policymakers, and academics, primarily in the U.S. and Europe, to address Eurocentrism in ECEiE and develop best practices to overcome it. Implementation, on the other hand, operates at a micro-level and involves the activities of locally situated organizations and actors who decolonize early childhood education by developing programs and standards that reduce European material and cultural power over refugee lives.

The study of norm diffusion and the relationship between normative structure and actor behaviors falls squarely under the investigatory domain of sociological institutionalism and it is therefore the main body of literature from which I frame my study. However, in addition to leveraging sociological insights, I also draw upon the work of political philosophers and international relations scholars such as Rachel Wahl (2017), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), Amitav Acharya (2004), and Alexander Betts and Phil Orchard (2015) who have productively explored the ways that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social service actors interpret norms from global to local settings.

NGOs are important actors in the field of education in emergencies, providing information and services that seek to advance the educational outcomes of children in disaster and displacement settings. As such, NGO workers inhabit a 'broker' role, navigating the priorities of international norm-setters and local stakeholders (Fechter 2012; Swidler and Watkins 2017). Most of the scholarship on NGOs focuses on the role NGO actors play in perpetuating and extending Global North norms beyond their cultural source, but this study, drawing on the work of Wahl (2017), asks what this relationship looks like when the global norm under investigation is being taken up and expressed by the exact actors whose power it is meant to constrain, namely the case of European NGO workers who are trying to eliminate Eurocentrism in their work? To explore this paradox, I situate the ECEiE NGOs in my sample as part of a Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) that seeks to simultaneously pursue increased attention to education as a human right for displaced young children, and, to a lesser degree, practically find ways that this can be done while degrading Eurocentricity, refugee powerlessness, and cultural imperialism.

To productively frame decolonization in ECEiE as an example of transnational advocacy, it makes sense to first start with some basics around norms and norms diffusion. Classically, norms have been defined as "collectively held standards of appropriate behavior for actors within a given identity" (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, 891) and researchers have historically been very interested in understanding how norms were generated and evolved. For these answers, scholars often look to the work of Keck and Sikkink (1998), who were some of the first scholars to postulate a norm "life cycle" within the framework of transnational advocacy movements. Keck and Sikkink believe that norms originally form when globally situated activists, and eventually organizations, bring attention to an issue by naming and defining it. After receiving this initial attention, a 'discursive change' happens as activists and the actors around them begin to *specify* the norm, setting rules for characterizing the problem and guidelines for how to achieve the desired change. Finally, reflecting these specified pathways for norm compliance, institutional actors create procedures and behavioral standards that guide others on how to successfully align to these normative ends. For example, compliance pressure can be generated through the development of stronger enforcement mechanisms such as international laws, or more subtle forms of norm enforcement, such as international rankings, practical guides, or standards documents. Keck and Sikkink also extend their framework to suggest that, once developed, these norms are then instrumental in shaping the behavior of tangentially relevant actors, such as states that may change their laws or NGOs that might change their policies and programming to reflect the new norm (Kapit 2015).

Keck and Sikkink and the canonical 'global norm' literature assert that international norms are originally defined at the global level (i.e. in the U.S. or Europe), integrated into a global culture, and then transferred or diffused to the domestic level, where they exert pressure on local actors to conform to global standards. What exactly this process of norm diffusion looks like has been the subject of innumerable debates and discussions in constructivist circles of political science and global and transnational sociology (*see* Acharya 2004 for a review). Historical accounts of norm diffusion tend to elaborate on how international organizations and the actors that inhabit them "teach" global culture to actors in local settings who then implement them based on the lessons taught (Finnemore 1993; 1996), but this vision of norm diffusion is being increasingly critiqued as oversimplified. For instance, Acharya (2009) rejects any 1-for-1 transference of global norms to local settings and instead theorizes that global norms are subject to a process of 'localization', where "norm takers build congruence between transnational norms (including norms previously institutionalized in a region) and local beliefs and practices" (p. 241).

Betts and Orchard (2014) go one step further by suggesting that a distinction should be made between the *institutionalization* of a new norm at the international level and the *implementation* of local policies and programs that draw on that norm. Institutionalization in this context relates to the ways that norms are adopted into formal policies and practices at the global level, while implementation is the process of realizing a normative goal through organizational action within a bounded context (Kapit 2015). Implementation, therefore, can be understood as the process of converting a diffuse normative definition into a precise action, a process that can necessitate significant reinterpretation and contestation at the local level (Kapit 2015).

As Kapit (2015) points out, Betts and Orchard's distinction between institutionalization and reinterpretation that takes place during implementation suggests that "a norm does not need to be fully specified by international actors in order to be implemented at the national [or organizational] level" (pp. 21). Indeed, my study focuses on the implementation an unspecified global norm, decolonization, which broadly asserts that all people are ethically obligated to consider how their daily lives are tied to perpetuating, mitigating, or abolishing the project of European empire. In short, I use the case of early childhood education in emergencies to explore how people, in the face of new ethical pressures, work out their ethical lives in an unethical global system.

Explaining "Sense-Making" in Refugee Inclusion Implementation with Inhabited Institutionalism

In this study, I apply concepts from Inhabited Institutionalism, which examines the recursive relationships between institutions, interactions, and organization, to help fill the gaps in our knowledge about how decolonization gets enacted by organizational actors in local settings. It is widely acknowledged in the literature that social actors are bound to institutional sectors, such as the field of humanitarian education, which provide norms, rules, and definitions of the environment that both constrain and enable action (DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Scott & Meyer 1994). And while recent scholarship in new institutionalism has downplayed actors' agency, looking instead to how institutional schemata define ‘appropriateness’ and ‘legitimacy’ and contributing to a more structurally determinist view of human activity (Spillane et al. 2002), many scholars have pointed out that this overdetermined role afforded to institutional schemata can push researchers to overlook actor agency and context, factors that form the bedrock of organizational actors’ sense-making (Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Barley 2007; Lawrence et al. 2009). This attention to actor agency and interpretation is especially valuable in the process of implementing unspecified norms, such as decolonization.

Scholarship across various disciplines investigates the role of actors’ sense-making in the implementation process (Ball 1994; Spillane 2000). Indeed, implementation is fundamentally a process of interpretation, as actors must figure out what a norm means, how it applies to their context, and decide whether to adopt, adapt, or altogether ignore global normative pressures. In this way, groups, or for this study, organizations, comprise an important “meso-realm”, through which the macro, global norms, and the micro, local context are realized in spaces of interaction (Fine and Hallett 2014).

Every group, whether a large multi-lateral NGO or a beer league rugby club, develops a shared set of mutually understood references or *idioculture*. Fine (1979) defines these idiocultures as, “systems of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which member can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction” (p. 734). Such idiocultures are formed by the confluence of abstract normative orders such as ‘institutional myths’, participant backgrounds (as triggered through social interaction), and the structural organization of a group, which determines the nature (dosage, intensity, etc.) of social interaction. For this study, I take NGO’s idiocultures as the unit of analysis to understand how educators ethically instantiate refugee educational justice through inclusion practices, observing the discourses they generate around refugee educational justice and inclusion and the germane behaviors they collectively enact in their pursuit.

Education in Emergencies and Refugee Educational Justice

Humanitarian workers are motivated by an ethical drive to help the vulnerable and since the turn of the 21st century, the humanitarian aid community has embraced an unprecedented focus on education in disaster and displacement contexts as a tool for achieving global justice (Kagawa 2005; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008; Davies and Talbot 2008; Lerch 2017). While antecedent approaches to humanitarian aid prioritized life-saving services such as food, water, sanitation and shelter, this growing global focus on education in emergencies (EiE) indicates a new role for education as a tool for both immediate and long-term social repair (Burde 2007, 2014; Dryden-Peterson 2011, 2016; Lerch 2017).

Concomitant to this new emphasis on education as a humanitarian service has been a growth in new funding streams, implementation organizations, professional communities, and training programs, all committed to supporting young people's access to quality education in disaster contexts (Lerch 2017). Perhaps surprisingly, given its relatively recent prominence in humanitarian aid architecture, the field of education in emergencies (EiE) is itself beginning to splinter and specialize, with EiE experts beginning to focus on specific age groups and curricular content. This dissertation examines the case of early childhood education in emergencies (ECEiE), a subsection of education in emergencies that is gaining prominence in the field of humanitarian aid.

Early Childhood Care and Education in Emergencies

While there had been some short-lived interest in early childhood outcomes in emergency settings in the 1990s and early 2000s, the contemporary prominence of ECEiE started in 2016, when *The Lancet*, one of the most reputable peer-reviewed medical journals, published a new series on global trends in early childhood development. In it, authors presented a dire state of affairs for very young children around the globe, estimating that 250 million (43%) children below the age of five in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential (Britto et al. 2017). Some parts of the world seem harder hit than others. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, an estimated 66% of children in 2010 were at risk of incomplete development (Black et al. 2016), a statistic that galvanized humanitarian educators to the plight of young children in poverty contexts.

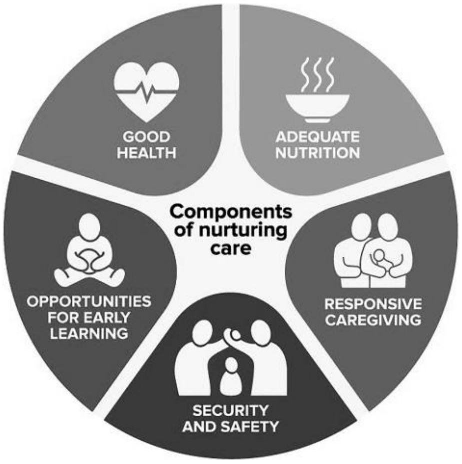

Figure 1- The Nurturing Care Framework

Following the lead of *The Lancet* researchers, UN agencies and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with humanitarian mandates began to give more of their attention to the effects of disaster on early childhood development outcomes. Early childhood development language was included in Education Cannot Wait commitments, a global funding mechanism for education in emergencies, and in 2020 the World Health Organization partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to publish a Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) for children living in humanitarian settings; a set of principles and guidelines for best practices in support of the developmental needs of young children and their caregivers in settings of disaster and displacement (WHO 2020).

Programmatically, ECEiE interventions are largely made up of early childcare programs, pre-school education, play hubs, and the remote delivery of digital content via radio, phone, television, and internet. Through various avenues, such as brain development and school readiness, these interventions are widely understood as tools to addressing global poverty and there is evidence that ECE programming can help children from low-income families improve their brain development, augment their long-term earnings, and achieve greater income parity with more well-off children. The Jamaica Birth Cohort Studies, for example, is a 20-year longitudinal study that looked at the impact of an early childhood education intervention, found that children who received health and education inputs in their early years ultimately increased their lifelong earnings by 25% relative to those who did not participate in the intervention (Gertler et al. 2014). While Jamaica is not a disaster setting, the Gertler et al. study is widely cited as proof that early childhood education programs can be effective at pulling young children, their caregivers, and their community out of relative poverty. Beyond affecting participants' long-term earnings, early childhood education programs also have social cohesion promise and are considered by many as a key tool for achieving global modernity, democracy, and nurturing institutions (Shah 2020).

For example, ECEiE programs are often used to help individual children develop skills such as cooperation, conflict management, regulating emotions, showing appreciation for diversity and being empathetic and understanding of others' perspectives (Shah 2016). Broadly, these individual-level impacts are meant to have downstream societal-level effects, bringing in a more socially aware, cooperative, and tolerant generation of young people

(Chopra 2012). The Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP), for example, is commonly touted as a successful *ECE for peacebuilding* intervention. TEEP was a center-based preschool and at-home caregiver program which exposed children to cognitively challenging pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, and storybook activities both at school and at home. Researchers found the program helped improve children's ability to adjust to school settings, promoted more positive self-conceptions, and lowered aggression levels towards other children, effects which were durable and found in the same participants in a 20-year follow up (Kagitcibasi et al. 2009).

Studies such as the Jamaica Birth Cohort Studies and the Turkish Early Enrichment Project evidence the potential transformational power of early childhood care and education programs for students in low- and middle-income countries, perpetuating a strong belief in humanitarian and international development expert circles that investing in early learning programming is a fundamental step in the ethical obligation of helping LMICs economically catch up to high income countries. This belief also creates a corollary economic logic which submits that for every year of *underinvestment* in early childhood development programs, there is an associative increase in future social policy and economic development costs for governments and global donor organizations. For example, a 2020 study published in *Nature* suggests that in low-income countries, imperfect child development results in a 9.06% loss in their GDP per year (Friedman et al., 2020) and ECEiE policymakers point out that the cost of inaction would be even higher for overburdened host countries and refugee communities where access to nurturing institutions and social programs is especially limited. The resulting belief, at the nexus of these logics, is a clear *ECEiE ethical mandate*: to combat global poverty, reverse the impacts of disaster and displacement and improve the lives of refugee families and communities, humanitarian programs must help *all* young children have access to quality early learning programs to help them develop to their full potential (Richter et al. 2017; Sachs 2005).

Reflecting on educational justice and ECEiE

Given this potential power to pull individuals and communities out of poverty, education is commonly viewed, colloquially and in research, policy, and practice, as inherently good and most people working in education agree that "educational equity" is an important aim of schooling. Some scholars argue, however, that a simplistic attachment to educational access can shroud the very real diversity in what various people and organizations mean by "equity" and how they operationalize it (Levinson et al., 2022). For example, recognizing the plight of refugee children and youth, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has spent the better part of a decade and a half prioritizing the inclusion of refugees within host-countries' national education systems (UNHCR 2012). UNHCR's inclusion approach may increase refugees' access to accredited education, but by focusing exclusively on access, it may also eschew the political and economic disadvantages of many refugees who, as non-citizens are unable to access the future flourishing education might promise to others. There is a growing corpus of research that demonstrates the difficult realties refugee youth face in majority school settings and after successfully graduating (see, Crul et al. 2019; Piper et al. 2020; Dryden-Peterson 2022; Dupuy et al 2022; UNHCR 2022; Morrice and Salem 2023; Reddick and Chopra 2023), prompting many education in emergencies scholars to call for a more robust attention to the concealed *relational harms* in majority school settings and problematizing an unnuanced dedication to humanitarian programming that seeks to mainstream refugee learners into standardized systems of education.

Looking for sources of relational injustice, a critical body of scholarship has emerged to destabilize simplistic savior framings of humanitarian workers by pointing out the severe control humanitarian NGOs hold over refugees' lives (Abdi 2005; Agamben 1995; Hyndman 2000; Thompson 2012). These scholars have successfully pointed out that many humanitarian workers rely on a 'bureaucratic rationale' to justify unethical forms of subjugation (Jaji 2012; Bornstein and Redfield 2011), while other scholars point out humanitarians' racialized and class-driven motivations, which leverage discourses of suffering, compassion, and the 'vulnerable' or 'needy' refugee victim to justify their intrusion (Fassin 2012; Malkki 1996; Timmer 2010). A third group of researchers productively demonstrate that while refugees may be popularly understood as needing the humanitarian worker, it is actually the 'needy aid worker' who relies on their proximity to refugees to build a professional and ethical identity, which is readily converted into material success (Krause, 2014).

In the contemporary humanitarian aid landscape, these critiques of the broader system have productively spread to the field of education in emergencies and contemporary scholars and practitioners within the field have taken up debates on the ethical veracity of educational aid (see; Novelli and Kutan 2023; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2018; Sriprakash, Tikly, and Walker 2020). The introduction of these critiques into the milieu of education in emergencies practice has forced some humanitarian educators to acknowledge the historical and contemporary relationship their work has to neo-colonial systems of refugee subjugation, forcing them into a state of ethical "implicated subjecthood" (Novelli and Kutan 2023) which proposes that such imperial forms of subjugation would not be possible without their active involvement. While many studies critically highlight the power that aid organizations and their workers have over the lives of displaced people, critical refugee scholarship spends less time exploring the ways that groups of humanitarian workers convert their moral and ethical motivations for educational justice into a vision of humanitarian education reform (*for exceptions, see* Krause 2014 and Sackett 2022). In the context of this normative shift towards a more relationally-driven, 'decolonized' humanitarian ways of working, this dissertation recenters educators' agentic (re)conceptualization of effective, moral, and ethical ECEiE programming and explores how they navigate the conflicting ethical norms of the field.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this inquiry are as follows:

1. How do ECEiE educators conceptualize refugee inclusion and its relationship to educational justice?
2. How do ECEiE educators draw on these beliefs in their language and practices both inside and outside of the classroom?
3. As the language and logics of a decolonized approach to ECEiE become more prominent, what opportunities for refugee power sharing are opened or foreclosed in global ECEiE programming?
4. And; how do actors in a global education field understand and overcome the ethical tensions that arise when their universalist ambitions interact with decolonization as an increasingly robust global norm?

Positionality

In the Spring and Summer of 2018, I was conducting research as a master's student at Teachers College of Columbia University on self-organized peace and human rights learning in Colombia. A fellow master's student, Daniel Nahum, and I were invited to investigate the work of SOLE Colombia, a very small, ~ 6-person non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Bogota that was recruiting community members from around the country and encouraging them to self-organize learning sessions in the newly constructed digital kiosks the government had built to improve connectivity in Colombia. My research partner and I were interested in exploring how these self-organized learning sessions could be used as means to implement peace education programs in post-conflict Colombia, but during a lull at the end of a busy planning day in the NGO's capital city office, Kunal[1], the Indian-Colombian founder of SOLE, let down his ponytail, poured us some small glasses of dark rum, and asked us, "But forcing participants to talk about peace and human rights isn't really *self-organized* learning is it?". My heart sunk a bit at Kunal's cautioning. Freshly finished with 3 semesters of education development courses that emphasized local decision-making and participatory measurement and evaluation, Daniel and I were committed to doing research that ceded decision-making power to local stakeholders and centered local learning priorities, but Kunal was pointing out the obvious; here we were, coming to Colombia with an inflated, Ivy League sense of self-importance and a top-down learning agenda like all the '*don't do this*' case studies we had read about in our coursework. Kunal, Daniel, and I spent the evening debating what role, if any, European and North American education experts should have in dictating the terms of educational programming. Kunal was steadfast that all decisions, including impact evaluation and learning outcomes, should be decided by the local communities. Daniel and I half-heartedly disagreed, and I asked, "Kunal, don't you think all people in the world, regardless of their circumstance, deserve the same education you and I received?" Kunal shrugged his shoulders and shot down the last of his drink, "maybe they don't want the education that you had." We laughed to relieve the tension, locked up the office and walked home, realizing the discussion had come to an end, but our debate has stayed with me and reemerges in each of the many international education development organizations in which I've worked since, I've asked the professionals around me about how they see their work fitting into larger systems of European and North American power and control; looking for anyone who has a satisfactory answer to the question: 'how do we, as education experts housed in systems and organizations implicated by empire and white supremacy, act in a way that supports, rather than hurts communities facing poverty, displacement, and marginalization?' Ultimately, it is this body of ethical inquiry that animates this study.

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[1] *All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms*

Conducting ethnographic research on refugee education as a White man with American citizenship from a wealthy family raises concerns about the ways that my research, despite its good intentions, might reify structures of inequality. Early in the planning process, I decided that I was not the right person to conduct research that collects data that directly interprets the lived experiences of refugees. There are innumerable highly qualified researchers with lived experience as refugees, who can do that work. Instead, I decided that I would research a population from my own lived experience, humanitarian educators housed in multi-national NGOs. I have worked in and around the field of education in emergencies for the last 7 years and worked directly for the Humanitarian Collaborative, a research center housed in the Batten School of Public Policy at the University of Virginia, in parallel with doing this research. In part, this research is motivated by my desire for answers around how to be a good humanitarian educator. Like the participants in this study, I too am an implicated subject, striving to be a good ally for refugee communities, while also realizing that humanitarian aid and international development programming is part of the architecture of subjugation that perpetuates refugee marginalization. Finally, like the participants in this study, I have come to realize my implicated subjecthood relatively late in my career and am trying to use this study to explore how I can approach my profession in a more thoughtful and nuanced way.

During the entirety of this study, I was concurrently an ECEiE practitioner and a social science researcher, actively looking for ways to expand and improve early childhood education services for refugees, while also analytically studying the field of ECEiE as a social field. This positionality gives me a keen insider knowledge of my participants' professional worlds, but it has also made it difficult to maintain analytical distance. For example, part of my data collection agreement with the non-governmental organization that participated in this study, was that I would volunteer to work for them as an ECEiE practitioner and expert, even as I was observing them for my dissertation research.

I wore many hats during my fieldwork, working as a classroom teaching assistant, a planning consultant, an interim measurement and evaluation director, and an advisor to the CEO. At times, I found it difficult to bracket my own personal understanding of the institutional space and analytically distance myself from the social phenomena I was trying to study. Like everyone else I've ever met in the field of humanitarian education, I got into the work because I had a strong desire to 'do good'. I was (and am still) dedicated to work that makes other people's lives better. But as this study has already suggested, it can be very difficult to pin down what exactly educational justice can and should look like. As a researcher, I found it challenging to disconnect from my own visions of educational justice, especially as I was tasked with contributing to policies and programming of the organizations I was studying. While in the field, the stakes of my work seemed high, and I oscillated between feelings of scientific inadequacy that arose when I felt I had influenced the analytical process by suggesting a new organizational practice and feelings of guilt when I felt that I had prioritized my research over suggesting ways that ECEiE programming could be more attentive to diverse visions of educational justice.

In the end, I believe my reflexive analytical approach allowed me to approach this research with an appropriate level of investigative distance, mostly because the claims I put forward in this study go beyond my own experience as an ECEiE practitioner. Some of what I present in this study are topics of which I had thought about at the time of my data collection and before, such as the assimilative pressure found in a structural inclusion approach (see Chapter 4) or the growing robustness of trauma discourses in ECEiE practice (see chapter 5). Other insights, however, I can now see were part of my professional life prior to my research, but not understood with analytical depth. I believe that these results being variably connected to my own experience as an ECEiE practitioner, speaks to my success in pushing the insights of this work beyond my ECEiE practitioner's perspective and into that of a social scientist.

Significance

Before delving into the universe humanitarian educators inhabit and its implication for achieving refugee educational justice, it is worth considering why it is valuable to explore global educators' conceptions of decolonization, inclusion, and justice. Education scholars Decoteau J. Irby, Charity Anderson, and Charles M. Payne, in advocating their own vision of ethical educational practice, insist that, "education policies and practices should center learners' individual dignity above all other outcomes and prepare them for an intellectual and creative struggle against their personal and institutional masters" (2022 pp. 2). But can and should this goal of local emancipation be extended to humanitarian education programming where educators, by the very nature of their work, pursue universalizing visions of education justice? Why write a dissertation about decolonizing education from the perspective of those often deemed as the perpetrators of hegemonic education practices? What good could come from understanding them?

I believe speaking to humanitarian educators about their decolonizing beliefs derives at least three benefits. The **first** is practical: understanding the meaning that humanitarian educators give to decolonizing their work has important implications for understanding the most effective ways to promote bottom-up education outcomes. As I discuss throughout the dissertation, my interviews with humanitarian educators suggest that there are many competing visions of how education can facilitate refugee educational justice. Without attending to this diversity, external calls to decolonize educational aid are based upon faulty assumptions about educators' motivations and destined to fail in accomplishing their aims. The **second** benefit is intellectual. Speaking to these educators reveals what happens to ideas as they are transmitted around the globe. Social scientists have offered robust insights into how and why norms are globalized and there have been many valuable macro-social studies on the spread of liberal and counter-liberal ideals through education. In many studies on global nongovernmental educators and the communities in which they work, scholars have provided detailed articulations of how global culture is translated into local contexts. Far less is known, however, about what happens when such global ideas are taken up and used by the global educators whose power they are meant to constrain (*see* Wahl 2017 for a notable example of where this type of work was conducted with police in India).

The **third** gain is both practical and intellectual. There is a great deal of aspiration within the field of education to decolonize our work, but how this is actually enacted *vis-* à

-*vis* the constraints of such efforts is important to understand. Typically, the constraints on decolonizing education are portrayed as either pushback from actors who ideologically disagree with these efforts, or as practical constraints such as the availability of funding or teacher training (Prah 2018). But what this depiction misses, is that the very project of universal education, whether in American primary schools or global humanitarian education, is premised on the idea that there is something on offer in schooling that is good for *everyone*. Finding out exactly how that universal 'good' is conceptualized, how it sits alongside the particular needs of those being served by schooling, and how educators navigate this tension in pursuit of educational justice matters tremendously for what actually happens in efforts to decolonize education.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One introduced the topics being explored, defined key terms, and laid out my research questions. Chapter Two reviews and synthesizes the relevant social science literature. The intersections of early childhood education, refugee inclusion, developmental psychology, education in emergencies, and educational justice are explored. Chapter Three provides an overview of the study's design, methodology, and methods. Conceived as a multiple-case ethnography, the chapter articulates the key principles of this methodology and explains the data collection and analysis methods used. Chapter Four explores ECEiE actors' conceptions of educational justice in the context of a structural inclusion approach. Far from being ignorant as some have asserted (Shah 2023), the structural inclusionists in this study, many of whom are from marginalized communities themselves, are well aware of the tradeoffs implicit to a structuralist approach and decide nonetheless that it is the best path forward for refugee educational justice. Chapter Five goes through a similar analysis for the sociocultural inclusion approach to refugee schooling. Complicating extant literature on sociocultural inclusion, this chapter shows how ECEiE actors variably instantiate sociocultural inclusion with some believing that trauma is the primary source of refugee discomfort, while others believe refugee discomfort is more readily attributed to a loss of cultural belonging. These divergent theories of change have significant repercussions for educators' classroom authority. Chapter Six identifies a top-down 'decolonizing turn' in the field of ECEiE and shows how it has intensified and expanded in the last five years. While the norms of decolonization are relatively unspecified compared to other normative demands in the field, humanitarian educators are ethically committed to promoting educational justice for refugees and are therefore highly motivated to meet decolonizing norms. The chapter finishes by showing how anticolonial academics and policy entrepreneurs tend to distill decolonizing normative demands into two aims 1) democratizing the humanitarian aid system to allow for more affected population decision making, and 2) questioning epistemic hierarchies that place Global Noth "experts" in a position of knowing and refugees in a position of subservience. Chapter Seven builds off the insights from Chapter Six by exploring how decolonizing norms are interpreted and implemented by individual educators in the field. Decolonizing educators engage in what I call a decolonizing dialectic where they ideologically oscillate between conforming to longstanding universalizing conceptions of educational justice and novel decolonizing critiques that frame universals as tools for unethical Global North social control. Ultimately, despite the emotionally painful decolonizing dialectic, educators in this study gravitate towards universalizing heuristics to find ethical comfort in their work. While this universalizing synthesis could be critiqued by anticolonial scholars of education in emergencies, I end Chapter Seven by going beyond the empirical insights of this study to offer my own normative argument by rejecting decolonizing critiques that disqualify the use of any universalizing frameworks in ECEiE policymaking and programming and by simultaneously warning against decolonizing approaches that myopically prioritize educators concerns of epistemic tolerance over the short-term political needs of refugee learners. I also use this chapter to make a pointed normative argument in support of what I call a *colonially sensitive rights-based approach* that encourages an enlightened eclecticism in ECEiE and allows for all forms of socially situated emancipatory knowledge to be taken seriously, whether European, non-European, universal or particular. The dissertation then concludes with Chapter Eight, which presents a more detailed articulation of the value of a colonially sensitive rights-based approach and how it is already part of the field of ECEiE. Finally, I finish Chapter Eight by offering a variety of closing thoughts including the study's limitations and contributions, as well as avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Background & Context

In this chapter, I present the background knowledge and context for the empirical chapters that come later in this dissertation by broadly tracing the global trends and evidence for emancipatory power of early childhood care and education policymaking and programming. I begin by briefly tracing the two theoretical approaches that dominate the field of global early childhood education and underpin educators' conceptions of educational justice, Human Capital Theory and the Human Capabilities approach. Next, I connect these frameworks to the specific bodies of evidence and pedagogical practices that give early childhood education broad legitimacy as a tool for social and community justice. Finally, I situate the global early childhood education agenda in settings of disaster and displacement by exploring the effects of disasters on young children and their communities, pointing to the ways that ECEiE has been touted as a tool for justice.

Global Development and Child Development as Two Sides of the Same Coin

To understand the connections between early childhood education programming and refugee social justice, I will first explore the domain of human development, which refers to the relationship between individual development and collective progress. For many in the field of education in emergencies, the process of advancing human development (i.e. schooling) with the goal of promoting economic development, is the fundamental pathway for achieving refugee social justice. In the field of early childhood education in emergencies, conceptions of individual and collective human development tend to draw on two dominant theoretical approaches: Human Capital Theory and the Human Capability Approach. The following section unpacks these two approaches and then proceeds to situate them alongside concrete curricular and pedagogical best practices in the field of ECEiE.

Early Childhood Care and Education as a Tool for Human Capital Accumulation

Since the middle of the 20th century, considerations of how ‘developed’ a country might be have been synonymous with its economic output and potential for economic growth. In the 1960s developmental economists from the University of Chicago, led by Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz, extended W.W. Rostow’s theory of economic growth (1959), to theorize the role that Human Capital plays in a country’s economic development. Broadly, Human Capital Theory posits that the capabilities of individuals in a society are a fundamental part of their society’s economic wellbeing and that capabilities can be augmented through access to services such as health, nutrition, education, and job training (Eide and Showalter 2010; Sweetland 1996). Individually, members of society can proceed to leverage these enhanced individual capabilities to demand better compensation, while at the societal level, improved individual capabilities concatenate to facilitate collective economic production.

From the inception of Human Capital Theory, education has been considered a critical investment for improving individual and collective human capital. Education is widely seen as an important tool for creating and strengthening skills that will allow a person to become economically productive in their society and earn more income over their lifetime (Unterhalter 2009). Because Human Capital Theory is concerned with the economic returns of social services, researchers, policymakers, and social service workers are often searching for which types of human capital investments produce the greatest *rate of return*. It was in pursuit of this ‘maximum-yield’ social service that James Heckman, an economist at the University of Chicago, first began to study the rate of return on early childhood care and education interventions (Reynolds et al. 2010). In 2003, along with fellow University of

Chicago professor of economics, Pedro Carneiro, Heckman published an influential paper synthesizing the effects of preschool programs on the long-term earnings of children from low-income families, comparing them to the rates of return found in primary-, secondary-, and remedial-school interventions. Their research suggests that the skill enhancement produced in preschool has cumulative effects that are more robust than those found in primary and secondary schooling and that the greatest returns on educational investments are therefore found in preschool programs (Heckman and Carneiro 2003).

One example they highlight is a longitudinal randomized control trial in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where "subnormal IQ children" from low-income families were randomly selected into the local Perry Preschool program. The researchers then followed both the control and interventions groups (students who were part of the Perry Preschool program and those who were not) for 20 years after preschool and monitored their long-term earnings. Measured through the age of 27, students who attended the Perry Preschool program had higher lifetime earnings and lower levels of criminal behavior than comparable children who did not attend the Perry program. The Perry program was also cost-effective. For every dollar spent, the program returned $5.70 in economic productivity. If these return of rate trends hold, when projected into the future lifetime of the participants, Carneiro and Heckman suggest the rate of return jumps to $8.70.

The majority of early childhood education rate of return literature comes from American and European settings, but some comparative studies show similar, but less pronounced trends in low- and middle-income countries. In a 2018 review of 700 *rate-of-return* studies, Psacharopoulos and Patrinos find that on average, globally, there is an 8.8% return on investment for each additional year of schooling, with low-income countries exhibiting a most robust return at 9.3%. Many of these evaluations also find that girls accrue greater economic benefit from schooling than boys (Lally, Mangione, and Honig 1988; Arnold 2004). Evidence on the rates of return of early childhood education in disaster and displacement settings are still largely non-existent. To date, no such studies have been conducted and are not likely to ever be conducted given the ethical implications of randomly and permanently denying early childhood care and education services to refugee children. That said, the vast preponderance of the evidence suggests that the rates of return on education, especially pre-primary education, are greatest for children from the most marginalized communities-- a trend that would likely be upheld for displaced children. It is because of this robust potential to enhance human capital accumulation that early childhood care and education programs are widely seen as “the great equalizer”, helping marginalized children achieve similar levels of development, academic achievement, and income parity as those from the majority (Irwin et al. 2007).

Early Childhood Care and Education and Expanding Human Capabilities

Human Capital Theory is still a dominant paradigm in global early childhood care and education and ECEiE practitioners and policymakers hold a robust dedication to thinking about how early childhood education can help individuals earn more income across their lifetimes. Though Human Capital Theory is useful in making an investment case for early learning programs, it is also criticized for its narrow focus on the outcomes of education that are quantifiable and correlated with economic productivity. For this reason, many ECEiE policymakers and educators also subscribe to a Human Capabilities Approach, which views an individual’s and society’s development as the freedom to pursue the “kind of life [they want] to lead” (Drèze and Sen 2013, pp. 11)

The Human Capabilities Approach started to gain traction in the 1970s when Amartya Sen, a Nobel Laureat in economics, challenged the idea that economic growth should be the main purpose of and sole means to promote human development. On an individual level, Sen suggests that it is a person's ability to "do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being" that defines their development, while at a society level, it is the nation-state's ability to universally facilitate this self-actualization that determines its degree of development (Sen 1993, pp. 30). In other words, a capabilities approach seeks to place people as active agents in their own development, including the ability to self-determine what development might mean to them, and self-actualize a valuable life (Alkire and Denulin, 2009; Walker and Unterhalter 2007). However, in a puzzle that presages the decolonizing debate that undergirds this study, the subjectivity of Sen's conceptualization of human development presents a problem for the global education field. For example, who, among any number of stakeholders in a given society, gets to define what a desirable capability looks like?; What does this process of defining actually look like?; What happens if one person's vision of a valuable life conflicts with another's?

Martha Nussbaum, a professor of philosophy, law and ethics at the University of Chicago took up the mantle to confront these challenges by piecing together a theory of *basic social justice* and positing ten universally valued human capabilities that are based in human rights. These include: 1) life, 2) bodily health, 3) bodily integrity, 4) senses, imagination and thought, 5) emotions, 6) practical reason, 7) affiliation, 8) other species, 9) play and, 10) control over one's environment (Nussbaum 2003, 2013 in Shah 2020). Nussbaum, unlike Sen, does not believe that defining a pre-determined set of capabilities undermines human agency, and instead, suggests that some central capabilities must be set to ensure peoples adequate access to basic rights and freedoms. Indeed, Nussbaum's capabilities project is intimately tied to how individuals can 'function' in a society. For Nussbaum, what makes capabilities significant is their ability to enable social functioning and their potential to create realistic 'options' for individuals to pursue.

Sen and Nussbaum both believe that education plays an essential role in promoting human capabilities and this belief is supported by a collection of empirical studies conducted by Mario Biggeri and his colleagues who ask children from several countries with diverse backgrounds and circumstances what capabilities they believe are the most important to achieving a valuable life. The interviews confirm that children most often identified education, as well as love and care, leisure, and physical health, as the most desirable capabilities (Biggeri 2007; Biggeri et al 2006; Biggeri and Libanora 2011).

This idea of education being a capability itself, as well as an important means to capableness, introduces a semantic challenge for policymakers and practitioners. Ballet, Biggeri, Ballet, and Comim (2011), in line with the views of Sen, avoid explicitly defining educational capabilities, believing that research should release itself of paternalistic forms of educational planning and show a genuine solidarity with children's capacity to determine their own wellbeing. Terzi (2007), on the other hand offers a set of basic capabilities specifically for education. These include literacy, numeracy, and participating in social life, learning correct disposition, physical activity, science and technology, and practical reason (Terzi 2007). These capabilities, Terzi suggests, will lead to the healthy and holistic functioning of children in their future society. In the next sections, this paper will go into more detail about how the educational capabilities Terzi has theorized have become central to best practice in global early childhood education and how their equal distribution underpins many ECEiE actors' conceptions of educational justice.

Early childhood care and education programming as a tool for the social repair of marginalized communities

In their 2022 book, *Quality Early Learning: Nurturing Children's Potential*, World Bank economist Magdalena Bendini and World Bank Global ECD Lead Amanda Devercelli lay out the global aid community's pitch for the value of early childhood education in pursuit of educational justice:

> *'Learning poverty' starts early in many children's lives. Even before the pandemic, an estimated 43 percent of the world's under-five population—almost 250 million children—were at risk of not reaching their developmental potential due to the debilitating effects of poverty and malnutrition. […] These children enter school without the preparation they need to succeed […] The lack of school readiness locks many children into a cycle of underperformance, grade repetition, and eventually dropout. […] Early childhood education (ECE) programs designed to meet the needs of young children are an essential component of a comprehensive package of interventions children need during early childhood. Quality ECE can help tackle 'learning poverty' by building human capital and setting children on higher developmental trajectories. […]*
>
> *Quality early learning opportunities also lead to increased perseverance in school, higher education attainment and improved health and labor market outcomes. Children who benefit from quality ECE are more likely to vote and less likely to commit crimes.*
>
> *(Bendini and Devercelli 2022 pp.2,4)*

The investment case for early childhood education laid out by the World Bank is promising. Early learning 'paves the way' for future school success by making sure that refugee children are competing in school on an even playing field, with a fully developed brain and a universalizable set of basic skills. Then, success in school can be parlayed into increased human capability, allowing for refugee learners to compete fully for jobs in the workforce and accumulate capital, ultimately reducing individual and collective poverty. But what exactly do early childhood educators mean when they say that ECE lays a "foundation of learning" and how do they envision this process of 'parlaying' early learning skills into school success?

"The Five Core Knowledge Areas" in ECE

Unlike primary-, secondary- and higher-education settings where learners are taken seriously as self-determining social and political agents, early childhood education approaches tend to consider children through a fundamentally biological disposition (Penn 2014) and insights into how and what very young children can and should learn primarily derive from the field of developmental cognitive science (Bendini and Devercelli 2022). Drawing on laboratory-based experiments on animals and children and an emerging neuroscience discipline to probe the inner-workings of the human brain, child development scholars broadly seek two insights: 1) to uncover the universal learning behaviors that *all* children exhibit, regardless of context; and 2) identifying the conditions that allow children to maximize learning behaviors, regardless of their nationality, culture, or material and social disadvantages (Bendini and Devercelli 2022).

In their pursuit of universal learning behaviors, child development researchers have composed a list of five *core knowledge areas* that all children, across the world, exhibit and should enhance for later learning in school: 1) place and space awareness; 2) learning numbers; 3) learning about objects; 4) learning to distinguish people as others; 5) learning about social interactions (Ibid). Each of these five domains of core knowledge are actively being defined by child development researchers and it is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore the literature. Instead, I will briefly sketch each domain and set the stage for the ECEiE policymaking and program planning responses that take young learner core knowledge into consideration.

Starting with learning about place and space, child development researchers point out that young children, from a very early age, begin to navigate the spatial contexts in which they find themselves, a skill that underlies their future action planning and spatial memory (Spelke and Lee 2012). Once they can crawl, young children use this spatial awareness knowledge to navigate between locations (Landau, Gleitman, and Spelke 1981). In early learning settings, cognitive scientists believe that this ability to spatially navigate is a fundamental element in their ability to observe and comprehend pictures and maps, and decode the letter sequences, converting them into meaningful messages (DeLoache et al. 1998; Shusterman, Lee, and Spelke 2008; Dehaene 2009). Exercises designed to activate and improve spatial learning have been shown to improve children's ability to learn mathematical language and symbols, even years after the original intervention (Dean et al. 2021; Dillon et al. 2017).

Similarly, child development researchers have used brain imaging technology to show that young children, like many animals, have a brain system dedicated to representing numerosity. This ability to represent quantity is perceived as a critical part of predicting future events (Gershman 2017) and has therefore become a key area for cognitive science study, with numerous studies showing that children's numerical acuity improves with experience. In terms of classroom practice, experiments with children in settings that lack institutional education have shown that numerical acuity is better predicted by schooling than chronological age, speaking to the importance of systematic and structured practice of numerical reasoning (Piazza et al. 2013). Also, numerous studies demonstrate that activities exercising numerosity can result in improved symbolic arithmetic (Khanum et al. 2016; Park et al. 2016). Policymakers and educators argue that these findings suggest that intuitive conceptions of numerosity, which arise in infancy, are foundational to children's learning of school mathematics and should therefore be fostered in early childhood learning programs.

From birth, children recognize objects in their environment and soon develop important skills such as recognizing where one object begins and another ends, predicting the movement of objects and their potential trajectory, and knowing how to categorize objects into sematic groupings (Kellman 1984; Chiandretti and Vallortigara 2011; Rakison and Oakes 2003). In relation to a child's future success in schooling, this ability to recognize, categorize and predict the behaviors of objects is thought to be integral to developing early arithmetic and the use of tools such as pencils, paper, keyboards, etc. (Carey 2011s; Bendini and Devercelli 2022)

Finally, research in developmental cognitive neuroscience has contributed significantly to the last two core knowledge areas, the ability for children to learn from people's actions and their ability to learn language and communicate. Studies show that by the age of three months, babies demonstrate a sensitivity to other people's actions and goals (Berenthal and Pinto 1994) and that children's own planning and mental self-reflection develops in congruence with their understanding of the planning and mental state of those around them (Comalli et al. 2016). Child development researchers point out that this ability to 'tune in' to those around you is a fundamental skill in formal schooling where children's learning depends on their ability to understand their peers and teachers. Similarly, communication, especially through language is an important part of school success. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that nearly all a child's ability to develop cognitively is modulated by children's social and language ability, including learning to use symbols to communicate and to read text (Dehaene 2009).

These Core Knowledge areas have an especially significant relationship with literacy, a key capability for success in school, human capital accumulation, and ultimately educational justice. For this reason, most ECEiE educators believe that developing and equitably distributing these Core Knowledge outcomes is the first step in achieving educational justice for refugees. While all children possess these learning capacities, evidence emanating from studies presented above feed into a global early childhood educational justice mandate that believes these skills can and should be augmented by practice, so that all children, regardless of country or culture, have the opportunity to augment their early learning skills and harness them for future success in primary, secondary and higher education.

Converting core knowledge into pre-academic skills, self-regulation, and appreciating diversity

With a canon of core learning behaviors comfortably established by child development researchers and neuroscientists, psychologists, early childhood educators, and global policymakers took on the task of articulating how classroom practice can develop core knowledge and deciding what quality should look like in ECE practice. While there is limited debate within the field of global early childhood education as to what ECE pedagogy and curriculum should look like around the world (see Vandenbroeck 2021; Penn 2014; Lancy 2021), there is a growing professional consensus for contemporary ECE practitioners that global ECE programming should development children's pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, social-emotional competencies and their ability to manage disputes in peaceful ways (Bendini and Devercelli 2022, pp. 85; Penn 2014; Richter et al. 2021; Chopra 2012).

Early childhood academic skills such as pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, fine motor skills, and shape recognition skills are seen as fundamental building blocks to later success in school and have enjoyed a long tenure as the central priority of early learning programs. In classroom practice, pre-literacy activities include collective book reading, storytelling, and the creation of play areas with reading and writing materials (i.e. a toy kitchen with labels, pretend money, etc.). Similarly, pre-numeracy classroom practices include playful activities where children can grasp formal aspects of the number system, such as board games that include counting, musical chairs, number songs, and playful measurement activities that ask children to weigh objects or time processes.

While pre-academic skill such as literacy and numeracy have been a key priority in early childhood education since its initial institutionalization, in the 1990's, a competing social emotional learning (SEL) agenda began to dislocate the supremacy of the academic learning agenda (Moreno, Nagasawa and Schwartz 2018). Social emotional learning is defined as the explicit and intentional promotion of social and emotional skills and the appreciation of the equal importance between those skills and academic learning. Such skills include self-regulation, problem-solving, self-awareness, building coping skills and resilience, and promoting a sense of belonging, agency, and self-worth. Self-regulation is an especially important learning goal in global early childhood education. Educational psychology research shows that children who can regulate their emotions and cognitive processes are more likely to succeed academically and report an increased sense of emotional wellbeing relative to their unregulated peers (Best, Miller, and Naglieri 2011; McClelland et al. 2013; Woods 2014).

Programs that promote self-regulation' encompass a wide variety of activities, often with divergent approaches to child learning, but Bendini and Devercelli (2022) present a concrete set of child outcomes which have been recognized as models for good practice.

First, ECE approaches that promote emotional regulation should teach children to relate to each other with emotional warmth (Ibid pp.91). This is done primarily by modeling and quality early childhood educators are expected to establish a positive emotional climate in the classroom by frequently expressing approval of children's behavior and creating close, responsive relationships with children when facing challenges (Fuhs, Farra, and Nesbitt 2013). Children are also thought to be better able to regulate their own emotions and thoughts when they are allowed autonomy in the classroom. Bendini and Devercelli point out that definitions of quality in early childhood education programs often include the degree to which teachers allow children to make decisions for themselves, set their own challenges in the classroom, and feel a sense of positive accomplishment upon overcoming their self-selected challenges (pp.91). Exposure to activities that allow for self-determination are positively correlated with measures of self-regulation, including planning, self-monitoring, reflection, and determining self-efficacy (Toering et al., 2012). Finally, ECE practices should provide opportunities to reflect on their learning and engage in metacognitive talk about their processes of learning. A robust body of educational research suggests that teaching this process of 'making learning visible' for young children significantly predicts their educational gains later in life (Hattie 2009; 2012)

The last early learning skill that early childhood education programs should teach children is tolerance building, giving ECE programs the transformative potential to create more peaceful future societies. Early childhood education programs have been revealed as an important means to teach children a culture of conviviality and peaceful conflict resolution (Allen 2009; Jaffe et al. 2004). Advocates for early education programs for interpersonal peacebuilding point to a growing body of research demonstrating how empathy, perspective-taking, emotional regulation, and impulse control are behaviors that develop in the early years of a child's growth, necessitating early 'corrective action' before bad habits are established that might inhibit a child's future success in school or in the workplace (Chopra 2012). Also, at a societal level, ECE programs, with their potential to promote educational and human capital equity, are believed to be important tools to mitigate social and economic inequality-- a factor that is widely perceived as a key driver of conflict and violence (Chopra 2012).

Educational Reponses to Conflict, Disaster and Displacement around the World

Early childhood education, with its promise to pull individuals and communities out of poverty, expand their human potential, and form tolerant liberal subjects, is widely considered a critical social justice tool for refugees. Alongside food and water, shelter, and health services, education, including ECE, has become "the fourth pillar of humanitarian response" (Sinclair 2002 p. 2). This shift in humanitarian thinking is notable given that multiplying global conflicts and disasters have displaced more people worldwide than ever before. In addition to ongoing wars in Ukraine, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, new conflicts have emerged in Gaza, Sudan, and Armenia— driving even more people to leave their home for fear of their personal safety and the safety of their families.

Regrettably, more emergencies are likely in 2024 and the 2024 Global Appeal from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that a total of 130.8 million people will be displaced from their home-- a collection of people larger than the populations of Italy, Canada, and Peru, *combined*. The statistics are almost too enormous to comprehend on a human level. As Filippo Grandi, the High Commissioner for Refugees said in October of 2023,

> “*Each of these statistics is a man, woman, or child whose way of life has been destroyed. Who has lost home, family and friends. Said goodbye—perhaps forever—to relatives who are too old or sick to make an arduous journey to safer locations*”
>
> - (United Nations Press 2023).

As of December of 2023, UNHCR, the UN agency with the most direct forced displacement mandate, publicly issued 43 emergency declarations in 29 countries in 2023, the most in decades (UNHCR 2024), but as of June 2023 around 50% of all refugees originate from just three countries: Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. Climate change and expanded human settlement are also significant drivers of displacement, as manmade conflicts such as those in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan can overshadow the displacement caused by environmental disasters. In February 2023, for example, two powerful 7.7 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes struck south-east Türkiye, affecting over 15 million people (UNHCR 2024), while in May of 2023, Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Myanmar and Bangladesh, affecting more than 11 million people, including 930,000 already displaced Rohingya refugees.

The intersectional realities of displacement, which can intensify refugee families’ sense of powerlessness, guilt, and regret (Papoutsi 2021), add a level of complexity germane to this dissertation study. Historically, most refugees were adult men, but recent data analyses have revealed that from 2010 to 2022, the global number of forcibly displaced children more than doubled from around 20.6 million in 2010 to the current number of 43.3 million (41%) (UNICEF, 2023). According to the UNHCR database (2023), over 1.9 million children were born as refugees from 2018 to 2022-- that’s 475,000 babies born into a life displacement every year. The multiple challenges of are displacement are intensified for refugee parents and caregivers of young children as they must come to terms with the fact that their children, if born into displacement this year, will, on average, not be fully repatriated into a permanent home until they are 21 years old (European Commission, 2023).

The Impact of Emergencies and Displacement on Young Children

In emergency aid and refugee response, young children (ages 0-to-8) are considered an exceptionally vulnerable subpopulation, as they rely on strong protective environment, namely their caregivers and community, to ensure their safety, development, and wellbeing. In settings of disaster and displacement, children's protective social ecology can deteriorate, making it less likely that they will be able to find food, water, shelter, and sanitation services (Bryce et al. 2008; Victora et al 2008) and they are frequently separated from their caregivers, injured, or killed. The risk of death for a child under the age of 8 is 20 times higher in emergency settings than in normal situations (Their World, 2016) and according to the World Health Organization, approximately 50% of global under 5 mortality presently occurs in humanitarian settings (WHO, 2020).

Beyond caring for their immediate physical safety, ECEiE practitioners and policymakers are very concerned that children who have lived through acute disaster and displacement might experience *toxic stress*, an intensity of stress that extends beyond the normal, tolerable levels of daily stress and which can lead to long-term psychological difficulties. Long established research in neuroscience shows that 90% of brain growth occurs in the first five years of life (Conel, 1939), a process that can never be repeated and is generally understood as the foundation for a child's long-term health, educational success, and wellbeing. A robust body of psychological and physiological literature shows that when stress reaches toxic levels during sensitive periods of brain development, it can diminish growth in brain connectivity, organ performance, and metabolic functioning (Shonkoff et al.

2012). For example, studies in rodents and non-human primates show that elevated stress hormones, such as cortisol, that are released when the organism feels a sense of fear, if persistently elevated, can alter brain connectivity and impair the animal's prefrontal-cortex development (Ibid).

In humans, the prefrontal cortex is considered critical for abilities such as focusing attention, controlling impulses, and the ability to hold new information in decision-making, skills that are fundamental to a child's success in school and work, and their ability to peacefully appreciate diversity. Indeed, disruptions in healthy bodily functioning such as these are believed to increase the likelihood of developmental delays in children, poor educational attainment, and pathologies such as depression, heart disease, diabetes, and alcoholism (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2007; 2010; Richter et al. 2017; Shonkoff et al. 2012). The policymaking and pedagogical response to this research has been robust and ECEiE interventions have increasingly prioritized reducing stress for young children so that they can be better learners, workers, and citizens. Naturally, this focus on stress as an impediment to holistic human development takes on an elevated valence in ECE programs designed for settings of conflict, disaster, and displacement, where instances of potentially toxic stress are elevated.

Toxic stress that results from exposure to violence and poverty is widely considered one of the main catalysts of long-lasting developmental disability in refugee children, causing cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, and physical illness such as poor working memory, learning disabilities, impulse control issues, and manic-depressive mood swings (Ibid). Importantly, many ECEiE researchers, policymakers, and practitioners believe that toxic stress can lead to mental illness, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), that can be passed from one generation to another (Shonkoff et al. 2012). A global recognition of the difficult circumstances faced by children in disaster and displacement settings and the potentially lifelong and multigenerational effects of toxic stress on their physical and mental health, have pushed policymaker and practitioners to advocate for an increasingly narrow ECEiE agenda that seeks the equitable distribution of early learning and care programs that prioritize psychological wellbeing, reduce toxic stress, and open avenues for children to capably compete in the mainstream primary and secondary schooling (Richter et al. 2017; Victora et al. 2008).

Promoting Resilience through Trauma Informed Programming

Despite ECEiE educators' focus on reducing the dosage of toxic stress a child might be exposed to, psychological studies show that experiencing potentially traumatic events (PTEs) does not automatically equate to limited brain connectivity and incomplete child development— in fact, some children demonstrate a robust *resilience* to the effects of toxic stress. In the field of ECEiE, a child's resilience refers to the degree to which they can maintain a positive development trajectory (lack of developmental disorders and psychopathologies such as PTSD and depression) and succeed in school, despite being exposed to environmental influences that might induce a toxic stress response from the brain (Center on the Developing Child 2015). Indeed, a large percentage of ECEiE programs for young children are designed to help children *build resilience* to past or future potentially traumatic events. Questions remain, however, as to what skills or traits children should be taught to promote resilience.

George Bonanno, a professor of educational psychology at Columbia University has conducted studies on American disaster victims and found several resilience-promoting factors. Many of these traits, however, are stable dimensions that cannot be plausibly converted into a pedagogical approach (Bonanno et al. 2011). For example, resilient outcomes in the aftermath of PTEs are mostly observed in older men with higher education levels (Bonanno et al 2007; Bonanno et al 2011; Murrell & Norris 1983). Interestingly, numerous studies looking at U.S. contexts have failed to detect a positive relationship between resilience and household income, though an acute loss of resources (i.e. income loss from a disaster) is associated with a reduction in resilience for disaster victims (Bonanno 2021).

Despite findings such as Bonanno's, which suggest that resilience is not something easily taught, much of ECEiE programming still tries to teach kids to be resilient in the face of disaster so that they can stay on course developmentally and capably compete in school. Pedagogically, teaching young children resilience can include maintaining a daily routine, helping them set and achieve reasonable goals, and learning self-regulation skills (American Psychological Association 2012). Despite education policymakers desire for a resilience-promoting curriculum and pedagogy, a growing body of research demonstrates that the most critical part of promoting resilience in young children is helping them create meaningful and long-lasting social connections following a disaster (Kaniasty & Norris 2008; Bonnano 2021).

Combatting Cultural Bereavement

The ECEiE field has a stong dedication to reducing toxic stress, but research from humanitarian settings show that in most emergencies, a strong majority of displaced children are resilient to the long-term effects of stress and do not need mental health or psychiatric services (Bonanno et al. 2011; Pine et al. 2005). Instead, many assert, refugee children simply need what displacement so acutely takes from them, security, access to basic survival resources, cultural dignity, and community support (Berry & Taban 2021).

Refugee social support systems are severely curtailed by displacement, in part due to diminished family connections and a loss of home community (Stewart et al 2008). Considering the collectivist and family-first culture of the Global South countries where most refugees originate, changes in family dynamics, acculturation gaps, and host community cultural deficit beliefs not only cause gaps in communication and cultural identity, but also create conflicts in family relationships and degrade protective social support systems (Im and Neff 2021).

The loss of cultural practices and diminished cultural identity that comes with resettlement can lead refugees to feel unanchored, as the sense of control, esteem, and social orientation cultural belonging normally provides is degraded. Maurice Eisenbruch (1991) calls the angst that stems from this loss of cultural connection *cultural bereavement,* defining it a "the experience of the uprooted person, or group, resulting from loss of social structures, cultural values, and self-identity" (p. 674). Eisenbruch's theory of cultural bereavement highlights the challenges faced by refugee cultural minority groups who have not only overcome an abrupt, forced dislocation, but also an intrusive and damaging cultural clash with host communities that results in cultural trauma. C*ultural trauma* is a useful heuristic for this study as it "refers to an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine one or several essential ingredients of a [person's] culture or the culture as a whole" (Alexander 2004, p. 38). In the case of forced displacement, the concept of cultural trauma can compellingly encompass the prolonged cultural indignities and erasures experienced by refugees and asylees, as well as depicting their detrimental consequences on their wellbeing. Moving forward, I use the concepts of cultural bereavement and cultural trauma as shorthand terms for the slow and painful process of losing cultural ways of living and the feelings of cultural inferiority interpellated upon refugee communities by the majority.

Cultural loss, feelings of cultural inferiority, and concomitant reduced social support can have multifaceted impacts on refugees and their community, leading to diminished material resources, fewer nurturing relationships, and psychological impediments (Asad & Clair 2018; Hobfoll 2001; Stewart et al. 2008). For example, studies show that displaced people who face socializing pressures that devalues their traditional cultural practices (as well as disruption in the practices themselves) are barred from cultural coping resources such as mourning rituals and ceremonies aimed at reinvigorating social connection, worsening individuals' wellbeing, but also afflicting the cultural community more broadly (Heath et al. 2012; Im and Neff 2021).

In the field of ECEiE, displaced children's cultural trauma and cultural bereavement are largely addressed through the implementation of culturally sustaining/restorative pedagogy (CSRP). CSRP is a popular approach to culturally inclusive education and builds on Ladson-Billings' (1995) landmark theory of "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy", which repositioned the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of working-class communities and communities of color as resources and assets to value, explore, and extend (Paris and Alim 2014). Although Ladson-Billings' conception of culturally relevant pedagogy laid the groundwork for a growing movement to maintain the cultural heritage of minoritized students and encouraged teachers and students to critique dominant power structures, many point out that culturally relevant pedagogy falls short of its liberatory potential (Paris and

Alim 2014). Indeed, the term ‘relevance’ exposes the limited emancipatory power of such an approach. Instead, CSRP seeks to invigorate cultural pluralism as part of schooling and at times, problematize White, majority cultural practices and investments.

For teachers, figuring out how exactly to implement culturally sustaining and restorative pedagogy can be difficult given the semiotic flexibility and capacious reach of “cultural relevancy”. For the most part, being culturally responsive in the early childhood education classroom is more of a mindset than a concrete set of lessons. Culturally responsive refugee early childhood educators should be open and curious, constantly engaging in a reflexive process of analyzing how to better value refugee learners’ culture, or even more critically, how learners’ culture is being marginalized (Walker 2023; Betrand & Porcher 2020). In terms of classroom activities, there are several best practices which can be found in culturally sustaining ECEiE programs, including: reading books that use refugees’ native languages and represent refugees cultural practices (food, dress, holidays, etc.), greeting children individually as they enter the classroom and in a way they feel culturally comfortable with, playing music and dancing to songs in refugee learners’ native languages, facilitating ‘show and tell’ days where children can share their cultural heritage and traditions, and teaching children to say ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’ in the languages of all the students in class.

For some educators and education scholars, these types of culturally sensitive best practices don’t go far enough in sustaining and restoring marginalized children’s culture and combatting cultural trauma. Instead, they argue, these approaches maintain White, European culture as a hegemonic standard by framing refugees’ cultural practices as an exotic deviation that should be celebrated, but not considered ontologically serious. McCarty and

Lee (2014), for example, conceptually complicate ‘quality’ CSRP programming by pushing beyond Paris and Alim’s theory of CSRP as a tool for affirming multilingualism and multiculturalism in the classroom and instead suggesting that CSRP should attend “directly to asymmetrical power relations [with] the goal of transforming legacies of colonization” (p. 103). According to this cohort of educators and scholars, CSRP for refugees, when done correctly, creates conditions where horizontal power structures in the humanitarian educational system, curriculum, and classroom create conditions where students can express their cultural selves, fully, and without influence from European and North American cultural conventions. For many decolonizing educators, this process of flattening power in schooling includes “marking for death” some aspects of the education system that are considered tools for exclusion and marginalization (Sriprakash 2023).

As this dissertation will demonstrate, calls to ‘decolonize’ ECEiE in the form of decolonizing CSRP are only now being implemented in the field, so the effect of such programs on refugee wellbeing has yet to be fully measured. But advocates of a decolonizing CSRP approach to ECEiE programming point to interview and focus group data emanating from refugee communities that suggest that cultural trauma and cultural bereavement are critical barriers to refugee flourishing as they resettle in new cultural landscapes (Oddy 2023a; Pallister-Wilkins 2021; Maleku et al. 2021; Yosso 2005).

Concluding thoughts on the power of ECEiE

Children experiencing displacement and disaster face severe economic, developmental, psychological, and cultural challenges and early childhood education programs have the power to mitigate, if not fully reverse, these negative effects. Previous sections of this chapter have showed that the overwhelming majority of global policymakers and practitioners see ECEiE programming as an important social justice tool to combat the negative effects of displacement, elevating two main goals: 1) increasing human capital accumulation; 2) increasing children's capable functioning in society, which can be achieved by through four outcomes: 1) correcting incomplete brain development by giving young children exercises that promote connectivity; 2) giving refugee children the regulation tools they need to self-correct any residual mental illness resulting from displacement and get along with their non-refugee peers; 3) teaching refugee children pre-academic skills so that they can enter kindergarten and primary schooling on a level playing field alongside non-refugee children, and 4) teaching refugee children to be tolerant of other cultures around them.

Against this backdrop of what might be called ECEiE 'traditionalism', in the last few decades a collection of academics, policymakers, and practitioners have begun to productively extend concepts such as cultural bereavement and cultural trauma to advocate for culturally sustaining/restorative pedagogies (CSRP) in ECEiE programming. Pointing to the racist, xenophobic, and anti-refugee climate found in many host-country classrooms, these CSRP advocates believe that refugees were not able to properly augment their brain development, self-regulation, and pre-academic skills because so much of their time and energy was spent trying to combat anti-refugee sentiments in the classroom. Classrooms, they assert, should be comfortable and inviting places where refugees can be their *full* cultural selves and only then can they fully compete alongside non-refugee peers in systems of schooling.

Now, within the last few years, a reformist group of ECEiE experts have advocated for a more radical understanding of what it means to be your full cultural self as a refugee learner by asking ECEiE experts to ‘change the rule of the game’ by reducing refugee powerlessness and cultural imperialism by decolonizing the field of ECEiE. Humanitarian education, they assert, is undergirded by colonial, European ways of knowing and acting and as a result, other forms of knowledge have been marginalized and hidden by omission. Harshad Keval (2019) talks about decolonization as a repositioning of ‘who and what gets to occupy the center and the margins of ideas and society’ and to try and rebalance that power.

These different approaches to refugee schooling draw on different conceptions of refugee social justice, a diversity which deserves attention as practitioners and policymakers try to meet align with the shifting ethical norms of the field.

Educational Justice as Inclusion

Social justice and inclusion are terms that feature prominently in global and national education policy. Most global education policymakers and practitioners pursue goals like ‘education for all’ or United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.2, which demands that *all* girls and boys have access to quality early childhood care and education. The EFA framework and the UN SDGs are underpinned by beliefs in the value of *distributional justice* (Gewirtz 1998) and the idea that the provision of standardized systems of teaching, learning, and assessment to include and support vulnerable learners, will facilitate equity for all (UNESCO 2014b).

While distributional justice is often considered synonymous with social justice in global education circles, Raewyn Connell (2012) suggests that social justice in education should consist of more than the equal distribution of, or access to, schooling, but should also “concern the nature of the service itself, and its consequences for society through time”

(Connell 2012, p. 681). In this way Connell encourages educators to move away from giving their sole attention to access and distribution of services and back to a theory of what constitutes *injustice* and how to prevent it. Young's (1990) theory of injustice is helpful in this case. In it, Young explicates "five faces of oppression": *exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence* and explains that while "distributive injustices may contribute to and result from these forms of oppression, none are reducible to [solely] distribution and all involve social structures and relations beyond distribution" (p. 9).

Building on Young, Gewirtz (1998) encourages educators to expand their conceptions of justice beyond distribution to include a *relational justice*, which emphasizes conditions of mutuality and recognition. For some policymakers and practitioners, relational justice in education consists of adapting schooling to help reimport social conscience into systems of power (like neoliberalism or capitalism) to curb their worst overindulgences without dismantling them. But for others, endeavoring to make 'benevolent capitalists' for example, is futile, as it ignores the injustice inherent within capitalism. Instead, they assert, inculcating relational justice in education should focus on freedom from oppressive relations, including the 'marking for death' certain cultural and political-economic relationships (including parts of the education system) that enable Young's 'five faces of oppression'.

This division between distributional justice and relational justice is critical for this study and I use the distinction as a framing device for understanding the ways that ECEiE educators think about the relationship between including refugees in systems of schooling, empowering them in the curricula, and achieving socially just ends. As the following chapters will demonstrate, ECEiE experts variably instantiate norms around distributional and relational justice, with some focusing exclusively on the equal distribution of accredited and standardized educational services, some framing relational injustice as a matter of interpersonal racism and xenophobia, and others envisioning a *decolonized* form of relational justice that trends towards a cultural relativism, problematizing any ECEiE practices that are seen as culturally coercive.

Critically, most educators fall somewhere in between these two poles and are forced to make difficult decisions when their pursuit of distributional justice clashes with their desires to eliminate relational injustice. I argue that ECEiE educators wrestle with this complexity by making their practice and policymaking decisions along three axes. **First**, ECEiE educators make decisions around which of the numerous ECEiE outcomes listed in this chapter they believe are critical to refugee flourishing. As future chapters will demonstrate, some educators believe that only pre-academic skills are critical to refugee flourishing, while others believe that healthy brain development and emotional regulation are critical to a fulfilling future. The **second** axis of decision-making comes into view when ECEiE educators are forced to determine whether each of these target outcomes are contextually particular or not. For example, some educators identify ECE outcomes like emotional regulation skills or beliefs about educational access for girls as specific to a certain cultural group or identity. If educators make the determination that an ECEiE outcome is culturally specific, the **third** decision they must make is whether coercing refugees into alignment has emancipatory returns that justify the process enacting power over refugee communities. As 20th century critical education and humanitarian scholarship has pointed out, this third axis of decision making, historically speaking, was hardly a decision at all. In the past, Global North educators were not exposed to anticolonial conceptions of relational injustice and acted from a place of absolutism. But as insights and new norms around the colonial entanglements of relational justice have begun to diffuse from critical scholarship into global culture and downward into the daily milieu of education in emergencies work, this third 'trade-off' decision has taken on an intensified valence. Indeed, in the sections to follow, I will theorize the decolonizing turn in ECDiE as the novel extension of conceptions around relational (in)justice to include the 'avatars of colonialism', which given the capaciousness of decolonizing rhetoric and scholarship, can result in the belief that there are very few (if any) justifications for replacing anything considered a refugee cultural expression, save perhaps directly harming children.

Refugee Inclusion in Early Childhood Education Programming

In many ways, converting social justice norms into ECEiE programming is really an issue of inclusion, with policymakers and practitioners facing difficult questions like: 'Who should be *included* in formal schooling?'; 'What types of knowledge should be *included* in the curriculum?'; and, 'Who should be *included* when deciding the answer to these questions?'

This question of inclusion is especially important considering less than 1 percent of refugees are able return to their home country following their initial displacement (UNHCR, 2023). In recognition of refugees' slim prospects of return, in 2012 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called for a new 'national integration' policy, encouraging national governments and NGOs to focus on refugee students' access to host country education systems (UNHCR 2012). But access to existing government services is not easily achieved. Most refugees find exile in states that neighbor their country of origin, the majority of which lack the institutional stability or capacity to allow for the inclusion of large populations of refugees (Bellino and Dryden-Peterson 2018).

This gap between the goal of including refugees in host country social systems and the reality of their systematic exclusion has catalyzed global advocacy campaigns in support of what Bellino and Dryden-Peterson (2018) term *structural inclusion*. Proponents of the structural inclusion of refugees prioritize broad conceptions of distributional justice and advocate for refugees' inclusion into formal and nonformal systems of education, employment, health, and democratic mechanisms for decision-making. In the context of early childhood development programs for refugees, structural integration campaigns encourage host communities to include young children in host nation creches, preschools, and kindergartens, while also helping refugee caregivers access high quality pre- and post-natal care, reproductive health services, and metal health support services.

While the structural inclusion of refugees is a fundamental pillar of educational humanitarian aid, critical scholars within the fields of international education development and multicultural education point out that simplistic, unidirectional structural integration initiatives often pressure (im)migrant learners to assimilate to the majority culture in ways that can cause individual and collective harm (Abu El-Haj 2015; Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, Adelman 2017; Karam, Monaghan and Yoder 2016; Salem 2020). Instead of focusing solely on the structural integration of (im)migrant learners and distributive justice, these critics call for the addition of *sociocultural inclusion* initiatives for refugee learners that make refugee learners feel more comfortable in classrooms and seek forms of relational justice alongside distributive justice. Sociocultural inclusion approaches in education emphasize the importance of making refugee and (im)migrant learners feel welcome in schools and inspiring in them a sense of pluralistic belonging. In contrast to the unidirectional nature of assimilationist, structural inclusion approaches, sociocultural inclusion places onus on host communities to actively combat xenophobia and ethnic biases in the classroom and to create culturally and psychologically comfortable conditions for refugees and (im)migrants to improve their learning (Bellino and Dryden-Peterson 2018).

Sociocultural inclusion approaches in refugee education are designed to mitigate the psychological strain of displacement by combatting the instances of prejudice, racism, and xenophobia faced by refugees on a daily basis, so that they might be better able to compete with non-refugees in school settings. Indeed, evidence from primary and secondary schools in the U.S. suggest that whole school approaches to refugee sociocultural inclusion promote positive social and academic outcomes for learners and their families (Bajaj, Canlas and Argenal 2017; Bajaj and Bartlett 2017; Mendenhall, Bartlett and Ghaffar-Kucher 2017; Greene, Espiritu, and Nyamangah 2023; Wilcox and Lawson 2022). In practice, early childhood education programs that emphasize refugees' sociocultural inclusion draw on culturally sensitive and trauma-informed pedagogies to help refugee learners feel culturally valued and psychologically safe in classrooms.

In a further evolution of inclusive education for refugees, this study identifies a third, new group of *decolonizing* early education professionals emerging in the field of ECEiE. Decolonizing reformers in ECEiE believe that an exclusive attention on sociocultural inclusion and making marginalized learners feel welcomed in classrooms can serve to perpetuate settler colonial relations by overemphasizing the everyday, local, and interpersonal instances of bias and eschew systemic Eurocentrism and the oppressive 'avatars' of colonial imperialism implicit to humanitarian aid and refugee education

(Wallerstein 1997; Oddy 2023a; Oddy 2023b). Eurocentrism is multifaceted, but broadly it is understood as the "sensibility that Europe is historically, culturally, and politically distinctive in ways that significantly determine the overall character of world politics" (Sabaratnam 2013: 261). In the field of early childhood education in emergencies, Eurocentrism and decoloniality are most evoked in reference to relational justice that the field perpetuates through Orientalist frames, where 'The East' is a space of tradition and deserving of either fear and control or is an object of pity and consequently legitimated as a subject to benign intervention. Decolonizing educators in ECEiE field also emphasize the hegemonic geopolitical production of knowledge and critique the cultural imperialism perpetuated by modern *social* scientific knowledge (Wallerstein 1997). In this way, they question the ways that social scientific modes of 'knowing' that emerged from 19th century Europe onwards eschew other approaches to knowing and the ways that this privileged epistemic position establishes a hierarchy of 'knowers' with the authority to speak about and socially engineer the world (Fias 2017; Sabaratnam 2013; Vandenbroeck 2021).

Specifically, the decolonizing educators in this study are dedicated to highlighting the relational injustice intrinsic to contemporary discourses of ECEiE 'expertise' and the ways that humanitarian aid architecture perpetuates American and European empire-- especially the role educational aid can play in either funneling refugees into conditions of capitalist extraction or inculcating in them a sense of epistemological inferiority. A decolonizing inclusion approach, therefore, aims to destabilize, if not reverse the epistemic and decision-making hierarchies in refugee programming and policymaking programming by parochializing what they see as Western social norms and questioning how they manifest in educators' 'expertise' and humanitarian ways of working.

Within a relatively short period of time, the concept of inclusion in refugee education has undergone several, overlapping and ongoing normative transformations leaving significant ideological space for educators to draw from as they try to implement properly inclusive early learning programs for refugees. For analytical purposes, this paper categorizes these beliefs around inclusive education into three approaches:

1) **a structuralist approach** exclusively prioritizes the structural inclusion of refugees into existing early education services. Structuralist approaches assert that refugee children, like all other children, are best served by developing a defined set of skills and corpus of knowledge so they can effectively compete in school and workplace settings. Believing that this is the best way to combat the negative effects of displacement, educational justice under a structuralist paradigm is simply the equal distribution of these skills, necessary for capably function in majority political economic systems

2) **a sociocultural inclusion approach**, like a structuralist approach, recognizes the importance of distributing a finite set of useful skills and knowledge that should be learned to compete in school and the workplace, but believe that this distribution should be equitable, not just equal. As such, they pursue interpersonal relational justice by demanding anti-racist, anti-xenophobic, and trauma-informed reforms to existing early education services so that refugee learners can feel culturally and psychologically welcome. In short, educators who pursue sociocultural inclusionists ends maintain a belief in the transformative power of distributional justice and see interpersonal instances of racism and xenophobia as barriers to equitable distribution of learning.

3) **a decolonization approach** is the only approach that prioritizes relational forms of justice over distributional justice, with a special attention to the ways that humanitarian education can reproduce epistemic and material hierarchies, which they perceive as a form of cultural imperialism. In practice, no educators in this study pursue refugee educational justice by totally abandoning distributional educational justice. This tradeoff makes these educators feel "implicated", expressing angst that their efforts might perpetuate one form of injustice while alleviating another.

Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the multifaceted landscape of early childhood education in emergency settings, particularly focusing on the challenges and opportunities in supporting displaced children. From the traditional emphasis on increasing human capital accumulation to the evolving paradigms of culturally sustaining/restorative pedagogies and decolonization, the discourse surrounding educational justice and its relationship to refugee learners' inclusion has evolved significantly. The delineation between distributional justice and relational justice underscores the complex decision-making processes educators face in balancing structural inclusion with sociocultural sensitivity and decolonial aspirations. Data collection around how educators navigate these diverse approaches, evidence the fact that inclusive early childhood education for refugees requires a nuanced understanding of power dynamics, cultural sensitivity, systemic inequalities, and ethical obligation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

An Ethnographic, Multiple Case Study

Methodologically, this work employs an ethnographic multiple case study approach, which combines case study research and ethnography. In the following sections, I sketch the general philosophies and key elements of each methodology. I then present the design of the study, including data collection methods, sample, and processes of analysis.

This study is based on several phases of ethnographic data collection, which took place in Thessaloniki, Greece; London, England; Athens, Greece; and Budapest, Hungary, among members of the early childhood education in emergencies communities, and in New York City, among members of the global early childhood education in emergencies community. As a form of research, ethnography focuses on uncovering people's cultural interpretation of the world around them (Geertz 1973; Spindler 1997; Wolcott 2009). Ethnography was an appropriate method for this study of norm formation because it allowed me to examine questions related to how ECEiE actors understand the meaning of "educational justice" as well as what they understood achieving that justice entailed. Ethnography also enabled me to experience daily practices related to program development and to understand at a micro-level how particular projects came to fruition.

While originally used almost exclusively in anthropology, sociologists have long used ethnographic methods to study marginalized groups, such as sex workers, drug users, and gang members (Neyland 2007). As a methodology, ethnography is the study of the everyday. Ethnographers often aim to uncover, as closely as possible, the particular experiences and perspectives of groups of people (LeCompte & Schensul 1999). Just as ethnographic methods have been adopted by an increasingly diverse body of scholars, so too have anthropologists used ethnographic approaches for studying aid and international development. This study was inspired by the ethnographic work of anthropologist Liisa Malkki who studies the discourses of care and justice of humanitarian aid workers in Finland. Likewise, this study is an examines how ECEiE educators work to make sense of new ethical norms around refugee educational inclusion, cultural agency, and justice.

Case study is a design framework for conducting in-depth research on a specific and bounded example of a widely occurring phenomenon (Thomas 2011; Yin 2018). The keystone element of case study research is the "case", which is the specific example or context being examined. The case must be "bounded" in a way that makes clear exactly what the exact unit of study is and separates that unit from the wider context (Stake 2005). The phenomenon of interest, can then be disentangled from the broader context to answer the question, "what is this a case of?" (Thomas 2011). Multiple case studies are studies, like this one, that examine more than one instance of the same phenomenon—exploring each case as a whole, as well as comparing across cases (Stake 2006; Yin 2018).

This study consisted of 12-months of continuous participant observation data collection across four sites: from June 2022 to October 2022 in Thessaloniki; from October 2022 to January 2023 in London; from January 2023 to April 2023 in Athens; and from April 2023 to June 2023 in Budapest. From February 2023 through February 2024, I also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with individuals I observed as well as individuals involved with the INEE ECD Task Team and the Moving Minds Alliance Working Group. Supplementing this data collection, I participated as a member and observer in Moving Minds Alliance and INEE activities before, during and after my fieldwork.

In my field sites in Europe, I employed three methods of data collection: (a) I conducted participant-observation by serving as a volunteer for the three NGOs I was observing; (b) I carried out semi-structured online interviews with staff members sampled from the NGOs I was observing and; (c) I collected program documents, pedagogical materials, reports, and archives of email correspondence related to projects intended to support refugee learners' classroom integration and successful learning.

The teachers and policymakers included in the analytical sample are largely sourced from three NGOs, each of which has an early childhood education mandate: The Refugee Healing Network[2], Protos Child Center, and Hungary Friends. **Table 1** below provides brief descriptions of the organizations. These organizations were chosen usen a snowball sampling methodology, beginning with RHN, who was an active member on the INEE ECD Task Team.

Table 1 Description of Three NGOs in this study

Name of the NGO	**Description**
The Refugee Healing Network (RHN) Thessaloniki, Greece London, England	RHN has offices in Thessaloniki, Greece and London, England and is a refugee-founded and refugee-led organization dedicated to implementing trauma-sensitive and identity-informed programming for youth and young children. Established in 2016, RHN spent six years delivering a play-based early childhood program in Greece that emphasized cultural sensitivity, an attention to emotional regulation and creating psychologically safe spaces. RHN no longer directly delivers this program but has transitioned to a 'capacity sharing' model that supports other refugee-facing educators to implement RHN's trauma-sensitive and identity-informed programming—an approach many in the organization describe as 'decolonizing' the field.

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[2] All organization and interlocutor names are pseudonyms.

Protos Child Center Athens, Greece	Protos Child Center is an NGO and nonformal early learning center based in the Omonia neighborhood of Athens. Founded in 1987, Protos was originally created to promote a culture of volunteerism in Greece and programming focused on environmental conservation. Since 2008, Protos pivoted its programming towards prosocial programs that aim to support marginalized communities in and around Greece. The Protos Child Center, which is funded by UNICEF, opened its door in fall of 2017 and includes Greek language, math, and preschool programs for refugee and migrant children under the age of 13.
Hungary Friends Budapest, Hungary	Hungary Friends was established in 1994 as an organization dedicated to Roma integration and conflict resolution in Hungary. Hungary Friends began its early education programming in 2011 when the centralization of the Hungarian education system made it difficult for civil society to support primary and secondary Roma inclusion programs. Hungary Friends' began supporting refugee early learners in 2022 when an influx of Hungarian-speaking Roma refugees began to flee the war in Ukraine and settle in Hungary. Hungary Friends directly delivers early learning programs for Roma refugees via a 'mobile play hub' that goes to three locations across Budapest and they also have partnered with War Child and UNICEF in the creation of 13 inclusive play hubs for refugees settling in Hungary.

Participant Observation

To offset the extractive nature of academic research, over the course of my fieldwork in Europe, I served in different volunteer roles for the NGOs in my sample. For Refugee Healing Network, I served as the interim director of measurement and evaluation. As the interim M&E Director, I helped establish program measurement and evaluation best practices, I trained staff and partner staff on how to manage data collection and analysis, and I sat in on 'Strategic Leadership Team' meetings where the Executive Director, CEO, Head of Programs, and Head of Operations came together to make important decisions about the trajectory of the organization. This role had advantages and disadvantages associated with ethnographic participant observations, which almost always "blurs the distinction between researcher and researchers, subject and object" (Le Compte and Schesul 1999 pp. 50). On the one hand, I had access to some important decision-making spaces where norms around refugee inclusion and educational justice were consolidated and congealed into organizational practice. However, I also had to navigate a fine line between my role as a researcher and as a participant in the strategic planning of RHN. I did so by ensuring, to the best of my ability and not always perfectly, that my involvement in decision making was limited, trying my best to instead encourage the leadership team to trust their own expertise. In cases where my opinion or input was forcefully asked for, I made sure to include that opinion on a list of suggestions I made over time, so that it could be fruitfully included in the analysis.

Unlike RHN, my roles at Protos and Hungary Friends were mostly superficial, posing relatively little challenge to my role as a researcher, as I am fully confident in saying that my influence over policy and programming in those organizations was exactly zero. At Protos, I served as a volunteer classroom teaching assistant, helping supervise students, participating in collective art projects, speaking English with the kids during English lessons, and cleaning up toys and books between lessons. On a weekly basis, the entire programming staff at Protos would come together for a debrief. I observed these debriefs which, for my benefit, mostly took place in English with some discussions taking place in Greek and being translated for me by the capable English teacher on staff. My responsibilities at Hungary Friends were essentially the same, with the small addition that I would come along for advocacy and planning meetings that took place between Partners Hungary and their civil society partners.

But for the most part, I would spend my time at Partners Hungary traveling alongside the 'mobile play hub' where, upon arrival, I would act as a teaching assistant, playing soccer with the kids, making crafts, playing tag, and acting as one of the handles of the ubiquitous colorful play parachute.

Finally, in addition to participant observation in Greece, the UK, and Hungary, this dissertation also benefits from several years of involvement in activities related to Moving Minds Alliance, INEE, Sesame Workshop and Lego Foundation. I was a researcher on a paper that mapped out the degree to which existing humanitarian standards covered the elements of nurturing care and I conducted another scoping research project where a colleague and I tried to identify all of the organizations implementing early childhood education programs for refugees and sketch together a map of each program, its impact, and the challenges practitioners faced in its implementation. Although I was not explicitly conducting my dissertation research during any of these activities, my involvement has informed my general understanding of the early childhood education in emergencies field and the *in-situ* implementation of their programs.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted 42 interviews for this dissertation. These can be divided into two categories. The first set of interviews was with 30 teachers, administrators, and training facilitators employed by RHN, Protos, or Partners Hungary, conducted to assess their part in norm adherence or creation. The second set consisted of 7 ECEiE experts who were not employed by RHN, Protos, or Partners Hungary, but were still in positions of influence for the field. To identify interviewees, I used a purposive sampling methodology with in each organization, focusing on organizational members who had a direct relationship to policymaking and program implementation.

Interviews focused on how respondents defined quality ECEiE programming, the process of developing such programming, and programs' relationship to refugee flourishing and social justice. I also asked interlocutors questions about their background, how they came to do this type of work, and their motivations to be refugee educators. This allowed me to investigate their individual priorities and commitments, and to understand their motivations for working in educational aid. Second, I questioned interviewees about educational inclusion, asking them to define inclusion and explain to me the factors that shaped how they came to those definitions. These questions allowed me to understand how interviewees envisioned the relationship between refugee educational inclusion and their visions of social justice. Finally, I asked interlocutors about inclusive early childhood education programming, encouraging them to tell me about programs that they've worked on, including the history of the program, implementation challenges, and processes of measurement and evaluation. These interview questions helped me understand how different beliefs around inclusion and educational justice are articulated in classroom practices.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom by the author in 2022 and 2023 and each one lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Some interlocutors were interviewed twice. After each interview, I wrote interview summaries and reflection memos. Most interviews were conducted in English, though several were also conducted in Hungarian and Greek with the help of a third-party simultaneous interpreter. Due to the demographics of the field of humanitarian education, most interviewees sampled were female and of European descent.

Document Analysis

Before, during, and after my fieldwork, I actively constructed a database of program documents, emails, training material, grant reporting documents, classroom materials, and advocacy documents. These documents supplied this study with a written record, allowing me to triangulate interview and observation data. They also allowed me to assess the degree of consensus around inclusive ECEiE best practices and the motivation that drives their implementation.

Data analysis

This dissertation takes a 'grounded' approach to data analysis, as ethnography is an appropriate method of data collection for an inductive analytic approach (Charmaz 2001; Schatz 2009). My findings, therefore, emerged from elements of policymaking and programming that my interlocutors found significant, such as educational justice consisting of sustaining the cultural characteristics of refugee learners in settings outside of their homeland, or questioning the injustice of implementing programming that is based on scientific insights considered to be excessively culturally determined. Accordingly, the perspectives on refugee inclusion and justice are those of my interlocutors. This grounded theory methodological approach was important as I began to pivot my focus away from my original research questions after I realized that other questions were more relevant in the field.

As a grounded approach necessitates, data for this study were examined inductively for emergent themes. Using intuition built from the field work, the development of codes and themes began organically. Looking back at my transcripts, analytic memos, and observation notes, I began to find trends in the way that stakeholders defined and articulated refugee inclusion and educational justice, both within and across cases, leading to an initial set of 83 codes. After each phase of coding, I would form hypotheses, grounded in a revisiting of the literature, about the defining character of these trends and themes and then proceed to search for disconfirming evidence that might push me to refine my theme or finding (Erickson 1986; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2011). Ultimately, this process of identifying trends, converting them into themes, codes, and sub-codes for analysis, and refining them through a search for disconfirming evidence left me with a standardized coding protocol and set of analytic codes (Saldaña 2021). This proved especially important as part of the goal of this work is to help outline, in the context of early education programs for refugees, loosely defined terms such as justice, inclusion and decoloniality.

Case Selection

Early Childhood Education in Emergencies makes a good case for exploring the local implementation of emerging ethical norms to decolonize humanitarian education for several reasons. First, humanitarian programming is often understood as one of the key vehicles through which people try to disseminate norms beyond their cultural source (Malkki, 1994; 1995; 1996). This makes a study of educators trying to decolonize humanitarian programming especially productive, as it forces humanitarian aid workers to tangibly demonstrate where they see global norm dissemination as a productive step towards achieving social justice, and where they see it as an ethical failing. Second, due to the cross-cultural and institutionalized nature of the work, the ECEiE field and the actors within it engage in an especially explicit articulation of what are otherwise tacit global norms around educational access and quality and its relationship to justice. Early childhood education, with its reliance on evidence from economics and psychology for legitimacy, is especially prone to universalizing pressures. This makes the field of ECEiE an especially productive space to explore how decolonizing educators make sense of their ethical obligations to refugee communities.

Conclusion

This dissertation employed an ethnographic multiple case study methodology to explore the understandings and articulations of 'decolonized' educational inclusion among early childhood educators and policymakers. Through the nuanced examination of organizations like the Refugee Healing Network, Protos Child Center, and Hungary Friends, as well as engagement with broader networks such as Moving Minds Alliance and INEE, the research elucidates how educators navigate the tensions between universalizing pressures and the imperative to respect cultural diversity. By adopting a grounded approach to data analysis, emergent themes surrounding refugee inclusion and educational justice were identified, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics at play in the pursuit of decolonized educational practices. In the next chapter, we analyze the data collected to articulate the educational justice beliefs of educators who follow a structural inclusion approach.

CHAPTER 4: A MAINSTREAMING APPROACH: STRUCTURAL INCLUSION AS DISRIBUTIVE JUSTICE IN HUNGARIAN ECEiE

> *"I don't really believe in this 'cultural differences' stuff. There are different cultures and differences between [us and refugees], but my experience is, wherever you go, that there are many more things which bind you together than separates us. So, the different culture [approach], I'm not so much a fan of that idea. I'm more for this human rights approach when we speak about education. I think that's the only way out of this situation."*
>
> \- *Gabor; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

The structural inclusion of refugees into early childhood education systems is criticized for forcing refugees to assimilate to European cultural conventions and has largely fallen into disrepute in academic and progressive global ECEiE policymaking circles. Yet, despite this, some program implementers in this study seem as dedicated as ever to 'just refugee getting kids in school'. Why is this? What evidence or beliefs do these structural inclusionists draw upon to justify their approach? And what actions do these educators take to pursue their conceptions of educational justice? This chapter attempts to answer these questions.

In the epigraph to this chapter, we hear from Gabor, an amiable refugee educator who dons a permanent half smile and jokingly describes himself as "the old one" at Hungary Friends, working since 1994 on Roma integration programs in Hungary. In his description, Gabor taps into a core belief of a structural integration theory of justice, namely that the equal distribution of national educational services is primarily a human rights issue. Like Nussbaum, Terzi, and UNESCO policymakers, Gabor sees equal access to mainstream education services as both a means to educational justice, but also a social justice end, giving refugee children universally valuable skills and allowing them to leverage that experience as a 'way out' of their situational oppression. It is also illuminating how Gabor anticipates sociocultural critiques of this approach, rejecting frames of refugee learners as cultural actors, instead emphasizing that Roma refugee and Hungarian White children are more alike than they are different, and by doing so, creating ideological space to universalize structural inclusion as a tool for educational justice. While Gabor is representative of some of the beliefs implicit to a structural inclusionists approach to refugee education, he is also unique in the degree to which he refutes accusations that mainstreaming perpetuates relational injustice (i.e. cultural imperialism, epistemic hierarchies, refugee powerlessness). Many structural inclusionists don't deny their decisions are perpetuating certain forms of refugee oppression, they are simply making a judgement call that access to accredited schooling is more important than any relational injustice it might perpetuate.

In the chapter that follows, I draw on interview and observation data to go into more detail about the institutional framings that structural inclusionists use to justify their distributional approach to refugee education justice. To start, data show that all structural inclusionists frame education as a human right, a rhetorical turn that cements educational access as universally valuable and which gives them the ability to prioritize distributional justice as the most relevant approach to refugee educational justice. In my analysis I also find two types of structural inclusionists, relational injustice *deniers* and relational injustice *minimizers*. Deniers, like Gabor, go as far as to reject criticisms that relational injustices such as powerlessness or cultural imperialism exist in education systems, believing instead that education is mostly an apolitical tool for building a universally valuable set of learner skills. Most structural inclusionists in this study, however, are minimizers, admitting that there are forms of relational injustice implicit to a structural inclusion approach, but, considering themselves realists and considering the context within which they work, they argue that elevating Whiteness and narrowing emancipatory praxis as a matter of access to white majority institutions is perhaps an unfortunate, but nonetheless necessary, precondition for educational justice. This chapter, therefore, adds nuance to polemical literature that suggests global education implementers act from a place of ignorance (*see* Shah 2023).

Denying Relational Injustice in ECEiE

Gabor and his Hungary Friends colleagues implement early learning programs for Hungarian-speaking Roma refugees who fled conflict in Ukraine to settle in Hungary and their belief in the power of structural inclusion seems to, at least in part, stem from the harsh reality of refugee educational access in 2023 Hungary. Lukacs, the executive director of Hungary Friends gave me his assessment on the state of refugee education in Hungary,

> *"Refugees in Hungary are in a[n] [e]special[ly] [bad] situation, partly because there had been no refugees in Hungary, only migrants, and the country did their best not to allow them into the country. The refugees from abroad were represented as a negative group, emphasizing the threat they might pose. In the meantime, the entire Hungarian social care system got frozen, the same [with] public education. It became very rigid, very cold, and the service approach was replaced by authority functions and administrative [red tape]."*
>
> \- *Lukacs; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

Lukacs is referring to the commonly named "STOP Soros" laws which were passed by the right-wing Fidesz Party in 2018 under Prime Minister Viktor Orban's supervision. The STOP Soros legislation allowed applications from asylum seekers arriving in Hungary through a "safe transit country" to be rejected as inadmissible and criminalized the activities of any individual or civil society organization who provided assistance to asylum seekers, making the distribution of helpful information, monitoring the border for the provision of social services, and operating a network of (im)migrant support punishable by up to one year in prison. When compounded with centuries of anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary, the difficult circumstances for Roma refugees from Ukraine are extreme. Eszter, a municipal government worker who plans and implements education programs for vulnerable populations, especially Roma, in the 8th district of Budapest, explained to me,

> *"I don't know how to think about inclusion outside of the Hungarian context, because it really feels so personal. There's always somebody who is not at the table and sometimes you don't get a reason-- and that's more about prejudice or stereotypes; why someone shouldn't be at our table. It's quite a thing in Hungarian culture, like how to exclude someone. I think after 10 years, our society is changing into not a good direction [sic]. We [Hungarians] always have to think about who [should be] excluded or who is not like us, not good enough. And we are really afraid of the other. And like historically, Roma people are really, really suffering from social exclusion, systematic racism. So, it's not getting better, but it's getting worse. So focusing on inclusion is somehow a must, because in the long run, [if you don't] you're going to face bigger problems."*
>
> \- *Eszter; 8th District Municipal Office; Budapest*

Desperate to find practical ways to make a difference in the face of draconian education policies, many of the educators at Hungary Friends focused all their energy on immediate desegregation and the assimilation of the Roma into mainstream Hungarian education systems, doubtful of critiques that pose mainstreaming Roma children as a path to unjust ends. I go back to Gabor to unpack the theory of mind of educators who reject the existence of relational injustice in mainstreaming approaches to refugee education:

> *"My background is in sociology, so we know that if you are educated, then [you] have the possibility or the hope to gain and to change. And without that, it's not gonna happen. And then whenever anyone comes with this idea, 'oh, but it's a culture thing', I don't care. I don't think it's there. It is just some romantic idea of [education] being cultural, but it's not cultural. It is just simply uneducated people, and you need more education, more information, more real knowledge. I mean [you need more] information about the world around you. And then, you should go and involve as many people as you can."*
>
> \- *Gabor; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

As Gabor's testimony shows, for some structural inclusionists in this study, being "educated" means having access to the finite conditions and skills that expand the human capabilities that are constitutive of one's participation in mainstream society. While they don't explicitly draw on her work, this conception of education as a tool for the future functioning in society is heavily influenced by Lorella Terzi's work on the just distribution of skills that give individuals the capacity to capably function (i.e. opportunities for well-being and living good lives) within a given society. Terzi argues that this determination of which skills give individuals the ability to capably function in each society is contextually bound, though in the context of a globalized economic system many of these skills are for all practical purposes universal (see Terzi 2007), but Gabor is unique in my sample, in that he doesn't think that these skills are culturally determined at all.

Gabor's critique of culturally sensitive education evokes his own image of a 'universal learner' that is a passive vessel ready to be filled with teachers' ready-made knowledge (Freire 1970). When speaking with Gabor, I indeed understood his framing as an instance of what Charles Mills (2015) calls an "epistemology of ignorance", where Gabor, an older White Hungarian man, unintentionally situates 'real knowledge' under the dominion of the White majority system of schooling, eliding any forms of expertise or knowledge that Roma refugee communities might hold but which might not be readily valuable in mainstream Hungarian society. While Gabor takes a decidedly universalizing perspective and is arguably 'ignorant' of how his approach perpetuates Roma refugee exclusion, many educators in my study who advocate for mainstreaming are surprising clear-eyed about the tradeoffs of their approach, recognizing that there are countless skills or capabilities that might be developed through early childhood education, but also believing that only a narrow few can productively be parlayed into capably functioning in global or Hungarian society. As such, they consider themselves practically and pragmatically prioritizing the just distribution of these few capabilities, even if such prioritization might reasonably be interpreted as an act of promoting epistemic hierarchies and eschewing Roma ways of being.

Prioritizing Distributional Justice over Relational Justice in Structural Inclusion

Like many systems of education around the world, early childhood educational institutions in Hungary are understaffed and underfunded and government reformers, activists, and civil society workers are often forced into a state of triage, deciding which policy initiatives should be prioritized. Projecting a hierarchy of needs onto refugee communities, a common refrain coming from structural inclusion advocates was that it would be *nice* to combat Roma powerlessness and cultural imperialism in schools, but what refugees really *need* is equitable access to the existing host-community services.

For example, in an acknowledgement of the anti-Roma and anti-refugee prejudice that permeates the Hungarian education system, conversations I had with Eszter often included her critiquing Roma refugee education services where non-Roma teachers demand Roma refugee children learn "to be White". "It's so pervasive, and it's so tragic," she explains, "[and] the [national government] institutions don't have any official opinion about [assimilation]. <pause> But what is happening is that there's a lot of work to keep, and this is most of the energy, keep kids at school. […] Like crisis management all the time in the last five years." This exchange with Eszter demonstrates the clarity with which structural inclusionists approach the tradeoff of distributional and relational justice. Far from an epistemology of ignorance, for many educators, forcing Roma refugees to 'be White' is preferable to leaving them under-schooled and underprepared for competing in at school and on the job market.

Another interesting example of this clarity of mission came from Inge, an 8th district of Budapest municipality worker who oversees the EU-funded Inclusive Kindergarten project for Roma refugees in the city. While Eszter described the practical tradeoffs between distributional justice and relational justice described above as "tragic", Inge is much less emotionally troubled. In conversations we had during lulls at a policy planning meeting, she explained to me part of her motivation, *"I'm an anti-capitalist, but when it comes to like my NGO work in the field, what I found most important is to make these [Roma refugee] people as capable of existing under capitalism as possible. […] I found that as their best interests."* In our conversations, Inge was resolute in her motivations to be an agent of immediate change for Roma refugee communities, even if in the long term, it meant folding them into an economic and political system which she disdained.

In this way, Inge, with her steadfast belief that helping Roma refugees make more money should be the goal of all social policy programming, is exemplifying the structural inclusionists theory of change, believing that the just distribution of educational skills will result in the just distribution of material, which is coterminous with a life of flourishing.

> *"I told you, I'm a Marxist, so like, I'm really materialistic in this sense. Like if [Roma refugees] have a higher standard of living in the future because of this [inclusive kindergarten] project, that's what's important to me. I do believe that your individual skills help you to get a better job and like, a nicer life. [...] You have to keep in mind what's best for the children, especially long term and to just like, kind of have fun with them, because that like a nice experience. If you cannot, by the end, say that okay, so their standard of living is better, then I don't see the point. [...] All of these like new approaches like [to] make them aware of their situation or whatever, but is it more important than teaching them to read? No, because that gives them a better job. So, <laugh> like, we could have all of these like innovative programs in terms of education, but I feel like [if] you don't give them the skills that is required to work at a higher paying job, then I don't see the point."*
>
> \- *Inge; 8th District Municipality office; Budapest*

Appealing to the White Middle Class in the Name of Educational Justice

While Inge's approach to educational justice reduces policymaking and programming complexity by collapsing all forms of refugee educational justice into the equal distribution of accredited schooling, "not seeing the point" of doing any educational programming that doesn't mainstream Roma refugees into Hungarian social systems forces Inge into some ethically difficult policymaking decisions. For example, with a masters in anthropology from a prestigious university in the UK, Inge has a complex understanding of the relationship between cultural assimilation and material flourishing. Deeply dedicated to the just distribution of accredited schooling and work opportunities, she often talks to me about how culturally assimilating Roma refugees into White, middle class-Hungarian spaces is an important outcome for the Inclusive Kindergarten initiative. When talking about the planning process for the program she explained to me,

> ***Inge**: "[At first, the focus] was more like access to services, or like equal opportunities, equal treatment, that sort of thing, But then they employed a communications [lead] and he, and because of focus groups and some research, basically showed that if we want to desegregate the nurseries, we have to kind of get the middle class back to the nurseries, because they're missing."*
>
> ***Charles**: "So what was the reasoning behind the need to include the middle class? Was it for financial purposes?"*
>
> ***Inge**: "That's how integration happens. […] What we saw is that most of the Roma refugee children are in our [public] kindergartens, but most of our middle class white affluent parents either enroll [their kids] to like private nurseries or church nurseries. This communications lead [pointed out] that it's like around 20% where white flight starts, so it was just like kind of getting the Roma children distributed, like equally amongst the 12 nurseries. That's like such a kind of social engineering thing to do, but basically [the] strategy is, that segregation is bad because it leads to the corrosion of services, and that's like an unequal situation, or like a violation of human rights in a sense. […] Nobody is really talking about that, like people from different backgrounds living together means they have much more opportunities just because their network and their kind of like world view is more complex."*

In this exchange, we can see how despite feeling uncomfortable by the “social engineering” optics of the district’s plan to equally distribute the Roma children across the 12 new kindergartens, her dedication to distributional educational justice overpowers her discomfort, which is ultimately assuaged as the price you pay for creating “more opportunities” for Roma refugee children. It’s also interesting to note how under a structural inclusionists approach, desegregation takes on an ontological force, superimposed over other categories of (in)justice. In our discussion, Inge reveals a form of mission creep where the provision of equal services and equal opportunities is not enough to achieve distributional justice, and instead the equal distribution of access to middle class Whiteness is also considered and used as a tool to manage Roma refugees. Also, as desegregation becomes the goal, increasingly less onus is placed on mainstream Hungarian society to support refugee flourishing, shifting responsibility on refugees to find a way to conform to Majority parameters for educational inclusion and justice.

Inge and Estzer, in their dedication to the just distribution of equal educational services and their belief that education should be a tool for helping marginalized communities capably participate in the majority culture, are willing to place Roma refugee children in spaces of schooling where they are taught to “be White”. For Inge, this even includes splitting up Roma children so that they are evenly distributed in school settings, making White Hungarians feel less threatened and creating conditions for Roma refugee children to more readily assimilate to majority Hungarian culture. Why? We know that this is not a case of ignorance, as discussions with Inge and Estzer show that they are at least partially aware of the justice tradeoffs they are making. Also, surely this is not a case of Inge and Estzer being bad people, indeed I know from my time with them that they make these decisions from a place of deep concern for Roma refugees. Estzer became an educator, turning down higher paying jobs, because she feels that education is an important tool for social repair and achieving justice. Similarly, Inge, who identifies as an activist, works long hours in an ideologically hostile environment to fight for "bigger social impact". Perhaps, as White Hungarians, Inge and Estzer are just more willing to overlook the relational injustices that result from such a strong dedication to distributional educational justice? Studies from around the world show that White educators hold implicit biases about their non-White students (Chin et al. 2020; Ferguson 2020; Tuck and Yang 2012), biases that could perhaps be readily converted into beliefs such as theirs. Is this the case here? To explore this assumption in this next section I will present data from Nora, a Hungarian Roma woman who believes that structural inclusion and the equal distribution of accredited education as a human right is more important than holding on to some "toxic" Romani cultural traditions.

Prioritizing distributional justice over powerlessness, epistemic hierarchies, and cultural imperialism, a voice from the margins

Nora is a half-Romani woman in her mid-twenties who works full time as a program coordinator for Hungary Friends' Roma refugee response. She grew up in what she calls "the Gypsy community" until the age of 17, "I was really brought up in the customs and traditions, which are now kind of like disappearing. But it is a big part of my identity,". Nora was a gifted student, prior to her time at Hungary Friends she was one of 400 applicants to receive a full scholarship to attend a small liberal arts college in the Midwest of the United States to study psychology, an opportunity she admits not many Romani women are able to access. Nora is proud of her Roma cultural background, but she is equally proud of her educational accomplishments, noting how her Roma upbringing alongside systemic anti-Roma racism made it difficult to succeed educationally:

> *"I actually attended a segregated primary school in the same village where my grandparents live. Thankfully, some of my teachers and my parents recognized the impact of education. [...] My family put a lot of emphasis on education, which I'm really thankful for because my grandparents are barely literate. Like my grandfather has an eighth-grade education and my grandmother has even less, I think about fifth grade. [...] My mom and my dad decided to take me out of the segregated school in grade six, when I was 12 years old, and put me in the bigger city school in the East of Hungary. I had a significant gap in knowledge, because even though I attended the same grade, I was way, way, way behind, you know, than my classmates [sic]. So, it required a lot of catching up to do. [...] I was always like, kind of academically talented, but I still felt that I was always behind people. And that's mainly due to my ethnicity and nobody [directly] made me feel that way, you know, it was just my own kind of perception of myself."*
>
> - *Nora: Hungary Friends: Budapest*

Despite admitting that she faced instances of relational injustice in her time in the White-majority city schools, conversations I had with Nora proved she was thoughtfully dedicated to educational justice that prioritized the distribution of accredited early childhood education services that folded Roma refugees into White Hungarian social systems, echoing many of the same arguments that I heard from Gabor, Eszter, and Inge. In describing her motivations to do ECEiE work, Nora offers an insight into what she thinks mainstream early childhood education has on offer:

> *"When we talk about early childhood, we usually talk about [children] under the age of six. Those [years] are really important [for the] development of a child. Those are shaping the majority of their years [to come] as well. So, if we immediately exclude students from that early age and there are segregated kindergartens; if you suggest to children that age that they are not good enough to include them in better kindergartens, you are already suggesting to them from the beginning that they are not good enough."*
>
> - *Nora; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

In this quote, Nora expresses two of the three key paradigmatic features of structural inclusion for early childhood education. First, that early childhood education services are critical to promoting the timely brain development of young refugee children and without which, they are not able to fully compete in ‘the years to come’ in the market of schooling and the job market. Second, Nora explicitly asserts that mainstream, White-majority schools are the best place to build these skills and that excluding children from these spaces not only leaves them underprepared for their future schooling and workplace success, but drawing on a relational justice motivation, also sends the message that Roma refugees are deficient, not important enough to be included in mainstream schooling.

Nora is a credible advocate for this assertion. As a Roma woman who grew up in a segregated ‘Gyspy community’, she has consistently asserted the importance of education in preparing her to capably compete with White, majority Hungarians. In one conversation I had with Nora, we were talking about her full scholarship to an American University to study psychology. Talking about the day she received the news of her scholarship, she said, “And that's when I actually realized the impact of education. Like that was, that was a really big part that when I realized that without that education, I would be nowhere near where I am right now.” For Nora, the contents and contours of educational justice are clear. From her perspective, had she not, by the grace of her parents and teachers, been allowed to attend a White, majority Hungarian school, she would have never caught up to her peers enough to be awarded her scholarship and to find herself doing work that is financially rewarding and vocationally fulfilling. Like other structural inclusionists I met, Nora converted these effects into a human rights heuristic, collapsing her conception of educational justice as the just distribution of mainstream educational services in a right to education. She told me,

> *“I'm [currently]doing my master's in human rights because I want to combine my expertise in psychology with children and human rights, so I can focus on protecting children's rights. And right now, my primary focus is the right to education. To equal education. […] I was given a chance and I was very, very lucky. But a lot of students are not in that situation. So, I believe that everybody deserves an equal chance, and that’s why I feel that this topic is really close to me.*

- *Nora; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

Like Estzer and Inge, Nora's dedication to structural inclusion and distributional justice does not stem from an epistemology of ignorance. Quite the opposite, in conversations we had, Nora was well-versed with the relational injustices of mainstreaming, because she lived them. As a "White educated" Roma woman, Nora would often talk about her feelings of hybridity. Not fully part of the Hungarian majority, Nora faces daily antipathy from the White majority in the form of microaggressions or the general sense of inferiority mentioned above, while also admitting to not feeling fully at home within the Roma community, "I did hear that some of my grandmother's family members have said that I lost my way. Why do I need so much education? Like whenever I see these family members, their first question is always, 'oh my God; you're 27 and unmarried? You have no chance in life anymore. You are already old, you know; just give up <laughing>. You know, you just basically just like listen to them and then you nod and then you can't really do anything." In these conversations Nora kept a positive attitude, but it was clear that her cultural liminality was a source of angst for her. Nonetheless, Nora was proud of her cultural heritage and strongly identified as a Roma woman, not feeling like her educational and professional success made her any less Roma. She carried forward this belief that one's Roma-ness has little to do with how dedicated you are to not attending mainstream schools.

Combatting 'stigma' in the name of educational justice

In some cases, Nora's belief in the power of preparing Roma refugees for White schooling pushed her to make difficult judgement calls around when educators should exert power over Roma refugee communities. For example, to fulfill this vision of justice Nora and educators like her must identify any cultural characteristic that they feel severely inhibit access to accredited schooling. If deemed to indeed be a barrier to refugees' educational success, these characteristics are legitimized as objects of exogenous cultural change and any resistance to such change is often couched in the language of stigma. For example, when discussing the Roma community's stigma against certain forms of parenting practices, Nora admitted that some 'community sensitization' was necessary,

> *"When we talk about cultural aspects in the Roma community, there are so many beautiful aspects of it; you know; that don't really need to be changed. But when it comes to parenting; child attachment; parenting styles, we have to shed centuries long of generational traditions and customs when it comes to that. That is what is hindering children from accessing education or their development. I'm not saying that we need to like completely strip away their identity or their cultures whatsoever. I believe that educating them on the aspect [of parenting] is very important. And I don't believe that it would take away anything from their culture."*
>
> \- *Nora: Hungary Friends: Budapest (emphasis added)*

In this excerpt, Nora draws on some of the child development evidence presented in Chapter 2 to make the case that Roma communities should shed centuries of tradition and custom in the name of accessing education. Interestingly, Nora, a proud Roma woman, employs a complicated and seemingly paradoxical rhetorical turn here. On the one hand, she calls for the adjustment of Roma parenting behaviors, a commonly referenced critical element of 'culture' (Spindler 1997). On the other hand, she converts healthy parental attachment and the presumed improved brain connectivity that comes with it into an important benefit, placing it beyond Roma cultural particularism in her final sentence by saying it wouldn't take anything away from their culture to change their behavior. Nora also makes a commonly held teleological argument here, placing contemporary theories around child attachment and their connection to community development in the realm of the modern and Roma customs under the auspices of long-abandoned 'traditions'. This rhetorical turn gives ECEiE educators more authority to help Roma refugee communities 'catch up' to modern mainstream society, a process that opens them up to critiques that argue they are perpetuating forms of relational violence such as the creation of epistemic heirarchies and Global North cultural imperialism (Lushaba 2009).

Parenting practices are not the only domain where Nora sees room for cultural sensitization. As a highly educated Roma woman who is earning her master's in human rights from a globally prestigious university and who believes that education is the primary source of her flourishing, the issue of girls' access to education is also a legitimate area for intervention.

> *Okay, let's put it this way. Very traditional Roma families don't believe in the importance of education, especially not for girls. It's actually incredibly hard for them because for Roma girls it's very important you get married, you have children, and then you're a housewife. And you can start as early as 16. Yeah, that's one thing that I think is incredibly toxic from the Roma community. I wouldn't even call it culture. I would say 'traditional thinking', you know. [...] We have to change. We have to acknowledge that sure, that girl can still be a really good mom, a really good wife, and she can stay at home if she chooses to[sic]. But let's give her a chance; for her to determine if she wants to do it. [...] So, I wouldn't say that I'm advocating for like completely changing their traditions or stripping away their culture, but there are aspects that need to be tweaked. That's for sure. I will die on that hill when I say that."*
>
> - *Nora: Hungary Friends; Budapest (emphasis added)*

In this excerpt Nora demonstrates again that, far from operating on an epistemology of ignorance, she is fully aware of the relational injustices she might be perpetuating by pressuring Roma communities to send their girls to school, but ultimately, she insists she is willing to "die on that hill".

An intersectional analysis of what Nora is saying here also adds a notable level of complexity to her rhetorical framing of educational justice. For Nora in this case, sending Roma refugee girls to school can often include putting Roma girls in spaces where they are pressured to assimilate to Whiteness. But despite knowing from her own experience that going to White schools can perpetuate feelings of epistemic inferiority, Nora feels that access to accredited schooling is still valuable. Through this logic, Nora draws on logics that frame educational justice into an issue of equal distribution of standardized schooling, broadly and benignly construed.

Conclusion

In this chapter I pulled together data from refugee educators in Hungary to explore why some refugee educators remain dedicated to structural inclusion, despite the broad belief that mainstreaming refugee learners in majority systems of education can be harmful. In the chapter I show that educators who value structural inclusion believe that educational justice is achieved through the equal distribution of accredited educational services. For some educators, this assertion is undergirded by a belief that education is an apolitical tool for human development. These relational justice 'deniers' believe that the skills education provides are universally valuable and that any effort to reduce the equal distribution of educational services is an act of educational injustice. This chapter also explored the justice beliefs of a second group of relational justice *minimizers*. Unlike the 'deniers' who don't believe that mainstreaming refugees into majority schools is in any way an act of relational injustice, 'minimizers' recognize that doing so does indeed perpetuate epistemic hierarchies. Nonetheless, after thoughtfully weighing the pros and cons, minimizers prioritize distributional justice over relational justice, believing that the immediate downstream benefits of making refugees "more White" outweighs the injustice of cultural loss such a policy decision enables. Finally, this chapter shows that this process of minimizing is not just a case of White Hungarian educators and policymakers acting from their own positional interests. Roma educators, such as Nora, show that minimizers justify their policymaking decisions, even as they fully understand and oftentimes live the relational injustices that structural inclusion and distributional justice perpetuate. In this way, this chapter adds nuance to polemical literature that suggests global education implementers are acting under a false consciousness or from a place of ignorance (*see* Shah 2023). This goal of adding analytical nuance to ECEiE educators' decision-making continues in the chapters that follow as my study attends to the ways that global norms demanding greater attention to relational justice are taken up by educators and policymakers who either try to make refugees feel more comfortable in school settings or try to 'decolonize' the field of early childhood education in emergencies.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIOCULTURAL INCLUSION IN ECEiE: TOWARDS A MORE RELATIONALLY JUST ECEIE AGENDA

In Chapter 4, this study explored the ways that early childhood educators in Hungary conceptualized refugee educational justice as the equal distribution of standardized schooling, which, when converted into programming and policymaking, manifests as a structural inclusion approach to refugee education. But over the last 10 years structural inclusion policies and practices have come under attack from academics and progressive educators for their tendency to perpetuate refugee forced assimilation, a phenomenon which critics say can cause refugees more harm than good (Abu El-Haj 2015; Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, Adelman 2017; Karam, Monaghan and Yoder 2016). These critiques have solidified into a more robust global attention to the cultural and social marginalization perpetuated by mainstream schooling and have prompted a sociocultural inclusion response that aims to be more sensitive to relational injustices by making refugee students feel welcome in classroom settings. This chapter takes a closer look at how sociocultural inclusion manifests in ECEiE settings by investigating how ECEiE educators conceptualize sociocultural inclusion, its relationship to educational justice, and what implementing sociocultural inclusion looks like in ECEiE policymaking and classroom practices.

Sociocultural inclusion approaches to early childhood education programs in emergencies emerge in response to critiques of structural approaches and are defined as giving refugees a sense of belonging in school, regardless of their displacement experience or cultural background. Education in emergencies literature tends to collapse all education policies and programs that make refugees feel safe and welcome in host education systems under a single, *sociocultural* inclusion category (*see* Bellino and Dryden-Peterson 2018;

Mendenhall & Falk 2023*)*, but in this chapter I argue that shifting global norms around relational justice and its connections to refugee inclusion have produced significant ideological space in ECEiE expert circles, catalyzing debates around where feelings of safety and belonging come from, what steps educators should take to help refugee children feel like they educationally belong, and how educational justice, whether relational or distributional, relates to educator interventions.

All humanitarian educators I spoke with frame refugee student comfort and belonging as consisting of a combination of psychological wellbeing and cultural agency. Despite this common definition, data collected in the field also show significant heterogeneity around how educators conceptualize the relationship between psychological wellbeing, cultural agency, belonging, and educational justice. For example, some educators assert that psychological wellbeing for young children is coterminous with an ability to control their emotional expression, believing that genuine refugee comfort, including feeling a sense of cultural dignity, must begin with educational interventions that actively teach students to emotionally self-regulate and mitigate the effects of trauma and toxic stress. In this study I call this group of educators, *trauma-first* educators, because they assert that without self-regulation interventions, refugees will constantly cycle through a state of anxiety-induced hyper arousal and be unable to find any form of comfort (cultural or otherwise) in school settings, destining them to a life of educational injustice.

Another camp of ECEiE practitioners, whom I label *culture-first* educators, believe that creating a sense of cultural dignity in the classroom is fundamental to psychological wellbeing and see cultural safety as necessary precondition for psychological comfort, rather than the other way around. While on the surface this distinction might seem pedantic, in practice, educators' orientation towards the primacy of culture or cognitive processing has significant repercussions for educational justice and the types of authority educators take on. For example, trauma-first educators who see emotional regulation as a universally necessary condition for cultural expression tend to take on the authority of a biomedical expert and leverage that expertise to take on the role of a mental health guide, helping individual refugees overcome their trauma and toxic stress so that they can better fit in to host-community society. On the other hand, culture-first educators who see cultural expression and dignity as a precursor to psychological wellbeing tend to cede authority, implementing interventions that help refugees create spaces of shared cultural expression, framing refugees as experts in their own culture and wellbeing, and placing the onus of integration on host communities' collective acceptance. The following sections explore these two groups of educators in more detail and contextualize their beliefs in concrete programmatic and policymaking settings. Afterwards, I will spend some time analyzing the implications these two approaches have for refugee education and refugee educational justice.

Competing definitions of psychological safety and the primacy of the psychological over the cultural in ECEiE

Previous sections of this paper have pointed out some areas of ideological contention within the field, but in contemporary early childhood education in emergencies practice, there is broad ethical agreement around the need for 'child-friendly' spaces. Child-friendliness, like inclusion, is a term that is differentially and expansively defined across contexts, but UNICEF, the UN agency tasked with coordinating global humanitarian education efforts, defines child friendly spaces as places of learning where children are physically safe (free from abuse, exploitation, or violence) and psychologically safe (free of frustration, anger, and aggression, and full of hope) (Ager et al. 2013; UNICEF 2011).

Physical safety has been a fundamental part of humanitarian aid since its inception, but the emphasis around psychological safety of children in humanitarian settings is a relatively recent shift; one that responds to a growing attention to the psychological pain of displacement as well as the racist and xenophobic hostility refugee learners face as they try to integrate into host communities (Campbell 2017; Getmansky, Sınmazdemir, and Zeitzoff 2018). Recognizing that refugee students' toxic stress and exposure to ethnic animus inside the classroom can degrade students' ability to learn, education in emergencies scholars have spent the last ten years encouraging ECEiE practitioners to achieve psychological safety through the implementation of a one-two punch of trauma-sensitive and culturally sustaining/restorative early learning approaches (Wanja Gitau 2018).

Trauma-sensitive approaches to early childhood education programs for refugees build off the assumption that young children and caregivers who have experienced forced displacement are less likely to have healthy adult-child attachments and more likely to have experienced toxic stress and symptoms of PTSD than those who have not been displaced (Ibid). The combination of unhealthy attachment and post-traumatic symptoms are believed to predispose refugee children to pathologies such as an increased risk of being overwhelmed by feelings of distress and a concomitant degraded ability to regulate their internal emotional and physical state-- all of which are seen as critical barriers to capably competing in school and professional life and living a life of flourishing (van der Kolk 2005). To combat the effects of trauma on learning, refugee early childhood educators are encouraged to implement a trauma-informed environmental approach to their teaching, creating stable and consistent routines or rituals in their classrooms, making room for periods of open play, and helping young learners regain a sense of agency by letting them choose classroom activities

(Statman-Weil 2015). In a more targeted method, trauma-sensitive educators are also increasingly encouraged to recognize the symptoms of PTSD and toxic stress in young children, help the children identify their emotional states, and regulate them through deep breathing, mindfulness, or somatic therapy practices. Finally, if deemed necessary, ECEiE educators are also encouraged to refer children deemed to be experiencing PTSD to more robust psychological and psychiatric interventions.

Like trauma-informed approaches, culturally sustaining/restorative practices have also been introduced in the field of early childhood education in emergencies to help refugee learners feel a sense of cultural dignity and eliminate any negative feelings that arise from being part of a cultural minority post-displacement. Compared to trauma-sensitive programming, culturally sustaining pedagogy has enjoyed a relatively long tenure among (im)migrant educator communities, included in the 'best practice' canon since its rise to prominence in the early 1990s with the publication of Luis Moll's (1992) article about connecting home and classroom cultures and Gloria Ladson-Billing's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy.

This elevation of both trauma-informed and culturally sustaining programming as best practices, while a welcome attention to the multifaceted needs of refugee learners, presents some ethical and pedagogical complexity for ECEiE teachers. For example, if a teacher observes a student acting 'strange' in class and they want to address the students' behavior, they must first make a judgement call as to whether the behavior they are observing is an instance of cultural difference or a manifestation of toxic stress or PTSD. This diagnosis has significant repercussions for the type of intervention a teacher might have with a student. For example, if the teacher decides that the students' behavior is primarily a cultural act and is only ‘strange’ because of the teacher’s own cultural expectations, there might not be a need for any intervention at all—let the child express themselves as they deem culturally appropriate, assuming it is not actively harming other students. On the other hand, if the teacher judges the student’s behavior to be an instance of PTSD, interventions can range from dancing and breathing exercises or special sessions with a social worker, to more intrusive interventions like family interventions and psychiatric intercession. Also, the question remains as to what teachers should do if caregivers and children are not interested in mental health interventions or do not consider them culturally appropriate? Should the educators try and convince the families to submit their children to psychological intervention? And what of the issue of false attribution? Trauma and PTSD are notoriously difficult to diagnose (Bonanno, 2021) and even when identified, diagnoses are criticized for being culturally bias and more likely to classify non-Europeans as mentally ill (Martínez-Falquina 2015; Visser 2015). It is entirely possible that a well-meaning teacher sees trauma where there is only cultural difference. In such a case, the teacher might be putting refugee learners down a difficult path of psychological intervention and mental illness interpellation that causes refugees more harm than good.

This is a complex ethical challenge for refugee educators who must ultimately make high-stakes decisions about where student classroom behaviors derive and what interventions are best suited for students’ flourishing. But despite this complexity, the discussions with educators highlighted in this chapter show that most educators don’t engage too deeply with this tension. Ultimately, in the field of early childhood education in emergencies, toxic stress is the primary concern for nearly everyone involved and as a result, any case of refugees’ rejection of certain mental health services tends to be framed by educators as primarily a source of culturally situated mental-health stigma. Given the absolutism concomitant mental health authority, this tendency to take on biomedical authority has significant repercussions for refugee learners as trauma, toxic stress, and PTSD have become the main object of ECEiE educators' concern.

Conceptualizing educational justice through psychological safety as trauma-sensitivity

One of the defining characteristics of modern conceptions around the refugee is their potential exposure to 'toxic stress' and traumatic events and while there is an ongoing debate that casts doubt on the degree to which refugees exhibit more trauma than other groups (*see* Bonanno 2021; Tolchin et al. 2023), there is a broadly held belief in policymaker and practitioner circles that refugees are a vulnerable group in large part due to their high incidence of trauma. Indeed, large multilateral NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee, Plan International, Save the Children, War Child, Sesame Workshop, and the International Federation of Red Cross are all implementing refugee response programs that prioritize trauma and emotional regulation, and are actively demanding more global funder attention to the provision of trauma-informed programming in humanitarian aid.

This robust belief that the refugee experience is primarily an experience of trauma was reflected in discussions I had with educators around the world. For example, Inge, the policy officer with the 8th District of Budapest whom I introduced in Chapter 4 told me about her experience of supporting Roma refugee education programs in rural districts outside of Budapest, "Yeah, my experience is that when I was doing that NGO [work] in the countryside, in [these] two counties that [there had been] like the highest trauma population, and it was in like a couple of villages and they were all like 99% trauma[tized]." Discussions I had across the field of ECEiE showed that this idea that refugees are traumatized and need help was common in global fora as well as at the local level. Bushra for example, who works for a UN Agency with a global child education mandate, also presents this perceived correlation between being a refugee and trauma when asked about what refugee learners need,

> *"I think it's the lack of ability to regulate [that] can be a sign of something, of some sort of trauma; not necessarily, but it can be a sign of trauma; something that's not going right. […] if you are a child unable to regulate your emotions and you continue like that through your adulthood, it can really pose a problem for [sic] the possibilities of better outcomes, the ability to deal with life, and the challenges [of life] et cetera. […] So, I'm thinking about it in terms of [refugees] long-term likelihood of social success."*
>
> \- *Bushra; UN Agency; New York*

In this excerpt Bushra articulates a causal chain commonly articulated in ECEiE circles, where the traumatized refugee is unable to stay calm and ultimately has trouble competing in school and the workplace with their non-refugee peers, irrespective of where they resettle. This belief in trauma as a fundamental source of refugee marginalization is foundational in the field of early childhood education in emergencies and as a result, reducing toxic stress and trauma has become cornerstone to ECEiE educators' conception of educational justice.

A trauma-informed approach, therefore, starts with the belief that all educational and social successes are undergirded by a social-emotional wellbeing that is physiologically rooted and a direct subject of instances of trauma or toxic stress. Just as structural inclusionist approaches frame refugee educational justice as the equal distribution of standardized schooling and the pre-academic skills it engenders, trauma-oriented socioculturalists assert that educational justice is achieved through the equal distribution of self-regulating educational practices and the calm, regulated brains they create. In other words, for trauma-oriented socioculturalists, the ethical motivation for their work is that no child, regardless of circumstances, should have their ability to succeed in school and the workplace curtailed by the effects of toxic stress on the brain.

In order to understand how the undergirding logic of trauma-informed sociocultural inclusion, it is helpful to start with an excerpt from James, an expert in trauma-sensitive practice and program facilitator at Refugee Healing Network. Here he explains to me why sociocultural inclusion, psychological safety, and educational justice should start with recognizing and attending to refugees' trauma,

> *"Yeah, your brain is made up of three different interconnected brains. And if you imagine the base of your brain as kind of the survival brain. So our brains evolved over time and this was our first brain, which is kind of a reptilian brain. […] That's where you have all of these kind of most basic function, how you breathe and your pulse rate, all these kinds of things. In the middle, there is something called the amygdala, your emotional brain. […] The emotional brain is really just completely interested in your emotions. […] And then we have the prefrontal cortex, which is your rational brain, your thinking brain.*
>
> *What happens when you experience danger is your amygdala [sends a message] 'Oh, something is afoot!' and it sends these messages to the survival brain and that kicks in. And when that kicks in, it sends your rational brain and your emotional brain, POW!, offline. So then you are just operating from a place of survival, and you are not operating from either a rational or emotional [place]. […] I think the work that we are doing with people post trauma, is working to kind of assist people to understand that whereas that response was maybe useful in that moment, there will be other parts of our life where that experience serves to impede us. […] When someone goes into this state of hyper arousal, they're not in a place where they're kind of grounded and able to think rationally in the way that they would like to. They're not able to live a life that is nearer to their values.*
>
> *So [the question is] how do we [at RHN] create a kind of reflective distance? To have the tools so that they can maybe have that response but still bring themselves back without judgement to a place where they can live nearer to their values, to the way that they want to live."*
>
> \- *James; RHN; London*

Recycling a speech he gives as trainer on trauma-informed practice, in this excerpt James draws on physiology and neuroscience research he picked up during his psychology graduate studies to explain to me the dominant theory of trauma in ECEiE and how it connects to education, culture, and wellbeing. Beliefs and language such as those expressed here by James lay the groundwork for a trauma-first argument that suggests that in order for refugee children to "think rationally" and "live a life near their values" they must learn skills and techniques to build reflective distance, understand when they might be entering a state of hyper-arousal, and bring themselves back into an emotionally regulated state.

Pedagogically, teachers that address trauma in the classroom teach their students *emotional regulation techniques* or more broadly, *social emotional skills*. These skills include emotional awareness (being able to recognize and label one's own and others' emotions), a capacity to physically express and manage emotions appropriately, a concomitant ability to make responsible choices, and an aptitude for handling difficult interpersonal situations effectively (Niemi 2020; Hoffman 2009). Conversations I had with Katherine, a member of the strategic leadership team at Refugee Healing Network who specializes in trauma-informed practice, helped me understand a bit better what trauma-first sociocultural inclusionists mean by teaching social emotional skill,

> *"We can explain [to refugee learners] with psychoeducation what [symptoms] we are noticing. How does it land? Does somebody feel like that's what they're experiencing? And we can use the language of the mental health field as it feels appropriate or use the language of the people that we're working with. [...] I think where RHN is unique is the intentional psychosocial activities that are linked to emotional regulation and really being aware of, within a session, that you're trying to build in a sense of ritual, a sense of emotional regulation that both activates and soothes, and these different collective healing practices together that starts to stand it apart."*
>
> - *Katherine; RHN; London*

Eleni, a trauma-informed facilitator at RHN built on Katherine's ideas to explain what RHN's specific trauma-informed learning outcomes are,

> *"So we try to empower [refugee learners] to go to school, to find a job, to gain skill, to learn new skills. To become stronger, if I might say like-- more emotionally stronger. The first one, as a skill, is self-care, which includes a lot of stuff. How to set boundaries to other people [sic]. How to take care of yourself when you feel low; you know, finding their own toolkit. Whether that is listening to music, going for a walk, whatever they might feel they can do to regulate themselves. […] And the tools that we give them is a way to not be afraid, let's say, to know that survive again this situation. [sic]."*
>
> \- *Eleni; RHN; Thessaloniki*

Katherine and Eleni argue that a key to being a successful student, worker, and member of society as a refugee, is building emotional regulation strength. From this power to control your emotions, to not feel overwhelmed, and to avoid 'maladaptive' coping skills comes the ability to, as Eleni explained in a later conversation, "to gain back the control they lost over their lives". This approach to refugee early childhood education helps ECEiE educators reduce some of the ethical complexity of their work by collapsing early childhood education services for refugees to a process of teaching emotional expression and regulation tools, after which, all other forms of emancipation (i.e. comfort, confidence, cultural-expression, success in school, and success in the workplace) can fall into place.

One of the most demonstrative examples of how trauma-first educators see the primacy of psychological processing comes from Katherine when she draws on the example of her own Jewish background to articulate a widely held trauma-informed vision of how protracted toxic stress alongside a lack of emotional regulation can eventually congeal into what many would consider culture:

> *"Feeling overwhelmed or feeling like profoundly sad or angry, like these kinds of core emotions aren't really like diag…; they're not necessarily cultural. They're things that like, we experience and also often animals sort of experience too. The kind of core range of emotions. But how people describe them, what people do with them, that's where culture, you know, and where you grow up, I think has a huge influence.*

> *So you know, often we're like 'oh, the culture of the Jewish community, or the culture of black people is like this', but actually it's often the experience and perhaps the kind of, if we want to use the word 'trauma', like the kind of trauma or stress that [a] community goes through that then can start; then become collective recognizable behaviors that then get defined as culture."*
>
> \- *Katherine; RHN; London*

In this quote Katherine reasserts the universality of a set of "core emotions" that she sees as part of the human experience and solidifies their primacy by creating a causal chain where culture is an extension of these psychological processes, not the other way around. Because they position emotional expression as a driver of what is widely recognized cultural particularity, educators like Katherine tend to couch their conceptions of educational justice as the universal distribution of emotional regulation and frame ethical programs as those that support refugee learners in creating calm, regulated brains, regardless of their background.

In short, the logic of trauma-informed practice allows sociocultural inclusionists to respond to normative pressures to prioritize relational justice (i.e. cultural agency, refugee decision-making, etc.) in refugee education by finding a new locus for distributional justice. If, as trauma-informed sociocultural inclusionists assert, the effective implementation of emotional regulation skills and their concomitant production of a calm, logical brain undergirds the entirety of all subsequent ability to express oneself (culturally or otherwise) and capably compete in school and the workplace, then educational justice is coterminous with the equal distribution of programs that effectively teach people emotional regulation skills. As we will see later in the chapter, this assertion comes in stark contrast to culture-first educators who see psychological processing, especially controlled emotional expression and self-regulation, as culturally determined rather than part of a universalizable human experience.

In a parallel story as those presented in Chapter 4 about structural inclusion approaches, this dedication to the equal distribution of a standardized set of emotional-regulation skills can push educators into policymaking and programming decisions that expose them to extant cultural relativist critiques that frame global mental health programs as key drivers of Global North cultural imperialism and other forms of relational injustice (see Hoffman 2024; Kaussen 2011; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Kim and Cohen 2010). Kaussen (2012) for example demonstrates that psychosocial support initiatives for displaced communities which emphasize emotional self-expression enable the "traumatized" to become more readily integrated into European, neoliberal projects of governmentality. Bolotta (2021), similarly argues that trauma-informed and emotional regulation approaches tend to depoliticize the suffering of marginalized groups by individualizing social suffering and camouflaging the political and economic sources of oppression. Going beyond trauma-informed initiatives as part of the project of Global North governmentality, a second body of critical literature argues that teaching emotional regulation skills is culturally inappropriate and perpetuates an epistemic hierarchy that prioritizes Global North conceptions around wellness and distress. Looking at the case of Haiti, Diane Hoffman (2024) points out that most Haitians prefer faith-based healing, grounded in Christianity and Voudou, over Western mental health approaches, but that Haitians feel pressure to conform to White expectations when discussing mental health and are often coerced into understanding emotional expression as a major means of dealing with stress and trauma. Collectively, this robust body of critical scholarship frames global efforts to promote trauma-informed programming as a source of relational injustice in so much as it maintains Eurocentric epistemic hierarchies and perpetuates refugee powerlessness by pushing disaster-affected populations into Global North systems of biomedical control where they feel very little agency to resist.

Interestingly, Katherine and Eleni are deeply knowledgeable of critical scholarship at the intersections of psychology, ethnic studies, and cultural anthropology, but nonetheless they often step away from the cultural relativist positions described above and decide to instead couch their teaching of trauma sensitivity in universal terms. As I will show in Chapter 6 and 7 where I focus on the decolonizing turn in ECEiE, educators at RHN, including Katherine and Eleni, consider themselves as part of a movement to decolonize ECEiE mental health programming and are very thoughtful about trying to recognize when their programming and policymaking might result cultural imperialism or epistemic hierarchies. In many cases, RHN educators were forced to make decisions that caused them an immense amount of personal angst, as they tried to find level ethical footing that satisfied conceptually diffuse demands for epistemic justice while also balancing universalizing, distributional ways of working. But not all the trauma-informed educators I met were so uncomfortable with the authority granted to them as early childhood education.

Biomedical authority in trauma-first sociocultural inclusion: the case of Protos

One of the field sites I visited with the deepest dedication to emotional regulation and addressing toxic stress was Protos, a nonformal refugee preschool and supplemental school based in the Omonia district of Athens. Funded by a large UN agency, Protos is a small NGO whose offices take up two floors of a high-rise building in downtown Athens. Exclusively serving refugee and migrant clientele, Protos programming included preschool classes for very young children ages 0-to-5, Greek, English, and math lessons for children aged 6-13, and vocational English and Greek classes for parents and other adults. Protos also provided psychological services to their clientele and were mandated by their UN agency funder to have at least one psychologist and one social worker on staff.

Greece, many would argue by design, is a transit country, meaning that the majority of Protos' clientele were only in Athens temporarily, gathering resources or waiting for paperwork before they moved on to more desirable host-countries like Germany or France. As a result, Protos had a lot of student turnover and the roster of children in preschool classes could differ significantly from week to week. Most of the preschool students were from the Middle East, with Afghan, Syrian, Egyptian, and Yemeni students making up the majority, but there were also a growing number of Ukrainian children and a few students from Cameroon and Congo who would come on occasion. This linguistic and cultural diversity in the student body presented challenges for Protos' cohort of young teachers, who taught predominantly in Greek, but would also use English as a *lingua franca*, or if really in a pinch, would use Google Translate on their phone to communicate with the children in their mother tongue. It also required teachers to navigate difficult cultural boundaries such as the manner and degree of student-to-student touch was appropriate or the level of emotional intensity that students were allowed to exhibit during a lesson.

While teachers at Protos recognized the diversity of their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, they also believed that students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, were fundamentally psychologically similar, especially in their exposure to trauma, giving them an important area for pedagogical repair. For example, I asked Konstantina, one of the most senior teachers at Protos, who had been teaching refugee students for 9 years what her goals were for her students, and she explained to me how she sees her students' cultural diversity sitting alongside a common psychological experience,

> *"I have seen that each child is different. Every child needs a different approach. Yet, there are some common denominators, there are some common elements. What I do observe through children with refugee backgrounds is that they have a more pronounced need [for us] to help them in their emotional part, in the emotional aspect on the part of integration, and for them to become members of a group, for them to accept the new cultural elements they come in contact with. […]*
>
> *A large percentage of these children have been through traumatic experiences, bet that a war, be that the family that was broken up or someone who died in their environment. So, they need care and very special management on our behalf. […] We don't always have the tools to manage and handle some discussions which are more of a psychological subject matter."*
>
> - *Konstantina; Protos; Athens*

Konstantina, like most educators who follow a trauma-first sociocultural inclusion approach, expresses a strong belief that refugees' educational justice is best achieved by providing them with the emotional regulation techniques necessary to help them overcome the trauma induced by displacement. When looking closely at the language Konstantina uses, there is a clear articulation of the connection she sees between emotional regulation and capably participating in mainstream Greek society, framing her ethical obligation as an ECEiE educator as helping refugees with the "emotional aspect" of their integration.

Believing in the importance of emotional regulation does not preclude ECEiE educators from deeming emotional expression as a fundamentally cultural practice, but in a stark similarity to *culture denying* structural inclusionists like Gabor (see Chapter 4), there are many trauma-first educators at Protos who do not seem to see the distributional/relational tradeoff that critical scholars like Hoffman, Kaussen, and Balotta suggest. When asked whether they felt the process of combatting trauma through teaching emotional regulation techniques and other forms of psychological intervention had any relationship to cultural expression, several educators rejected any cultural reading of mental health, mirroring language from culture denying structural inclusionists and asserting that social emotional learning is integral to being modern and educated. Angela, a schoolteacher at Protos, for example explained to me,

> **Charles***: “What about social emotional learning and emotional regulation? How do you see culture as a factor in your classroom [around emotional learning]?*
>
> **Angela***: “Despite the fact that [refugee parents] come here and have decided to bear children at a very young age, they raise them as far as I can tell in a way that is 21st Century compatible, to put it like this. I mean, they’re not far from it. […] I can’t tell what happens at home, but I believe that [emotional regulation] works and [the parents] follow what we do here. They adopt it themselves. So, I don’t see culture as a hindrance at the socio-emotional level.* *I don’t think it plays any role, culture.”*
>
> \- *Angela; Protos; Athens*

I interpret this excerpt Angela connects social emotional learning with modernity and expresses a degree of comfort in teaching refugee caregivers and children how to regulate their emotions. In this way, as an ethical actor and a teacher, Angela sees it as her ethical responsibility to teach refugee communities how to emotionally regulate, a skill they have not yet built and she believes is a key pathway to flourishing. Concomitant with this belief in the value of emotional regulation is a counterpart belief that cultural orientations that deprioritize or reject the teaching and learning of emotional regulation skills are an instance of mental health stigma and should be corrected. I interpret her unprompted framing of refugees’ culture as primarily a source of ‘hindrance’ and expresses relief that refugees’ cultural orientations have not prevented her from teaching emotional regulation skills in class.

Other conversations I had with Protos staff show that while Angela interacts with refugee parents who are mostly aligned with what she sees as 21st century parenting, Protos teachers think that many parents either don’t know or don’t care about the importance of emotional regulation in a child’s learning and flourishing. Vassiliki, for example, is another teacher at Protos and she helped me understand how Protos staff see this relationship between parents' knowledge of emotional regulation, their child's mental health, and the role of teachers,

> *[Parents] ask how their children are doing in Greek, why they aren't' picking up Greek faster. They want the children to do well so that they can do even better in public school. So that is the[ir] main question. It's us, the teachers, who introduce them to other things such as self-confidence, their empowerment, and everything. I have understood that it is we who introduce these subjects from my experience so far, not so much the parents. […]*
>
> *I don't know whether they're aware of it or not. They may intervene when the child had a quarrel in the classroom. […] but not so much emotional focus. No, they don't focus on the emotional part. […] [The parents] are very stressed and very anxious to have their children achieve academically at regular school. And they probably feel that if you can speak Greek and you can do maths, that's the way to move forward in life and everything else will come. Maybe they don't think that psychosocial support is part of school at all. I don't know."*
>
> \- *Vassiliki; Protos; Athens*

Together, the excerpts from Angela and Vassiliki show that the teachers from Protos see themselves as aware of something that refugee caregivers are not, namely that schooling should go beyond simply learning academic subjects and that emotional regulation and appropriate emotional expression are valuable sources of flourishing and therefore fundamental pathways for realizing refugee justice. A corollary to this belief is that when Angela and Vassiliki encounter caregivers who do not believe that emotional regulation is the primary source of their child's flourishing or educational justice, they often assume that those caregivers are making that decision from a place of ignorance or cultural stigma, a phenomenon that many critical scholars say can harm refugee communities as they try to regain literal and symbolic power and find agency over the terms of their own flourishing post-displacement.

No educator in my field work was more dedicated to the belief in primacy of emotional regulation and psychological processing than Christos, a social worker at Protos. Protos is funded by a large UN agency with an early childhood mandate and as part of their funding contingencies, Protos was required to hire a social worker and a staff psychologist to always be on site. Christos was that mandated social worker, so I started my interview by asking him a little bit about his background and how he got into this work of refugee education. Sitting in a classroom decorated with young children's drawings of kittens and soccer players, Christos, smiling at the excitement of being able to share with me, told me a story from his previous job, working to get Roma families in Greece mainstreamed into national education systems,

> *"I was with Roma. I was trying to register them to school. It's like a curse that's [on] my life to register them. So, I went to one of their tents, I sat down and called the mother and the father. […] They gave me one bottle, [a] dirty bottle, and they told me, 'You have to drink it all if you want to be here. If you don't drink it, get out of here.' <eyes wide, pause>* *It was just a cultural test.*
>
> *If I wanted to help these children, I had to drink from the dirty bottle, all the water. <smiling> I drank it all and asked for more…. <pause> They registered nine children in the educational system. That's what is happening here. They carry with them a lot of cultural baggage, all the cultural background they have. We have the obligation to respect it [sic]. Sometimes we try to smooth some issues. […]*
>
> *Sometimes it can be some kind of cultural inheritance, let's say, but* *we try not to let this [get] to the children.* *It can help [if] you create individuality. It's a little bit controversial, but when you see a lot of stars, you can see who is rising more. You can see who is ready to sparkle. You can see who is ready to fall. So, if you consider the sky as [the] educational system and the children as the stars, you can see which student needs help. You can see which student develops, and you can change things. It's like a puzzle."*
>
> \- *Christos; Protos; Athens*

In this excerpt Christos frames his work to register the Roma community in schools was a 'curse on his life'. Talking to me about the 'baggage' his Roma clients carried, Christos frames the family's distrust of him, their test of his dedication by purposefully giving him a dirty bottle, their numerous children, and their lack of motivation to register their children in school, none of which he considers valuable, as collective cultural expressions. Given his perception that these cultural expressions are keeping Roma children from flourishing, Christos sees his role as an educator as to smooth out these attributes by teaching Roma children to be individuals and to prevent such cultural baggage from being passed from Roma parents to their children. Drawing on his authority as a trained social worker, Christos continues by describing in seemingly comfortable terms his power to 'puzzle' together the livelihoods of refugee learners, some who "sparkle" and some "who are ready to fall".

Intrigued, I follow up, asking, "Do you have a specific story where this [puzzling together] happened?"

> *"Yes, yes. <nodding> We had two years ago. [sic] There was a girl from Afghanistan with a very strong cultural approach, with hijab, with long sleeves in the summer; trying not to talk to men, no friends, no boyfriend, always the head down.*
>
> *Now, after three years, she's studying biology in Belgium and her hair is quite large [hands out] like this. Yes; she has put away the scarf and she's living a normal European life, let's say. All the traumas that she had been through had to be discussed and expressed and she had to overcome some issues. And now she communicates with us in order [for us] to see her progress and it's truly remarkable.* ***This is an example of how the traditional and cultural cannot let you in order to develop****. [sic]"*
>
> \- *Christos; Protos; Athens*

Christos' story of the Afghan girl who "sparkled" is an interesting one and worth exploring deeply. In a continuation of the framing that he had leveraged just seconds before when talking about Roma families, Christos frames the cultural traditions of the Afghan girl primarily as a source of deficit, as barriers to her 'development'. Christos believes that wearing hijab, wearing long sleeves, not having a boyfriend, and not talking to strange men represent an undesirable cultural state and that one of the goals of Protos programming should be helping her overcome 'the traditional' and live a "normal" European life. Trauma-first educators are not always 'culture blind', but like other educators who are dedicated to distributional justice, the honoring of cultural expression has its limits and when educators start to believe that refugee cultural expression stands in the way their controlled emotions, something that they see as a ‘good’ more important than some cultural particularity, coercive interventions that limit refugees’ cultural expression can be justified.

Interestingly, unlike some of the educators presented in Chapter 4 who were troubled by the ethical tradeoffs they were perpetuating in forcing Roma refugees into majority Hungarian schooling, most of the educators at Protos did not see their goal of distributing emotional regulation skills as having any relational justice implications. The trauma-first ECEiE educators I met tended to feel secure in the ‘modernness’ and scientific voracity of their educational justice campaign, and as such, rarely, if ever, openly quesionted their distributive justice ends in front of me. For decolonizing scholars and activists, this absolutism is worrisome and paradigmatic of a global “anti-stigma campaign” (Holland 2022: 167) in early childhood education in emergencies, where biomedical professionals, social activists, and educators teach the public, especially racialized refugees, about health and illness with a “benign authority” that aims to heal but also simultaneously interpellates expectations about who are the rightful producers of mental health knowledge, who are its conduits, and who its recipients (Holland 2022; Briggs and Hallin 2016). Holland argues that under this biomedical authority model, mental health professionals see themselves as the legitimate creators and distributors of ‘the facts’ about psychological safety and “to be a good citizen, one must embrace their solutions” (Holland 2022: 178). If, as is the case with Christos suggests, some mental health experts see being a good citizen and normal European as eliminating undesirable cultural expressions like wearing Hijab or not having a boyfriend, it is possible that biomedical authority with its tendency towards absolutism can be a source of cultural imperialism. Indeed, it is exactly this act of creating an ‘epistemic hierarchy’ that prioritizes universalizing emotional regulation skills and eschews potentially contradictory cultural expressions that is considered ethically unjustifiable by anticolonial scholars. While these ethical critiques have not percolated into the collective consciousness of the Protos educators I met, Chapter 6 and 7 explores how these beliefs around the relational injustice baked into global mental health programming have been productively taken up by decolonizing activists in the field of ECEiE.

Conclusion

This section on trauma-first sociocultural inclusionists started by showing that many educators in the field of ECEiE work off the assumption that most refugee children have experienced some kind of prolonged toxic stress or trauma, forcing them into frequent states of dysregulation—a deeply uncomfortable state that challenges refugees' sense of safety and social belonging. As such, these educators see safety, comfort, and belonging as fundamentally products of psychological processing and believe that they can be augmented through the teaching of emotional regulation skills. Social justice praxis for trauma-first sociocultural inclusionists, therefore, often comes in the form of psychological intervention, ranging from teaching refugee learners' self-regulation techniques (i.e. meditation, breathing exercises, or somatic practices) to clinical interventions with psychologists and psychiatrists, the goal being that all children, regardless of experience, can have a healthy, well-regulated brain.

Despite its emergence in response relational justice normative pressures, educational justice for trauma-first educators is fundamentally distributional in nature, prioritizing the equitable distribution of self-regulation techniques and the well-regulated brains such techniques engender. But like other educators who prioritize distributional over certain unadulterated relational justice, trauma-first educators run the ethical risk of perpetuating epistemic hierarchies and enacting cultural imperialism over refugees by eschewing or minimizing refugee cultural characteristics that are deemed as barriers to the dispersal of well-regulated brain. Importantly, mental health educators and facilitators tend to be less outwardly worried about the possible relational injustice implicit to their work than education scholars and teachers, instead inhabiting a biomedical authority that trends towards more authoritative confidence. When contextualized, this authoritative claim can open space for educators like Christos to appear outwardly ethically unrestricted (if not obligated) to 'puzzle together' refugee livelihoods by eliminating cultural expressions that they deem as barriers to building emotional wellbeing—as phenomenon that anticolonial scholars consider ethically unjustifiable.

Cultural expression and dignity as drivers of psychological safety and belonging: culture-first educators and their conceptions of justice in ECEiE

Trauma-first educators make up the majority of the ECEiE field, but not all sociocultural inclusionists I met in my fieldwork felt that genuine cultural expression is only possible from a place of emotional regulation. Some, in fact, felt that cultural dignity was a necessary condition to feeling psychological safety and as a result, in instances where cultural expression and healthy emotional regulation seemed to clash, they prioritized unrestricted cultural expression, believing that having 'regulated emotions' is fundamentally a cultural state of being rather than a physiological one. Critically, this belief held by culture-first sociocultural inclusionists around the primacy of cultural dignity engenders a radically different form of authority than the biomedical authority trauma-first educators draw upon. In the sections that follow I untangle the beliefs, practices, and conceptions of justice of this culture-first group of sociocultural inclusionists, adding nuance to refugee inclusion literature and demonstrating that ‘making refugees comfortable’, like many other facets of refugee educational programming, is an area of robust ideological and ethical contestation with significant implications for refugee cultural expression and self-determination.

Educational services that help culturally minoritized students feel more comfortable in majority educational spaces generally fall under the category of culturally sustaining/restorative pedagogy (CSRP). In education scholarship, proponents of culturally sustaining pedagogical approaches value CSRP as a tool to help students resist a hegemonic cultural status quo by encouraging majority and marginalized communities to preserve minority linguistic and cultural particularities and fight for their maintenance despite pressures to assimilate (Ladson-Billings 2021). In the field of ECEiE, however, most of the educators I interviewed found value in culturally sustaining pedagogy, not as a tool for pluralistic cultural expression, but rather for making children feel psychologically comfortable.

Perhaps predictably, culture-first visions of sociocultural inclusion were prevalent at Hungary Friends, where educators and community organizers had spent the last 30 years combatting anti-Roma attitudes and implementing social inclusion programs for Roma communities across Hungary. Historically, education programming was not part of Hungary Friends’ mandate, and their team is composed of more community organizers than educators. As a result, Hungary Friends’ involvement in early childhood education programs for refugees was a bit serendipitous. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, when tens of thousands of Roma refugees were forced out of Western Ukraine and into Hungary, Hungary Friends was able to procure humanitarian aid funding in support of Roma refugee education programming. However, a federally managed and centralized primary and secondary education system meant that any refugee education programs would have to first gain the approval of a conservative Viktor Orbán administration that generally acts in opposition to Roma inclusion. In an effort to respond quickly and avoid obstructionist policies at the federal level, Hungary Friends made the practical decision to implement Roma refugee education programs in local creches, preschools, and kindergartens which are under the purview of the more progressive local municipality governments in Budapest. This surreptitious pathway to early childhood programs for refugees resulted in a group of educators and experts at Hungary Friends who are more dedicated to desegregation and cultural approaches to educational inclusion than educators in more 'traditional' early childhood development NGO.

Educators at Hungary Friends use the terms 'culturally sustaining' pedagogy and 'anti-bias' pedagogy interchangeably and use 'culture' as a catch all for the entire Roma lived experience-- translating cultural sustaining pedagogy into teaching practices that make the child feel seen and valued and combatting tropes that the White majority held around Roma communities. Indeed, for educators at Hungary Friends, the fact that the young Roma refugee learners in their programs were refugees, was less important than the fact that they were Roma. In fact, the influx of Transcarpathian Roma refugee families who were fleeing the war in Ukraine improved funding conditions for the organization and allowed them to expand the reach of Roma-facing programs that were already being implemented. While educators at Hungary Friends recognize the multiplied challenges of being displaced and Roma in Hungary, it is the bias that learners' face as Roma, rather than the potentially traumatic conditions of their displacement, that was of central concern in their sociocultural inclusion approach.

An example of how this culture-first approach manifested at Hungary Friends comes from Zsofia, a White Hungarian and the program coordinator for early childhood learning programs at Hungary Friends, who used the example of the racism her adopted Roma son faced in school to emphasize how cultural dignity precludes a sense of psychological safety,

> *"There are cultural differences we have to be aware of. I don't believe in color blind education. […] These kind of Roma children who are coming from those [refugee] compounds, they are really live [sic] in a different culture. It is not just individual differences, but cultural differences we have to be aware of. […] You know, my son, you met him. He's adopted, obviously. And because we live in a quite rich neighborhood, these middle class kids on the playground told him to 'get lost Gypsy <derogatory>'. And he went to his teacher and [the teacher] told him that 'yeah, you are a Gypsy. What was the problem with that?' It's ridiculous. So cultural dignity is something that I try to teach [at Hungary Friends].*
>
> *[…] I think [culture] has to go hand in hand [with other ECE skills]. So even though I think it's sort of a Don Quixote-like task, doing so many things in vain, I still think that it's super important. And we couldn't succeed with our son either. He is still fighting with these identity issues. He has this inferiority [complex], so even I couldn't teach it to him. But I think it's super important to try and try and try again and again. We really have to make this [approach] work, because we got to make them understand that they [the Roma refugee learners] are important. I think it's super crucial to [help them] to feel that that they have this cultural dignity; that there are people who come here 'because they like us'.*
>
> \- *Zsofia: Hungary Friends: Budapest*

As the mother of an adopted Roma child in Hungary, Zsofia tells me that creating a sense of cultural esteem as a fundamental first step towards educating young Roma refugees in Hungary. Zsofia and I spent a lot of time together, driving to field sites and observing classroom practices, and throughout my time with her, this message of cultural agency was consistent. Our discussions suggested to me that her vision of cultural dignity in the classroom, like many other culture-first educators, is borne from a pragmatic response to the social conditions Roma refugees faced in early childhood education settings. In many ways, I see Zsofia's belief in the power of cultural dignity to achieve refugee educational justice as paradigmatic of culture-first sociocultural inclusionists in that she views her work through a robust political lens, expressing to me how she sees cultural and social dignity as paramount for Roma refugee educational success and therefore Roma educational justice. In this way, rather than thinking about children exclusively through an individualistic psychological or developmental lens, Zsofia tends to frame Roma children as a political collective and juxtaposes this collective Roma refugee construction alongside a "hostile" Hungarian government rhetoric that perpetuates anti-Roma tropes for political ends. "They like to have an enemy," she told me about the Hungarian conservative government, "and Roma is an enemy [sic].".

Another culture-first educator I met in Budapest was Aliz, the director of early childhood education programs at Hungary Friends and a close colleague of Zsofia's. In discussions I had with her about the role of culture in refugee education, Aliz commonly makes the distinction between "accepting" and "celebrating" refugee culture and says that high quality early childhood education programming should find ways to celebrate refugee families' distinctiveness rather than just making room for them. To demonstrate, she tells me a story from her tenure as an early childhood educator about an immigrant Mongolian family in Hungary that was invited to celebrate their cultural practices in a classroom in Budapest.

> *"In our 8th District project, when the [inclusive] kindergarten [teachers] started to be aware of all the nationalities they had in the kindergarten, [they] started to think of ways to celebrate. I have a favorite moment when I was almost crying. There was a Mongolian family. And there was an afternoon in the kindergarten where the parents came and they had little tables and they could provide any kind of cultural experience according to their nationality. You could smell spices at some tables. You could play certain games. And the Mongolian family were encouraged [to] sing. And the family were wearing national costumes [sic]. Everybody admired them. And they stood in front of everybody and they started to sing. The air stopped and everybody was listening to them. And they [the Mongolian family] felt like they are in the middle of the world [sic]. So, I think that was a moment when I felt that [the teachers] understood something and they provided the opportunity for that little community."*
>
> \- *Aliz: Hungary Friends: Budapest*

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Setting aside that a single ‘cultural appreciation’ day is far from the whole school approaches sociocultural inclusion scholars have advocated for (*see* Bajaj et al. 2023 for examples), a distinguishing part of Aliz’s construction of culturally sustaining pedagogy is its celebration of diversity as an end to quality programming. In the case of the Mongolian Family in the 8th District of Budapest, Aliz encouraged the teachers to create space for the horizontal sharing of cultural practices, not to help them with their pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, social emotional learning, but to create a sense of cultural dignity which, for Aliz, is fundamental to feeling a sense of belonging and child flourishing.

Conceptions of teacher authority in culture-first sociocultural inclusion approaches to ECEiE

In the first half of the chapter, I argued that trauma-first sociocultural inclusionists tend to take on a biomedical authority, which gives them an elevated degree of certainty around their decision-making power, including decisions around when refugee cultural expression might be considered a barrier to the distribution of regulated brains. Culture-first educators, however, believe that mental health is undergirded by cultural recognition and the dignity such recognition engenders, and therefore do not see themselves as holding any robust forms of biomedical authority. Instead, culture-first educators in ECEiE take on a very different role where they abdicate a significant degree of authority over what proper refugee behavior should be, advocating for more teacher humility and curiosity in school settings, and reallocating their classroom authority towards setting norms around what majority student acceptance should look like.

Predictably, the culture-first educators I spoke to tended to consider refugee students’ behavior first and foremost through the lens of cultural expression. But understanding classroom dynamics primarily as an expression of culture introduces some challenges for these educators who, unlike the trauma-first educators who are comfortable in their expertise, find it difficult as Majority White Hungarians to be an expert on someone else's culture. In interviews where we tried to wade through some of this complexity, Aliz told me a bit about how she thinks about relational justice in Roma classrooms, how it relates to culture, and what types of advice she gives to ECEiE teachers who are teaching Roma refugees,

> *"You cannot be an expert on each culture. And even if you become an ["]expert["] <scare quotes> on a certain culture, you never know if the person who is holding that culture, what is his or her identity to that culture (sic). So I don't think it's about being an expert on any culture. For me, the expertise [is] to become open, and remain curious about the other culture. And try to understand the essence of the culture and not judge the culture from your personal cultural point of view. That's the expertise, to not judge. […]*
>
> *It's a very important tool for the teacher to observe, to observe the kids when they are playing, what he or she uses from the culture during play, his or her relationship to others. [Asking themselves] are there culture features in that? […] And that's the safe space idea. To create safe places for people to be able to speak out, to be able to formulate their interests, because I think especially in case[s] of deprived communities (sic). They, they might lose their openness. And I think if you can create safe spaces, some of this openness can come back."*
>
> \- *Aliz: Hungary Friends: Budapest*

At the start of this excerpt, Aliz lays out some of the challenges that arise for ECEiE educators as they convert global norms around prioritizing relational justice into a culture-first approach. Teachers are normally expected to hold expertise in subject matter germane to student learning, but if understanding your students' diverse cultural perspectives is considered the primary means to making them feel comfortable and succeed in the classroom, it can be difficult to know what being an expert in a culture that is not your own might even entail. What's more, as Aliz points out, culture is not static, making expertise in any particular culture difficult, if not impossible. Aliz's reaction to this ethical complexity is to completely abandon any goal of being an ‘expert’ in any particular culture. Instead, like many other culture-first educators I spoke with, Aliz asserts that quality refugee teachers’ expertise comes in their ability to relate to refugee students with humility and curiosity, alongside a robust ability to interrogate their own cultural biases. In other words, for Aliz, the expertise of culture first educators consists of recognizing any potential axes of cultural hegemony and relating to refugee students in ways help minimize the students’ feelings of deficit-inflected ‘otherness’.

Pressures to act ethically and attend more holistically to instances of relational justice in the classroom can fill culture-first educators with significant angst. It’s no easy task to question, much less overcome, your own personal biases, even if you have a strong connection to the minority population you are working with. Indeed, ECEiE educators at Hungary Friends, despite their dedication to culture-first approaches, often had a difficult time figuring out how exactly to make Roma children feel a sense of cultural dignity.

One such example comes from Zsofia, the Hungary Friends educator with an adopted Roma son who complained to me about racist teachers in her son’s public school. After a preschool ‘play hub’ session at a tree-lined Roma refugee resettlement center on the Buda side of the river, I asked Zsofia as we were driving back to Pest about how we as educators should respect the cultural dignity of children like those we had just visited, “Mmm, dignity is something that I can try to teach them, to those kids where we went, that ‘you have beautiful hair, beautiful skin; you are smart’, you know? These kinds of things. But I will be the only one who tells these things to her (sic). It’s very hard.” Zsofia admirably frames early childhood education classrooms as spaces where educators can make children feel psychologically safe by combating anti-Roma rhetoric that frames them as unintelligent or dirty, but it is also clear that Zsofia's approach does little to elevate authentic Roma cultural expression, if such a thing exists. Arguably, it could even be seen as using White majority points of reference to promote psychological comfort. While beauty and intelligence are valued in the Roma community, they are also valued in mainstream White Hungarian culture and in many cases Roma women are oversexualized in White majority society (Hancock 2008). Critical scholars might suggest that, making comments like "you have beautiful skin" is more likely to perpetuate Majority stereotypes than disrupt them. At a minimum, despite the potentially psychologically soothing effect of her student-teacher relationship with the Romani girls in Buda, it's hard to see any Roma culture in Zsofia's statement.

I tell this story not as an indictment of Zsofia. She is a wonderfully dedicated and caring refugee educator whom I admire greatly, but rather to highlight the Sisyphean task of meeting global demands to adequately adapt to critical, relational critiques of refugee educational programming. Recognizing that it is nearly impossible to be an expert on any one culture, culture-first educators instead emphasize cultural curiosity, active listening, and the abdication of power in the name of cultural humility. But at the same time, trying to find your own implicit biases is difficult; they're implicit after all. So instead, much of the work of culture-first sociocultural inclusionists involves correcting for more obvious forms of injustice. For Zsofia, Aliz, and other culture-first sociocultural inclusionists, combatting relational injustice is pragmatically collapsed into combatting overt racial tropes, pejorative exotification, and cultural frames that position refugees as deficient in school settings. In this way, culture-first sociocultural inclusionists are addressing the challenges to educational justice that seem most pressing to them, but global demands for education systems that disrupt cultural hierarchies have framed the efforts of Zsofia and Aliz as insufficient, arguing that simply combatting instances of interpersonal racism and xenophobia in the classroom does little to address the systemic causes of refugee educational injustice, namely White supremacy, epistemic hegemony, and the marketization of schooling, all of which fall under the catch-all term of Eurocentrism (*see* Sriprakash, Tikly, and Walker 2020; Novelli and Kutan 2023; Shah 2023). This global effort to bring attention to and combat the ways that European and American Empire interact with global education to interpellate acceptable social relationships and perpetuate relational injustice for non-Europeans is part of what I call a *decolonizing turn* in global education. In the final two chapters of this dissertation, I will demonstrate the significance of 'decolonization' as a normative framework in the field ECEiE by unpacking the ways that program implementers understand the novel demands for decolonized early childhood education and how they convert those demands into early policies and programs in support of refugees.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how sociocultural inclusionists, who believe that refugees should feel safe and welcome in host-community classrooms, conceptualize their work and the connections they see between sociocultural inclusion and educational justice. I added nuance to existing literature on refugees' sociocultural inclusion by showing the heterogeneity of beliefs that educators hold around where safety and comfort come from and what types of classroom interventions facilitate refugee belonging. In the first half of the chapter, I showed how trauma-first educators believe that safety and comfort derive from a calm, emotionally regulated brain and that educational justice is primarily a function of the equal distribution of self-regulation skills, which help refugee learners overcome their exposure to toxic stress. I also show how this trauma-first approach imbues educators with a biomedical authority that at times can trump refugees' authority to fully express themselves culturally. In the second half the chapter, I show how culture-first educators see belonging as a function of relational dignity and connection, prioritizing pedagogical approaches that diminish the reach of teacher's authority over refugee cultural expression in order to combat instances of interpersonal racism and xenophobia in the classroom. In this way, this chapter shows how sociocultural educators who seemingly hold the same goal to "make refugees feel like they belong" can have radically different conceptions of educational justice with radically different implications for refugees' freedom of self-determination and/or their ability to "successfully" assimilate into host communities.

CHAPTER 6: GOING BEYOND SOCIOCULTURAL INCLUSION: AN EMERGING DECOLONIZING TURN IN ECEiE

In May, 2023, the who's who of global early childhood education in emergencies (ECEiE) educators and policymakers came together for the annual Moving Minds Alliance meeting in Amman, Jordan. The task at hand for the meeting was to conduct a 'systems mapping' of early childhood education and its intersection with humanitarian aid. A key challenge for the field of ECEiE is that the humanitarian system is broken up thematic 'clusters', such as health, nutrition, shelter, etc., none of which fully include early childhood care and services. The education cluster is perhaps the most logical place for early childhood programs, but most countries mandate education enrollment starting in primary school, meaning the education cluster almost exclusively attends to getting children in disaster contexts back into primary and secondary school, leaving early childhood care and education relatively unprioritized in the eyes for donors and humanitarian coordinating bodies.

It was with the goal of better understanding how these intersecting coordination mechanisms keep early childhood care and education relatively underfunded and underprioritized that the Moving Minds Alliance called for all members to come together for their annual meeting. But the process of systems mapping and identifying how to develop the field of ECEiE did not proceed as everyone had planned, "Some people [were like] 'I want to pull up my sleeve and get working. We don't see each other very often in person. We are results oriented. We've come together for a purpose'", Alice, the director of programs at a large corporate foundation that supports refugee education programming, told me. But to the surprise of Alice and many others at the meeting, the issue of *coloniality* in educational aid took center stage as discussions turned away from coordination issues and towards to how to improve power imbalances in early childhood education in emergencies.

The Moving Minds Alliance (MMA) leadership team had prepared for the annual meeting by conducting a preliminary systems mapping, which they hoped could help MMA members better understand the dynamics of the field and look for leverage points for reform. In the preliminary mapping MMA had identified what they called "Deep Structures", the repeated elements and relationships that make up the "core story" or "connective narrative of the map". For the Moving Minds Alliance leadership, the core story of early childhood education in emergencies revolves around two Deep Structures: Coloniality and Crisis-affected People's Dignity and Power,

> *"Coloniality is defined as the enduring legacy of colonialism found in social, economic, cultural, and political systems. Furthermore, coloniality has a knock-on effect to saviourism mindsets – a way of thinking in which one individual or group believes that they have the power and obligation to 'rescue' or 'fix' another person or group they perceive to be in need.*
>
> *Coloniality also propels power concentrations, such as power which can often be held by large organisations, such as UN Agencies and INGOs, which then undermines local leadership. A power imbalance also exists between the humanitarian system and crisis-affected people, which results in a lack of accountability to and engagement with crisis-affected people and undermines their dignity and power."*
>
> - *Moving Minds Alliance (2023) (emphasis added)*

This meeting represents a significant ethical shift for many veteran experts in the field of ECEiE, with some suggesting that the attention to coloniality, refugee powerlessness, and cultural imperialism in the meeting had been a normative shock. "So much of what I believed to be true or right [in ECEiE] has rightly been questioned" Alice, a 30-year veteran in the field of ECEiE, explained to me in an email that asked her about the MMA annual meeting. Bushra, another 10-year veteran in the field of ECEiE who works at a large UN Agency with an education mandate, was also shocked and advocated for more of a sociocultural inclusion approach to ECEiE when she told me that she sees educational justice as primarily an issue of the equal distribution of emotional regulation and pre-academic skills. She was quick to problematize a move towards decolonization, calling instead for better distribution mechanisms and using language of coordination, alignment, and measurement to make sure ECEiE skills are equally accessible:

> *"The MMA annual meeting this year was hyper-focused on decolonization and sort of finger pointing at the UN, at the big agencies. [...] I was a little bit like, 'we're going off track', you know? There is no benefit in finger pointing. [...] What we should focus on is better coordination, alignment, looking at the kind of measurement tools that we're using for our programming, identifying best practices. Like, we should focus on that rather than finger pointing that you are from the Global North, so you can't, you know, you can't tell me what to do."*
>
> \- Bushra (UN Agency; Early Childhood Development Expert)

Alice, the educator who pointed out that a lot of her assumptions had been rightly questioned during the meeting, while shocked at the new justice norms in the field, was also much more optimistic about the liberatory potential of a decolonizing turn. In one of our interviews, she followed up on this line of thinking,

> *"[...] I think it was overall very powerful that we've kicked this [decolonizing reform] off and I'm really glad that our director really thought about this; you know, opening up how we think about humanitarian aid and how we can shift the paradigm. I think it's just opened all of our minds quite a bit. And now it's a question of sort of revisiting what are the leverage points that we should be using? And are the ones that we've thought we would [use], are they still, well <pause>, are they even successful? And if not, why not change it? The question is how."*
>
> \- *Alice; ECEiE Corporate Foundation*

It is Alice's question of "how?" that animates this chapter, which explores the ways that ECEiE program implementers articulate new norms around educational justice in their everyday work. The question of 'how' to achieve educational justice in ECEiE is complicated by the collapsing of justice as primarily an issue of colonialism, transforming understandings of oppression into a binary of Eurocentrism or not. On the one hand, framing Eurocentricity as a key axis for understanding oppression can productively highlight the content and contours of global White Supremacy, extractive economic relationships, and the arbitrary cultural construction of ‘progress’ and human development. On the other hand, as a capacious and deeply contested concept, combatting Eurocentricity with the goal decolonizing ECEiE and achieving relational justice leaves considerable room for ideological interpretation by actors tasked with implementing decolonized forms of early childhood education for refugees.

To tackle some of this complexity, in the chapter that follows I draw on data collected from ECEiE implementation sites to first establish decolonization as a significant normative framework in the field of ECEiE. To do this, I first briefly sketch 20th century decolonizing literature in order to ground contemporary efforts to decolonize refugee education in the wider landscape of postcolonial studies. I then use institutional documents, organizational statements, and global coordinator interview data to demonstrate how global humanitarian education institutions have converted academic decolonizing critiques into a novel decolonizing cultural order that demands ECEiE educators make significant efforts to recognize and address cultural imperialism and refugee powerlessness in their policymaking programming.

After establishing decolonization as global cultural order, in the second half of this chapter, I drill down on the opposing demands being placed on ECEiE educators who, on the one hand are being asked to decolonize their work, and on the other, are pressured to spread standardized forms of schooling as a universal human right. Previous chapters in this dissertation have demonstrated that structural inclusionists and sociocultural inclusionists are forced to face tradeoffs, picking and choosing which forms of refugee culture need "tweaking". But unlike sociocultural inclusionists who work to make refugees feel interpersonally comfortable in host-community classrooms, decolonizing educators take this attention to relational justice into new ideological territory, looking for the ways that ECEiE programming is part of a racialized European order that keeps non-Europeans in a place of marginality. While many decolonizing educators believe that removing Eurocentrism in educational aid would entail abolishing the entirety of the humanitarian system, the ECEiE educators I spoke to parse through decolonizing complexity by pragmatically prioritizing two interconnected forms of Eurocentrism that they believe are especially germane to refugee relational injustice: 1) the extractive relationship between multilateral humanitarian organizations and refugee 'beneficiaries' and 2) the Global North construction of educator expertise.

Distilling ECEiE decolonization to these two outcomes helps decolonizing reformers narrow their agenda and funnel resources into more concrete agendas, but it does not fully eliminate the complexity of decolonizing ECiE. For example, all the decolonizing educators I met could be reasonably understood as experts, holding graduate degrees from prestigious universities in psychology, child development, or education. What is more, many educators interested in decolonizing educational aid work for the same multilateral organizations that are the target of decolonizing critiques. In the final section of this chapter, I show how these contradictory realities push decolonizing educators to identify as colonially implicated subjects, recognizing that they work for systems that perpetuate refugee harm even as those very same systems are dedicated to promoting justice on a global scale. As such, the chapter finishes by drawing on observation and interview data to investigate this implicated positionality as a source of significant angst for decolonizing ECEiE educators, most of whom became humanitarian educators because of the ethical tenor of the work, as they are forced to admit that a central part of their work involves identifying acceptable forms of refugee subjugation. Critically, and perhaps surprisingly, the angst of being a colonially implicated ECEiE educator is not enough for them to leave the profession or seek to abolish humanitarian education.

The historical roots of decolonization and its influence on humanitarian education

It is prudent to start by this chapter by briefly sketching out the normative landscape that makes decolonization a relevant consideration for ECEiE practitioners. The study of colonization and decolonization, as it is contemporarily understood, began to reach mainstream academic popularity in the 1960s and 70's. In 1961 Martiniquan author Frantz Fanon published his canonical book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, with its opening sentence establishing the gravity of the decolonizing movement: "Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. […] The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets, and blood-stained knives which emanate from it" (Fanon 1961, p. 29-30). In the book, Fanon insists that no tool should be left unused as 'the wretched', in rising against the system, become 'new men', reestablishing the authority and dignity previously denied to them by their colonial overlords.

In the same era as Fanon's progressive, if not radical, writing on decolonization, political scientists and economics scholars increasingly focused on how to 'help' formerly colonized countries 'modernize' and 'develop' socially and economically. In response to prevailing ideas around 'backward' Global South societies and inspired by Fanon's innovative work, Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney published his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* in which he theorized that poverty in Africa was a direct "product of capitalist, imperialist, and colonial exploitation" (Rodney 1972, p. 14). Work such as Fanon's and Rodney's catalyzed an interest in decolonial studies that has steadily increased up into the modern era.

As postcolonial/decolonial studies have expanded, so too have has its semantic reach. While early works (with Fanon as a notable exception) focused exclusively on the political and economic vestiges of imperial and colonial rule in non-European countries, prompted by the growing prominence of cultural sociology and neo-Marxist scholarship in the 1980s, many scholars began to assert that cultural imperialism should be the new interpretive front of decolonization efforts. This was the belief of Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o when he wrote his innovative book, impactfully titled, *Decolonizing the Mind,* in 1986. As a novelist, Ngũgĩ was concerned with how English as a hegemonic language in Kenya was preventing African writers from expressing themselves from a truly African perspective. Inspired by Ngũgĩ, culture theorists in the late 20th century began to bring decolonization back to its political origins by suggesting that in the same way that imperialist language conventions could prevent Kenyans from expressing their true African-ness, so too could imperial cultural conventions prevent formerly colonized people from achieving totalized forms of social expression and self-determination.

To combat these forms of cultural imperialism, in recent years there has been an intellectual effort to reconfigure the world and 'provincialize' Europe (Chakrabarty 2008), or to decenter it (Betts 2012). Decolonization, in confluence with Postmodernist thought, which questions and problematizes the commanding position of Western culture, places

‘Eurocentrism’ as an unsustainable and undesirable arrogance, putting normative pressure on places of cultural production to change the way the world is understood and seen. Importantly, recent scholarship at the intersection of decolonization, global and transnational culture, and institutional norm diffusion has underscored how the spread of Eurocentrism was not always enacted through economic or military force. Partha Chatterjee, a professor at Calcutta University and one of the founders of Subaltern Studies, points out that many formerly colonial states consciously replicated the forms of the modern state in the Global North, making it difficult to know where the ‘imperial gaze’ and the subaltern ‘colonized object’ begin and end—a phenomenon that complicates efforts to combat the erasure of colonized people’s pre-existing knowledge (epitsemicide), language (linguicide), and culture (culturecide) (de Sousa Santos 2014; Grosfoguel, 2007).

Critical scholarship and navigating the normative complexity of decolonizing humanitarian education

By extending the purview of Eurocentricity (and therefore the concomitant obligation to decolonize) to nearly all realms of economic, political, and cultural life, decolonizing scholars have opened significant ideological space around what decolonization could and should look like. This ideological capaciousness is especially difficult to untangle in the fields of humanitarian aid and global education, two institutions that touch nearly all parts of social life.

Undeterred, in the 1990s and early 2000s, critical scholars of humanitarian aid took up Fassin’s and Rodney’s project and began to theorize the colonial entanglements of educational aid. Hoping to dislocate stereotypes of humanitarian workers as benign and selfless philanthropists, several scholars question the ostensibly liberatory motivation of humanitarian workers by pointing out the severe control humanitarian NGOs hold over aid recipients' and refugees' lives (Abdi 2005; Agamben 1995; Hyndman 2000; Thompson 2012). Concerned by the paradoxical views of aid workers who are ostensibly concerned with alleviating the suffering of all people and simultaneously perpetuate refugee powerlessness, some critical scholars found explanatory power in aid workers' subscription to what they call a 'bureaucratic rationale'. Framed as a vestige of colonial administration, these scholars argue that humanitarian workers use antiquated beliefs around expertise and social progress to justify forms of professionalization, secularization, and marketization that maintain unjust power relationships (Barnett 2020; Jaji 2012; Bornstein and Redfield 2011). Pointing to common humanitarian program language such as 'formal vs informal', 'best practices vs alternative approaches', and 'planned vs impromptu', critical scholars highlight how humanitarian logics center and reproduce standards from the Global north and ultimately repackage longstanding epistemic hierarchies between the Global South and the Global North in the language of 'innovative' programming and policymaking (Kothari 2006)

Other critics add, that beyond a bureaucratic path dependency grounded in colonial legacy, humanitarians are motivated by racialized and class-driven distinctions that rely on discourses of suffering, compassion, and the 'vulnerable' or 'needy' refugee victim (Fassin 2012; Malkki 1996; Timmer 2010). Critical scholars of humanitarian aid point out that these assumptions and attitudes assume the Global South as inferior and open ideological space for humanitarian agencies to implement paternalizing policies that necessitate Global South 'capacity building'. Implementing programs that 'build' aid-recipients' 'capacity', critical scholars assert, perpetuates an assumption that affected people do not have the skills or knowledge to capably intervene on their own behalf, prompting a 'humanitarian gaze' that looks for 'what is missing' or 'what needs to be done', rather than seeing disaster survivors as capable first responders who lack the material resources (e.g. money) to capably implement their own programming (Baguios 2024).

A final decolonizing critique of humanitarian aid comes from critical scholars who point out that the humanitarian sector is largely monopolized by UN agencies and a handful of influential international NGOs who are predominately funded and managed by Global North actors (Cornish 2021). In part, this concentration of power in humanitarian aid is motivated by practical challenges. Depending on the severity of a disaster, humanitarian aid organizations are tasked with maintaining a wide array of social services that would normally fall under the auspices of the national government, necessitating a diverse and capable government-like body to effectively respond to post-disaster needs. However, critics point out that UN agencies and large international NGOs are not nearly so centralized (or capable) and that they leave much of the actual on-the-ground implementation to local actors, reserving for themselves the majority of the decision-making power and transforming their ‘expertise’ into prescriptive project frameworks to ensure ‘effective’ local implementation. As a result, humanitarian ways of working tend to frame local implementers as a source of programmatic risk, an arena where donor funds might be inefficiently implemented or lost-- a belief that necessitates a more robust investment in capacity building and recenters UN agencies and large INGO experts as the main source of progressive knowledge.

In critical scholarship on education in emergencies, where critiques of the colonial entanglements of education meet critiques of the colonial entanglements of humanitarian aid, decolonizing scholars, for the most part, draw on the same theoretical assertions made by critical humanitarian aid scholars (*see* Novelli 2023 for a review). But relative to their critical humanitarian aid scholar peers, critical scholars of education in emergencies tend to focus their critiques more heavily on colonial processes of knowledge production and the *epistemic violence* European 'expertise' perpetuates. A term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), epistemic violence refers to the marginalization of non-Global North voices and perspectives in processes of knowledge production, that in turn elevate Global North ideas and beliefs as the only legitimate form of valuable knowledge. Critical scholars of education in emergencies believe that efforts to globalize standardized forms of education can be best understood as a contemporary manifestation of historic efforts to force non-European populations, including communities indigenous to the North and South American continent, to assimilate to European ways of thinking and being.

This assertion prompts a series of difficult questions for decolonizing education advocates. Like, 'what types of knowledge or interpretations of knowledge should be considered culturally European?'; 'Which not?'; 'And how do we know?' Some, perhaps more radical critics argue that nearly all forms of modern knowledge production should be considered problematically European. The scientific method, for example, which came to fruition during an era of European imperial rule, has been framed as a vestige of Eurocentrism and should be contextualized as such in K-12 schooling (Thakur 2023). Other, more nuanced, critical education scholars have theorized European knowledge as any knowledge that teaches people to be part of a hegemonic Global North world order that values liberal democratic values, free-markets, and individual competition (Tikly 2004; Oddy 2022; Shah et al. 2023). While such a framing is more intellectually robust, it does little to reduce the complexity of decolonization, as nearly all global social systems are dedicated to one of these three forms of social organization.

The emergence of decolonization as part of the zeitgeist of contemporary ECEiE

As this scan of the literature makes clear, decolonizing critics of educational aid are concerned with *who* the primary actors are in humanitarian action, how humanitarian action is undertaken, and *what* sources of knowledge are drawn upon to shape humanitarian education. This comprehensive agenda demands substantial changes in the traditional 'ways of working' in humanitarian aid, changes that many veteran humanitarian experts feel are too radical or too difficult to implement effectively. Nonetheless, humanitarians are guided by an intense dedication to "do no harm" (Krause 2014) and as decolonizing activist and academic pressure intensified, aid workers responded to demands by initiating an institutional wide effort to 'localize' educational aid, which at a minimum sought to address the question of *who* primarily undertakes humanitarian educational programs. Most notable of these efforts is the 2016 "Grand Bargain", an agreement which sought to make humanitarian action more efficient and "level the playing field, where all meet as equals" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2016)

Two of the nine workstreams in the Grand Bargain specifically addressed the issue of localization. Workstream 2, for example, set a target of channeling 25% of aid directly to local and national actors by 2020. Similarly, Workstream 6 called for a 'participation revolution' in aid delivery by mandating that humanitarian organizations, including the UN, take steps to include aid recipients in making aid distribution decisions (Ibid). To the disappointment of decolonizing humanitarians, an independent review carried out in 2021 showed that after five years, progress on the Grand Bargain's localization workstreams has been slow, with many indicators ironically reflecting increased decision-making power for UN agencies and international NGOs (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021). Despite the lack of progress, the initiation and institutionalization of the Grand Bargain and subsequent efforts to promote localization indicate a global normative shift, where the concept of and rationale for localization are no longer in question. That is, when it comes to the question of *who* the primary actors in educational aid should be, there is little debate that non-European actors should be central to future decision-making processes.

Clearly the Grand Bargain, by highlighting the hegemony of European organizations in decision-making processes and coalescing in significant regulatory mechanisms, represents a durable and dominant manifestation of a significant decolonizing normative shift in humanitarian aid (Weaver & Cain, 2023). For several years after the Grand Bargain, decolonizing norms in humanitarian aid stayed mor or less the same, with humanitarian policymakers and practitioners predominantly converting critiques of the colonial entanglements of aid into an issue of localization, an issue of *who* gets to make decisions around the distribution of aid. But since 2020, a growing number of humanitarian organizations and actors have begun to mainstream decolonizing questions that were previously considered outside the realm of serious policymaking debate. Questions like, '*How* humanitarian action should be undertaken?' and '*What* sources of knowledge should be taken seriously in educational aid?'

Black Lives Matter and the intensification of the decolonizing turn in humanitarian education

Despite its complexity, for some social justice movements such as police reform, open borders, and prison reform, decolonizing questions of *how* and *what* have proved powerful framing devices, highlighting how police, prisons and borders, even when managed by people from marginalized communities, can be productively interpreted as devices of racialized social control, borne out European and American imperialism and a White

Supremacist desire to control non-white bodies (Cunneen 2023; Aliverti et al. 2021; Agozino 2017). In 2020, the intensification of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements across the U.S. and Europe, which emerged in response to the murder of Geroge Floyd by police office Derek Chauvin, proved a critical cultural turning point where decolonizing critiques began to fully integrate into the Global North cultural zeitgeist and diffuse into arenas of social life other than criminal justice.

One such arena was humanitarian education (Strong et al., 2022). In October 2020, just five months after a video depicting George Floyd's murder went globally viral, the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies, the foremost coordinating body for the field of education in emergencies, like many other organizations and corporations at the time, released an Anti-Racism and Racial Equity Statement to all 20,000 of its individual members that included decolonizing critiques while promising improved coordination mechanisms,

> *"We recognize and acknowledge that we are part of a global humanitarian system that, while holding good intentions for the world's most vulnerable, is implicitly colonial in nature. Because of this, the INEE Secretariat acknowledges the ways in which we reinforce and perpetuate white supremacy culture and institutional racism through some of our structure and action. It is essential that we face these flaws in our systems --and ourselves-- head-on and take steps to dismantle these structures and take more inclusive and racially responsive actions to advance our mission of ensuring the right to a quality, safe and relevant education for all who live in emergency and crisis contexts."*
>
> - *(INEE 2020)*

The INEE secretariat's admission that, by the very nature of its work, it actively perpetuates colonial power relations and white supremacy was a first of its kind for education in emergencies, but since then many of the largest bilateral humanitarian organizations like The United States of America's USAID and Germany's GIZ have made similar statements about the unequal power relations perpetuated by humanitarian aid, including educational aid.

Since 2020, a flurry of practitioner-facing publications have emerged in response to INEE's call for decolonized education in emergencies, exploring topics such as abolishing refugee camps and the reproduction a racialized refugee 'other' through humanitarian programming (*see* Brankamp 2021; Givens 2021; Shuayb & Crul 2020). In February of 2022, the New Humanitarian, an influential non-partisan digital newspaper that covers issues on and around humanitarian aid, held an off-the-record forum attended by 50 representatives of governments, foundations, UN agencies, NGOs and activist organization to discuss what the future of decolonized humanitarian aid might look like. That same year, Doctors Without Borders, the oldest and perhaps the most influential humanitarian aid organization in the world, titled its annual congress "Exposing Power and Privilege in Times of Crisis".

Data suggest that the decolonization movement is intensifying in the field of education in emergencies. A scan of INEE's 'resources' page, a database of guidance documents intended to support education in emergencies policymakers and practitioners, uncovers 58 resources, published between 2003 and 2024, that intend to help education in emergency practitioners decolonize their programming, 37 of which (64%) were published in the last three years. Evidencing a new focus on the *how* and *what* of decolonizing reforms, INEE resources published in the last two years include policymaking guides that show educators how to 'dismantle and reconstruct children's human rights', a process that begins by calling into question the liberatory promise of Human Rights given their European origins (Keshavarzian 2022). Similarly, other resources in the database help educators recognize the overlap between Whiteness and professional expertise, asserting that while generally considered identity-neutral and merit-based, competency and expertise are undeniably subjective and intrinsically tied to the projects of White Supremacy and European Empire (Bian 2022).

The growth in the number and intensity of decolonization statements and publications such as those above suggests that the field of education in emergencies is indeed undergoing a ‘decolonizing turn’, but interestingly, the normative behaviors, rules, and regulations that accompany the decolonizing turn are still largely unspecified. Efforts to set rules and guidelines for decolonization such as the INEE resources presented above remain largely at the conceptual level and do more to destabilize and problematize ‘traditional’ ways of working in EiE than present a step-by-step roadmap to a decolonized future. Adding to this complexity, for some decolonization advocates, a lack of specificity is exactly what makes decolonization anti-colonial. For these activists, the need to label and rigidly define concepts like decoloniality is distinctly a European construct, making the conceptual vagueness of decolonization and the European angst it produces a key component of decoloniality praxis (Opara 2021).

What the previous sections make clear is that the fast-moving debate around what decolonization can and should be in education in emergencies has opened significant ideological space for program implementer implementation. Indeed, the first half of this chapter has shown that in a period of just 7 years, decolonization as a normative agenda in EiE has semantically shifted from a relatively straightforward demand for more democratic representation in humanitarian decision making to a more complicated call to eliminate uncritical acceptance of Global North expertise, in some cases positing the idea that science and systematization themselves are a product of European imperial control. In the sections that follow, I will go back to the ethnographic record to examine the various ways in which early childhood education in emergencies practitioners wade through this complexity and interpret demands to decolonize their work.

Looking to voices from the field to understand decolonization in ECEiE Practice

> *"Coloniality was in the core of how the humanitarian system was built. It wasn't my opinion; it's research [sic]. [...] But for me [the thing] is we can't decolonize ECD without decolonizing the whole humanitarian system because you can't fix a broken window in a house on fire, okay? As much as we want to work on early childhood development, the traditional ways of working within the humanitarian system blocks solutions for these children and families."*
>
> \- *Mouna: Moving Minds Alliance: London*

Three years after INEE's statement on the colonial entanglements of education in emergencies, the Moving Minds Alliance (MMA), a similar coordinating body to INEE but with an early childhood development and education focus, used its annual meeting to bring its members together and explore how colonialism is part of the 'core story' of the ECEiE field—suggesting that early childhood education in emergencies is now beginning to absorb decolonizing normative pressures. In the epigraph to this section, Mouna, the Senior Engagement Manager at the Moving Minds Alliance and a Syrian refugee, reinforces MMA's commitment to decolonize the field during our interview. In our discussion, she suggests that the only way to effectively implement ECD programs for children and families is to decolonize the whole humanitarian system. But in a capacious style that mirrors MMA's annual meeting statement beginning this chapter, the decolonizing language that Mouna uses in our discussion does more to present a problem than provide tangible guidance on what steps the ECEiE educators should take to decolonize the field.

The feedback from MMA members after the annual meeting suggests that indeed there was some confusion around what exactly ECEiE educators should be doing to decolonize the field. In a *Frequently Asked Questions* feedback document distributed to members after the 2023 Annual meeting, an MMA member asked, “So, are we saying we need to change the entire Humanitarian System? Isn’t that basically impossible?” Another asked, “Some of the ideas that are emerging don’t seem to be traditional advocacy. […] Are these really within the mandate of the Alliance?” Clearly, for many ECEiE experts, the annual meeting had produced more questions than solutions. For an example, I go back to Bushra, the ECD expert who works at a UN agency with a childcare mandate and who has significant influence in the field as a whole. Bushra felt that the push to decolonize was like any other politically convenient education reform and was more about power plays and politics than providing tangible steps to support displaced children, leaving the ECEiE field with a confusing future,

> *“I want to just address this decolonization thing, Charles. What’s happening with the Moving Minds Alliance group is that there is a hyper focus where we’re losing track of the actual thing that we’re here to talk about, which is early childhood development. So, decolonization is something that the ECD community is not experts in. You know, we’re not experts in this area.*
>
> *There is some validity to it, but to be honest, Charles-- I’m just gonna be very blunt. I think some of it is hubris, you know, somebody just wanting to push a certain agenda. […] And I think sometimes it’s [a matter of] going back to the basics. [Asking refugees,] ‘What do you need?’ ‘What do your children need?’ […] I think sometimes going back to the basics is lost and going back to the actual child is lost. Let’s think about what is, rather than what [would] be the best. […] I think people get so caught up in what is the best way and that competitive approach-- and [they] forget about what is the best way for a child, the best way for them, not what is the best way, you know, theoretically. […]*
>
> *We’re all in this together, you know; we’re trying to make a difference. And if we start to focus on, you know, what each other is doing wrong in our approach, none of us are perfect. Not even the agencies that we know are doing really great work. None of us are perfect.*
>
> - Bushra (UN Agency; Early Childhood Development Expert)

Testament to the diffuse conceptual interpretations that ECEiE educators are applying to calls to decolonize the field, Bushra, an ECD expert with 25 years of experience admits that she's feeling a bit lost around what exactly decolonizing the field would look like. Admitting that she herself is not an expert in decolonization, but also suggesting that she doesn't see any decolonizing experts within the field as a whole, Bushra shows that she sees her job as primarily tasked with helping young children develop to their full potential, not create education systems that combat Eurocentrism, whatever that might be. Indeed, Bushra seems skeptical that decolonizing educators are even really interested in eliminating Eurocentrism, suggesting that much of the movement to 'decolonize' is a politically motivated power grab that is based on a logic of humanitarian competition instead of supporting young children.

Bushra expresses some trepidation, if not outright disdain for the decolonizing turn in ECEiE, but Bushra is in the minority at MMA. Most of the educators I spoke with enthusiastically supported calls to decolonize the ECEiE field. Katherine, for example, who is the head of programming at the Refugee Healing Network (RHN), held a much more optimistic vision for a future decolonized field, committing RHN to a decolonizing campaign,

> *"We're on that [decolonizing] journey. We've got a way to go and we're certainly not perfect. […] There's a journey to go on, but yes, I would say that the concept and actuality of advocating for and creating example practices of where you can go directly to local communities and resource them as experts in their own contexts […] is already kind of anti- the kind of coloniality [that is part] of the current high-level NGO and government kind of relationship."*
>
> \- Katherine; RHN; London

Wading through the complexity of decolonizing ECEiE, in this excerpt Katherine presents her own interpretation, a view that, as it turns out, is paradigmatic of the decolonizing beliefs in ECEiE. For Katherine and the other decolonizing ECEiE educators I met, decolonizing the field is generally collapsed into two main objectives: 1) pursuing the promise of the Grand Bargain and giving decision-making power to refugee 'beneficiaries'; and 2) eliminating epistemic hierarchies that situate Global North ECEiE educators as the primary source of 'expertise'. While on one level collapsing decolonization and epistemic violence into these two objectives reduces complexity for ECEiE practitioners, it also introduces new arenas for educator interpretation and recreates some tensions found in 'culturally sensitive' structural inclusion and sociocultural inclusion approaches. For example, 'how much decision-making refugees should have?'; 'how should it be facilitated?'; 'should all forms of refugee expertise should be valued?' ; and 'if refugees are experts in their own recovery, what role, if any, do humanitarian educators play?

Decolonization as dismantling the 'traditional' NGO-refugee relationship: the case of Refugee Healing Network

Of all the organizations I spent time with during my field work, Refugee Healing Network (RHN) was the most explicitly dedicated to 'decolonizing' the field of ECEiE. Headquartered in London and with a field office in Thessaloniki, RHN was founded by an Afghan refugee who, at the time of my fieldwork was the active CEO. Thanks in part to her thought leadership, RHN educators were especially sensitive to the ways that humanitarian educators can erode refugees' flourishing and sense of dignity. To remedy this, they implement 'values based' and 'identity-informed' early childhood education programs that aim to give young refugee children and their caregivers a safe space to develop and flourish. James, a program facilitator exemplified this sensitivity in a conversation we had in RHN's "We Work" Clerkenwell office, where he identifies the framing of humanitarian 'provision' and refugee 'reception' as a key part of the coloniality of ECEiE,

> *"And I think that is so wildly presumptions, and again, kind of colonial. Lots of the people we're working with are marginalized people and have lived experiences of powerlessness because of their lived reality, whether that's systemic racism or xenophobia. So again, to actually compound those power imbalances by this traditional NGO, provider-recipient relationship, I think is really dangerous and really lazy. And it means that often lots of white savior people can go away and think, we've done a great job today. I feel like they are actually doing a disservice to what they profess they're trying to do."*
>
> \- *James: RHN: London*

One way that RHN staff tried to combat hegemonic frames and fulfill their decolonizing aspirations, was through what they called 'a values-based approach'. Like a non-profit's vision statement, RHN staff felt that creating and subscribing to a values-based approach could provide them with an ethical north star and keep them from conforming to 'traditional' ways of humanitarian aid. RHN's value-based approach subscribes to four ideals: respect, understanding, curiosity, and connection, with the idea being that if RHN educators can respect, connect and commit to understanding refugee children and caregivers, from a place of curiosity rather than judgement, they will be able identify and breakdown any power inequalities that might result from 'providing' services for refugee learners. I spent 12 months in the field working full time with RHN staff. A defining trend across the many, many conversations I had with RHN staff was their intense motivation to interpret and debate decoloniality, especially how to create more horizontal relations in the provision of aid,

> *"If we really want to work with respect, with understanding, with curiosity, and facilitate connection, we have to be values-based. What happens if we don't do that? We impose. And then there is a power element there. I mean look at the way France has affected education in Lebanon. It is very evident that it's a colonial system. So do we [at RHN] want to be that? Do we want to be these powerful Westerners that know it all and come and teach you poor people? <shaking her head, no> [Being values-based] is really about being intercultural. Because the power systems that were built during the [Imperial] part of history, but yeah, it is about decolonizing*

> *early childhood education and really just meeting [refugees] where they are and following an intercultural road.*
>
> - *Cora; RHN; Thessaloniki*

During my time observing RHN operations I was working as the interim measurement and evaluation officer, and I noted how every new employee at RHN (including me) received training on what it means to work with RHN values. Significant time was spent during the interview process to make sure that incoming hires, especially educators, believed in the power of a values-based approach. Once part of the RHN team, this process of decolonizing their work through following their 'values' was a defining in-group characteristic for the staff. Countless all-staff meetings revolved around how RHN can be better about framing refugees as powerful decisionmakers and these discussions often wrapped up with motivational statements reminding RHN staff that they were part of fixing the humanitarian system. Katherine, the head of programs at RHN, explained to me how RHN's values-based approach separates them from other NGOs by making them more aligned with decolonizing norms,

> *"I think where we are unique compared to big INGOs' programs is that as an organization, we're very values based; and those values mean that we don't see ourselves as a 'big dog' expert who should weigh in and come and do the work in a context that we know absolutely nothing about, that we're not a part of. […] There is a real reciprocity [in our work] and there is an exchange, a mutuality and an exchange. And there is a real recognition that there are locals who should be doing this work and not us—rather than the flown in international staff."*
>
> - *Katherine: RHN: London*

None of the staff at RHN ever explicitly mentioned the Grand Bargain, but as Katherine's testimony suggests, a 'values-based approach' was RHN's primarily used as a catchall term for localization. At one level of analysis, RHN's dedication to localization is not particularly unique. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, localization is a deeply held global norm, with UN agencies and large INGOs making significant efforts to transfer implementation responsibility to local and national NGOs. But at another level of analysis, RHN seems especially dedicated to this decolonizing question of *who* gets to participate in decision-making and educational aid, not merely relying on grassroots NGOs and refugees to implement RHN's agenda, but also considering them genuine partners in co-creating the curriculum.

In the 12 months that I worked with RHN, a significant proportion of their permanent staff were refugees or formerly displaced. Two members of the executive board, the CEO, and four members of their 8-person programming staff were refugees. For RHN, this was an act of decolonizing praxis and part of a concerted effort within the organization to promote relational justice within the humanitarian system. This vision of hiring and paying refugee educators was also part of their programming, which in 2022 extended to a *training-of-trainers* model where RHN provided financial and technical support to 'partner organizations' implementing early childhood education programs for refugees. Katherine explained to me, "As you're aware, in our second year of funding, we sought for each partner to hire at least one refugee facilitator who RHN will provide additional training to." For a myriad of reasons that range from bureaucratic red tape to a lack of faith in refugee capability, RHN was not always successful in convincing partner organizations to hire refugee workers, but RHN's efforts to separate themselves from 'traditional' INGOs and the power imbalances they reproduce represent an example of an implementing organization trying to meet growing global demands for more decolonized programming.

Efforts such as hiring refugees and using the language of global-local reciprocity are part of a more established push to localize humanitarian education and not unique to RHN. In fact, despite their dedication to relational justice, RHN was not particularly good at localizing their operations and as a small NGO, they often lacked the manpower and institutional bandwidth to implement some relatively simple localization best practices. For example, while I was working with them, RHN had yet to conceptualize and implement a systematic needs assessment, a critical tool for understanding what refugee communities want from humanitarian aid. Also, as funding bottlenecks and pressures 'to scale' their programming mounted, RHN transitioned to programming more akin to a 'capacity-building' model, teaching larger INGOs like International Rescue Committee how to implement RHN's values-based approach to safe spaces in early childhood education. As they transitioned to the capacity building model, they also were forced to close their direct delivery of early childhood and youth programming, shutting down their Greek office and subsequently let go of a large proportion of their lived experience employees.

While RHN were not exceptional in their efforts to localize ECEiE programming, where educators at RHN were unique was the degree to which they were experimenting with more novel forms of decolonization. Prompted by decolonizing literature and responding to mounting demands to prioritize relational justice in humanitarian aid, educators at RHN were especially vocal about questioning the value of Global North expertise and asking difficult questions around *what* kind of information should be valued in ECEiE programming.

The rhetoric and reality of 'expertise' and 'useful knowledge' in efforts to decolonize early childhood education in emergencies

Critiques around the coloniality of knowledge production in education in emergencies take aim at a wide variety of Global North conventions, from teaching human rights to teaching children politeness (Ravishankar, 2020). And as decolonizing critiques, which by design rarely offer concrete decolonizing pathways, have diffused into the normative and operational logics of the EiE field, program implementers have been left with the burden of making difficult decisions around which forms of European knowledge and knowledge production should be considered valuable and which considered a perpetuation of damaging epistemic hierarchies. In the section that follows, I highlight the difficulty of these decisions for ECEiE practitioners who, on the one hand, believe that all children deserve standardized psychologically safe classrooms and curricula, but who on the other hand, also are experimenting with how different conceptions of 'safeness' might have European origins, ironically diminishing refugee flourishing rather than enhancing it.

Critical ECEiE scholarship has spent the last 20 years productively highlighting the many ways that ECEiE programming might be undergirded by European conceptions of 'the good life' (*see Vandenbroeck 2021;* Macvarish 2016; Del Solar 2014; Valentin and Meinert 2009). Animated by the liberatory potential of the decolonizing turn and feeling the pressure of academic publishing conventions, decolonizing scholars are perpetually searching for novel decolonizing territory, leaving the door open for a near limitless ECEiE decolonizing agenda, including criticisms of the World Bank's three main early childhood education goals, teaching young refugee children: 1) pre-academic skills such as shape recognition, fine motor skills, and numerosity; 2) social emotional skills such recognizing emotions and self-regulation techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness, etc.; and 3) peacebuilding skills like perspective taking and impulse control (*see* Vandenbroeck 2021; Hoffman 2009; Lancy 2021*)*.

When I first started my fieldwork, I had just finished my graduate coursework and feeling intellectually stimulated by the critical childhood studies literature I had read, I was especially interested in interviewing ECEiE educators who were confronting the universal desirability of pre academic skill, social emotional learning, and peacebuilding; I never met them. To my surprise, all three of the early childhood education outcomes laid out by the World Bank remain largely unquestioned by ECEiE actors in the field, even the most radical proponents of decolonization. What I found instead, and perhaps surprisingly given their training as psychotherapists, was a group of educators who primarily interpreted decolonization in ECEiE as critiquing "Western" forms of mental health and psychosocial support.

Decolonization in ECEiE as questioning mental health expertise

> *"I think if we are working on inclusion, we have to ensure the participation and representation of the different cultures who are in certain communities. [...] Whatever community you are [from], you can create participation and representation of certain groups and cultures. Then, you can go much further [with the impact of your programming]. [...] And if, if we would go to Africa, we should see what is there, what they think about child development, and what is the full potential of a child there. We shouldn't go to North Africa telling them what is the appropriate child development [sic]. In certain cultural contexts, if you want to provide [for the] full potential of the kids, you have to accept the socially accepted developmental criteria."*
>
> - *Aliz; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

One of the most common decolonizing critiques I observed in the field was the questioning of the 'individualizing' and 'pathologizing' European conventions found in mental health and psychosocial support services. Historically, pediatricians and developmental psychologists have been considered unassailable sources of knowledge and expertise concerning the development and mental health of very young children. But postmodern scholars and decolonizing scholars have worked over the last 70 years to destabilize physiological and psychological literature as the sole source of valuable knowledge production, pointing to how culture and context-specific social relationships have significant implications for not only what ‘flourishing’ entails, but also how scientific knowledge is ‘put to work’ in pursuit of such flourishing (*see* Mullan 2023 for a review). In the field of ECEiE, these critiques have productively diffused down to program implementers, like Aliz, the head of early childhood education programs at Hungary Friends, who in the quote above parochializes child development science, suggesting that to be an effective promoter of child development around the globe, you must understand what child development entails for the specific target population.

Conforming to decolonizing norms that pressure educators to destabilize epistemic hierarchies and refugee exclusion from ECEiE decision-making, Aliz stands in stark opposition to ECEiE sociocultural inclusion ‘best practices’ that seek the just distribution of healthy, well-regulated brains (as measured by children hitting all their developmental stages in a timely manner). In an ironic turn of phrase, Aliz uses the language of trauma-first brain development advocates who seek to help all children’s brains develop to their ‘full potential’, to convert educational justice into relational justice and destabilize standardized brain development as a universalizable measure of flourishing. Instead, Aliz suggests that reaching your full potential is a culturally determined outcome and one that should be realized via cooperation between financially rich Global North educators and knowledge rich Global South aid recipients.

Aliz, and the degree to which she believes that culture undergirds conceptions of mental health, is unique in my sample, but educators at Refugee Healing Network are also noteworthy in their use of decolonizing language in their refugee education programming. Their dedication to decolonization exists in part because RHN brands themselves as an organization that sees critical thinking as part of their organizational DNA. In the capacity building training for other NGOs, part of benefit RHN feels it has on offer is a specific set of useful tools for reflecting on how race, class, and gender manifest in humanitarian education, which, when applied correctly results in what they call, an *identity-informed approach*. "Safety and making people feel safe is at the heart of our practice", their training materials explain, "the more we are curious, reflective, and self-aware, the safer our practice and the physical and emotional spaces we develop will be." RHN's identity informed approach reflects many of the decolonizing critiques found in critical humanitarian education literature and RHN staff tell me that an identity-informed early childhood education program could only be run by educators 1) who think deeply about the various ways refugees are expected to give up their cultural identity to be accepted, 2) who recognize that some identities have access to resources (symbolic and material) that others do not, and 3) who acknowledge that humanitarian educators can perpetuate refugee oppression by exercising authority in an unfair way.

Given this organizational identity that centers relational justice in ECEiE programming, it is not surprising that staff at RHN were especially vocal advocates for destabilizing epistemic hierarchies and Global North expertise. For example, Katherine, the head of programs at RHN and expert in identity-based psychological programming was an especially outspoken in her critiques of 'Western' forms of psychology, pointing out the damage that top-down psychological approaches can perpetuate,

> *"There are plenty of people who speak out about the experience they had arriving as a refugee in a new country and kind of seeing a mental health practitioner— and the kind of harm actually, rather than help, it caused— [from] not being well understood to being pathologized, treated as if you're stupid. And so, you've got to be identity informed.*
>
> *Diagnoses are culturally informed and it then gets imbedded into systems. You know, like the DSM 7 is not the Bible. It's a representation of an institution and a kind of way of thinking that is like culturally shaped. I think if we're being culturally sensitive and identity-informed, it's for us to be aware of that. And that is why we're a very non-clinical model and we're a non-clinical team. It wouldn't be our place to kind of make a diagnosis."*
>
> \- *Katherine: RHN: London*

In this discussion, Katherine reflects her familiarity of critical psychology literature to reassure me that RHN is aware of the cultural imperialism of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a mental health guide published by the American Psychiatric Association for the classification of mental disorders that is commonly relied upon by mental health professionals in humanitarian policymaking and programming. With a mental health framing that differs significantly from Christos' at Protos, Katherine parochializes Europe and The United States and problematizes a 'clinical approach' that diagnoses refugee students with mental health disorders, suggesting instead that what might be considered a mental health disorder in the DSM could actually just be a non-European cultural expression.

RHN's dedication to destabilizing 'Western' psychology approaches was robust despite the fact that all of the Programs leadership team had graduate degrees in psychology, as well as many of the program facilitators. For example, in a conversation I had with Cassandra, a program manager at RHN, she mirrored some decolonizing critiques while discussing her relationship with the field of psychology,

> *"Active listening and acceptance are deeply essential in the work we do. I am a psychologist, a trained psychotherapist, and I have been trained to the Western model of psychotherapy. [But] this is not my expertise regarding refugees. Coming back to my workplace and talking with people [refugees] here and there, telling me 'This is what we do. We sit all around the fire and the master of the village' for example, 'comes and you know it heals us'.*
>
> *And this is actually-- it not only happens, it actually works. And this is when you realize that yes, you know, not everyone works the same way. And this is also why we do have people with lived experience in our organization and on my team-- because these are the people who can best inform you on how to do the practices."*
>
> *- Cassandra; RHN; Thessaloniki*

Similar quotes about decolonizing mental health came from James, a facilitator at RHN with a graduate degree in psychotherapy and who was especially thoughtful about the relational injustice of his practice. In our second interview, James came back to discussions we had earlier about trauma pushing someone out of their 'window of tolerance' and into an irrational emotional state,

> *"If we're talking about social emotional experiences, there's no point me talking to somebody about, 'these are your three brains and this is the interconnected journey and this is when your reptilian brain kicks in. [...] I worked for many years in West Africa, with West African men. There's no way I'm talking to then in the [psychological] language of like, 'window of tolerance', because it just, it did not chime. They experience what they were going through primarily as a kind of sexual torture and the stigma of that as men in Wester African society in terms of spirits and kind of what, how spirits moved through and with them.*
>
> *So again, it's just kind of [asking yourself], 'what am I actually trying to do here? What's really the work?' Is the work that [the refugee] really understand what a window of tolerance is? Or is the work that you kind of, you and your spirit and your relationship with those spirits get to a place where you are able to move through life in something akin to a window of tolerance. You find some peace with those [spirits] where you can breathe, or whatever you wanna do with those spirits.*
>
> *For me to presume what is the kind of right or wrong level for you to be at feels presumptuous. I think is more [about] trying to make the move to better using and replicating the language or the meaning that the other people are putting to their*

> *experiences. But it can also extend to a much more active approach. Co-creating what the [healing] space should look like or ultimately handing over the space altogether. Ultimately, checking ourselves from the outset, that we have the answers to anything, I think is probably my starting position."*
>
> *- James: RHN: London*

In this excerpt James demonstrates how deeply he has internalized decolonizing norms that question epistemic hierarchies and the value of Global North expertise. James' decolonizing orientation stems in part from his dedication to philanthropy; he is an incredibly kind and thoughtful humanitarian educator. We had many deep conversations in and out of the office about decolonization, cultural relativism and the relationship between cultural expression and the field of psychology. Like many other humanitarian workers, James has dedicated his life to supporting marginalized communities, but through his exposure to decolonizing literature and under the new justice pressures of decolonizing norms, James began to question the foundational value of Western psychology. James' testimony also shows that as he begins to question the authority of 'Western' psychology, he naturally begins to question other forms of authority he might possess, going as far as questioning if he has anything to offer at all as a White English humanitarian educator.

Once one form of authority was problematized as Eurocentric, where should you draw the line? James, like other decolonizing educators I met began to ask himself some difficult questions: 'Was he actually helping refugee communities?' 'Or was he just making himself feel better by 'helping' while actually perpetuating a regime of colonial slow violence?' 'Maybe he shouldn't be trying to 'help' at all?'

"Are we becoming colonials?"- Cora; RHN; Thessaloniki: **Program implementer confusion while questioning 'expertise' as decolonizing praxis**

This shift in what ‘helping’ refugees should look like has had profound effects on humanitarian ways of working. In the tradition of Nussbaum and Terzi, the “old” humanitarian education approach was defined by a process of community ‘capacity building’, where a highly educated humanitarian aid worker would teach local actors skills that were critical to achieving modern forms of flourishing. This approach revolves around the knowledge and teaching skills of humanitarians. But the decolonizing turn in ECEiE has many humanitarian educators, all of whom hold graduate degrees in psychology, education, or social work, questioning what exactly expertise can and should be, if anything. As is evident from James’ testimony, the professional crisis that accompanied the internalization of decolonizing norms may have begun by questioning ostensibly overt forms of ‘Western’ psychology, but ECEiE professionals have extended those same critiques to questioning what use, if any, humanitarians were at all. In response to questions about where they saw their expertise as useful for refugees, many educators, especially those at RHN, consistently responded with humility and confusion:

- *“That really overlaps with my personal crisis. I don’t know what to say. I really don’t know. I would still consider myself a professional, but then again, in what?”*
  -(Annamaria: Hungary Friends: Budapest)

- *“I really don’t know, Charles, if there’s an answer to that question. [...] I have this personal discomfort about being tagged or ever using that word expertise, because what really is that? The question that’s coming to me is like, what is really effective [programming]? And who qualifies that?”*
  - (Vinita: RHN: Mumbai)

- *I don’t know the answer to that question. I really don’t. I’m kind of grappling with it a lot. I guess the expertise comes from the fact that I have a body and I have experiences. So my expertise comes from my experience and it’s no more or less valid than yours. [...] I’m uncomfortable with the idea of expertise. [...] Maybe the expertise is in destigmatizing the need for expertise in a way.”*
  -(James: RHN: London)

-

-I don't' know to be honest. And what I really like about our work is the fact that we don't come as experts. […] I don't know [what] to tell you about expertise.

- (Cora: RHN: Thessaloniki)

As mentioned, a critique of humanitarian educator expertise cuts to the core logic of delivering educational aid, which makes the ubiquity of anti-expert rhetoric in the ECEiE field notable. In an effort to meet global demands to prevent epistemic hierarchy in educational aid, decolonizing humanitarian educators often felt ethically safest when they parroted decolonizing scholars and simply questioned all types of authority humanitarian experts might hold. For example, James expresses his belief in the decolonizing praxis of an anti-expert rhetorical turn. Others, like Vinita, an Indian national and another highly educated mental health facilitator at RHN, takes this questioning of humanitarian expertise to a slippery slope conclusion, questioning what should be considered effective programming and questioning her own ability to judge what justice my be by provocatively asking, "who qualifies that?"

While the decolonizing turn in early childhood education in emergencies has opened space for many interviewees to question their own knowledge or that of the abstract 'humanitarian expert', some decolonizing educators I spoke with maintained a level of faith in the value of their expertise and work, even as they recognized that they were might be perpetuating some of the epistemic hierarchies highlighted in decolonizing literature. Katherine is an especially interesting case of holding these two truths at the same time. Unlike Vinita and James, who in conversation would often carry critiques of Global North expertise to semi-abolitionist ends, Katherine seemed ethically satisfied with RHN's attention to participatory community spaces as a tool for flattening power dynamics between refugees and humanitarians, while also allowing room for humanitarian educators to be experts with tangible offering for refugee learners,

> *In the long term, you really want to create participatory community spaces where there is a recognition that the organization or the [humanitarian] facilitators are bringing a certain level expertise, and they are setting up a space. But you really want that to be meaningful to the community, and, integrated at some point—hopefully like owned by, led, taken over by the community. That in itself is an anti-colonial approach.*
>
> *But that said, I was reflecting on this recently, we [at RHN] are reflecting a lot about like the bigger picture of RHN and our relationship with [local NGO] partners. And I think we are still reinforcing systems that have imperial colonial kind of history that have influenced how we do what we do."*
>
> *- Katherine: RHN: London*

This excerpt shows that in cases where Katherine is confronted with difficult questions about expertise and what humanitarians have to offer refugees, she would often fall back to democratic representation and the language of the Grand Bargain to justify humanitarian participation in refugee educational agenda setting. Similarly, James, when pushed to explore the programmatic implications of his criticism of Global North expertise, uses the rhetoric of democratic participation to justify the existence of humanitarian organizations like RHN,

> *"I don't think it's about saying… It's not a question of saying you, White Western organizations, have nothing to offer. Like, your seat will be removed. It's just saying, let's bring another seat to the table, with the person with the cultural lived experience and see where our respective expertise might be fruitful. So, I don't think it's an 'either or'."*

But later in the conversation he jumps back to a more abolitionist rhetoric, questioning whether Global North humanitarian organizations need exist at all,

> "*So much of the way [RHN] works is still deeply colonial. I think decolonizing the wider NGO sector involves completely reshaping funding and where the funding starts and ends. I mean, I would prefer to see money and support go directly to grassroots organizations in their respective contexts, rather than, this model where we [at RHN], as a kind of weird intermediary, get to kind of anoint people based on a weeklong observation trip. […] You know? I mean, we're still planning an 18-*

> *month expansion into the Middle East. Just those collection of words don't feel great <laughs>."*
>
> *-(James: RHN: London)*

What becomes clear in the analysis of interview and observation data at RHN is that through the process of trying to meet decolonizing demands, RHN educators were faced with incompatible ethical pressures. On the one hand, RHN tasked themselves with helping refugees overcome their trauma and reach a state of standardized mental health, which, given their lack of faith in tools like the DSM, was mostly measured by the degree of 'calm' refugee students were showing. On the other hand, they also were tasked with helping refugees feel an unadulterated sense of self-determination and cultural expression. This challenge that RHN faces in deciding which forms of standardization and relativism in ECEiE programming are ethical speaks to the tension that arises for humanitarian educators as conceptions of educational justice transform from the equal distribution of benchmarkable mental health characteristics or accredited education services, to relational conceptions of justice that aim to combat epistemic hierarchy and refugee powerlessness in all its forms. As an observer of all the difficulty RHN had in finding ethical ground, I asked them, 'what about abandoning the mental health part of your programming all together?'

While almost all the RHN educators I interviewed questioned the value of humanitarian educators' knowledge, when I pushed them to explain why they did trainings on the trauma of refugee learners, they frequently drew on longstanding sociocultural inclusion logics that frame psychological wellbeing as a necessary condition for rational thought. Then reflexively, just as was the case with James talking about inclusion, RHN educators would respond to their own sociocultural inclusion logics with a decolonizing retort,

> *"**Me**: If the main goal [of your programming] is to create spaces of critical reflection and reduce power inequality, why include this trauma informed part?*

> ***Cora**: "'Cause there is this knowledge around [it]. I mean, there is a lot of scientific proof around the impact that devastating experiences can have on the body. I mean, this exists and I think it's very useful, like to enable somebody to be reflective. [...]*
>
> *What happens when people regulate is that they can think more clearly, in my opinion. They can make more informed decisions, more logic[al] decision. I would say having the possibility to be ore sure, to be more in control of your decisions (sic). [...]*
>
> *[But] there is one thing that at RHN we have failed to understand when we speak about trauma. We say we don't assume trauma, but we do assume trauma, if we have to be honest. That's why we say, 'work with regulation'. Now there are two ways of seeing regulation. One way is working with regulation with people that face adversity and stress, and the other is just being this way in general. Being trauma sensitive, [in the general sense] means being more curious, more mindful, more open to listening. And it doesn't' have to relate to trauma [specifically]. So do we pathologize when we say, 'with these groups do breathing and do this exercise?' We do pathologize."*

As Cora's excerpt suggests, many educators at RHN engage in open conversations with themselves, oscillating between advocating for sociocultural inclusion approaches that emphasized standardized psychological wellbeing and decolonizing approaches that emphasized cultural freedom and decision-making. In many cases, the ideological tensions they face force them to make idiosyncratic decisions about which forms of standardization are acceptable and which spurious.

Conversations I had with Katherine were especially interesting in this respect. As a trained psychotherapist who was well read in decolonizing literature, she often interpreted decolonizing pressures as a rejection of Western psychological practices rather than a rejection of the field of psychology as a whole, as some of her colleagues did. In one conversation about decolonization we had, she drew on rhetoric of coloniality to reject "clinical psychology" which she believes has been problematically very "Western" and "mind oriented", while simultaneously justifying universalizing mindfulness in classrooms by pointing to "research now which links adverse psychological experiences and physical health outcomes [and] you know, the whole Chinese medicine system is all about Chi and blockages of flow. So, I'd say [it's all] like evidence-based sort of since the beginning of time." In an interesting interpretation of decolonizing norms, rather than rejecting her expertise altogether, Katherine would often convert her psychological expertise into a knowledge of non-Western traditions— meaning that a big part of her work was bringing non-Western healing approaches to non-Western communities through early childhood education programming.

Taken as a whole, the stories and testimonies collected from decolonizing educators paint a picture of normative confusion and ethical angst. Many educators in the field of ECEiE are highly educated individuals, holding master's degrees in the social sciences from some of the world's most prestigious universities. As a part of their graduate training, they are well read in the critical literature of their field and have internalized pressures to decolonize their work. But as this chapter has demonstrated, decolonization in humanitarian education is still largely an unspecified norm and, in many cases, eludes the types of specification found in other norm life cycles. At the program implementation level, this lack of specification results in a group of decolonizing educators who, in their struggle to meet shifting global demands, must come to terms with the implicit tradeoffs of their work. This is a source of significant personal pain for decolonizing educators. James, for example, would often tell me about his struggle to be an ethical educator,

> *"You appear like you're doing something good, in the immediate sense. And you probably are. But in the much longer, darker, deeper recesses of what it means to create a[n] [ECEiE] sector, it's problematic. <pause> and I'm a completely problematic cog.*
>
> *In this kind of sector, the currency when you get into it is idealism. [But] it's always much messier than your ideals will allow. I do a lot of self-reflection, but to what extent that reflection leads to shifts in power balances? I guess, that's another*

> *question. I grapple with it all the time and I don't know the answer to it. […] It doesn't make for a particularly settling life and it definitely adds to my wider neurosis <pause> Or maybe my wider neurosis adds to it <laughs>."*
>
> \- *James; RHN; London*

The internal life of a decolonizing humanitarian educator can be tumultuous and full of doubt-- doubt as to whether you are really fulfilling your humanitarian obligation to reduce suffering; doubt as to whether your professional vocation should be a source of social esteem or social antipathy; and doubt, given your area of expertise, whether you even have anything to offer society after years of schooling and professional development. Some decolonization literature even suggests that giving too much attention to humanitarian educators' emotional reaction to decolonizing reform is an arrangement of White Supremacy (Pallister-Wilkins 2021), making decolonizing ECEiE educators feel guilty of perpetuating oppression when expressing discontent about their loss of ethical and professional vocation.

Conclusion

This chapter began by describing the normative contents and contours of decolonization in humanitarian education. I started by grounding contemporary calls to decolonize education in emergencies in the wider body of decolonizing scholarship. Then, theorizing decolonization as a global normative order, I showed how the language and logics of decoloniality have manifested in global discourses, starting with an attention to horizontal decision-making and moving into a post- Black Lives Matter era characterized by more globally robust interrogations of education in emergencies' role in perpetuating epistemic hierarchy and marginalizing the beliefs and ideas of non-European communities.

After establishing decolonization as an influential normative order in ECEiE, I used the second half of the chapter to show how ECEiE program implementers draw on decolonizing norms in their everyday work, idiosyncratically deciding what should be consider a colonial vestige, struggling to drill down on a set of decolonizing principles, and admitting that the decolonizing turn in ECEiE is a source of psychic angst and anxiety. I showed in this chapter that decolonizing educators in the field of ECEiE don't consider themselves experts in anything particularly useful; they are not sure that the programs they implement are effective; they even tell me that they are not sure that they are doing more good than harm for refugees. But ultimately, despite these confessions, even the most radical decolonizing educators I met had justifications for why they should stay in the field. In the next chapter, I will build off of the macro-/micro- story I have laid out here to show how the moral panic and internal angst that educators feel in response to decolonizing reforms are not robust enough for them to leave the profession and I identify three discursive frames that ECEiE educators use to find moral comfort in their work.

CHAPTER 7: IN DEFENSE OF UNIVERSALS IN ECEiE-- TOWARDS A COLONIALLY SENSITIVE RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

> *"I guess it comes down to a real question of, again, why are we doing what we're doing? Like if I'm doing what I'm doing because I really want to have an impact, then I'm not sure this [work] is that. That should really, kind of, drive the approach rather than many other completely human needs, like job security, a sense of purpose and the connections and you know, fuck, the travel that people [get to do]. There are so many different reasons that people might get into this kind of work. Um, not all of them I think are aligned with that work having the most impact, but okay, that's also life."*
>
> \- *James; RHN; London*

To be a decolonizing educator in the field of ECEiE is to be full of doubt. Implicated by the perceived colonial entanglements of their work and deeply invested in being an ethical actor, decolonizing ECEiE educators spiral between moral panic and a sense of pride. Like James in the excerpt above, educators who are trying to meet paradoxical justice demands are caught in a near-constant dialectic of doubt, self-reflection, and "okay, that's also life" resolution, only to then enter a new phase of self-doubt. In Chapter 7, I focused on this phenomenon of educator angst and self-doubt and showed how normative pressures to decolonize ECEiE programming have pushed educators into feelings of confusion, hesitation, and skepticism, sometimes bordering on self-loathing. In this Chapter, I turn the focus to educators' resolution processes by exploring the discourses and beliefs that decolonizing ECEiE educators draw upon to find ethical comfort in their colonially implicated subjecthood. Afterwards, in response to polemical literature in ECEiE that considers these educators' resolution efforts as important drivers of educational injustice, I suggest my own resolution, a colonially sensitive rights-based approach that synthesizes decolonizing and human rights approaches and aims to reorient ECEiE justice debates towards socially-situated liberation, rather than disqualifying any knowledge simply because of its cultural source, particularity, or universality.

Like doctors who take the Hippocratic oath upon graduating from medical school, humanitarians are guided by the imperative of "doing no harm" which mandates that aid workers take measures to prevent any adverse consequences of its actions on affected populations. But as we saw in Chapter 7, decolonizing humanitarian educators like James, Vinita, and Cora remain doubtful that their humanitarian work is not a source of refugee harm. Where does this leave them? Anticolonial critics believe that these instances of humanitarian harm undermine the moral and ethical integrity of liberal humanitarian projects and many call for the abolition of current humanitarian aid system, including globally-situated NGOs like RHN (Dadusc & Mudu 2020; Gomez 2021). But despite the success of abolition movements in other activist spaces (borders, police, and prisons), the decolonizing ECEiE educators I met do not convert decolonizing norms into a radically progressive agenda of abolition. Instead, despite all the doubt and angst that comes with trying to decolonize the field of ECEiE, interview and observations data show that decolonizing educators are as resolute as ever to continuing humanitarian educational aid, prompting the question, 'Why?' How can an ECEiE educator dedicated to doing no harm, on the one hand, tell me that he suspects his work might be harming vulnerable refugee communities, but on the other hand say that he plans on continuing to do the work? The answers to these questions are revealed in the stories that educators tell themselves as they try to make sense of their self-described, colonially implicated careers.

In my fieldwork I found three discursive frames that decolonizing educators use to resolve their colonially implicated subjecthood and make sense of their continued participation in the field of ECEiE. The first discursive frame consists of decolonizing ECEiE educators universalizing early learning outcomes. While they might criticize the colonial entanglements of 'traditional' humanitarian ways of working, they remain uncritical of the global aspirations of the field and they interpret the early learning outcomes laid out by the World Bank as universal human rights, solidifying their global campaign as an intrinsically ethical endeavor. Second, they overcome doubt in the ethical certainty of their work by pointing to the very process of self-doubt as a form of decolonizing praxis. By remaining suspicious of their work and engaging in a constant process of critical reflection, decolonizing educators in ECEiE believe that they are already actively addressing the colonial entanglements of the work, temporarily freeing them from feelings of guilt and converting doubt into a steadfastness around the morality of their work. Finally, decolonizing educators overcome their colonially implicated subjecthood by framing the globalized social and economic system as a part of a worldwide colonial project, meaning that no job is free from colonial implication. Through such a frame, decolonizing educators feel comfortable being part of a "problematic" humanitarian system, rather than another more problematic discipline like banking or real estate. Along with feelings of ethical comfort, these discursive framings result in an ostensibly less radical form of decolonization, where epistemic hierarchies and some forms of cultural imperialism remain unchallenged.

Some more hardline anticolonial scholars might criticize the educators in this study for masking Global North interests under the guise of universal human rights or soothing the emotional distress of perpetuating colonial violence with fatalism and pseudo-realist platitudes, but in the second half of this chapter, I argue that the educators in this study, far from being ignorant perpetuators of colonial violence, are quite adept at thinking about how their work perpetuates epistemic hierarchies and appropriately use the discursive frames presented in the first half of the chapter to meet decolonizing pressures, while simultaneously using the liberal norms of equality and democracy in education to combat the injustices concomitant to globalized capitalism. In this way, I see many of the decolonizing beliefs of educators in this study in alignment with what I call a colonially sensitive rights-based approach. Such an approach opens ideological space for an enlightened eclecticism in the field of ECEiE and encourages a more balanced attention to the immediate material and political needs of refugee populations, rather than being myopically fixated on concerns of ontological and epistemological tolerance.

Resolving tensions as colonially-implicated subjects

Anticolonial thinkers and activists have long called for a disrupting of forces that 'colonize the mind', including calls to decolonize global education initiatives which are seen as a significant tool for erasing non-European histories and humanities (Sriprakash 2023). For many anticolonial scholars, an important part of decolonizing knowledge production is identifying educational arrangements that are beyond reform and should be metaphorically "put into hospice", where they can die and disappear forever (Machado de Oliveira 2021). While building a scholarly career out of showing that nearly all parts of social life are undergirded by European hegemony, these same anticolonial scholars also avoid articulating specific methods to identify which arrangements should be abolished and which not, leaving it up to educational program implementers to decide.

Not surprisingly, despite the decolonizing turn in humanitarian education, there has not been a wave of mass resignations or internal calls for abolition in the field of ECEiE. While the integration of decolonizing norms in the field has led to some moral panic about what being a good ECEiE educator should entail, my fieldwork shows that even the most radical decolonizing educators in my sample hadn't seriously considered leaving the field for ethical reasons. Nor have they begun to seriously consider organizing any kind of abolition of humanitarian aid movement, a feature of other global decolonization movements. Contemporary abolition organizing, which has been productively levied in support of police, prisons, and borders reform movements, takes decolonization logics to absolutist ends and calls for the dismantling of the gendered, colonial, and racist violence intrinsic to a number of global systems, (Brankamp 2021). Importantly, abolition is not absent from the collective consciousness of the decolonizing educators I spoke with. Quite the contrary, some used the language of abolition to describe their ideal relationship between refugees and systems of material support. Most prominently, in Refugee Healing Network's annual retreat, numerous discussions revolved around how RHN's programming could help facilitate the destruction of the 'humanitarian industrial complex' and RHN staff joked, half-serious, that replacing large multilateral organizations like the International Rescue Committee, parts of the UN, and Sesame Workshop with cash transfer programs would be a much better approach for helping refugees overcome the challenges of displacement. Nonetheless, these beliefs didn't extend beyond the realm of jest and when pressed, nobody from this study ever actually articulated a strong vision of abolition.

Ironically, it seems that for now, the decolonizing movement in ECEiE had the opposite effect, solidifying educators' dedication to universal education, rather than disrupting it. Discussions I had with humanitarian educators make clear that despite growing professional pressures to incorporate more critical reflection and cultural relativism into their work, even the most ardently self-described decolonizing early childhood educators of refugees are absolutists in their support of humanitarian aid and a concomitant moral imperative to intervene in the lives of those identified as marginalized. They maintain this dedication even as they feel the paradoxical pressures of their work, spending a lot of time and energy thinking about how to make sense of their implicated positionality and at times using abolitionist rhetoric to describe their angst.

The three discursive frames that educators used to justify their involvement in humanitarian education manifest in the following ways:

1. First, they universalize the World Bank's ECEiE outcomes, converting them to universal human rights and placing their social value beyond any cultural relativist critiques.

2. Second, they focus on form over function, arguing that the process of critically examining humanitarian educational aid as a tool for colonial control is a form of decolonizing praxis and will eventually lead to a less Eurocentric ECEiE system.

3. Third, they assert that in a world of globalized capitalism, all professions have an element of subjugation and extraction, and therefore they would rather be part of the 'problematic' humanitarian system than another problematic field.

Universalizing ECE Outcomes

> *"For me, this is kind of universal. Like how do I know that this child is safe? Like if they're physically safe, mentally safe; [...] I think a lot of people think this is something from the Global North. But I think the core values of 'what does it mean for a child to be safe and to have quality early childhood' is very similar in most countries. [...] So for me, like, I don't feel it is colonial in this sense. I think the colonial part comes [from how] we enforce it. For me, again, like the coloniality is not in the outcome."*
>
> - *Mouna: Moving Minds Alliance: London*

In the excerpt above we hear from Mouna, a Syrian refugee and lead coordinator at the Moving Minds Alliance (MMA). She is an influential proponent of decolonizing the field, but here, perhaps surprisingly, she expresses unequivocal support for universalizing the goals of ECEiE. Arguably, Mouna has been the most influential and outspoken decolonizing educator in the contemporary field of ECEiE. As the lead coordinator at MMA, it was Mouna who organized the MMA annual meeting that framed coloniality as a "core story' of the ECEiE field and it was Mouna who facilitated the Annual Meeting discussion that upset

Bushra and other less 'colonially-inclined' educators. It was Mouna who in previous chapters framed the humanitarian aid system as "a house on fire", suggesting that trying to fix ECEiE was like trying to fix a window in a burning building, a metaphor with abolitionist inflections as abolition activists frequently call for 'burning the whole thing down'. She also expressed some serious doubts about the effectiveness of humanitarian aid as a whole, including ECEiE,

> *"[Humanitarian aid] is clearly not working. The more we put money, the more displacement there is. Like it's not working. When you are only dealing with the symptoms of the problem, you are basically just perpetuating it. You are not really [fixing it]. You're just putting a Band-Aid and then someone takes it off."*
>
> - *Mouna: Moving Minds Alliance: London*

Given this rhetoric, as I began my interview with Mouna, whom I had only met in passing prior to my fieldwork, I was ready for her to express some of the anticolonial critiques around how global ECEiE programs perpetuate epistemic hierarchies that had been a big part of my graduate coursework, like the Eurocentricity of parental attachment science, human rights as a guise for Orientalist intervention, and the elevation of indigenous knowledges as a tool to fight European epistemic hegemony. But I was surprised when Mouna's vision of decoloniality centered around the aspirations of the Grand Bargain and the democratization of decision-making in humanitarian aid, rather than disrupting the epistemic underpinnings of the ECEiE field as a whole,

> *"Yeah, [decolonization] for me is separating the power. There is a huge power imbalance in the humanitarian system, in what we do and how we do ECE. So, the more funding from donors that goes to UN agencies and to the governments… <pause> It shows clearly in the [MMA] systems map, the more we fund, the more we trust UN agencies and those big actors and government, the less dignified children and families will be. They have no dignity, they have no autonomy, they have no voice. Right?*

> *And it shows you the other pattern. The more we support and the more we trust, and the more we advocate with donors and funders to trust the local ECE actors, the more dignified approaches and the more autonomy for the children and their family. The more sustainable the impact because you're building core infrastructure and resources in that country, not giving money to like some externals to come for 10 years, help, and go back. So, this, for me, is how we decolonize."*
>
> - *Mouna: Moving Minds Alliance: London*

As a global coordinator for ECEiE policymaking, Mouna's vision of decolonization sits far away from a radical epistemic recasting of quality programming or humanitarian expertise. Instead, she aligns with a relatively conventional demand for decentralizing reform, which she believes begins with increased trust in the local, community-based NGOs that she believes are best situated to achieve educational change in settings of disaster and displacement. Surprised at this answer, I dug a bit deeper into her beliefs, asking her if she agreed with decolonizing educators who see colonial epistemic underpinnings in ECEiE programming:

> ***Charles**: "There are some people in ECEiE who are moving towards a cultural relativism, suggesting that there is a cultural element in deciding that the World Bank outcomes [of pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, social emotional learning, and anti-bias education] are important, that even the outcomes are colonial. How as a field should we think about that?"*
>
> ***Mouna**: "Yeah, No. I think for me, speaking of my own experience [as a refugee], to be honest, and my niece and my nephew's experience, we have those four aspects in our own community. This is kind of universal. I think a lot of people think this is like something from the Global North, but we have this [sic]. I think the core values of what does it mean for a child to be safe and to have a quality childhood is this [set of outcomes]. And I think it's very similar in most countries. I think, by evidence, we have this very universal understanding of what it means for a child in their early years to be safe.*
>
> *So for me, I don't feel like it is colonial in this sense. I think the colonial part comes when we enforce it. So like 'if you don't achieve these four [outcomes]', 'then you are not working'; 'you are not going to get funded'; 'we're gonna close your charity'. And this is what happens with a lot of ECE programs after one year of funding. So, for me, again, the coloniality is not in the outcome, it is separating the power."*

Mouna is undoubtedly dedicated to decolonizing the field of ECEiE, but unlike her decolonizing peers at RHN, she doesn't seem to express any angst about how her work might be colonially-implicated. Nowhere in our discussions does she express the same doubts or sense of futility that RHN program implementers feel. Instead, she feels confident in her convictions, comfortably universalizing the World Bank's definition of quality early childhood education and couching it in the language of safety. In this way Mouna converts pressures to decolonize ECEiE into achieving more genuine liberal social arrangements, like more democratic representation in systems of decision-making and more robust individual rights-- the very arrangements which some anticolonial scholars believe motivate the 'security-development' nexus and its prescription for intervention into non-European lives (Güven 2015; Mac Ginty 2011). Despite such critiques, Mouna describes the World Bank outcomes as foundational for her vision of educational justice and while there may be relativistic debates around how best to achieve those ends, the outcomes themselves, she asserts, should not be up for cultural relativist debate.

Form over function? Framing self-reflection as decolonization praxis

> *"Power is really uncomfortable. <pause> Whether you have it or you don't have it. So, I think I'm always going to be grappling with it. I think I'm always going to be looking for some kind of perfect balance, because there isn't a perfect balance, and it's trying to work out just to get that balance right between where I am part of the problem or where I can be part of the solution. [...]*
>
> *I think those tensions are all good tensions because they're real. And I am flagging them. They are tensions completely in myself as much as they are with anybody else. It's not really with much judgement, it's [just] that question of 'why are we doing what we're doing?' kind of thing. I think posing those questions and having those reflections are important. [...] The uncomfortableness is crucial. If we were all kind of completely chuffed about what we were doing, then that would be more of a concern."*
>
> - *James; RHN; London*

It might be obvious at this point in the paper that James, the caring and intelligent Englishman in his late 30's who has worked on and off as a humanitarian for years, is one of the most power-conscientious educators at RHN and often speaks up in meetings to pressure other RHN staff towards more decolonized programming. He is also one of the most perspicacious about what he sees as his 'problematic' role in the industry and often uses language of humility to call for decolonizing reforms within RHN and across the wider system. In the excerpt that begins this section, James tells me about his views on the paradox of power in humanitarian aid. In a typical decolonizing dialectic that I found often in the field of ECEiE, James reflexively oscillates between ideological perspectives, ultimately finding ethical and emotional comfort in the dialectic itself.

So much comfort in fact, that James and other RHN staff made critical self-reflection a centerpiece of their training and organizational beliefs. In this way, When Katherine, the Program Lead at RHN suggested that RHN is "going on that decolonizing journey" (see Chapter 4), she didn't mean that she was going to abolish the humanitarian aid industrial complex or systematically destabilize European epistemic hierarchies, though she and other RHN staff may express some of these ideas when signaling their anticolonial orientation. What she meant was that RHN was going to organizationally commit to systematic self-reflection as decolonizing praxis. Like most decolonizing advocates in ECEiE, RHN staff had no specificity as to where exactly Eurocentricity lies in the field, what knowledge and behaviors should be considered genuinely local, which an expression of false consciousness, and what a decolonized ECEiE system might look like. So instead, they dedicate themselves and their programming to deep thinking. Katherine explained to me what a decolonizing dialectic looks like in the training-of-trainers model that RHN delivers to other NGOs and which makes up the majority of their programming,

> *"The work that we do at the front end of our training is all about like, um, reflective practice. And that is all about like really reflecting on like, who am I? Where am I from? What's influenced me? Like what influences the way that I think and feel? What are my perceptions? What are my judgments? What are my biases? Um, and we try to do that in a non-shame based way, um, but with a recognition that like, if you don't do that work, like you're, you, you are not creating. And even then, it's a lifelong journey that like, we get a kind of microcosm and it, and it really, genuinely is lifelong. Um, but it allows you to kind of see and interrogate so much. [...]*
>
> *I also feel like we've, we've really reflected on our choices, like our partner selection. We, we are trying to think kind of decolonial and like kind of at each stage now as of, of the process and evolve, we're evolving our kind of reflection as an organization."*
>
> - *Katherine; RHN; London*

In this way, the decolonizing turn in ECEiE, as it currently manifests, might not have as much liberatory bite as some anticolonial scholars and activists would hope. The process of decolonial self-reflection, while laudable, does not necessarily produce a radical transformation of epistemic hierarchies or more relationally just refugee schooling; the testimonies of the ECEiE educators evidence as much. Save Gabor (see Chapter 4), who felt that standardized schooling was an acultural undertaking, all the educators in this study, granted with varying degrees of intensity, reflected on how their programming could be perpetuating cultural imperialism. But ultimately, despite the reflections, some educators settle on learning outcomes that position humanitarian educators in a place of benevolent knowing without a concomitant proof of the liberatory power of their programs. James, in a candid moment during our second interview, admits that self-reflection is not coterminous with relational justice, but oscillates back to a comforting resolution that the decolonizing power is in the reflection process,

> *I find that I'm forever thinking, I mean, that's the problem, isn't it? I think in this kind of sector, the currency usually when you get into it is idealism, which is a little tricky because people have different ideals and the reality of the situations than the environments and it's always much messier than your ideals will allow.*
>
> *I think to RHN's huge credit, this emphasis on self-reflection that we speak, we encourage others to work to, I think is great.* *I think we do actually quite a lot of self-reflection, but to what extent that reflection leads to shifts in internal power balances. I guess it's another question.* *But no, I kind of grapple with it. I grapple with it all the time and I don't know the answers to it. And I think also maybe part of the grappling is just knowing that nothing is going to be completely [obvious].*
>
> \- *James; RHN; London*

The Decolonial Paradox in ECEiE- Looking at the unintended consequences of framing critical thinking as decolonial praxis

RHN's trajectory is an example of how decolonization as a global cultural order can ironically result in intensified centralization in humanitarian aid, rather than more horizontal power dynamics-- at least in the short term. Like previous waves of reform in the field (i.e. trauma sensitive, gender sensitive, native language instruction, etc.), as decolonization has come to be considered an element of best practice in education in emergencies, it has also become a new arena for professionalizing the field. Organizations who are touted as capably decolonizing their programming are elevated as examples of how to achieve quality programming while organizations that aren't decolonizing their programming feel pressure to make their programming more anticolonial (Oddy 2023b). It was under this normative pressure that RHN decided to pivot their programming to a capacity building model.

For numerous reasons, some of which were beyond their control (i.e. funding, pressure to be sustainable, restrictive laws in Greece, etc.), in 2022 RHN transitioned away from the direct delivery of programs for refugees and into a 'capacity strengthening' model, where they would give national NGOs money and train these partner organizations in the RHN approach (values-based, identity-informed, and trauma-informed), a key component of which was critical self-reflection in pursuit of decolonized ECEiE programming. For RHN, this transition to "thought leadership and advocacy", was framed as a means to inject the logic of critical reflection as decolonizing praxis into the ECEiE system and share concrete tools for self-reflection with other NGOs in the field.

The ironic result of this transition given their commitment to diminishing the Eurocentricity of the humanitarian industrial complex, is that RHN no longer provides any direct ECEiE programming for refugee communities and nor do they destabilize the "Global North knower" and "Global South knowledge recipient" dynamic. Instead, their vision of educational justice is transformed into the universal distribution of decolonizing self-reflection, a process in which they are elevated as experts tasked with spreading the gospel of decolonizing critical reflection to the relatively ignorant national and local NGOs they aim to empower. I pointed out this irony to James and while he initially fell back on an anticolonial critique of his expertise, he ultimately found ethical comfort in tentatively framing himself as an expert in self-reflection-- a surprising admission given his reluctant to admit expertise in anything else,

> *No. I mean that, I don't know. I don't know. That feels, again, quite presumptuous of others' ability to critically think. I mean, I wouldn't presume that my ability to critically think is any more astute or, or further along than the group of West African guys that were speaking of spirits. Um, yeah. <pause> So I would be slightly…, um, I think there's something about like honing a reflective muscle. But like, it's a muscle we all have, so it's not like… <pause> I know that that's, that's done a lot for, that's, that's helped me a lot in my, in my work. But again, I, yeah, I don't know. I think it's more like, maybe we're like personal trainers for people's reflective muscles.*
>
> \- *James; RHN; London*

To be sure, RHN did not come to the decision to pivot away from direct delivery easily. During my fieldwork there were innumerable thoughtful discussions between RHN staff about the pros and cons of such a transition. Ultimately RHN transitioned to a capacity building model in response to a one-two combination of government legislation in Greece that made it harder for NGOs to work in the refugee camps and donor pressures to scale programming and make RHN's services more financially sustainable. Leila, the founder and former CEO of RHN, and a resettled Afghan refugee, explained to me an interview how this marketization pressure manifested for RHN, even as donors were excited to fund a refugee-led organization with identify-informed (decolonizing) programming,

> *I think [RHN] was an easy win for [donors]. It had me [as CEO] who's a former refugee; now our CEO is a former refugee. So, it's an easy win in some ways to kind of say, we give money to this organization that does this. And then the other part of it is we create these spaces that acknowledge people's suffering in the way that they [as refugees] want it to be acknowledged. We want to do things a bit differently and we want to work with local partners and we want to contextualize stuff. I think we piqued a lot of donors' interest. It was new; not many people were talking about refugees in that way. [...]*
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> *Part of [the pivot] was that Greece just stopped having as many refugees as it did when we first started. So, the demand went down; the political situation changed. So, you had all these camps where you couldn't get access to. [...] [And] there's the other thing that is a tension for organizations like RHN, which is you have to keep growing. And we've really tried to be a bit like, no. [But] we were serving tiny numbers of people. And so there was this tension between, okay, you're spending this money, we had to report this to our funders and running a girls club that had 13 girls or however many; how is this value for money? And I could probably argue for both sides, but the business side of it doesn't allow for that. [...]*
>
> *So yeah,[lots of] pressure. That's the worst one. How to scale, it's basically the growth model. Every single fellowship I've had was like, 'we want to scale you'. They're all about how you can change the world. And I'm like, okay, sure. I'll give it a go. Hold my beer. <laughs> [...] No but when you have that, [the idea that] every single one should focus on scale. That's the thing that's wrong [with ECEiE]. [..]*
>
> *[Ultimately] It just made more sense to work with local partner [NGOs] with the amount of money that we had and at least to introduce some of the principles that Amna works with to organizations that want to do it and want to take some time to learn about it.*
>
> \- *Leila; RHN; London*

In this way, RHN's story is not atypical. The market pressures baked into the humanitarian system force small-to-medium sized NGOs like RHN to demonstrate to their funders how they plan to reach increasingly more expansive target populations and how they will maintain service delivery after donor support runs out (Carbonnier, 2016). As the Greek government made it harder for RHN to reach refugee populations, rather than shutting down shop, humanitarian orthodoxy dictated that RHN transition to a capacity building model which allowed them to demonstrate scalability by reaching large numbers of NGO workers and make the investment case to donors that they are catalyzing widespread decolonizing reform in the system.

In describing her journey as a founder of a decolonizing NGO, Leila's experience with RHN illuminates how market structures in the ECEiE sector organize the social relations of the field and channel decolonizing norms into narrow and predictable ECEiE arenas (like capacity building and scaling), taking much of the radical, transformational bite out of the decolonizing movement. This case of the ironic intensification of the humanitarian industrial complex in the name of decolonizing ECEiE is no way an indictment of RHN, but instead an illuminating case of how the market logics of the humanitarian aid system make reform difficult, even for the most dedicated and thoughtful of anticolonial humanitarians like those at RHN.

We are all colonially implicated subjects, right?

The third technique that ECEiE educators use to overcome their colonially implicated positionality is to frame humanitarian education as a more benevolent corner of a broader globalized capitalist system that is predicated on Global North extraction and the concentration of capital into the hands a very few. In this way, decolonizing ECEiE educators who recognize that their work might be perpetuating neocolonial violence find solace in universalizing their colonially implicated subjecthood to everyone who is participating in the global capitalist system. This technique was most obviously employed by Vinita, an RHN mental health facilitator who was born and raised in India,

> *"If you were to ask me, ideally, what would an ideal world [look like]. I would love for it to be a decolonized system, but I know better now that it doesn't work like that. There are complexities that you have to navigate. All of us are in this profession because we are at least slightly arrogant. That we know what's best for other people. And that's why we are here. I feel some part of us is a little bit ignorant. And the other [part] is like this savior complex triggered all the time. […] I'm gonna be part of the problem. I know that.*
>
> *- Vinita; RHN; Mumbai*

Intrigued, I followed up,

> ***Charles**: Does it ever push you to question doing the work? Do you ever ask, 'is this the right place to be?'*
>
> ***Vinita**: Yes. But, also, I feel like there are different places [reads professions] that are also problematic, so I would like to be part of this problem. Not the other problems. <laughs>*

In the first paragraph of this excerpt, Vinita struggles with what she sees as the intractable challenges of decolonizing the field of ECEiE and she admits that by the very nature of her work she is perpetuating colonial relations between Global North saviors and Global South refugee 'beneficiaries'. Despite their relative radicality, these critiques of the fundamental logic of her work do not dissuade Vinita from continuing the work of humanitarian education. And though Vinita recognizes herself as colonially implicated and "part of the problem", she ultimately finds comfort by drawing on world systems critiques that frame a global capitalist system designed for exploitation and the colonial extraction of value and comparing humanitarian aid to other relatively more problematic professions.

A key element of this framing comes from the fact that ECEiE educators got into humanitarian aid because they believe that their work helps marginalized communities flourish. As decolonizing critiques introduced the possibility that educational aid was part of a wider system of Global North imperialism, ECEiE educators were forced to admit the possibility that their work was actively harming refugee communities, but they never fully abandoned the idea that it could also be helpful. Indeed, implicit with the belief that educational aid can possibly lead to harm, is a concomitant belief that educational aid can possibly lead to flourishing. For Vinita, it is this possibility of good that sets humanitarian aid aside from other colonially implicated professions that she believes more obviously perpetuate Global North supremacy. While not many educators I met explicitly drew on this technique, Vinita was not alone. James makes a similar argument when I ask him why he stays in a field that he thinks could be hurting marginalized communities.

> *"I've got myself into this complete morass of cul-de-sacs, where I'm wildly puritanical about how I think something should be, but also completely jaded and resigned because I've seen the kind of reality; we all have, as we all live this particular kind of NGO world. But I think about it a lot. I mean, my skills and my experiences are rightly or wrongly, fortunately, or unfortunately, wrapped up in this sector. So just going off and finding that dream banking job, I'm not sure. <laughs>."*
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> - *James; RHN; London*

When compared to professions like finance, real estate, or advertising, work as a humanitarian educator at least offers the possibility of social good and it is this possibility that Vinita and James cling to for ethical comfort as they wrestle with the paradoxical demands of universalized and standardized education alongside unrestricted refugee cultural expression.

Complicating the polemical: Towards a 'colonially sensitive' rights-based approach in ECEiE

When considered as a whole, it is tempting to be disappointed by the lack of radical transformation decolonizing norms have produced in the ECEiE system. While decolonizing pressures have pushed ECEiE educators to question the colonially implicated epistemics of their work, this study suggests that the educator angst and anxiety this anticolonial questioning engenders, does not easily convert into a destabilization of epistemic hierarchies. Instead, decolonizing educators rely on many of the same universalizing heuristics, whether in the form of globalizing ECE outcomes or teaching the world critical thinking, that are at the focus of decolonizing critiques. What is more, this study shows that these efforts can sometimes do little to democratize decision making in humanitarian aid. Instead, the market logics of the humanitarian system convert well-intentioned initiatives, like teaching decolonizing skills to humanitarian educators, into new axes of competitive advantage and elite resource capture, epistemically and materially privileging ECEiE educators who were taught critical theory at Global North universities and who can parlay that knowledge into high paying training-of-trainer jobs. So, what lessons should we as consumers of this research take away from this research? What are the implications of this for ECEiE practice? In response to these questions, in the section that follows I go beyond the empirical insights of this paper to make my own normative case for what I call a *colonially sensitive rights-based approach*, which aims to correct the growing tendency to prioritize concerns of epistemic hierarchy in decolonializing efforts over the political ones and overlook the immediate material needs of refugee populations. To be clear, my argument here is not against 'decolonization' as a whole. It is an action-oriented argument that stresses the need for ideological openness and to encourage a future-oriented politics for education justice, rather than embarking on anachronistic and unguaranteed journeys in search of 'alternative' ways of living and being.

Chapter 6 of this study demonstrated that decolonization normative pressures in the contemporary ECEiE field primarily manifest to respond to two questions, 1) *Who* is allowed to participate in the planning and implementation of educational aid; and 2) *What* sources and types of knowledge should be taken seriously in ECEiE programming. I interpret these questions as addressing two separate questions. The question of '*who',* which is the primary concern of the Grand Bargain*,* is essentially a question of distributional justice, of inequality and exploitation. In a multibillion-dollar humanitarian aid industry, *who* makes the decisions about which resources are distributed where, whether those be the actual educational services themselves or the high-paying salaries and esteem many humanitarian workers earn through their work? The second question, the question of '*what*' is more readily converted into a question of tolerance, a freedom of cultural expression.

The case of RHN makes clear that organizations who want to meet the decolonizing demands of the field can be successful in promoting epistemic tolerance while also doing little to address the unequal distribution of decision-making power and material resources. In fact, an over articulation of decolonization norms around cultural tolerance can lead to a cultural relativist position that makes fulfilling the aims of the Grand Bargain difficult. This study shows that this cooptation of decolonial aims into individual resource capture is principally the result of the globalized neoliberal market logics baked into humanitarian aid that pressure organizations like RHN to find ways to globally scale their programming and maximize their donors' return on investment. RHN's case is not unique, and many anticolonial scholars would look at the case of RHN and argue that the best way to combat the exploitation and injustice caused by global capitalism is to full stop reject universalizing Eurocentric logics of individual rights and democracy, and return to an ancient indigenous sensibility of kinship, cultural belonging, and interlocking responsibility (*see* Güven, 2015; Ruth 2020; Verbos & Humphries, 2013).

Global capitalism and its concomitant exploitations have proven quite capable of accommodating themselves to a plurality of local traditions and cultures, and critical studies of capitalism in countries like India, Singapore, and China show that paradoxically, it is exactly this 'sticking to traditional values' that some actors use to justify their ruthless market approach, perpetuating exploitation under the guise of fulfilling their family or national duty (Bloom 2016; Žižek 2008). A critical political starting point for achieving future educational justice, therefore, is to admit that for all practical purposes, the field of ECEiE is universally implicated by capitalist relations and will remain so in the foreseeable future. In contrast to unnuanced disqualifications of potentially emancipatory universalisms as Eurocentric, I find myself in broad agreement with the ideological project of 'decolonizing' scholars found in this study, as I, like them, contend that a project of universal political and economic rights is powerful tool for combatting the most destructive effects of capitalist globalization— a universalizing remedy for a universal disease. This is not to say that decolonizing scholarship does not offer valuable insights into what forms such political and economic rights might take, it is simply to say that instead of succumbing to esoteric forms of relativism or hardline absolutism, I believe that the field of ECEiE should pursue an enlightened eclecticism that takes seriously any knowledge that maximizes the chances of success in the struggle against the exploitations of global capitalism, regardless of whether it is universalist, scientific, local, artisanal, non-scientific, etc.

In this way a colonially sensitive rights-based approach follows Basma Hajir's (2021) calls for educators to adopt Santos' (2008) framing of 'ecologies of knowledge', that believes educators should “evaluate knowledge based on its consequences rather than its sources” and do so in response to the “social struggles in which the relevant epistemic community is involved” (p.7). This framing links the political representation and cultural tolerance parts of decolonial reform efforts in ways that ECEiE educators might find relevant. Indeed, the educators in this study who had refugee or Roma backgrounds were some of the most politically minded, avoiding what they perceived as impractical debates over the boundaries of epistemic hegemony and recentering immediate instances of refugee and Roma oppression and exploitation. Like Nora, the Roma educator at Hungary Friends who advocates for listening to Roma youth who want to pursue education equality and economic rights, even if it means ‘tweaking’ Roma traditions, or Mouna, a Syrian refugee who rejects overly relativistic demands to abolish global education campaigns, recognizing that quality early childhood education as an individual right can serve as a bullwork against global capitalist exploitation of refugees.

In short, I argue that ECEiE educators should be skeptical of normative calls that disqualify all universalisms in ECEiE policymaking and programming as absolute sources of educational injustice and epistemic violence. If taken seriously as a normative order, such ideological purity could prevent socially situated actors from accessing pragmatic anti-exploitative practices and liberatory knowledges, which in the context of globalized capitalism, would be a significant barrier to educational justice.

Conceptualizing a Colonially Sensitive Rights-Based Approach in ECEiE

It bears repeating that this chapter’s call for a colonially sensitive rights-based approach builds from the assumption that neoliberal global capitalism and its concomitants (i.e. labor exploitation, global elite capital capture, environmental degradation, etc.) have emerged as civilizational paradigms, encompassing all domains of contemporary social life. The oppression, extraction, and discrimination it produces reaches all corners of humanity and has material, social, political consequences as well as cultural and epistemological ones. The primary challenge of 21st Century humanitarian aid, reparative education, and emancipatory scholarship, therefore, is to confront this paradigm in *all* its dimensions. Indeed, a main argument of this paper is that ECEiE scholars and practitioners should be wary of excessively prioritizing epistemological and cultural tolerance concerns at the expense of the immediate political and material needs of refugee communities, though the opposite is also surely wrong as well.

Anticolonial critics have long argued that Global North social sciences have diminished understandings of the world to fit into the truth claims of Western epistemology and academic studies, a phenomenon that postcolonial scholars argue is partially responsible for the social marginalization and subordination of Global South communities (Faulkner 2019; Escobar 1995; McClintock 1998). The historical creation of empire and concomitant colonial subjects implied the export of 'civilized' ways of living to the colonies and a replacing of local beliefs with more suitable framework of knowing and acting, a process that many assert persists today in the name of global development and humanitarian aid (Buba 2018;Meneses 2003). This assertion has clear merit and attending to the ways that 'indigenous knowledge', or 'local knowledge' can undergird or complement future projects of emancipation, catalyze knowledge hybridity and prevent a narrow monoculture of liberatory knowledge is a valuable dimension of social justice praxis. Indeed, recognizing alternative knowledges as valid means to material, social and political justice opens a window towards a broader, more democratic, and more robust critical evaluation of contemporary forms of oppression and repair. To be clear, this is not a relativistic stance. Relativism, which is defined as an absence of criteria for hierarchies of validity among different forms of knowledge, is an invalid position and does nothing to advance projects of social emancipation. The merit or validity of different conceptions of emancipation must plainly be evaluated, but what a colonially sensitive rights-based approach aims to emphasize, is that such evaluations must not be made based merely on the arbitrary disqualification of any knowledge, whether local, universal, from the Global North, or from the Global South.

Having established that the epistemic diversity of the world should be valued and engaged with curiosity, the question remains how to convert this diversity of knowing into an emancipatory, colonially informed rights-based approach to ECEiE. The tensions we see in this research between distributional and relational forms of educational justice are paradigmatic of the tensions between equality and difference—the tension between redistribution and the demand for tolerance and recognition. To help illuminate the importance of attending to this tension when conceptualizing a project for social justice I borrow from de Sousa Santos (2018) a clear presupposition, namely that "Equality and difference are not, in themselves, sufficient conditions for a politics of emancipation" (p. XXXV). For example, debates on the hegemonic underpinnings of human rights have long demonstrated that the universalistic presuppositions implicit to human rights frameworks can perpetuate relational injustice by diminishing and de-characterizing differentiated identities, social arrangements, and historical experiences. At the same time, the declaration of difference, in itself, can rationalize discrimination, marginalization, and subordination under the guise of juxtaposed collective rights and cultural particularity. To overcome this tension and justify my calls for a colonially sensitive rights-based approach to ECEiE, I borrow again from de Sousa Santos his proposal for a future meta right: “the right to be equal when difference breeds inferiority and the right to be different when claims of equality threaten the right to identity based on shared experiences and histories” (de Sousa Santos 2008 p. xlvii). De Sousa Santos’ ‘meta right’ opens the door for an enlightened eclecticism in ECEiE that recognizes that oppression will always be met with resistance, regardless of context, and that humanitarians and educators are therefore most effective when they take seriously the pragmatic, anti-oppressive relationship between knowledge and social change in the social, political, and economic context of their programming.

As the field of ECEiE faces more robust pressures to be anticolonial in their programming, the value of a colonially sensitive rights-based approach comes from its emphasis on practical forms of emancipation. A colonially sensitive rights-based approach sees the knowledge and activities borne out of grassroots activism as a primary source of emancipatory social practice but also leaves ideological space for hybrid knowledges by not disqualifying forms of liberatory knowledge or emancipatory projects merely because they are universal or merely because they originated from a particular cultural context (European or otherwise). Indeed, if global capitalism is a universal source of oppression and social marginalization, universal projects of emancipation might be the most effective tool at hand for local communities, while policy and programming that draws on totalizing decolonizing critiques and disqualify knowledges or practices simply because of their cultural source or universal aspirations can leave communities exposed to the worst exploits of capitalist relations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter delves into the complex terrain of decolonization efforts within the field of Early Childhood Education in Emergencies (ECEiE), focusing on how educators navigate their colonially implicated subjectivity and the unintended consequences of decolonizing norms. The analysis highlights three key discursive frames employed by educators to rationalize their involvement in humanitarian education, namely universalizing ECE outcomes, framing self-reflection as decolonization praxis, and couching humanitarian education within the broader context of global capitalism.

Through examining the narratives of educators like Mouna, James, and Vinita, it becomes evident that while there is a strong commitment to decolonizing ideals, the practical implementation often falls short of radical transformation. The chapter reveals how market pressures and organizational dynamics within the humanitarian aid system can lead to the co-optation of decolonizing aims into processes that reinforce existing power structures rather than challenging them.

However, amidst these challenges, educators' inclusion efforts collectively include some key elements of a colonially sensitive rights-based approach in ECEiE. This approach acknowledges the pervasiveness of global capitalism and the need to confront its injustices while also recognizing the importance of attending to cultural and epistemological diversity. It seeks to balance the tensions between equality and difference, acknowledging that both are essential for a politics of emancipation.

Drawing on insights from scholars like de Sousa Santos, this chapter proposed a future-oriented approach that rejects calls to return to ancient indigenous sensibilities and social arrangements, and instead embraces hybridity, eclecticism, and pragmatism in pursuit of social justice. It emphasized the need for educators to simultaneously engage critically with power dynamics and to prioritize the immediate political and material needs of marginalized communities. In essence, the chapter calls for a nuanced understanding of decolonization in ECEiE—one that moves beyond ideological purity towards pragmatic action informed by a commitment to justice and equity. By adopting a colonially sensitive rights-based approach, educators can work towards dismantling oppressive structures while simultaneously fostering inclusive and empowering learning environments for all children, particularly those affected by emergencies and displacement.

In the following chapter, I will conclude this paper by juxtaposing a colonially sensitive rights-based approach alongside the other approaches highlighted in this study, drawing on the strengths of this sample of educators to make it easier for ECEiE scholars and practitioners to think through the tradeoffs of their work and brainstorm techniques to make a colonially sensitive rights-based approach more readily applicable.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Dispositions of justice are longstanding cultural expectations for humanitarians and educators alike, but as this research has demonstrated, conceptions of educational justice are varied and manifest in diverse policymaking and programming agendas. In assessing the educational justice norms in the field of early childhood education in emergencies and across three NGOs, this study identifies a growing relational justice agenda, culminating in an emerging 'decolonizing' normative turn that aims to identify and eliminate instances of Eurocentrism in ECEiE programming and policymaking, specifically, the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of ECEiE experts housed in Global North multilateral institutions and the formation of epistemic hierarchies that position Global North educators as experts with the authority to unilaterally intervene in refugees' lives.

In recognition of these changes, this paper explores the complexities surrounding educators' efforts to align with novel relational justice norms and draws on evidence from diverse refugee inclusion practices and resettlement contexts to highlight the social justice tradeoffs of ECEiE programming, including occasions where the dual decolonizing goals of enhancing refugee political power and eliminating epistemic hierarchies are in tension. Encouraging a skepticism of decolonizing critiques that prioritize epistemic tolerance over refugee decision-making power, I make my own normative argument and advocate for a colonially sensitive rights-based approach that opens ideological space for an enlightened eclecticism in ECEiE by cautioning against relativism, emphasizing the need to evaluate different forms of knowledge based on their potential contributions to context-specific social emancipation, and rejecting external demands to disqualify potentially liberatory knowledges and practices merely because of their cultural origin or universalizing aspirations.

It is beyond the purview of this study to give a step-by-step guide on how to implement a colonially sensitive rights-based approach to ECEiE in any giving setting, but to illuminate the value of the approach, it seems prudent to spend time looking at the cases presented in the earlier chapters of this study to draw on the strengths and insights of the educators presented in this study and elucidate how many of the ideas and practices that undergird a colonially sensitive rights-based approach are already being employed in the field. Indeed, implementation of an appropriately colonially sensitive rights-based approach might simply be a matter of looking deeply at the socially situated practices of community-based educators and exploring how they may or may not reflect a thoughtful technique to balance the tradeoffs of orienting educational justice towards equality or towards recognizing difference.

As such, I will use the next sections of this concluding chapter to expand my normative argument, showcasing instances from the field where I see educators as effectively embracing a colonially sensitive rights-based approach by appropriately prioritizing issues of equality, as well as corollary instances where I believe educators have appropriately prioritized concerns of epistemic tolerance. I hope this section is received both negatively, that is, as a potential moment of interruption, but also positively, as a possible catalyst for dialogue and conversation within and between ECEiE educator and policymaking communities.

Reasonably prioritizing equality over difference in ECEiE

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the most notable instances of prioritizing equality and distributive justice in this paper comes from the structural inclusionist educators at Hungary Friends, the organization based in Budapest that is establishing 13 public early childhood education centers with the hope of providing improved access to early learning services for Roma refugees who have resettled from Ukraine into Hungary. Specifically, in Chapter 4 I explore Nora's conceptions of educational justice. Nora, a young Roma woman who grew up in a "Gypsy" village outside of Budapest believes that education is a universal human right and drawing on her own experience in both segregated and predominantly White educational systems, she presents standardized education as a source of transformational emancipation for her, both intellectually and materially. Some decolonizing scholars might externally criticize Nora's belief in education as human right and her campaign for distributional educational justice as an instance of false consciousness and European cultural particularism hiding behind universalist rhetoric (*see* Saghaye-Biria, 2018; Ignatieff, 2009; Gurd 2006). But if taken seriously as a normative expectation, decolonizing calls to disqualify any universalisms in humanitarian education programming would have prevented Nora from using human rights rhetoric or any form of standardized educational services as a tool for liberatory praxis in her community, a phenomenon that in Nora's insider expert opinion would do more harm than good for Roma refugees. In contrast to non-Roma decolorizers who are narrowly concerned with instances of epistemic violence, I suggest that Nora is especially well positioned to know what a socially situated politics of emancipation looks like for Roma Hungarians and therefore, when advocating for the emancipatory power of standardized schooling as a fundamental human right, is acting in a way that embraces the enlightened eclecticism of a colonially sensitive rights-based approach.

Importantly, Nora is not blind to the potential epistemic violence of standardized schooling. Ideologically located far from an "epistemology of ignorance" (Shah 2023), Nora recognizes that at times Roma community members are against sending their children to school, preferring they learn a traditional Roma trade or stay at home. But her insider positionality allows Nora to be discerning in her judgement and rather than abandoning education as a human right in favor of knee-jerk cultural tolerance, she thinks critically about what justice tradeoffs would be implicit to prioritizing this particular form of cultural expression over a right to standardized education. Taking an intersectional lens and arguing that schooling is a ubiquitous social force in contemporary Hungary, Nora explained to me that those in the Roma community that reject sending kids to school are primarily from an older demographic that lived during a time when schooling was not as socially and materially significant as it is now. She explained, "Sure; 60 to 70 years ago, this [rejection] was a norm. But it isn't anymore. You know; we [Roma] have to change and we have to acknowledge […] education is so important in every aspect of life. For you to understand your rights as a citizen. Or for you to understand what healthcare is. To prevent labor exploitation." Nora's vision of educational justice is decidedly political, emphasizing the immediate needs of Roma youth who need a job and access to healthcare over the long-term potential for epistemic erasure, an erasure she doesn't really believe is an important part of being Roma. She recognizes that some older Roma community members might be resistant to the normative changes around schooling, but Nora does not see this as a serious threat to future generations being genuinely "Gypsy". She gives me the example of her own Roma identity to make the point that education can be culturally sustaining while also politically emancipatory,

> *"I believe educating [Roma] on these aspects [of their culture] is very important. They can still do [schooling] it on their own terms. […] It really doesn't mean you that you are taking away one's identity. Look at me. I'm highly educated. We pretty much keep up with all of the customs we were brought up in. We value family; a lot. The first and most important thing is family. So you can see that it doesn't strip away that kind of ideal that was put into us through our culture. But at least we are*

> *given the chance to equip [ourselves] with the necessary tools and knowledge. [...] We are at an age where we have so many Roma intellectuals, we have so many Roma scholars, researchers, educators. And that's great. We can actually start doing changes for us, and we can push some political agendas [sic]. We can participate in politics. Our road is much, much harder than for non-Roma, but it's not impossible."*
>
> \- *Nora; Hungary Friends; Budapest*

In this excerpt Nora reasserts the transformative power of education, recognizing the social and political power of scholars and researchers in pursuit of emancipation and liberation in Hungary. She also recognizes that Roma refugee communities face daily challenges to their political and material equality and rather than succumbing to critiques that frame her work as primarily a source of epistemic violence and abandoning her project of equal educational access in the name of relational justice, she makes the pragmatic, socially situated decision to prioritize the immediate political outcomes of Roma refugees over the potential epistemic harm such work might entail.

In short, Nora's insider perspective on Roma emancipation goes beyond totalizing decolonizing critiques that disqualify global education as an untenable source of relational injustice by taking seriously the ideological heterogeneity in the Roma community and sourcing Roma youth (i.e. herself, her family, and her community) as those best socially situated to understand what educational justice and emancipation looks like in the context of Huganarian Roma communities. In this way I see Nora's approach as a revealing example of how a colonially sensitive rights-based approach, with its attention to emancipation over ideological purity, might help educators like those at Refugee Healing Network who feel ethically overwhelmed by relational justice normative pressures to identify and evaluate the justice tradeoffs implicit to their policymaking and programming decisions.

Reasonably prioritizing epistemic tolerance in ECEiE

In recognition that normative expectations around relational justice are growing more robust in the field of early childhood education in emergencies, one of the aims of this study is to warn against the potential for such norms to be converted into an unhelpful cultural relativism that prioritizes educators' concerns around epistemic tolerance over the immediate political needs of refugee communities. But equally important is remembering that decolonization and relational justice dispositions have emerged in response to a robust and ongoing uncritical absolutism in humanitarian aid, international development, and education in emergencies programming. So, while this study seeks to add nuance to decolonizing critiques that see absolutism, universality, and Eurocentrism as coterminous, this nuance should not be understood as an indictment of decolonization or of the attention to relational justice decolonizing movements in ECEiE hope to engender. Quite the opposite, another equally valuable goal of this study is to show how absolutist conceptions around refugee flourishing can produce uncritical, hegemonic forms of authority that diminish refugees' right to self-determination. I believe a colonially sensitive rights-based approach corrects for such uncritical absolutism by encouraging ECEiE educators, especially those with outsider positionality, to interrogate any universalizing frameworks they bring to bear in their work and take seriously the socially situated liberatory knowledge being produced by marginalized communities.

In Chapter 5, I presented the case of Protos, a small NGO based in Athens that is implementing early childhood education services for refugees and displaced communities from the Middle East, Ukraine, and Central Africa. In the chapter I tell the story of Protos staff who see emotional regulation as a critical tool for refugee flourishing post-displacement. Believing that most refugees have experienced some form of toxic stress, educators at Protos were deeply invested in recognizing children's symptoms of PTSD, helping the children recognize their emotions, and teaching them how to stay calm by breathing deeply and engaging in mindful meditation when potentially feeling overwhelmed. Discussions with the Protos educators also revealed that educators agreed most refugee parents were not interested in teaching their children emotional regulation, with caregivers believing that their children's flourishing was more readily connected with learning the Greek language, English, math, and study skills. When confronted with parents' opposition to emotional regulation, educators at Protos framed parents' opinions as antiquated or instances of mental health stigma, believing that the equal distribution of well-regulated brains should be prioritized over any relational injustice that might be perpetuated by teaching children to regulate their emotions.

At first glance, one could reasonably assert that Nora and the Protos educators seem to be employing the same technique, framing the cultural particularity of the Roma or refugees as a case of irrational cultural expression and conservative backwardness. But I would argue that such an analysis is missing a couple important elements to consider. A first factor to consider is the positionality of the educators at Protos versus that of Nora. Unlike Nora, none of the educators at Protos are refugees in Greece or have lived a life of displacement, making their disqualification of the socially situated dismissals of social emotional learning by refugee parents suspect. Second, and alongside their clear outsider positionality, is the questionable universalizability of controlled emotional expression as a civilizational paradigm. Importantly, this is not a rebuff of universalizing emotional regulation simply because it is a universalism, but rather an empirical question of whether controlling emotional expression is actually an effective and universal source of emancipation in the same way that schooling has proven to be (Palik & Østby, 2023) and should therefore be prioritized over refugees' demands to seek alternative forms of emancipatory knowledge and practice. The vast majority of empirically robust statistical studies on teaching emotional regulation skills like breathing and mindfulness to refugee and other severely marginalized communities cast doubt on their transformational liberatory impact (Kim et al. 2023; Deitz et al. 2021; Matsuba et al. 2021; McCoy et al. 2021; Lange-Nielse et al. 2012; Quota et al. 2012). What is more, in parallel consideration with this empirically questionable effectiveness, if controlled emotional expression was so universally valuable, why would the majority of refugee caregivers who send their kids to Protos not ask for it to be taught in class?

Destabilizing the prominence of narrowly constructed top-down agendas in mental health programming for refugees is what motivated the Refugee Healing Network (RHN), to start their "identity-informed" programming, which begins with the dual assumptions that most mental health processes are culturally determined and that concomitantly, local communities are best positioned to determine what mental health services should look like and achieve. Applying an anticolonial lens to their programming and policymaking, educators at RHN draw on empirical studies such as those presented above and on the experience of the resettled refugees on their staff to make the case that prioritizing a narrow set of emotional expression skills in refugee education programs is an unwarrantable form of relational injustice, as it discourages refugees from drawing on the vast array of mental health practices already available to them without justifiably robust emancipatory returns. In this way I see RHN's identity-informed vision as representative of the enlightened eclecticism encouraged by a colonially sensitive rights-based approach and illustrative of a thoughtful and appropriate prioritization of epistemic tolerance and cultural particularity over equality and distributive justice and therefore

A key part of employing a colonially sensitive rights-based approach is a critical evaluation of the universal value of any distributional justice project and in this regard, the RHN staff are well practiced. In multiple conversations with RHN staff, I heard educators questioning the universal value of narrowly defined mental health and emotional regulation techniques like deep breathing and mindfulness. For example, Eleni, a previously mentioned RHN educator who has two masters degrees, one in human rights and one in psychology, explained to me how she doesn't see narrow emotional regulation techniques as universally emancipatory,

> *"[To me] being identity informed means letting people express themselves in the way that they know best. So, if that means we're sitting all together as a sign of grief, we cook all together, we light up candles, or dance around a fire, etcetera. These are all rituals that are happening in refugee communities. This is how they're going to release tension.*
>
> *We [educators] shouldn't be that fixed in putting them into their little boxes. These 'A,B,C' [mental health concepts] were developed by Western people and proved successful to Western people. This doesn't work in [communities from] the Middle East, in Africa, or in South American. We need to be aware of that. We need to give them voices and give them space to let us know what they need and find a way to make this happen."*
>
> - *Eleni; RHN; Athens*

Similarly, Katherine, the head of programs at RHN makes a related statement about the universality of certain mental health approaches,

> *"RHN's learning over the years of delivery, is that clinical mental health supports, not that they don't exist in non-Western Eurocentric countries, but it's a very particular understanding of mental health. And all over, there are so many different models of care, whether that's elders, or different people who exist within communities that you speak to, or a relationship to nature, or ceremony, that are*

> *actually much more common place and effective than being sent to see a certain mental health specialist."*
>
> - *Katherine; RHN; London*

In these excerpts from RHN educators, I see a compelling example of RHN staff emphasizing the 'enlightened' in the enlightened eclecticism of a colonially sensitive rights-based approach. Both Eleni and Katherine reject universalizing frames that call for the equal distribution of standardized mental health models, but they don't disqualify them merely because they are universal or because they originated in Europe. In fact, as previous chapters have shown (see Chapter 7 and 8), RHN staff are quite comfortable fully dedicating themselves to universals with European origins, like education and mental wellbeing as human rights. But because experience and empirical study have demonstrated that many 'best practice' mental health practices as both culturally inappropriate and ineffective in supporting refugee communities, RHN staff thoughtfully, and in my opinion appropriately, call for more epistemic and cultural tolerance around how mental health is understood and operationalized in ECEiE.

Eleni and Katherine, like the Protos educators, are not refugees and have never been forcibly displaced, but in recognition of this shortcoming, Eleni tells me that she relies heavily on her RHN colleague, Qutayba, a forcibly displaced Syrian with lived experience as a refugee living in Greece, "[He] comes to me and says 'no, Eleni, this is all very nice, but it's crap though' <laughs>. 'This will never work with young boys from Syria, or young Afghani girls, etcetera'. I listen. He's one of them. I'm a Greek, White female from Europe. What do I know?" In this way, Eleni commits herself to the second axiom of a colonially sensitive rights-based approach, a dedication to socially situated forms of emancipatory knowledge and action. By ceding power and elevating her refugee colleagues' decision-making above her own and not framing rejections of her ideas as a case of refugee ignorance or mental health stigma, she rightfully situates refugees' practices as examples of socially situated praxis that comes about as a pragmatic pursuit of their own conceptions of flourishing and emancipation.

Given the importance to understanding the socially situated sources of emancipation, a critical enabling factor for RHN's ability to appropriately implement culturally tolerant programs comes from their emphasis on hiring individuals with lived experience in displacement. This starts from the top as Leila, their former CEO and founder is a resettled Afghan refugee and multiple resettled refugees sit on the NGO's board. This belief in the power of lived experience aid workers extends to their direct services as well, as they also make a point of hiring frontline facilitators and educators who are resettled refugees living in Greece. Importantly, these educators with insider positionality lend RHN's identity-informed programming insight into what socially situated praxis looks like. For example, I asked Qutayba what he sees as his goal as a mental health facilitator,

> *"I see it as very important for us to show them, from the first impression, that we are respecting them. We are with them if they need any kind of support. We talk about what we can offer and how to deal with challenges. I'm a mental health facilitator, and I'm a friend of them [sic]. Like one of the group. This is my way of showing how we are [relating] with them. That makes them feel very comfortable and safe. [...] Honestly with the boys especially. Like yeah, I know what they like to do. We do the psychological part in alternative ways. We try to play, you know, put together funny stuff.*
>
> *Being an Arab and a refugee, my role is like a cultural mediator. I'm really aware about their cultures and that makes it easier for me to be part of them, because I know how life is. I'm respecting their identity and I know exactly what they would like to do [sic]. So that's the identity part. To respect them, to ask them what they want to do, to share with them, to be at the same level together with them. [...]*
>
> *When I see people [in Greece] from Iran for example, we had the same childhood; I feel the connection. 'I know what you'd like to do. I know; I passed through this."*
>
> \- *Qutayba; RHN; Thessaloniki*

When juxtaposed against the testimony of Protos educators like Christos (see Chapter 5), it is clear how educators at RHN, especially those with refugee backgrounds, prioritize cultural and epistemic tolerance over an uncritical dedication to the equal distribution of standardized mental health services. For all the RHN staff, the benefits of such an approach are two-fold. First, by opening space for culturally appropriate mental health tools, RHN's programming will be more effective in achieving their main goal, making refugees feel safe, but also, by trying to expand opportunities for the democratic participation of refugee learners, and identity-informed approach gives refugees a sense of agency that is often missing for refugee communities post-displacement. In a mental health and early childhood education field with a deep tradition of justifying absolutist framings, RHN staff's belief in the value of epistemic tolerance is a welcome change and one that I think should inspire others towards to a more relationally just and emancipatory approach ECEiE.

In short, this section underscores the crucial importance of navigating the complexities inherent in early childhood education in emergencies (ECEiE), particularly concerning epistemic tolerance. While cautioning against the conversion of relational justice norms into knee-jerk cultural relativism that disqualifies any knowledge deemed as from European origins, this section also acknowledges the necessity of decolonization and relational justice dispositions in response to the historical absolutism of humanitarian aid. By examining highlighting approaches exemplified by organizations like Refugee Healing Network (RHN) and Hungary Friends, this section illuminates the significance of prioritizing socially situated emancipatory knowledge and practices in ECEiE programming. Hungary Friends education rights campaign and RHN's identity-informed programming offers a compelling alternative to top-down approaches, potentially fostering not only effective ECEiE services but also empowering refugee communities. By embracing an enlightened eclecticism and amplifying marginalized voices, RHN and Hungary Friends set a precedent for a more just and emancipatory approach in ECEiE, one that prioritizes the right to be equal when difference breeds inferiority and the right to be different when claims of equality threaten the right to identity based on shared experiences and histories.

This research has been my attempt to look deeply at the constructions of educational justice in the field of ECEiE and based on those insights, to suggest a constructive approach that synthesizes the strengths of the educators with whom I spoke to explore how non-refugee ECEiE practitioners can better support displaced communities through education. It is my hope that the knowledge generated in this study can be used to refocus the ECEiE field's attention to the justice tradeoffs implicit to the various approaches to refugee inclusion and encourage an enlightened eclecticism in the field that rejects both relativism and absolutism and leaves ideological space for any socially situated emancipatory knowledge, whether it be universal, particular, European, or non-European.

Limitations

First, there is the issue of generalizability. The limited number of cases in this study are not sufficient to represent the entire field of ECEiE, much less education in emergencies. So, while these cases may be thought provoking and demonstrative of a social phenomenon with practical implications for ECEiE policymaking and programming settings that share characteristics with the cases presented in the study, the findings of this study cannot be widely applied. Another limitation in terms of this study's generalizability is its lack of replicability. This ethnographic research describes the field of ECEiE during a very particular period of time and through the lens of a limited set of context-specific cases. This combination of factors makes reproducing this study impossible and forces the one-time interpretations of this data into those of a single researcher. Inevitably, the themes of this work are a result of my own intellectual interests and regardless of any attempt at analytical distance, the results of this work are deeply subjective.

Another major limitation of this research is that it is wholly generated from the testimony and observation of ECEiE educators and is notably missing the voices of refugee learners and their community. While this decision was made consciously and with the goal inhabiting and 'insider' positionality as a researcher, it undoubtedly inhibits the analytical purview of the work. This is not to say that marginalized voices are not present in the work. ECEiE educators with refugee or minoritized backgrounds make up a significant proportion of the sample and I make efforts to ensure they are represented thoughtfully, but including refugee ECEiE educators is not a replacement for refugee learners and their communities who are actively seeking stability in the face of forced displacement.

Avenues for future research

More research is indeed needed to understand how the normative language and logics of decolonization are manifesting in ECEiE. By focusing on ECEiE educators, it was my intention to open avenues for researchers with the lived experience of forced displacement to follow the lead of this study and gaze beyond the educators to include the voices of refugee learners themselves. I believe there are significant questions to be answered around how refugees interpret ostensibly 'decolonized' ECEiE programming and to what degree they see such programming providing benefit relative to programming understood by some as 'colonially-inflected'. Some of the motivation of decolonized scholarship is that structural inclusive and sociocultural inclusive approaches have been shown to have modest effects on refugee material success (see, Crul et al. 2019; Piper et al. 2020; Dryden-Peterson 2022; Dupuy et al 2022; UNHCR 2022; Morrice and Salem 2023; Reddick and Chopra 2023), further research around the longitudinal effect of ECEiE programming touted as representatively of decolonizing best practices would help add nuance to this study and test the final assertion that a decolonization agenda that is overly concerned with outcomes around epistemic tolerance can actively harm refugees by ignoring their political needs.

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