"IS THE GROUND READY?" EXPLORING THE USE OF FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN REFUGEE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN GREECE THROUGH A FEMINIST, INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

by

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Declaration

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Tereza Mytakou

14th July 2023

To my grandparents, Eirini, Konstantinos, Tereza, Kostas— this thesis is dedicated to your memory.

To my students, wherever you may be, I am confident that you are growing into the strong individuals I knew you would be.

الى طلابي اينما كنتم، كلّي ثقة انكم يوما عن يوم تزدادون قوة وتميّز

Summary

The present study aims to explore the use of feminist pedagogy in a refugee education setting in Greece through a feminist, intersectional approach. More specifically, the research examines the obstacles and opportunities of a feminist pedagogy approach, as well as its reception by teachers and students. The study focuses on the Greek border-island of Leros, where data collection took place at a school for children of refugee background.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the thesis, by establishing its rationale and research aims. It presents the epistemological and methodological framework of the study, as well as an overview of its structure.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and an overview of the literature on refugee education and feminist pedagogy, assuming a reflexive orientation that combines the literature with my own experiences in the field and with parent and student voices from my own experience and secondary sources. This reflexive style is in consonance with the feminist research methodology adopted in the thesis. The first section introduces feminist pedagogy, its origins, aims, and core elements. The second section examines the elements of trauma and resilience in relation to refugee education. The third section draws connections between the aims of feminist pedagogy and refugee education, highlighting the benefits that a feminist pedagogical approach could have in forced migration education settings.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my choice to assume a feminist epistemology and methodology for this project, which aligns with the research topic of feminist pedagogy. I present an account of how the feminist tool of reflexivity enabled me to be aware of my two-fold positionality as a teacher and researcher, and I focus on the value of practising emotional and political reflexivity while doing research in a forced migration context. Furthermore, I provide a researcher positionality statement, which addresses how potential power imbalances in relation to the participants were mitigated, and how my own theoretical assumptions on the topic shaped the research process.

Chapter 4 focuses on research methods. It discusses the socio-political factors that have shaped forced migration in the Mediterranean region in recent years, and examines the socio-historical background of Leros as a place of confinement. I then explain how the research design and questions developed, and provide background information about the school context and the participants involved the study (the

educators, managers, and students), then presenting each specific tool of data collection. The ethical considerations of doing research with refugee students are also explored in relation to vulnerability, power, and informed consent/assent. Finally, I provide an overview of how I conducted the data analysis process according to Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 provides a reflexive overview of feminist pedagogy in practice and praxis following a chronological approach for each of the months of the teaching intervention. Drawing from my researcher diary excerpts, the lesson plans that I used, and the recorded classroom discussion excerpts with the students, I reflect on the main critical pedagogical moments which shaped my understanding of feminist pedagogy on the field.

Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 present the themes which were developed through the analysis of the data, using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis approach. Chapter 6 focuses on the theme of "Gender as a Difficult and Complex Construct", whereas Chapter 7 examines the themes of "Trauma as Present, but not Defining" and "Culture/Language as Dividing Barriers". Quotes from the educator and managers interviews are presented, with some quotes from the classroom discussions with the students offering counter-narratives to the adult participants' views.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the above themes in relation to the theoretical framework of the study and to previous literature. I discuss the obstacles and opportunities that a feminist approach can have in refugee education in relation to the themes that were produced through the analysis. The analysis of the data suggested that feminist pedagogy can be beneficial in many aspects of refugee education in Greece, such as equipping teachers with reflexivity and a critical view of gender, helping them shed the lens of cultural and linguistic deficit through which students are often viewed, and integrating students' emotions and lived experience in the lesson, so as to help them in healing from trauma and in building resilience. I also present the implications of the study, as well as its limitations, and avenues for future research in feminist pedagogy and refugee education. I conclude that feminist reflexivity and awareness of positionality, both elements of feminist research methodology and feminist pedagogy, were vital tools that assisted me in my dual role as a researcher and teacher in this project.

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

EAP   English for Academic Purposes

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

EU   European Union

JMD   Joint Ministerial Decision

MENA   Middle East and North Africa

RIC   Reception and Identification Centre

RTA   Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SDG   Sustainable Development Goal

TA   Thematic Analysis

UN   United Nations

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

List of Figures

Transcription Conventions

Convention	Meaning
[yeah] [okay]	Overlapping talk
(.)	Brief intervals (between 0.08 and 0.2 sec)
<u>word</u>	loud words/stress
WORD	much louder words
word	Syllables or words quieter than surrounding speech by the same speaker
(word)	Uncertain word
(( ))	Additional comments or descriptions by the author regarding context, movements, laughter, etc.
leksi ((*word*))	Italics for word in Greek or Arabic which is then translated into English in double parentheses

These conventions were adopted in the original full transcriptions of the educator and manager interviews and the student classroom discussions. The data extracts presented in the body of the thesis have been edited for clarity and readability and do not contain all of the above transcription signs.

A Note of the Use of Nomenclature and Labelling

When conducting research with individuals who have been forcibly displaced, it is important to acknowledge the negative effect of the 'labels' used to refer to these individuals. I wish to acknowledge that the label of the "refugee" can be limiting, as it foregrounds the temporary state of refugeehood, while also defining individuals solely on the basis of their experience of forced migration. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the terms "refugee students" and "students of refugee background" are used interchangeably throughout the study to refer to students who have been forced to seek asylum outside of their home country, and who have either received or are still awaiting asylum confirmation. Nonetheless, I wish to clarify that this aspect of the students' identity is not viewed as defining, but rather, that they are perceived as whole individuals, who possess the capability of displaying agency and resilience.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

> *July 2020, 4am.*
>
> *The ferry has just set anchor at Lakki, the port of Leros, after a nine-hour boat trip from Peiraeus. On the way here I have been trying to prepare myself for my stay on the island, unsure whether I will be able to cope with the emotional toll of working in a forced migration context. I have watched a documentary about the island's mental health asylum, infamous for its inhumane treatment of patients in the 90s. I have read about Leros' history, its rationalist architecture, designed by Mussolini's architects during World War II. But nothing I have read can prepare me for what I set eyes on as I step off the ferry. The eerie promenade with its rationalist architecture, the imposing, but decaying, mental health asylum gaping at me from across the port, the yellow light in which everything is embellished, all create an atmosphere of mystery.*
>
> *The island is very different during the day. Melina picks me up with her car the next morning and drives me to the school—possibly the most colorful school I've ever witnessed. The bus brings the students from the nearby camp in batches, and the yard gradually fills with the laughter and voices of the children gathering and playing. They start singing popular songs in Arabic and English, the music blasting from the school's speakers, and the teachers also join them in this morning ritual. There is an atmosphere of celebration, of life going on despite the difficulties, almost like a deliberate defiance of the grim reality of the camp…*
>
> *—Researcher diary excerpt*

1.1 Rationale and Aim of the Study

This research project arose from the need to explore a more culturally and linguistically sensitive pedagogy for teaching students of refugee background, one which would take into account the vital factors of gender, ethnicity, religion, and their intersection in the classroom. The humanitarian crisis which was ongoing in Greece since 2015 was one of the main reasons that led me to consider the necessity of researching refugee language education. As I began to examine the Greek state's provision for a language learning curriculum for refugee students, I discovered that there was, in fact, a lack of such provision in terms of material, curriculum, and trained staff. Furthermore, there was a lack of material and methodologies which would take into account the particular

cultural, linguistic, and religious background of the students, as well as their experience of forced migration. At the same time, the ongoing marginalisation and "Othering" of refugees in mainstream society and education on the basis of gender, cultural, and religious issues made it imperative to integrate these topics into the discussion. The stereotype of the "backwards" patriarch Muslim male was widespread and employed in order to support anti-immigration discourse and policy. Gender, culture, religion, were therefore crucial elements which needed to be explored in refugee education, so that students could be equipped with the necessary tools to think critically about these issues.

I therefore decided to turn to feminist pedagogy, a liberatory pedagogy grounded in feminist theory, as a teaching philosophy and methodology which could potentially be of value when considering refugee education. My previous exploration of feminist pedagogy in English Language Teaching through my MPhil dissertation had provided me with a solid theoretical background, which could now be applied to the refugee education context. Feminist pedagogy's attention to gender issues, its integration of emotions and lived experience, its emphasis on student empowerment, its focus on intersectionality, as well as its aim to deconstruct traditional power structures in the classroom were some of its core principles which seemed particularly apt for teaching students of refugee background.

The above considerations led me to develop the research aims of the project. The central aim of the study was to explore the use of feminist pedagogy in a forced migration education context in Greece. The main over-arching question which I sought out to investigate was the following: *Is the ground ready for a feminist pedagogy approach in refugee education in the Greek context?* Drawing from this, three subsidiary questions arose:

- *Firstly, what are the obstacles in implementing feminist pedagogy in the Greek refugee education context?*
- *Secondly, what are the opportunities for such an approach?*
- *And thirdly, how do teachers and students perceive of these obstacles and opportunities?*

1.2 Epistemological and Methodological Approach

I sought to explore the above questions by assuming a feminist qualitative research methodology. During an eight-month stay on the border-island of Leros, Greece, I worked as an English language teacher at a Non-Formal Education Centre for refugee students aged 6-16. The data collection involved semi-structured interviews with eight educators and two managers working in refugee education (on Leros, as well as other islands of the south-east Aegean), classroom discussions with two students attending the school on Leros, as well as the keeping of my own researcher diary.

Throughout the design, data collection and fieldwork, I was met with certain ethical and methodological challenges. In particular, I was preoccupied with issues of power and positionality regarding my own role as a feminist teacher and researcher in a forced migration context, and about how I could introduce topics of gender, ethnicity, and religion in the classroom, without perpetuating Eurocentric discourse or implying that European ideals of gender were more legitimate than those of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA)[1] countries, where most students were from. A crucial tool for me was the feminist epistemological and methodological framework which I employed for the study. Drawing on feminist epistemology and research practice, I equipped my teacher and researcher self with the tool of reflexivity, which proved to be invaluable throughout the research process. Practising reflexivity allowed me to be more aware of how my positionality, background and ideology functioned in the classroom, and how it influenced my choices as a teacher and researcher, as well as my relationship with the participants. Therefore, the value of feminist epistemology and research methodology in doing research in forced migration contexts was something which emerged through the project, and which enabled me to navigate ethical and methodological dilemmas.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The following chapter begins by outlining the theoretical framework and relevant literature. I discuss the key elements and the origins of feminist pedagogy, while also exploring the concepts of trauma and resilience, which are major concerns in refugee

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[1] According to (Chen, 2022), "The [MENA] region is typically considered to include around 19 countries, but the definition can be stretched to include up to 27". Somalia, while in the eastern part of Africa, is often included in the extended use of the term "North Africa", and will therefore be included in the definition of the term throughout the thesis.

education. I then provide an argument for the beneficial use of employing feminist pedagogy in refugee education settings, demonstrating the links between their shared aims. In Chapter 3 I discuss in more detail how assuming a feminist epistemological stance enabled me to navigate complex ethical dilemmas as a teacher and researcher and I argue for its value in doing research in forced migration contexts. I discuss the more practical details of my methodological approach and of the research aims and design in Chapter 4. I also provide an overview of the social and geopolitical context of Leros, as well as an account of the data collection tools that I used. Furthermore, I discuss certain ethical considerations, and provide an account of how I conducted the data analysis through reflexive thematic analysis. Chapter 5 then provides more insight into my daily practice of feminist pedagogy in the school, following a chronological approach. I present critical and illustrative moments of feminist pedagogy through excerpts from my researcher diary, the classroom discussions with the students, and the lesson plans which I developed. In Chapters 6 and 7 I explore the major themes that I produced through the data analysis, "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", "Trauma as present, but not defining", and "Culture/language as barriers", and discuss each of their subthemes by presenting relevant data extracts. Lastly, in Chapter 8 I discuss the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. I discuss the themes and subthemes with regards to a) the obstacles in implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in a refugee education context in Greece, b) the opportunities for implementing such an approach, and c) the viewpoints of the adult and student participants, as well as my own experience through my researcher diary.

Finally, in accordance with the practice of feminist research reflexivity which is present throughout the thesis, Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 both begin with two vignettes from my researcher diary, which aim to introduce the reader to the context in which the research took place and to provide an insight into the reflexive writing that I engaged in throughout the fieldwork.

2   Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1   Introduction

This chapter explores the academic literature and theoretical background that underpins this study, with regard to refugee education, feminist pedagogy, as well as their interrelation. Firstly, I provide an overview of the importance of education in forced migration contexts, Secondly, I present the origins and key elements of feminist pedagogy, highlighting a gap in its exploration in the refugee education context. I then provide an examination of trauma and resilience, and the main concerns around these two concepts as they have been discussed in the literature on refugee education. Finally, I explore feminist pedagogy in relation to forced migration contexts, arguing that it has many potential benefits for refugee students and their teachers, mainly in terms of developing critical consciousness, as well as in dealing with trauma and fostering resilience.

It is also important to highlight that this literature review assumes a reflexive orientation, in line with feminist research methodology and reflexive thematic analysis, the chosen methodological and analytical frameworks of this project. This is achieved by interweaving into the literature reflections of my own experiences on the field, as well as voices of the students' parents from my own experience or refugee children's voices from secondary sources. Therefore, reflexivity is not just key to the methodology and analysis chapters of this thesis, but it is a fundamental element which underlies all chapters and which has enabled me to assume a more critical and situated take on the study.

2.2   The Paramount Role of Refugee Education

The criticality of refugee education is an indisputable fact, and its key role in refugee students' lives is widely recognized by international scholarship and protected by global organizations (UNHCR et al., 2019). Firstly, the right of displaced children to education falls under the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. SDG number 4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (*Goal 4*, n.d.), an aim which, according to the UNHCR (2015), places "a strong focus on [the] equity and inclusion of vulnerable

groups". However, although this right is widely acknowledged by theory and legislation, in reality access to education still proves to be a major issue for students in forced migration settings worldwide (UNHCR, 2022), as well as in the Greek context, which is particularly examined in the present study. The vast exclusion of students with refugee backgrounds from the formal Greek educational system has been commented upon throughout the years following the humanitarian crisis of 2015. More specifically, according to Action for Education (n.d.):

> For the 2020/21 academic year, only 8,637 were enrolled into formal education out of approximately 44,000 children recorded at the end of 2020. 62% of school aged children lived in camps, also known as reception and identification centres, but statistics have previously shown that attendance for those residing in camps are significantly lower than those residing in other accommodation types; only 14% of the 62% enrolled attended school.

The figures above are illustrative of the marginalisation that students of refugee background face in the Greek educational system and of the ways in which their right to education is devalued by policy and praxis. However, the value that the students themselves as well as their parent/carers attribute to education has often been commented on by scholarship, and is something which I also became aware of during my first weeks of fieldwork in the school on Leros. This deep appreciation of the school and the educational process was perhaps best summarized in the words of a student's father, who wished to thank the school's coordinator and teachers for their work. The father expressed his gratitude by using an Arabic expression which was later translated to me by the interpreters, exclaiming that he holds the school "on his eyes and on his head" (على عيني وراسي‘) ['ala 'aini wa raasi'] in Arabic)[2]. The use of this expression signifies mutual respect and appreciation: the school is so highly valued that it is positioned on top of two of the most important parts of the body, the head and the eyes. It therefore serves to demonstrate the significance that the father attributed to the school and his gratitude for this opportunity to educate his children during the difficult time of containment in the Greek borderlands.

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[2] Personal communication, August 2020. I would like to thank the school's interpreters for assisting me with their cultural knowledge and the translation of the above quote in Arabic.

Drawing from this single example, it is worth examining the general attitude of displaced individuals towards the role of education. It can be argued that this quote is indicative of the high importance that is largely attributed by students of refugee background to education. According to the NGO *Save the Children*, students of refugee background view education as one of their most vital needs, as research conducted internationally indicates that "99% of children in crisis situations see education as a priority", whereas 69% of children include education in their list of top three priorities (*What do children want in times of emergency and crisis?: They want an education*, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, studies conducted in Greece, which have focused on interviewing refugee students regarding the education they have received after their arrival, demonstrate that it is indeed a vital part of their life in the host country. Interestingly enough, as Simopoulos and Magos (2020) note, these interviews serve to disprove the commonly held belief that parents of refugee students have no interest in their children's education, and that they are indifferent to or negatively inclined towards it. On the contrary, Simopoulos and Magos' (2020) research points to the fact that the family plays a decisive role when it comes to providing motivation for the integration and success of the children in school (p. 129). An indicative example from their research are the words of an 18-year old Palestinian girl, who remarks the following regarding her schooling experience in Greece:

> I was fifteen years old when I went to school in Greece. And it was hard to write and speak… But we had to learn, in order to achieve something, that's what our father would tell us, since they hadn't been able to, we should be able to study. (Simopoulos & Magos, 2020, p. 130)

It is therefore observed that education is often valued by parents, who urge their children to make the most out of what is offered to them. Education is perceived as a good which they may not have had the chance to benefit from in their countries of origin and is consequently viewed as a means for their children to acquire a better future.

The significance of the school and education in general is not only confirmed by refugee students and their parents' voices, but, as will be explored later in this chapter, is also widely acknowledged in the literature surrounding refugee education. Apart from equipping them with critical skills for their future, education has been claimed to prove

beneficial to refugee students, as it assists them in dealing with the potential trauma they may have experienced, and in developing resilience. The interrelation between trauma and resilience will be explored in section 2.4 and 2.5. The next section aims to provide an introduction to feminist pedagogy and its origins and main aims.

2.3   Feminist Pedagogy

The current research project aims to explore the use of feminist pedagogy in the context of refugee education, and more specifically to examine if the ground is ready for such an approach, and the potential obstacles and opportunities that its application could have in this context. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the particular elements and aims of feminist pedagogy, and how these can relate to the aims of refugee education. The following sections provide an overview of what feminist pedagogy is and what constitute its basic tenets, in order to explore why it can be a beneficial approach for teaching students with refugee backgrounds. Below I examine definitions of feminist pedagogy, its origins in critical pedagogy, its central tenets, as well as previous practical applications of it.

2.3.1   What is Feminist Pedagogy?

Feminist pedagogy, like the term feminism itself, is a notion which has no conclusive definition, and one which has been shaped by the contributions of many different theorists and educators. Although it is often associated with academic teaching and gender studies curricula, feminist pedagogy has also been explored as a methodology of teaching that can be used outside of these two narrow domains, and regardless of the content that is being taught, thus spanning across diverse subject areas and educational levels. In particular, the current research project aims to shift feminist pedagogy outside of its most common academic context, and to integrate it in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) scenario, and more specifically in a non-formal forced migration education setting for students aged 6-16.

At this point it is useful to closely examine some of the most prominent attempts to define feminist pedagogy, and to lay out its fundamental principles. In essence, feminist pedagogy is a pedagogical framework grounded on the basis of feminist theory and thought. It is concerned not only with the content—*what is taught*—but also with the methodology—*how this is taught*. This is the reason that it has also been

characterized as a "philosophy" or "theory of teaching and learning" (Bostow et al., 2015), which informs feminist educators' practice and draws on feminist theory, with the ultimate goal of inspiring social change.

The definition below provided by Crabtree et al. (2009) is perhaps quite comprehensive and inclusive of the many elements that it encompasses. According to the aforementioned authors, feminist pedagogy is "a set of assumptions about knowledge and knowing, approaches to content across the disciplines, teaching objectives and strategies, classroom practices, and instructional relationships that are grounded in critical pedagogical and feminist theory" (Crabtree et al., 2009, p. 4). It can therefore be understood that feminist pedagogy is a philosophy of teaching that spans across curricula and different subjects, and is not just limited to teaching about feminist issues or issues relating to gender. This underlying philosophy is what informs not only the content, but also the various elements of the educational procedure, as mentioned above, and it is subsequently crucial for educators to examine different aspects of their teaching in relation to these.

Another aspect of feminist pedagogy that is also emphasized in most of its definitions is that it is a pedagogy which is political, in the sense that it aims to deal with social inequality, and contains a strong social message. As Crabtree et. al remark, feminist pedagogy is "a movement against hegemonic educational practices that tacitly accept or more forcefully reproduce an oppressively gendered, classed, racialized, and androcentric social order" (Crabtree et al., 2009, p. 4). It aims to deconstruct such hierarchies which present white heterosexual maleness as the norm, and to provide an education which will raise awareness around and be critical of these notions.

2.3.2   The Origins of Feminist Pedagogy: Critical Pedagogy

The political nature of feminist pedagogy can be traced back to its origins and the theoretical framework from which it was developed. Feminist pedagogy is a philosophy of teaching which has its roots in what is known as *critical pedagogy*, a movement in the field of education, first conceptualized by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and further developed by American Canadian educator Henry Giroux. In particular, Freire proposed the concept of critical pedagogy in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed [Pedagogia do Oprimido]*, originally published in 1968 in Portuguese.

In his work, Freire criticizes the unequal distribution of power in society, and points to the formative role that education can play in giving marginalized subjects the voice and the power to strive for change. Examining oppression in society, he refers to two groups of people; the "oppressors", who hold the greatest share of power, and who take advantage of and rob the other group, the "oppressed", of their humanity and freedom (Freire, 2005). According to Freire, it is the role of education to provide the oppressed with what he terms as *critical consciousness* or *conscientização* in Portuguese. Critical consciousness is defined as equipping the students with the skills of "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2005, p. 35). Namely, critical education aims to provide the students with the necessary critical thought and tools to understand their own oppression, and fight against this, a process also known as *empowerment*, which will lead to what Freire (2005) calls "liberation". This is also the reason why critical pedagogy is characterized as a "liberatory" pedagogy, one that aims to set free the "oppressed", marginalized subjects.

It is worth mentioning here, that the oppression that Freire refers to in his work is mainly related to social class. As he notes, his work and research "is rooted in concrete situations and describes the reactions of laborers (peasant or urban) and of middle-class persons whom [he] […] observed directly or indirectly during the course of [his] educative work" (Freire, 2005, p. 37). It is therefore important to keep in mind that his work around oppression focuses mainly on the aspect of class, whereas feminist pedagogy considers other types of oppression as well, in particular bringing attention to the gendered aspect of oppression, to which critical pedagogy has been criticised of being mostly oblivious.

2.3.3   Basic Elements of Feminist Pedagogy

The literature on feminist pedagogy tends to agree on a defining set of characteristics and some core principles which are present in most of its corresponding curricula. These can be summarized as the following:

    a) an aim to encourage the empowerment of the students,
    b) an emphasis on intersectionality,
    c) an attempt to break down traditional hierarchies in the classroom,

d) an emphasis on emotions and personal experience as a valid way of knowing, and

e) a link to feminist praxis and inspiring social change.

Feminist pedagogy shares many characteristics with critical pedagogy, in that they are both liberatory pedagogies which aim to empower students, and to raise awareness around oppression. As Weiler (1991) notes in her feminist critique of Freire's critical pedagogy, feminist and critical pedagogy both have a shared "vision of social transformation" and "certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness and historical change" (p. 450). They both aim towards empowerment, which is one of the basic tenets of feminist pedagogy. However, the latter draws specific attention to issues related to gender, whereas critical pedagogy has been often criticized of being unobservant of the gender dimension. As mentioned previously, Freire's idea of oppression focuses mostly on class oppression and is based on the specific Brazilian political context, and therefore his concept of empowerment is centred mostly around liberating the working class. According to Weiler (1991), Freire looks at oppression through a "dualism between the oppressed and the oppressors" (p. 452). This, she claims, does not allow for different kinds of oppressions to be explored, and assumes that the oppressed cannot be oppressors at the same time. On the contrary, feminist pedagogy advocates for a different view of oppression, one which will acknowledge the fluidity of identities and bring attention to other forms of oppression, such as those based on gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.

This view of oppression is connected to another basic element of feminist pedagogy, which is its great attention to intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term which originated in black feminist thought, and was first coined by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe interconnected forms of oppression. More specifically, drawing from the experience of Black women, Crenshaw (1989) criticises "the tendency [of theoretical frameworks] to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (p. 139). Furthermore, she supports that oppression is much more multifaceted and multi-layered, and that gender and race need to be examined as intersecting categories in order for oppression to be understood more fully. Feminist pedagogy draws on this theory, holding "an explicit commitment to address the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality not only in the content of the discipline but also in the dynamics of the classroom" (Crabtree et al.,

2009b, p. 5). It therefore places emphasis on how each student's identity is constructed in light of the various other identities that intersect with their gender identity, providing a much wider and detailed view of oppression and empowerment. It draws attention to different kinds of discrimination, and takes into account the fluidity of one's identity, and the possibility that they can assume different identities as oppressors or oppressed subjects. This element of feminist pedagogy further makes it clear that it does not advocate just against gender oppression, but against any other type of oppression as well. Adopting an intersectional point of view is what will allow students and teachers to become aware of the different layers of their identities, and to understand how these function inside the classroom in terms of the power dynamics.

Another key principle of feminist pedagogy is that it is very much concerned with hierarchy and with the kinds of relationships that are developed between students and teachers. Since one of its primary concerns is the unequal distribution of power, it argues for a deconstruction of traditional student-teacher relationships in which the teacher has all the power. Instead, it proposes a relationship which "is marked by the development of non-hierarchical relationships among teachers and students and reflexivity about power relations, not only in society but also in the classroom" (Crabtree et al., 2009, p. 5). This, in an EFL classroom, can be considered, for example, in terms of how much talking time amounts to the teacher and the students respectively, with specific interest in the female students or students marginalized on the ground of other factors such as class, ethnicity, etc. It could also be considered with regard to the teachers' role; whether they are an authoritarian figure in the classroom, leaving no space for the students' voices to be heard, or a facilitator and guide to the students, providing them with the chance to contribute actively to their learning.

Furthermore, apart from the relationships of students and teachers, feminist pedagogy is also concerned with what constitutes knowledge, and greatly values the use of emotions and personal experience as valid ways of knowing. It comes to challenge traditional perceptions around knowledge, which revolve around a masculine-centred model of the schooling system and of knowledge. The value that the educational system places on reason and logic, while at the same time dismissing other ways of experiencing and knowing as invalid, stems from the stereotypical belief that reason and logic is masculine, whereas emotionality, irrationality, lived and bodily experience are stereotypically connected to femininity. Emotions are traditionally dismissed as irrational, and not as a sufficient or reliable way of constructing knowledge of the world

around us (Paechter, 1998, p. 66). Feminist pedagogy, however, challenges this assumption, making feelings and personal experience an integral part of knowing and of feminist teaching. Furthermore, as Bostow et al. (2015) comment, there is great potential in utilising emotions in the classroom in order to develop the critical thinking skills of students. According to Bostow et al. (2015):

> emotion must be recognized in the classroom in order to facilitate greater and more critical understanding. For instance, striving for equity and justice may lead to frustration, anger, stress, relief, joy, and pride. Identifying the relationship between experience, emotion, and action will help students bridge the classroom and the "real world," the personal and the political, theory and practice.

Therefore, feminist classrooms should strive to integrate emotions and lived experience as tools through which students can learn to think critically about their own responses and the social and political reality in which they live.

Finally, feminist pedagogy is very closely tied to what is called feminist praxis. It is, in other words, a theoretical framework which calls for action and actual social change inspired by the theory. In the words of Weiner (1994) "[p]raxis is a term that is used to signify the dialectical relationship between thought and action (or theory and practice) in certain 'practical sciences' such as teaching" (p. 121). It is therefore vital for feminist pedagogy and feminism in general that the theory will inspire action, such as actual change in classroom practices and the materials taught, and, if possible, even in the students' everyday lives. This is one of the tenets of feminist pedagogy which has inspired the proposed curriculum of this dissertation, since it aims for a practical application of all the theory which will be examined.

2.3.4   *Previous Studies and Applications of Feminist Pedagogy*

Feminist pedagogies have been applied in various contexts and locations, these being concentrated, however, mainly in the West, and in countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK, as well as some Nordic and Scandinavian countries and Australia. Feminist pedagogy was originally developed in the context of the university classroom, by feminist scholars who taught women's studies or gender studies curricula, (Digiovanni

& Liston, 2005, p. 123), and consequently it has been explored more extensively in third level education academic settings, with studies being published on work in the USA (Benesch, 1998; Chick & Hassel, 2009; Crabtree et al., 2009; Weiler, 1991), the UK (Ferrebe & Tolan, 2012), and in other various countries in Europe (Revelles-Benavente & M. González Ramos, 2017). In more recent years, some studies have also presented applications of feminist pedagogy in high-school classroom settings, and in subjects other than gender studies. However, it has been observed that there are not as many studies conducted around the use of feminist pedagogy in the elementary classroom, a fact which, according to Digiovanni and Liston (2005), "does not address the educational experiences of the majority of women who do not pursue postsecondary education" (p. 123). Digiovanni and Liston's (2005) work in the USA context is an example of one of the few studies conducted on the use of feminist pedagogy in the elementary classroom, and in this they argue that it is indeed possible to apply a feminist methodology of teaching for younger learners as well, providing practical suggestions about how this can be done.

Furthermore, there have been some studies which have attempted to apply a feminist pedagogy approach in the EFL classroom. One of these is Benesch's (1998) work on "A Feminist EAP Curriculum", in which she describes her application of feminist pedagogy in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) writing class on anorexia, associated with a psychology class. Benesch's study aims to bring greater attention to feminist issues in ESL, and to provide an example of how feminist pedagogy's principles and content can be applied to this. Benesch's (2012) work on emotions and English language teaching also examines a strand in applied linguistics very much related to feminist pedagogy, which is called critical applied linguistics. According to Pennycook (2017), critical applied linguistics is connected to critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy, and aims to "connect questions of language to broader issues of power and inequality" (p. 2), drawing attention to the fact that these issues have long been overlooked in applied linguistics. Among others, critical applied linguistics examines "the effects of global capitalism, issues of gender and sexuality, differential relations of power between languages […]" (Pennycook, 2017, p. 4). It is therefore clear that it shares a common vision with both feminist and critical pedagogy, as it aims to raise awareness around complex issues of discrimination, and to equip second language learning students with critical consciousness.

Having presented the basic principles of feminist pedagogy, it is now of use to explore two central concerns of the literature around refugee education, namely trauma and resilience, so as to examine the connections between these and feminist pedagogy.

2.4   Trauma

A vast amount of research on refugee education is centred around the concept of "trauma", exploring different types of trauma that refugee students may be experiencing, as well as how these can manifest in the classroom, and how education can help them process this (Barrett & Berger, 2021; Beauregard et al., 2017; Mayor, 2019; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). Furthermore, as Stathopoulou and Dassi (2020) highlight, trauma also constitutes one of the major concern of teachers working in the Greek forced migration context. It can therefore be concluded that trauma occupies a significant amount of space in research on refugee education, and that it is an element which needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about improvements in this area. This section seeks to provide a definition of trauma and to explore the potential sources and effects of trauma on refugee students, as well as to highlight the type of "deficit" discourse that is used when talking about trauma. Finally, it also provides an account of trauma-informed approaches in education.

2.4.1   Definitions of Trauma

Trauma is a widely investigated topic in the refugee education sector; however, it is a concept which has been discussed in several disciplines and has been associated with different meanings and connotations throughout time. It is therefore useful to present the definitions of trauma that are adopted in the present study. As Zembylas (2022) notes, trauma is a concept originally stemming from theories of psychoanalysis, and which, in more recent times, "has become closely aligned with psychological and medical terminology—especially the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (p. 1). Zembylas, like other critics, draws attention to this type of "medical" discourse in which discussions of trauma are most often located. He further discusses the meaning that trauma has assumed in the realm of education, from the most prominent tendency to view trauma as a personal adverse experience that affects students psychologically, to more situated understandings of trauma as located in time and space. He explains that

trauma studies in education have mostly adopted an understanding of trauma as a "difficult experience" carried into the classroom either from the students themselves or from literary texts and artistic representations— a perspective that has sometimes limited discussions to the psychological "wounds" of traumatic experiences. Other education researchers and theorists have acknowledged the historical, political and cultural aspects of trauma and their impact on teaching and learning. (Zembylas, 2022, p. 2)

This perception of trauma as a "wound" which is mentioned above is perhaps the most prevalent way in which trauma is perceived in the literature. However, contrary to definitions of trauma as something solely negative, painful and injurious, there have been other definitions of trauma which seek to offer a different, more holistic understanding of this "wounding" as a process which is both destructive, but also transformative. One of these is Papadopoulos' (2021) rendering of trauma, which retreats back to the etymology of the word, which originates from the Greek verb *teiro* (τείρω), meaning "to rub" (p. 212). Papadopoulos' definition of trauma draws attention to this "rubbing" effect that adverse, traumatic experiences have on people, which he argues can be interpreted both as destructive, but also as transformational (p. 13). According to Papadopoulos (2021), these two types of "rubbing" that the etymology of the word "trauma" connotes can provide a more accurate understanding of the wounding but also life-changing and renewing effects of trauma on individuals. Trauma can thus refer to

> the actualities of human realities, when the disrupting experiences of severe adversity are rubbed into people, so to speak, inflicting wounds on them. However, the very same adverse experiences also have a rubbing off rubbing away effect on them insofar as they erase previous perceptions of life, routines and lifestyles, leading to the creation of a clean(er) slate, ready to be inscribed with new narratives, new values, new perspectives on life and its meaning. These erasing effects open up new vistas, more suited to the new realities that the adversity created. (Papadopoulos, 2021, p. 213)

This definition of trauma by Papadopoulos (2021) is the most suited for this study, as it is in line with more resilience-based approaches to refugee education, rather than ones that focus on a deficit lens of viewing refugee students.

2.4.2   Sources of Trauma

Previous research has revealed that refugee students suffer from trauma inflicted to them due to past life experiences, as well as ongoing difficulties in the country of asylum or resettlement. Most of these students have been through extraordinary circumstances while trying to escape their home countries, and have lived through situations of war or persecution. According to the European Commission, most applications for asylum in Europe in 2019 came from the following countries: Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Colombia, and Iraq, among others ("Asylum in the EU Member States," 2020), all of which are countries where war, armed conflict or social and political unrest are present. It is therefore quite likely that most children arriving to Europe from these countries will have experienced these disturbing circumstances directly or indirectly through their family or close environment.

Apart from experiencing traumatic events at the country of origin, refugee children may also be exposed to other sources of trauma. The journey to the country of asylum also very often constitutes a traumatic experience; one such example is, for instance, the crossing of the Mediterranean sea by refugees coming from the Middle East or Africa to Europe. The deadliness of the Mediterranean sea has been commented upon by many global organizations and researchers and it has often been termed as "the graveyard of 'Fortress Europe'" (Hartikainen, 2014), while the journey across it has been described as the "Mediterranean death trip" (Basilien-Gainch, 2016), given the numerous deaths of those who are trying to cross it that occur every year in its waters. Indicatively, according to the UNHCR (2018), 5,096 people lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean in 2016, 3,139 in 2017 and 2,275 in 2018 (p. 6), numbers which point to the lethality of this journey, especially when compared to land crossings, where the death toll is lower in numbers.

The perilous circumstances under which these journeys are made are combined with the hostile treatment of the reception countries in the form of so-called "pushback" operations. According to the EU's Directorate-General for External Policies, pushbacks are a phenomenon which has been observed to take place in the Mediterranean sea and consists of "national coast guards trying to avoid that migrant boats reach certain territorial waters by returning them to their points of departure" (Cogolati, Verlinden, & Schmitt, 2015, p. 31). Even though pushbacks are illegal and constitute a violation of

human rights, there have been reports that Frontex, the EU Border and Coastguard Agency, has been allowing national coastguards to illegally conduct pushbacks, by concealing these operations and not pursuing further investigations into the matter (Narrillos, 2020; Stevis-Gridneff, 2020). This phenomenon has been especially prominent in Greece's territorial waters, as there have been multiple accounts of the Greek coastguard pushing back arriving refugees, either by hindering them in their attempt to land on the islands, or by illicitly forcing them into poorly constructed rafts and sending them back to sea after their arrival (Cogolati et al., 2015; Kingsley & Shoumali, 2020).

Furthermore, pushback operations have become even more frequent after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, since this has often functioned as an excuse for host countries to close their borders and deny access to outside populations in fear of transmission of the virus (Zander, 2020). Moreover, in May 2023, the EU and the UNHCR requested the Greek government to undertake a formal investigation, after the leaking of footage showing the Greek coastguard in the act of forcing asylum seekers away from the Greek coast and abandoning them at sea ("EU Calls for Independent Inquiry into Greece 'Pushback' of Asylum Seekers," 2023). This was followed by another incident in June 2023, during which at least 78 asylum seekers died, as the boat that was carrying them sunk outside the Greek port of Pylos, while 500 people still remain missing at the time of writing ("Greece Boat Disaster: Up to 500 People Still Missing Says UN," 2023). While the Greek coastguard denies allegations, the statements of the survivors suggest the deliberate sinking of the ship by the Greek authorities.

Finally, apart from any difficulties encountered during their journey to the host-country, refugee children are faced with new challenges upon arrival, that may act as stress-inducing factors and may lead to the development of trauma. As Driver and Beltran (1998) correctly note, further possible difficulties may arise while these children are in refugee camps in the country of asylum, or after their resettlement in their final destination country (p. 24). Numerous news stories have exposed that living conditions in refugee camps are dire and that residents there are suffering from their prolonged stay in cramped, squalid tents or containers, without adequate heating, supplies, and in many cases without the ability to move outside freely. Special attention was brought to the island of Lesvos during the summer of 2020, when a fire broke out and destroyed the biggest part of Moria, Greece's largest refugee camp. As a consequence, almost 13.000

people were rendered homeless and were forced to sleep on the streets of the island or in fields, until the new camp, Kara Tepe, was built in a new location ("Moria Migrants: Fire Destroys Greek Camp Leaving 13,000 without Shelter," 2020). However, this new space cannot accommodate the large number of refugees either, and has been deemed "highly unsuitable" (Arvanitis et al., 2020) by officials who have examined it, as well as the UNHCR (Nanou & Mantoo, 2020), as the ground on which it is built is not only infected with lead, but is also particularly prone to flooding, and many flooding incidents were already witnessed during the month of October 2020. Of course, these are only a few examples of the horrid situations that refugees are forced to reside in, and are not particular only to the specific camp or island. Similar conditions prevail in other parts of Greece as well and other host countries where refugee camps function as the place of first reception of refugees.

However, trauma-inducing situations do not only arise in refugee camps. When refugees are granted asylum and can leave the camps, there are new difficulties that may arise, whether they remain in the same country or move on to their final country of resettlement. Indicatively, some of these are mentioned by Driver and Beltran (1998) as the following: "linguistic and cultural differences, a change in status, economic constraints, social discrimination, bad news from home, intrusive memories from the past, role changes and major family disruptions" (p. 24). It may therefore be said that the stress of forced migration to a new country, the culture shock and the burden of adapting to new circumstances are factors which affect newly arrived refugees as well. Given all of the above, it is interesting to explore how these factors affect refugee students' school experience and performance, and how trauma may be manifested in the classroom.

2.4.3 *Effects of Trauma in the Classroom*

When examining the effects that trauma may have on refugee students, it is important to take into consideration that these students are not solely defined by their traumatic experiences, but are also capable of exhibiting agency and resilience. While this point will be further explained later on, this section will briefly outline certain possible effects that trauma can have on students, as it is still important to acknowledge that these traumatic experiences may indeed have an effect on refugee students, and to be aware of how this may be demonstrated in the classroom. Research conducted on the impact of

trauma on refugee students usually focuses on two main areas which it might affect: firstly, academic performance and secondly, student behaviour in the classroom.

Living through stressful events and circumstances has been proven to cause different types of trauma to children; some of these mentioned widely in the literature are PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), toxic stress, complex trauma, and adjustment disorders. Perhaps the most prevalent among refugee students is PTSD, a disorder which "involves re-experiencing the trauma, avoidance of things that are reminders of the trauma, and an uncomfortable state of arousal usually connected with readiness to avoid re-experiencing a trauma" (Piotrowsky & Range, 2020). This therefore makes it imperative for educators to be mindful and aware of the content that they include in their lessons, in order to avoid triggering painful memories in the students. Toxic stress is also a response to adverse experiences and can have negative effects on the brain, since it "can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment" (*Toxic Stress*, n.d.). Complex trauma has also been studied in relation to the students' academic performance, and research has argued that it can have certain negative effects on this, such as "reduced cognitive capacity", "sleep disturbance", "difficulties with memory", and "language delays" (Downey, 2007, p. 12-13).

While these issues may well be present in the daily life of refugee students and awareness of teachers around these is important, it is not in the scope of the present study to examine these effects of trauma in depth. However, this study assumes a critical take on the way in which trauma is perceived in refugee education, exploring in detail how these perceptions around trauma can affect the way in which teachers view their students, the pedagogy that teachers assume, and consequently the students' educational experience.

2.4.4   *The Medicalization of Trauma vs. the Lens of Resilience*

As can be inferred from the phraseology used in the studies mentioned above, the discourse around trauma in refugee education is mostly centred around "deficit". Many scholars have critiqued previous perceptions of refugee students as deficient in certain areas, as they are often thought to be lacking certain skills or qualities needed in order to succeed in educational activities. As Shapiro (2018), notes, "research on refugee-background students has sometimes promoted a deficit perspective, construing refugees as lacking in social, psychological and linguistic resources" (p. 5). It is therefore

understood that a lot of the research conducted around refugee students presents them through a deficit viewpoint, a viewpoint which limits their abilities and strips them of their agency. This perception is often linked to trauma and the assumption that they suffer and are deeply affected by their uprooting and the consequent difficult situations that this has caused. However, this perspective assumes that these experiences wholly define refugee students, not leaving any space for recovery and for them to exhibit their agency and resilience.

Another reason why this representation of refugee students is problematic, according to Stergiou and Simopoulos (2019) is that the medicalization of refugee-background individuals homogenises and stigmatizes this group, underlining their vulnerability and fragility (p. 191), and foregrounds these aspects that may not necessarily be true for every individual. Furthermore, as the aforementioned authors emphasize, this rhetoric around trauma is often hard to overlook, as it usually stimulates "positive" responses that trigger the material, psychological, and political support of others (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019, p. 191). This constitutes it harder to break away from the established rhetoric around the trauma of refugee students and to instead view them as individuals with agency, who are capable of building resilience. Moreover, Stergiou and Simopoulos (2019) argue that perceptions and experiences of trauma are socially and culturally contingent (p. 188), and that in order to better understand the experience of refugee students, it is crucial to assume a holistic approach and consider all of the factors that shape their reality from the pre-migratory period to their post-migratory life (p. 189).

Therefore, even though trauma is indeed a real challenge in refugee education, it is important for researchers and educators to be mindful of the way that it is represented in research, as well as how it is dealt with in education. Instead of focusing on the possible trauma that students may be affected from, it is vital to instead view them through a lens of resilience, and to focus on teaching strategies that will assist them in building this resilience. Many studies have recently begun to focus on the agency of refugee students, and to highlight the need to "view refugee children's expectations through a lens of recovery and resilience" (Pieloch et al., 2016, p. 331). The concept of resilience will be explored later on in section 2.5.

2.4.5 *Trauma-Informed Approaches in Education*

In line with the above information, it is evident that trauma is a prevalent issue which, while not solely defining of refugee individuals, may be present in the classroom and may affect their educational experience. It is important, therefore, to ensure that educators working with students of refugee background follow a trauma-informed pedagogy, while at the same time being aware of the medicalised deficit discourse that exists around trauma.

Trauma-informed approaches originated in the care sector, and were later also applied to the field of education studies. Harris and Fallot (2001) originally proposed the need for trauma-informed approaches in mental health and addiction services systems, arguing that without an approach that takes into account the possible previous trauma of individuals, there is a high risk for them to be retraumatised while receiving treatment (p. 3). Carello and Butler (2015) discuss trauma-informed practice in the context of the classroom, defining this as follows:

> To be trauma-informed, in any context, is to understand the ways in which violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have impacted the lives of the individuals involved and to apply that understanding to the design of systems and provision of services so they accommodate trauma survivors' needs and are consonant with healing and recovery. (p. 264)

This awareness of possible previous traumatic experiences is especially important in the context of refugee education, in order to inform the design of teaching content and methodology used to teach students of refugee background, who have potentially been through stressful and traumatic situations, as has been outlined in the above sections.

There are various ways through which a trauma-informed approach can be implemented, and Fallot and Harris (2009) have proposed that such an approach needs to be grounded on the following five principles: ensuring safety, maximizing trustworthiness, prioritising choice, maximising collaboration, and prioritising empowerment. It is interesting here to note the close connection of trauma-informed approaches to feminist pedagogy approaches, as many of their key elements, such as the attention to empowerment and choice, are common in both approaches. This can possibly point to the compatibility of a feminist pedagogy approach in a context where trauma-informed approaches are necessary, such as that of refugee education.

Carello and Butler (2015) outline some further trauma-informed strategies for the classroom, such as "teaching self-care, titrating exposure, eliciting and responding both emotionally and intellectually to student feedback, creating networks of support both in and out of the classroom, being mindful of power imbalances, and maintaining effective boundaries" (pp. 264-5). Furthermore, they discuss certain areas in which trauma-informed strategies may be useful: they highlight the importance of being aware of the students' background, as well as of possible triggers in the presentation of the content and assignment requirements, and in certain triggering behaviours of the instructor or of other students. Finally, they discuss the importance of the classroom characteristics in building a safe space, as well as the significance of practicing self-care. They argue that the principle of safety, originally proposed by Harris and Fallot (2001), is the most important one in creating a trauma-informed approach in education. Furthermore, the principle of safety is also related to a final important point that Carello and Butler (2015) make regarding the aim of trauma-informed approaches. This, they argue is not purely therapeutical, but focuses more on building a safe environment which will not retraumatise the students. Carello states that during her teaching experience

> "[Her] goal was not to learn how to provide therapy to students but, instead, to ensure their—and [her] own—emotional safety, especially when discussing traumatic material." (Carello & Butler, p. 268)

This point is of particular value in the refugee education context, as teachers tend to be overwhelmed by thinking that, in order to deal with trauma in the classroom, they need to be trained as therapists (Mayor, 2019; Nastasi et al., 2011). However, what Carello and Butler (2015) propose is that, in assuming a trauma-informed approach, teachers do not need to assume the role of the therapist, but instead they need to be aware of the environment in which the lesson is taking place and to ensure that they minimise any potential triggers of trauma for the students (and themselves).

2.5   Resilience

As discussed in the above section, trauma is one of the main concerns of teachers who work in forced migration contexts, and also preoccupies a great amount of the literature

around refugee education. However, in more recent studies, more emphasis is given by researchers to the concept of "resilience", which has become a buzzword in the area of refugee studies. Research around refugee and migrant education nowadays frequently revolves around the concept of resilience, which is referred to as one of its key goals and a basic skill which refugee and migrant learners need to develop. As resilience has been a concept explored in many disciplines, it is useful to first of all examine some definitions of the term, before exploring its use in refugee education.

2.5.1 *Definitions of Resilience*

Masten (2014), defines resilience as "the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability or development" (p. 6), clarifying that this system may of course refer to an individual. Luthar's (2003) definition seems to agree with that of Masten, as she defines resilience as "the manifestation of positive adaptation despite significant life adversity" (p. xxix). More specifically, when it comes to refugee individuals, Sleijpen et al. (2017) describe resilience as "a person's ability to adapt successfully to acute stress, trauma, or chronic forms of adversity" (p. 349). Most authors agree on a set of common characteristics which describe resilience, and it is often pointed out that this does not refer to a one-time event, but to a continuous process, which is different for each individual, and therefore difficult to measure. Sleijpen et al. (2017) refer to it as a "dynamic process that is context and time specific" (p. 348), whereas Chandler (2012) adds that resilience should be viewed as "a goal rather than a final state of being" (p. 218), thus emphasizing its continuity as a process rather than an end-goal.

However, even though resilience cannot be precisely measured, it can be traced back to other indicators of student well-being, which help us form a better idea of it. Even though definitions of resilience vary, and there cannot be one factor which measures it efficiently for everyone, Pieloch et al. (2016) highlight that "resilience emerges from the interactions among several different systems and contexts; therefore, it can be measured and examined at multiple levels" (p. 331), some of which have been examined by previous studies. The OECD's (2018) report on immigrant students' resilience defines it as "the capacity of students with an immigrant background to reach adequate levels of adjustment across multiple well-being dimensions" (p. 19) and measures this with regard to five different factors that affect wellbeing. According to the OECD (2018), these five indicators are the following: "academic

(under)performance", "sense of belonging at school", "satisfaction with life", "schoolwork-related anxiety", and "achievement motivation" (p. 19). Similarly, research conducted by Sleijpen et al. (2017) has shown that the development of resilience of refugees in the Netherlands can be located in a set of coping strategies that they employ. These have emerged through their study as the following: "(1) acting autonomously, (2) performing at school, (3) perceiving support from peers and parents, and (4) participating in the new society" (p. 354). Research conducted by Pieloch et al. (2016) with refugee students confirms two of the above findings; firstly, that general interest in education is highly connected to resilience building (p. 334) and secondly that "positive school experiences" and "pride in educational achievement" (p. 334) are also indicators which lead to resilience in refugee youth.

From all the above research, it can therefore be inferred that developing resilience is a continuous process which involves an amalgam of wellbeing indicators and strategies of coping with adversity, and that education holds an important role in this process. The studies discussed also foreground the agency and active role of refugee students in developing resilience, as, apart from the support that they receive from the school system and society in general, their personal effort and agency play a crucial role in this as well. The above findings are particularly helpful when thinking about refugee education and how this can be designed in order to promote resilience-building skills for the students.

2.5.2   *The Role of Education in Healing and Promoting Resilience*

Studies on refugee education showcase the vital role of the school in assisting students deal with trauma and build resilience. According to Demirdjian (2012), "education acts as a source of psychosocial support and helps reduce the children's exposure to threats, violence, physical attack" (p. 12). Through this psychosocial support, learners can gain the vital skills and the confidence that they need in order to build resilience and learn how to cope with adversity. Various other studies have underlined the role that education can play in minimizing the effects of trauma, and its healing effects have been highlighted. Hayward (2017), for example, notes how "classrooms are places where the opportunity for frequent affirmation enables learners to gain confidence, as well as to build capacity and develop new skills" (p. 169). Therefore, by viewing the students as capable to exhibit resilience, and by making the most out of the classroom's potential as

a site for healing and resilience building, educators can help students deal with trauma more successfully.

Healing and the development of resilience can be supported through the educational process in various different ways. Research has identified that education can help refugee students overcome trauma and build resilience by providing them with a sense of structure and normality (Hayward, 2017; Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019) , by instilling in them the feelings of trust, connection and community (Hayward, 2017; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020), by focusing on and including the students' emotions in the lesson (Hayward, 2017; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020), as well as by empowering them through language learning (Capstick & Delaney, 2018; Costa, 2017; Erling, 2017; Imperiale et al., 2017; Thondhlana & Madziva, 2017; Xerri, 2017). Moreover, the role of the educators in all of the above processes of "healing" is highlighted as crucial by the literature, as it is argued that "educators are in a unique position to employ approaches which potentially support the recovery process of refugees whilst concurrently enhancing opportunities for inclusion and successful integration into new communities" (Hayward, 2017, p. 165).

To begin with, attending school or receiving some type of education can have an extremely beneficial effect on refugee students' lives, in that it creates a feeling of normality. Attending classes regularly provides students with a sense of structure in their everyday lives, and this is reinforced by the regular repetition of daily activities and school routines and "rituals", such as morning assembly, break time, the sequence of lessons, the repeated structure of each individual lesson, etc. This sense of structure proves to be extremely beneficial for refugee students, since the vast majority find themselves in a state of constant waiting, feeling trapped and confined in refugee camps or in temporary accommodation. Going to school can, therefore, provide a very welcome and meaningful activity for them. Simopoulos and Stergiou's research with refugee students in Greece confirms this:

> "If I wasn't able to go to school", says a 12-year old Afghan girl whom they interviewed, "I don't know what I would be doing… Being at the camp all day, this is no kind of life…" (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019, p. 163).

The words of this girl are representative of the mental state of many refugees and asylum seekers, and show how education can offer them a useful, structured and

meaningful occupation at the host country, especially at refugee camps, while they are still waiting for asylum applications in order to continue their journey.

Furthermore, another benefit that students gain through the educational process, which can also help them process trauma and develop their agency and resilience, is the development of the feelings of trust, connection, and community. The literature highlights the importance of the formation of strong relationships of trust between students and teachers, as this can lead the students to feel connected and safe. As Stathopoulou and Dassi (2020) remark, in the refugee education context, "[i]n order to tackle any psychological problems successfully, apart from using mental health specialists, it is a common practice to encourage teachers to build strong connections and relations with their students and their families" (p. 62). Likewise, Hayward (2017) also comments on the importance of building relationships and trust, emphasising the view that "[t]he calm and affirming environment of the classroom can be a perfect locus for the renewal of hope, trust, and agency to occur" (Hayward, 2017, p. 169).

Establishing an environment of trust and connection is also related to being able to express emotions and to prioritize the students' emotional wellbeing in the classroom. Various scholars suggest that the integration of emotions in the lesson can have beneficial effects on refugee students, as it can allow them to process their feelings and emotional responses and ultimately contribute towards healing. In particular, the work of Zembylas (2012) on education, migration, and emotions, as well as that of Anwaruddin (2017) on emotions in the refugee education curriculum, point to the value of emotions in understanding how power and oppression function in the classroom. More specifically, Zembylas (2012) argues that "the movement of people involves complex emotional processes that have important consequences for educational policy, practice and research" (p. 164), suggesting that the pedagogical value of emotions in education should be considered, as they can aid in the process of critically understanding and deconstructing dominant power regimes.

Similarly, Anwaruddin (2017) points to the use of emotions in refugee education curricula, also drawing attention to how they are used in discursive practices in order to marginalize refugee students. Moreover, emotions are also examined for their therapeutic quality in the classroom, and specifically in relation to language learning. Hayward (2017) examines the favourable results that language learning around emotions can have in healing and resilience. She argues that "[h]aving an extended repertoire of vocabulary to express emotions can be a recovery tool in itself, as it

expands the options for sharing feelings – whether these be joy, illness or anxiety", suggesting that through the tasks in the language classroom, students can "safely and anonymously explore emotions through role plays, journal and creative writing, class discussions and debates, or via simple language or conversational exercises" (p. 172-3).

This last observation is interrelated with another factor which has been studied in terms of building resilience in refugee students, that of language learning. Extensive work has been carried out in recent years in order to investigate the potential of language learning to help students develop resilience. Specifically, in relation to the recent humanitarian crisis and forced migration movements after 2015, several publications by the British Council examined language learning for resilience in forced migration contexts (Capstick & Delaney, 2018; Erling, 2017). These studies point to "the potential of language learning to develop the resilience of individuals in difficult contexts and to develop skills such as tolerance and forgiveness that contribute to healthy societies" (Knagg, 2017, p. 9). Language learning can refer both to the host country language and additional languages, as well as to the learning of the home language. Imperiale et al. (2017) discuss the value of learning English for refugee students, as this can allow them to share their ideas and feel connected with a broader network, claiming that "an appropriate language pedagogy nurtures learners' wellbeing by teaching them a language in which hopes, dreams, injustice, experiences of pain and pressure are articulated and expressed to the wider international community" (p. 37). At the same time, staying in touch with their home language and being able to have education in this language has been proven to help refugee students develop a sense of belonging and consequently aid in developing resilience (Capstick & Delaney, 2018).

It can therefore be concluded that education in forced migration contexts can have various benefits for refugee students, and can support them in healing from trauma and in displaying agency and resilience. The sense of normality that it provides, the feelings of trust and connection that students develop in school, the integration of emotions in the lesson, as well as the healing role of language learning are all factors which are mentioned by the literature. Healing and resilience will be further explored in the next section as well, in relation to feminist pedagogy and its aims.

2.6 The Value of a Feminist Pedagogy Approach in Refugee Education

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the use of feminist pedagogy has been explored in academic settings, in secondary (and fewer) elementary settings, and in EFL

classrooms. In relation to refugee education settings, there are several studies that have focused on applying critical pedagogies to refugee education (Couch, 2017; Magee & Pherali, 2017; Swisher, 2023). However, when it comes to applications of a specifically feminist pedagogy in teaching refugee students, this has not been explored as extensively. The current research project aims to bridge this gap by exploring if feminist pedagogy can be applied in the (EFL) refugee classroom, and, in particular, in the Greek context, by examining the obstacles and opportunities that such an approach would be presented with.

Drawing on the aims and needs of refugee education, as well as on the elements and aims of feminist pedagogy, it can be inferred that there are certain elements of feminist pedagogy which lend themselves well to a refugee education setting. This study aims to explore these elements, proposing that they could benefit refugee students and their teachers alike. Firstly, I argue that feminist pedagogy's explicit attention to and critical view of, gender, race and ethnicity can be extremely relevant in a forced migration education setting, where a multiplicity of students from different cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds exist, and in which the aforementioned factors intersect. Secondly, I suggest that feminist pedagogy's attentiveness to the emotions and lived experiences of students, its focus on teaching as a practice of love, care, and connection, as well as its deconstruction of traditional power dynamics in the classroom, are all factors which complement the aim of refugee education to help students heal from trauma and develop resilience. These connections are examined in more detail below.

To begin with, being able to think about gender and ethnicity in a critical way is a skill which students of refugee background should be equipped with. As the literature suggests, these are issues which refugee students often encounter in the countries of reception, and against which they are often "Othered" in dominant discourse and societal narratives. Previous studies with Syrian refugee students have shown that the students demonstrate an "awareness of their perceived 'otherness'" (Ćatibušić, 2020) and that they are often recipients of xenophobic behaviour due to their appearance or particular dress, e.g. wearing the hijab (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). Furthermore, this othering of refugees on the basis of gender has been further explored by Farris (2017) in her work on femonationalism. Farris examines the ways in which race and gender are employed by Western discourse in order to negatively and stereotypically represent Muslim refugees arriving to Europe, and discusses the concepts of "sexualization of

racism" and "racialization of sexism" (p. 73). According to Farris (2017), "the notion of sexualization of racism emphasizes that racism is sexed because it relies on different stereotypes of Othered men and women—as oppressors and sexual threats, and as victims and sexual objects/property, respectively" (p. 73-74). This definition refers to the stereotypical representation of Muslim refugee women and men in Western thought, as well as to the fact that they are othered and reduced to stereotypical gender roles which are attributed to their religion and culture. McPherson (2015) also comments on "the West's propensity for representing women in development and forced migration circumstances as un-agentic victims" (p. 4), thus reaffirming that stereotypical representations of refugees are quite common. Similarly, "the racialization of sexism" describes the attribution of certain sexist practices to specific ethnic groups, in this case, Muslim refugees, as Farris (2017) describes below:

> The notion of racialization of sexism foregrounds the ways in which racism operates through the portrayal of sexism and patriarchy as the exclusive domains of the (non-western and Muslim) Other. The racist stigmatization of the Other thus depends on the description of the Other's culture as a sexist hell for women, thereby implying the danger of importing such nefarious sexist practices and relations into the West if foreign men are allowed to enter its borders." (p. 74)

As Farris notes, both of these notions are harmful towards refugees, as they perpetuate racist and sexist stereotypes, and are instrumentalised in nationalist discourse in order to promote anti-immigration propaganda.

Given the above observations, it is clear that refugee students are often faced with these stereotypes and othering on the basis of gender, ethnicity, and religion. It is therefore imperative for them to be able to critically understand these concepts, as well as the intersections between these. Feminist pedagogy, given its emphasis on issues of oppression and their intersectionality, can provide an effective way for students to be introduced to these issues and to start developing a critical awareness around them. By including topics related to gender, culture, religion, race, students can become more attuned to the ways in which these may be perceived differently in the host country in which they are living, and can learn to question dominant narratives around these.

Apart from assisting the critical exploration of gender, ethnicity, religion, and other layers of identity, feminist pedagogy can also be beneficial in helping students heal from trauma and develop agency and resilience. As discussed previously, the

healing role of education in forced migration settings has been remarked on by many studies, as has the crucial role of the teacher in creating a "healing" environment. This role coincides with certain elements of feminist pedagogy which promote healing and resilience building, such as its attention to emotions and lived experience, its emphasis on care, love, and connection, and its deconstruction of traditional power dynamics in the classroom.

Firstly, feminist pedagogy highly values the integration of emotions and lived experience in the classroom as valid ways of knowing (Boler, 1999; Bostow et al., 2015; Fisher, 1987; hooks, 2003; Paechter, 1998). However, emotions and experience are used critically in feminist education, and are employed as tools to reflect on one's beliefs and ideas. As Bostow et al. (2015) remark, "feminist classrooms aren't simply about uncritically sharing emotions but instead analyzing how they inform perspectives and actions". Furthermore, Boler's (1999) formative work on emotions and education point to the value of emotions as powerful tools which can assist in consciousness-raising and which are viewed not only in relation to the individual, but also in relation to society. Emotions thus assume a political dimension:

> The feminist practices of consciousness-raising and feminist pedagogy powerfully reclaim emotions out of the (patriarchally enforced) private sphere and put emotions on the political and public map. Feminist politics of emotions recognize emotions not only as a site of social control, but of political resistance. (p. 112)

Similarly, Fisher (1987) highlights the use of emotions and lived experience in understanding gender oppression— consequently, these are viewed again as insights into political practices of exclusion and marginalisation:

> Feminist pedagogy emphasizes the emotions in great part because of its origins in consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising focuses on women's experience, and feeling plays an important part in that experience. The power of consciousness-raising stems from the potential of shared experiences and feelings to shed light on the nature of women's oppression. (p. 176)

It can therefore be argued that through feminist pedagogy, teachers and students can critically use emotions and lived experience to understand oppression, something which can have a positive effect on strengthening the students' resilience. Moreover, as hooks

(2003) discusses below, tending to the students' emotional responses is indeed quite important to feminist pedagogy and it can allow for building a more favourable environment for learning to occur:

> When teachers work to affirm the emotional wellbeing of students we are doing the work of love. Colleagues have shared with me that they do not want to be placed in the role of "therapist"; they do not want to respond to emotional feeling in the classroom. Refusing to make a place for emotional feelings in the classroom does not change the reality that their presence overdetermines the conditions where learning can occur. Teachers are not therapists. However, there are times when conscious teaching—teaching with love—brings us the insight that we will not be able to have a meaningful experience in the classroom without reading the emotional climate of our students and attending to it. In some cases that may require becoming more emotionally aware of psychological conflicts within a student blocking the student's capacity to learn. (hooks, 2003, p.133)

The connection with healing and creating a warm and safe environment can be made in relation to hooks' words on the importance of tending to the students' emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, what is also highlighted by hooks is the attention of feminist pedagogy to care, love, and connection, factors which can also contribute to healing and building resilience. Feminist pedagogy is a pedagogy which views teaching as an act of care and love; as McArthur and Lane (2019) observe, "love [is] a central tenet of authentically caring and healing pedagogies" (p. 65). hooks (2003) also comments on the importance of love and care in teaching, as these can create a safe environment for learning. She describes love "as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust", stating that "[w]hen these basic principles of love form the basis of teacher-pupil interaction the mutual pursuit of knowledge create the conditions for optimal learning" (p. 131-2). Therefore, it can be observed that feminist pedagogy prioritises the relationship between the teacher and the students. As Morley (1998) argues:

> Feminist pedagogy has been developed in opposition to the traditional hierarchical relationship between teacher and taught. In this construction, social relations are highlighted, in the belief that pedagogy is not something one does

'to' people, but rather it is a complex interaction of at least three agencies—the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they produce together. (p. 16)

This prioritisation of care, connection, and relationships relates back to the aims of refugee education. As the literature suggests that the above factors can help students overcome trauma and build resilience, a feminist pedagogy approach which forefronts these elements could be of immense benefit for refugee students and teachers. Finally, through questioning traditional power dynamics and relationships between teacher and students, feminist pedagogy can also aid refugee students to develop their agency and be empowered through the learning process.

2.7   Conclusion

This chapter has examined the origins, basic principles, and aims of feminist pedagogy and has discussed this as a potentially beneficial pedagogy in forced migration contexts. Furthermore, it has provided an overview of the main aims of refugee education, highlighting debates between trauma and resilience, and discussing the need for a pedagogy which will enable students and teachers to deal with trauma and focus on resilience. The last section in particular has attempted to provide an explanation of how feminist pedagogy could be of use in refugee education. It has been argued that feminist pedagogy's beneficial effect on students and teachers is twofold. On the one hand, its critical attention to issues of oppression (gender, ethnicity, race, religion, etc.), can enable refugee students to think about these issues critically and develop critical thinking skills and resilience. On the other hand, its focus on the students' emotional wellbeing through the practice of love, care and connection, can provide a warm and safe environment for healing to occur, and for emotions to be used as tools to understand oppression. The next chapter provides an overview of the research epistemology which was employed for the project.

3 Chapter 3: Feminist Research Epistemology and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Before delving into details regarding the research methods that were employed, it is first of all essential to explore the particular research epistemology and methodology that underlies the project, as this has functioned as a foundation for the development of the research questions and the design of the research. According to Leavy and Harris (2019), the term research epistemology in general refers to "the study of theories of knowledge" (p. 17). In other words, it is concerned with what constitutes knowledge and with the ways that knowledge is constructed during the research process. Feminist epistemology, in particular, is defined as "the study of knowledge from a feminist perspective; that is, the production of knowledge through a feminist lens" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 17). Feminist epistemology rejects positivist paradigms of knowledge construction, and argues instead for the need to acknowledge the situatedness and subjectivity of the researcher. Through feminist epistemology, as Leavy and Harris note, feminist thought has developed from a subject area into a "an *epistemological lens* [emphasis added] through which researchers can both see and do any and all kinds of research" (2019, p. 18).

It is precisely this "epistemological lens" mentioned above that the present research seeks to adopt. In other words, the study assumes a feminist approach as to what constitutes knowledge, meaning-making, and ethical research practice. Its epistemology, therefore, draws on the values and tenets of feminist research methodology, which will be explained in more detail below. This particular choice of methodology is also justified in light of the topic of inquiry, which is feminist pedagogy, as it was found to relate to the topic in many ways. Braun and Clarke (2021), argue that the design of a research project needs to be "considered and coherent" and claim that it should be characterized by an "overall conceptual coherence or 'fit'" (p. 26). Feminist research methodology provided me with this "fit" and "coherence" that I sought for the methodological part of the current project, as it aligns in many ways with the main research question that I set out to explore, namely feminist pedagogy.

3.2   Feminist Research Methodology

Feminist research shares many of the basic tenets of feminist pedagogy, and it was therefore deemed the most suitable research framework to follow when examining the use of feminist pedagogy in the refugee classroom. The various literature available on feminist research methodology agrees on some key concepts which are critical to it and form its core (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Joyappa & J. Martin, 1996; Maguire, 1987; Rizvi, 2019; Rose & Lauer, 1998). Feminist research methodology is strongly connected to feminist activism and aims to empower and give voice to women and marginalized subjects; it places emphasis on intersectionality; it strongly critiques positivism as a framework of knowledge; it acknowledges the significance of emotions and lived experience; and it greatly values self-reflexivity. Below, I will elaborate on each of these characteristics of feminist research, focusing especially on its attention to reflexivity and positionality, as well as considering how this takes form in the current research.

3.2.1   Activism and Empowerment

As mentioned earlier, feminist methodology—whether that has to do with pedagogy or research—, is very closely tied to the concept of praxis, of raising awareness and promoting actual social change, starting from the classroom and expanding to other real-life contexts. This is largely due to the fact that "feminist research *originated within the context of the second wave feminist movement*" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 5, emphasis in original), a movement which was very much concerned with the emancipation of women and bringing about the desired change in society towards gender equality. Likewise, feminist research is conducted with this goal in mind, with the aim of engaging in research which will be of benefit and give voice to oppressed, marginalized communities, which are often overlooked by mainstream research. As Rizvi (2019) notes, feminist research methodology was initially developed in order to promote not only "consciousness-raising", but also "the empowerment of women through the research process, giving them agency to challenge oppressive structures" (p. 47). It is therefore clear how feminist methodology adopts many of the basic tenets of feminist and critical pedagogy, such as the strong advocacy for social change, the focus on consciousness-raising around issues of oppression, and the empowerment of marginalized groups through the development of critical consciousness.

3.2.2 Intersectionality: Not Only Gender

As feminist research originated in women's movements and second wave feminism, gender and women's rights are a significant concern for feminist researchers. However, that is not to say that gender is the sole objective of feminist research. As Leavy and Harris (2019) put it, "*gender* is central to defining what feminist research does and believes, yet gender is not the only focus of feminist research" (p. 4, emphasis in original). Instead, feminist research utilizes its specific epistemological lens, which was mentioned above, in order to conduct research that will address issues of oppression more widely, and also to pose critical questions and inspire reflexivity about researcher identity. Therefore, feminist research focuses not only on gender, but it also explores other related issues, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, etc. In other words, it acknowledges that gender functions in relation to all of the above categories, and that it is explored more fully when taking into account the intersectionality between all of these—again, linking back to feminist pedagogy and its intersectional nature. Some of the questions that are pivotal for feminist research and which relate to intersectionality are summarized in the following excerpt from Leavy and Harris' book on feminist research methodology, which states that

> [i]n order to be wide awake as feminist researchers, we must not only ask about gender, but we must also ask: What about race? What about sexuality? What about ableism? What about class (socioeconomic) inequity? How do these conditions and positions work together or against one another?" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. vi)

The questions above serve to draw attention to the fact that, even though researchers may be investigating the subject of gender, they still need to be aware of and to question how gender interacts with sexuality, ethnicity, social class, religious background, linguistic background, etc., not only in their topic of inquiry, but also for themselves as researchers.

During the carrying out of the current project and the writing of the dissertation, these questions constantly arose through the interviews with the participants, as well as when I was considering my own dual role as a teacher and researcher, in this way constituting it vital for me to assume an intersectional approach. The nature of the

project itself, which focused on the exploration of feminist pedagogy in language learning for students of refugee backgrounds, cut across multiple intersecting topics, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and language. More specifically, during the interviews with educators and managerial staff, when discussing gender issues in the school, the notions of "culture" and "religion" were also very dominant in the discussions, and were presented as reasons to account for differences in perceptions around gender. Similarly, during the student discussions, when exploring topics related to gender and women's rights, "religion" as well as "ethnicity" were often brought up in the discussions. This led me to the conclusion that the issue of gender could not be explored one-sidedly; rather, it was necessary to look at it from an intersectional point of view, and in relation to the rest of the topics that I located in the data. Furthermore, intersectionality also proved to be a vital tool for me to better understand my researcher positionality, and how the multiple levels of my identity as a teacher and researcher interacted in the research process. I provide further details on this in my positionality statement.

3.2.3 *Self-reflexivity and Researcher Positionality*

Similarly to feminist pedagogy, a central feature of feminist research is self-reflexivity, which is used as a tool towards making the research process more valid and true to the population that is being researched. In her research on the use of feminist pedagogy in English Language Teaching, Japanese researcher Reiko Yoshihara employs a feminist research methodology, and reflects on how important it is for the feminist researcher to be self-reflexive about her own identity. As Yoshihara (2017), notes, it is quite important to acknowledge the fact that a researcher's positionality, that is, "a researcher's gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual identity and biography *do* influence the research" (p. 19, emphasis added), as it is impossible to distinguish between these aspects of one's personal identity and one's research identity. This means that the researcher acknowledges her positionality, in other words, her background and her identity, as well as how this might impact the research process, and that she is also self-reflexive about her own practices and research methods.

Reflexivity and awareness of researcher positionality is seen as a central element by many feminist researchers, who argue that it is critical "to integrate researchers themselves into the research process, incorporate their own values, theory, ontology,

and epistemology, and reflect their participants' experiences and references as seen from the inside" (Yoshihara, 2017, p. 19). Integrating one's positionality into the research is therefore important, as it enables them to better understand how their identity shapes their work, and their relationship with the participants, as well as how each participant's identity influences their experience. Benesch (1998) also makes a strong argument for integrating positionality not only in feminist research, but also in feminist pedagogy classrooms, as it "acknowledges that teachers' and students' subjectivities are socially constructed" and that each individual identity, each "*I[,]* is a function of class, race, sexual preference, ethnicity, gender, history, and region" (p. 103, emphasis in original). As it draws attention to the particular aspects of one's identity that may affect teaching and learning, recognizing one's positionality also helps us understand that all these different aspects, including gender, are social constructs, and consequently questions essentialist approaches to these.

3.2.4   *Positionality and the Critique of Positivism*

The emphasis that feminist research methodology places on researcher positionality and self-reflexivity comes as an answer to its critique of positivism as a framework of knowledge and research. Positivism is a scientific and philosophical theory that insists on objectivity, rationalism, and the prevalence of the mind over the body, whereas feminist researchers have criticized the idea that these elements are the only valid ways of constructing knowledge or enacting research. Positivism, rooted in an androcentric conception of knowledge, aims for an objective truth discovered through unbiased research, rejecting emotions, and lived or bodily experience as concepts which can be included in scientific research. On the other hand, feminist researchers have strongly criticized this knowledge and research framework, claiming that positivist research is not, in fact, as objective as it claims, but that it is actually quite biased and subjective, as it is rooted in a "privileged location within a historical, material, and social set of patriarchal power relations" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 7). In other words, researchers who engage in positivist research might not be as objective as they purport, since they fail to acknowledge their positionality and how this influences their research, as well as to explore how the patriarchal structures underlying traditional research frameworks impact their research methodology and process as well. Finally, feminist researchers critique positivism as a framework, as it does not fully represent the whole

of society— how can positivist research be objective, inclusive, and, consequently, valid, if it fails to include the feelings and lived experiences of women and marginalized groups in general (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 6)?

Feminist research, as Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), note, aims to introduce a new research framework which includes elements traditionally rejected by positivist research as invalid, such as "interpretation, subjectivity, emotion and embodiment" (p. 13), by including and analysing as valid data the researcher's and participant's emotions and experiences. Feminist research does not profess to be objective; on the contrary, it openly manifests its position, its starting point, and acknowledges the limitations that this may cause in the research and interpretation of data. However, this position need not necessarily be negatively interpreted. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) note, gender theorist Donna Haraway has discussed how

> [O]ur situated location – our particular biography, history, and positionality – does not have to be perceived as a barrier to achieving knowledge or truth but instead can offer each of us a unique way of seeing the world, a 'focusing device' so to speak, through which we may be able to catch, see and/or understand phenomena in ways that others cannot (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 13).

Feminist researchers are therefore encouraged to make use of their positionality, rather than seeing it as a hindrance, and to employ it as a tool in their research, which will enable them to reflect on their own and their participants' feelings and experiences more truly. As Yoshihara (2017), puts it, it might be useful to "reject objectivity and neutrality" and instead "employ an insider status in this research" (p. 19), as this might prove much more beneficial for the research validity than claiming to be totally neutral and objective and failing to perceive how we are influenced by our background and ideology.

3.2.5 *Feminist Standpoint Theory, Strong Objectivity, Strong Reflexivity*

This stance of feminist research which rejects objectivity and neutrality, leads us to the concepts of "strong objectivity" and *"strong reflexivity"*, proposed by feminist philosopher Sandra Harding in her "feminist standpoint theory" (Harding, 2004).

According to Harding, the approach suggested above, that is, acknowledging that one cannot be completely neutral towards their research and taking into account one's positionality, does not take away from the objectivity of the research, but does, in fact, enhance it and brings it closer to an improved type of objectivity, which Harding terms *strong objectivity*. Strong objectivity is deemed much more reliable, as in this framework, "the experiences and voices of marginalized others, including women, are not only incorporated but serve as the starting point for building knowledge" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 8). Thus, what characterizes the research process, is, as Harding claims, "*more* objectivity" (Harding as in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 8, emphasis in original), and not subjectivity, as some might argue. In fact, according to feminist researchers, the inclusion of feelings, lived experiences and reference to positionality does not make the research subjective, or detract from its validity, but rather makes it even more inclusive, objective, and closer to the perspectives of multiple individuals. This has to do with the connection of feminist research to alternative ways of knowledge construction, that argue for the inclusion of emotions and lived experience as valuable tools in the construction of knowledge and research frameworks. According to Alison Jaggar, we need not strive "to cleanse ourselves of our emotions to achieve some notion of objective truth or knowledge but instead to pay closer attention to our emotions and listen to them more carefully" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 14), as they are the most reliable indicators towards understanding ourselves and our perceptions of the world. Being self-reflexive and self-critical in order to understand how one's positionality may hinder or influence the research process is what Harding calls "strong reflexivity" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). By employing strong reflexivity, researchers strive towards strong objectivity, and both these notions together form Harding's "feminist standpoint theory", which calls us to be cognizant of the role that our standpoint, our background and point of departure plays in the research.

3.3 Reflexivity in Practice

Having examined the importance of researcher reflexivity in feminist research, this chapter now aims to focus on two specific sub-categories of reflexivity: emotional reflexivity and political reflexivity. These have provided me with more targeted tools and ways to question my role as a researcher in the particular context that I was researching. The fact that I was researching feminist pedagogy in a context of forced

migration meant that I needed to be especially reflexive about my own emotions towards the topic, as well as about the political situation in which the study took place. In the following sections I introduce the uses and importance of emotional and political reflexivity, while also relating them to my specific research process and how they assisted me in developing my reflexivity.

3.3.1 Emotional Reflexivity

> *"Write about Layla.*
>
> *[A few days later]*
>
> *I notice how this topic has troubled me more than others, it's been sitting in my diary notes for a while now, until I properly write it up and type it here, probably because it was the most emotionally draining, and I didn't feel like approaching it again. It got me thinking:*
>
> *What happens when you write about memories, experiences, people you know and students that you saw grow who are now facing their tenth asylum rejection, or are roaming the streets of Athens homeless?*
>
> *Dealing with the emotions this brings up is not an easy task; they need to be taken into account, however, and to be acknowledged. This part of the research is one of the hardest ones.*
>
> *How do I relate to my dissertation and the written text?*
>
> *What do the feelings certain parts cause me betray?*
>
> *How do I put these aside or come to terms with them in order to write my dissertation?"*
>
> *–Researcher diary excerpt*

The above excerpt comes from my researcher diary, a tool which has often been employed by feminist researchers in order to advance their reflexivity and record their reactions, thoughts, and emotions during the research process. The specific passage refers to an incident that had occurred during one of my lessons at the school, when one of my students disclosed to me an instance of abuse that she had been a victim of. The whole incident of the disclosure shocked me, and I did not know how to respond to the situation. Although I did want to record what had happened that day and my thoughts about it in my researcher diary, I merely noted down one sentence: "*Write about Layla*",

41

feeling unable to complete the rest. A few days later, while I had entered several other entries into my researcher diary, the entry about Layla still remained unwritten. Knowing that it was not mere idleness or lack of time that kept me from writing about this particular subject, I wondered what this reluctance of mine to approach it could teach me and what it could mean in a broader sense. In other words, I saw this as an opportunity to unpick and critically question the emotions that I was feeling towards this subject, and to inquire into what these might signify and how they could become relevant to the research question. The questions that arose above (*"How do I relate to my dissertation and the written text? What do the feelings certain parts cause me betray?"*) assisted me in exploring this topic further. During my fieldwork and data collection at the school on Leros, I kept revisiting and reflecting on these questions; questions which alerted me to the significance and the impact that emotions had on myself as a researcher and on the research process as a whole. In particular, I feel that the above excerpt from my researcher diary illustrates three central points that the literature on emotions in feminist research has explored. These include, first of all, the rejection of the traditional positivist view of emotions as harmful towards research objectivity; secondly, the valuing of emotions as insights into the research process and the topic of inquiry; and, finally, the acknowledgment of the emotional work—and sometimes the emotional "burden"—that researchers undertake, especially in feminist research and research with vulnerable populations, like refugees.

As mentioned previously, feminist research draws attention to how emotions have been marginalized by traditional positivist views about what constitutes "objective" and "scientific" research. Positivism reinforces a dualistic perception regarding reason and emotions, claiming that these two are separate, and that the latter have no place in research. Alison Jaggar, whose work on feminism and emotions has been formative, comments on the marginalisation of emotions in traditional research paradigms and on their perception as a hindrance to academic knowledge. This happens, she argues, due to the fact that emotions are considered as "passive or involuntary responses to the world" (Jaggar, 1989, p. 159), as irrational and uncontrollable, and therefore as unable to provide "trustworthy"—if there are indeed such—accounts of knowledge.

This belief is deep-rooted in Western thought and epistemology, and it is therefore difficult to challenge it, as its remnants still pervade views on what constitutes "objective" and "scientific" research. This was true in my case as well, even though I

consciously adopted a feminist epistemology approach, had read extensively on feminist research and pedagogy, and felt that I identify with their values. Nonetheless, I still found that some underlying positivist assumptions about emotions in research were hard to eliminate from my way of thinking. An example being my thought process in the above diary excerpt, where I wonder how I can *"put [my feelings] aside or come to terms with them in order to write my dissertation"*. This quote indicates an internalised positivist attitude towards emotions as something that needs to be discarded in order for me to be objective and continue writing. Braun and Clarke (2021) define these "positivist assumptions slinking into the research, unacknowledged by the author" as "positivism creep" (p. 270), something which they argue is common in student papers and which I also recognised in my researcher diary extract. However, the whole journal entry alerted me to the fact that it is not possible to actually "put aside" our emotions as researchers, to simply ignore the emotions that the research stirs in us. As Liebling (1999) observes on a similar note, "our emotions do not need to be reconciled with our so-called data. They constitute data" (p. 164). Similarly, I did not need to discard my emotions in order to continue my research; rather, I needed to treat them as data. Documenting my thought process in the researcher diary thus helped me to be more reflexive about my own epistemological standpoint, and my explicit and also unconscious views on the role of emotions in research.

While it may be difficult to deconstruct traditional positivist views that have been the norm for centuries, feminist thinkers have paved the way in reconsidering the role and value of emotions in research. Contrary to positivist traditions, Jaggar (1989), proposes that new methodological frameworks need to be developed— frameworks which will acknowledge the interrelation of emotions and reason, and the fact that emotions are actually "ways in which we engage actively and even construct the world" (p. 159). In other words, she draws attention to how emotions are in fact very crucial in knowledge construction, and how they are still part of the equation, even when claims are made that the research is entirely rid of them. Likewise, Lumsden (2019) comments on the significance of emotions in research, maintaining that researchers need to consider these "as playing an interpretive, sensitizing, and cognitive function in that they help to attune us to the feelings, meanings, and behaviours of others, hence allowing us to empathize with them" (p. 83). In this way, emotions can be seen as functioning not in opposition to knowledge, but instead, as assisting researchers to delve deeper into their relationship with the participants and with the topic that they are

exploring. Therefore, emotions in research are essential and cannot be dismissed; they provide insight and help researchers be more reflexive, and consequently better aware of their motives, their behaviours, and the ways in which they construct knowledge. In this sense, it can be said that emotions actually *are* data (Liebling, 1999; Lumsden, 2019), and they should be treated as such, as they can offer valuable material for analysis.

The diary passage discussed above serves as one example during which I exercised emotional reflexivity. I began by observing and actively noticing my emotions and attitude towards a certain topic that I was writing about: *"I notice how this topic has troubled me more than others […]"*. After that, I followed along the lines of Braun and Clarke's (2021) model of reflexivity, which proposes that researchers ask the vital questions of "why *might* I be having this particular type of response, and how *might* this matter for my research?" (p. 19, emphasis in original). This stance, they argue, engages the researchers in a "de-socialization process" (p. 19), helping them to deconstruct meaning that is often thought of as a given. In this sense, asking myself *"[w]hat do the feelings certain parts [of my dissertation] cause me betray?"* was a very active inquiry into how my own emotions could act as a guide to help me form a more concise understanding of the matter. *Why did I not want to write about the incident during which a student disclosed abuse to me?* Because, apart from it being a sensitive topic, I felt like I was not adequately prepared to handle it. *Why did I feel like I did not do well as a teacher?* Because I felt like I should always be able to provide my students with answers. *How is this connected to my views on how to practice feminist pedagogy?* It is connected to the role that a teacher should assume, and to the deep-rooted belief that a teacher should have all the answers and should be able to provide these to the students. *What did I learn from this?* That it is not possible to know how to respond to everything or how to act in any scenario and that sometimes the sole act of practicing active listening and being there for the students is enough.

All of the above points demonstrate how emotional reflexivity is vital in research, and how it can provide precious guidance towards exploring the topic in question. Aside from this point, emotions also need to be considered in relation to the emotional work that researchers are very often called to undertake. Lumsden (2019) refers to this as the "the emotionally charged and embodied nature of fieldwork which has physical and psychological consequences for the researcher" (p. 87), and which has also been termed as "emotional labour" (Hochschild, as in Lumsden, 2019, p. 87) or

"emotional craft work" (Coffey, as in Lumsden, 2019, p. 87). This kind of psychological strain is exacerbated in contexts which involve doing research with vulnerable populations, such as displaced populations, due to the violent situations that they have experienced and the dangerous and inhumane conditions in which they are living in most countries of reception (e.g., reception camps, inadequate support from the government, etc.).

In particular, during the current study, in my twofold role as a teacher and researcher in a refugee population context, I often felt the emotional strain of working with students seeking asylum. The emotions that arose were mainly related to the conditions under which the students that I taught were living; namely, their practical "imprisonment" in squalid conditions at the refugee camp of the island, the long amount of time they had to wait to be granted asylum, the multiple rejections of their asylum applications, and the mental strain that all this, combined with the global pandemic, caused them and their families. Aside from this, the unstable nature of working with populations on the move was also a source of emotional distress. As the student body was ever-changing, I felt that I was constantly saying goodbye to students that I had formed strong bonds with. On the one hand, I was happy when the students got granted asylum and were able to move on to mainland Greece, and from there to their final destinations, if possible. On the other hand, this parting with students that I had seen grow in my classroom was bittersweet and very emotional. One particular excerpt from my diary sketches my thoughts on the day when a few students very dear to me left the school:

> *"I feel half, or lesser; some of my much-loved students left the school today. Every time one of them leaves I feel like a small piece of myself leaves with them—am I to pretend I never knew them?"*
> *—Researcher diary excerpt*

These emotions that I felt that day very evidently affected me, as I didn't feel like continuing my lessons as normal— I felt emotionally drained. The rest of the teachers were sympathetic towards me—they had been through this multiple times in the past and knew how it felt. However, this strain which I felt was something that affected me, my teaching, and the research process, and something which needed to be

acknowledged, in order for me "to preserve [my] well-being and prevent burn-out" (Lumsden, 2019, p. 94).

Likewise, my reaction to my student's disclosure mentioned above, points to how research with displaced populations can often bring researchers into contact with uncomfortable and violent subjects, such as abuse. My diary observation that this subject *"was the most emotionally draining, and I didn't feel like approaching it again"*, shows my discomfort in writing about this issue and how the emotions that it caused me hindered me from dealing with this topic altogether. Similarly, I felt unmotivated to write about students with whom I had developed strong bonds and who had left, as this seemed to be an experience which caused me pain and discomfort, as can be seen in the excerpt where I wonder: "*What happens when you write about memories/experiences/people you know and students that you saw grow who are now facing their 10th asylum rejection, or are roaming the streets of Athens homeless?"*. These thoughts point not only to the emotional burden of the researcher in contexts of displacement, but also to the relationships that can be formed with the participants and the effect that these can have on the research.

So, what is the importance of acknowledging emotions and emotional work in research? To sum up, this section has discussed the value of emotions as data in the research, and as insights which can aid us to better understand the research aim. Likewise, awareness of the emotional work that researchers dedicate to the project is important, as, once again, it points to the fact that "research is an emotionally-embodied practice and experience" (Lumsden, 2019, p. 89) and therefore, it is impossible to proceed without taking the emotions that arise into consideration.

3.3.2 *Political Reflexivity*

Along with emotional reflexivity, political reflexivity has also been proposed as a vital lens through which researchers should consider their practice and through which they can be reflexive about their choices of methodology and their relationships with the participants. Many theorists draw attention to the fact that all research is political, even when researchers themselves claim that they are being objective and impartial. According to Lumsden (2019), being entirely neutral towards the research topic that one is investigating is impossible, as "[r]esearch itself is a political exercise – and hence what we choose to investigate is determined by the way in which we perceive the

world" (p. 166). This quote illuminates two points: first of all, the fact that the act of doing research—along with selecting what we examine (the topic) and how we do this (the methodology)—is, in fact, a very conscious and political decision; secondly, that it is political because of our particular positionality as researchers and the ideology that we carry into our project. In this sense, political reflexivity is closely associated with the notion of positionality and awareness of researcher subjectivity, that were mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Furthermore, political reflexivity has been proposed as an additional way of being reflexive, in contexts where traditional notions of reflexivity seem to be inadequate. Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) claim that this type of reflexivity is particularly crucial when conducting research in violent contexts and with vulnerable populations, and they provide a framework for enacting political reflexivity in research with displaced populations. They claim that, in these cases, it is imperative to be reflexive about the political consequences and implications of the study, due to the nature of researching violent contexts and the power imbalances that arise in these. Political reflexivity is therefore proposed by the above authors as a means of repairing the damage that is usually caused to vulnerable populations by their representation in research, as it allows researchers "to account for their positionality and privilege in relation to power disparities, seek out and centre marginalized voices in their work, and where possible subvert those structures that do the marginalizing" (Abdelnour & Moghli, 2021, p. 2). This type of reflexivity is therefore connected to awareness of researcher positionality—which links to feminist research methodology—, to giving voice to marginalized subjects—which is connected to the aims of critical and feminist pedagogy—, and to bringing about social change and deconstructing oppressive regimes—again, both of which are aims of critical and feminist pedagogy and research.

Given the above connections of political reflexivity to feminist frameworks and feminist thought, it seems quite logical that both Abdelnour and Moghli's work (2021), as well as Lumsden's (2019), suggest feminist standpoint theory as a suitable framework through which political reflexivity may be developed in studies that research highly violent or political contexts. The above authors all agree on the aptness of feminist standpoint theory in such research contexts. Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) propose that it suits these contexts, as it helps researchers "critically examine their positionality and privilege in relation to the geopolitics of the research setting, epistemic privilege of marginalized participants, and political implications of their work." (p. 1).

Lumsden (2019) also concurs that it brings to the fore "the privileged positions" of researchers and encourages them to assume a "self-critical approach" (p. 159). Thus, the central common points that they both make about feminist standpoint theory are, firstly, the recognition of the power dynamics between researcher and researched, and, secondly, the aim of providing subjects who have been traditionally obscured in research with a space to voice their personal experiences. This approach that the above authors propose also aligns with the aim of the current project, as it adopts a feminist epistemological framework (as explained previously), which provides useful and appropriate tools for enacting reflexivity— both emotional and political.

Similarly to broader renderings of reflexivity, political reflexivity alerts researchers to issues of positionality and subjectivity. However, political reflexivity is more specific, in that it also asks questions that are tailored to more politicized and violent research contexts. First and foremost, researchers are called to acknowledge that they cannot be neutral towards the topic they are exploring. Lumsden (2019) argues that "it is essential that the ethnographer is visible in the text" and that they shouldn't "pretend to be neutral, but [should] be honest about one's own perspectives and beliefs" (p. 157). Therefore, one important aspect is disclosing one's own political stance on the issue that is being researched, and discussing how this might be influencing the representation and analysis of the data, as well as how this can be taken into account. Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) also refer to this aspect, making note of how researchers are often very much emotionally and politically involved in the issues that they are exploring, and how these "very personal ways of relating to violent contexts" (p. 2) constitute it vital to disclose our positionality.

Apart from this very important aspect of political reflexivity, Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) propose a framework composed of three crucial elements that researchers need to pay attention to in order to exercise political reflexivity when conducting research with refugees. The authors identify three forms through which researchers may cause harm when doing research in violent contexts and which they should be reflexive about. These three forms include the "objectification" of the participants, "violence normalization" of the contexts examined, and the "silencing" of participants who are marginalized and on the lower end of the power axis (Abdelnour & Moghli, 2021, p. 3). It seems useful to present and analyse these three elements in relation to the research topic of the present thesis, and to investigate how political

reflexivity can be applied in my exploration of feminist pedagogy in the education of students who have been forcibly displaced.

First of all, the danger of "objectification" that the above authors mention, has to do with representing the participants as lacking agency or as characterized by a single identity or label (Abdelnour & Moghli, 2021, p. 5). This risks that they will be associated with just this label, while it also deprives them of their capability for displaying agency, and their humanity in general. In my study's case, this concern around objectification was particularly pertinent to the representation of students with refugee backgrounds in the research. More specifically, it was important for me to be reflexive about two main labels that risked objectifying the students and their cultural backgrounds: a) the label of "the refugee", and b) the label of the "back-wards, patriarchal and gender stereotypical" person whose religious and cultural beliefs pose a threat to gender equality.

A lot has been written in terms of the first label, that of the "refugee", and the effects that it can have on individuals to whom it is attributed, as well as its power in constructing a certain image around them in society (Cole, 2018; Fruja Amthor, 2017; Ludwig, 2016; Pittaway & Pittaway, 2004; Vigil & Abidi, 2018; Zetter, 2007). Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) claim that it is a "reductionist label" (p. 5), which delimits the humanity of people who have been forcibly displaced and reduces them to this aspect of their identity only. While working and doing research with students from refugee backgrounds, I found it was crucial to be aware of this labelling, and especially of how the label of the "refugee" might very often prevent myself or other teachers from seeing the full potential that the students had in school. As discussed in the literature review chapter, the "medicalization of trauma" is a common phenomenon and a lens through which refugee students are often seen in the literature and in real life. In other words, they are regarded only through the perspective of the trauma they might have experienced, rather than being seen as full persons with the potential for recovery and resilience. Adopting a feminist pedagogy approach, meant that I chose to view my students through a resilience lens, while amplifying their voice and ensuring there was space for them to discuss their experiences and emotions in the classroom. This proved to be a vital strategy which helped me become more reflexive about challenging these labels.

Likewise, the second label mentioned above often came up in the school context, as well as in the interviews with the teachers and managerial staff. The

stereotypical belief that refugees from Muslim, Arab backgrounds follow a patriarchal way of life was a common theme in many of the educator and managerial staff interviews. It was often implied or stated explicitly in the interviews that the reason behind the students holding some stereotypical beliefs about gender was "their culture" and "their religion". This view of the students, apart from "othering" them and placing a barrier between "their" culture and a supposedly more gender-equal "Western culture", is over-generalizing and presents all refugees as a homogeneous group without allowing for any diversity. Therefore, when we were touching upon gender issues during the classroom discussions with the students, it was of crucial importance for me to exercise political reflexivity around this label. This meant being aware of my own positionality regarding gender issues and my identity as a "feminist" and giving the students space to relate their own views in a safe, non-judgemental environment.

This last point also resonates with the call of Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) for researchers to be reflexive about the "silencing" of marginalized populations in research. This silencing may occur when choosing what topic or question one is going to research or which voices are going to be given the space to be heard in the study. Both Abdelnour and Moghli (2021), as well as Lumsden (2019), highlight the importance of "standpoint" as key in such cases. In particular, they draw attention to making sure to allow space for the voices of the marginalized through presenting their standpoint, that which Lumsden (2019) calls "the standpoint of the underdog". The "underdogs" in my research would refer to the students coming from refugee backgrounds, who are marginalized in many different ways by Greek society. Through the student discussions, I have tried to give space to the students to discuss their own views, experiences, and emotions about gender issues, being aware that the aim of my lessons was not to impose Western ideals on them, but rather, to create a space for an open dialogue and for discussion.

The last element that deserves attention, is defined as the "normalization of violence". Doing research with refugee students entails being confronted with the brutality and violence of forced migration contexts. Being informed about the political situation one is researching is crucial, and so is being reflexive about doing justice to how this is represented in the research. Abdelnour and Moghli (2021) note that violence can be normalized in research when researchers portray simplified accounts of it, or when they choose to retain an "apolitical" stance" (p. 7). In the present study, I try to acknowledge and provide a background for the political situation which was ongoing as

I was conducting the research. In Chapter 4 I provide a more detailed description of the political decisions and developments and how these deteriorated the situation in which refugees and asylum seekers on Leros were living in. During my fieldwork I felt it was impossible to be blind to the politics around the refugee situation, as the new governmental legislations and decisions directly affected our work at the school.

Greece's hostile policy towards migrants and refugees and the pushback operations meant that the population on the island had shrunk. At the same time many of the school's students and their families were being denied asylum and were sent to the prison-like Pre-Removal Detention Centres, or back to Türkiye. Added to that, the further limitation on the asylum seekers' freedom to move around the island during COVID-19 only made the situation worse. This instability, uncertainty, and denial of asylum applications, as well as the double incarceration due to COVID-19, inevitably affected not only the school's function, but also the students' mood and mental health. The political situation was often discussed in the school's teacher meetings, and therefore it was something which we all acknowledged as vital for our work there, which in turn, could not be disconnected from the decisions that were being taken on a higher level. Furthermore, as a researcher, I cannot purport that I am impartial to this matter. Having held a position as a teacher in a school for refugees, and having seen the inequality and marginalization of the refugee population by the Greek state, I take a more favourable stance towards them in my research, while being open about the Greek state's tactics and hostile policy towards refugees and migrants.

3.4   Researcher Positionality Statement

Thoughts of positionality troubled my mind since the very beginning of this research project. The nature of the project, as well as the question that I had set out to explore made it clear to me that I needed to treat it with special care. More specifically, one of my main concerns was how I, a white, Greek woman who identified as a feminist, could approach gender issues in a classroom with students of refugee background, without evoking traditional power structures and without reproducing the harmful stereotype of the white, Western researcher—"saviour" who aims to "enlighten" others. How could I broach such a political topic, like gender, without sparking debates or extreme conflicts in the classroom? How could I be mindful of the power relations in the classroom in terms of language, social class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and how these might affect

our discussions of these issues? How could I introduce gender issues without imposing my own views on the students or presenting these as the "correct" ones? Similarly, how could I ask other teachers and managerial staff about their views on the importance of feminist pedagogy, while being open to hearing different views from mine and without implying that because I advocate for gender issues other teachers should as well?

All of the above questions sparked a slight uneasiness—they posed a difficulty in my research process, they made me uncomfortable, and I initially did not possess a clear-cut answer to them. However, what proved equally important to exploring the topic of feminist pedagogy in my research, was also exploring the methodology that I would use to research this topic, and my role as a researcher. Feminist research methodology provided me with an answer as to how to conduct research that would strive to be ethical and that would do justice to the participants and enable them to voice their opinions. It also helped me to situate myself as a researcher, to ponder on my role in this whole venture, and to reflect on my own positionality and how this "fit" in the research, as well as how it affected it. Awareness of my own background and positionality through reflexivity was, therefore, not an addition to the research or a mere part of it; it was the medium, the answer to my questions—that which enabled me to actually conduct my research.

3.4.1   *Limitations and Clarifications Around the Positionality Statement*

In this section, I aim to present a reflexive account of my positionality, and the ways in which my own personal background and ideological and theoretical assumptions relate to the research. However, before doing so, I wish to draw attention to some limitations and to clarify some particular beliefs around the positionality statement as a research tool, which have been noted by scholars. These include the demystification of the positionality statement as a "panacea", its acknowledgment as a product of a long process of reflexivity, and its fluid nature.

When composing a positionality statement, it is first of all necessary to be aware that this does not necessarily act as a panacea and does not guarantee that the research is now objective (Holmes, 2020, p. 4). Writing up a positionality statement and being reflexive does not mean that the research is now value-free; it is therefore important, as Holmes (2020) notes, for researchers to keep in mind the "limits of self-reflexivity" (p. 4). Added to that, great care needs to be taken in terms of the quality of the positionality

statement provided. Other writers have commented on the risks of providing a "shopping-list" positionality statement (Folkes, 2022), in which researchers simply mention information about their background and beliefs, without actually linking these to their research topic. Instead, it is vital that they engage in deeper reflexivity about these points, and seek to explore how these may have shaped their beliefs and the way in which they conduct their projects. In order to avoid a "surface" reflexivity which might not add any insight to the research, it is useful to remember that reflexivity is not simply about laying out a decontextualized list of information about the researcher. Rather, it involves an exploration of how the researcher's background and beliefs are connected to and influence the research, the methodology they have chosen, their construction of knowledge, and the analysis of the data. The answer to the question of "How much information is needed?" is exactly this— as much as is relevant and applicable to the particular study. As Braun and Clarke (2021) note, "[r]eflexivity isn't all navel-gazing and just thinking about yourself; it's also about the knowledge we produce from research and how we produce it" (p. 13). It is therefore important to make connections between one's background and theoretical assumptions and how these might have influenced how knowledge is constructed in a specific project.

This is also related to the second point mentioned above, the fact that the positionality statement is just the product of a long process of reflexivity which has been continuous from the beginning of the study until the end (Martin et al., 2022). Reflexivity is something which researchers need to enact throughout the whole study, in every step of the way. The positionality statement is just "the tip of the iceberg", as Martin et. al (2022) note; it is the product that has emerged from this long process of reflection and reflexivity. According to the above authors, acknowledging positionality is therefore a process, and one which is constant, and complex. Braun and Clarke (2021) also point to the fact that being reflexive about one's own positionality is "a journey, not a destination" (p.15); the positionality statement is therefore a mere window into this journey.

Finally, another important point about positionality that is highlighted by many writers is that it is fluid. This means that positionality is not viewed as something rigid, something which is stable and decided. Rather, it has been argued that positionality should be viewed as dynamic, since our identities as researchers and our relationships with the participants are not stable and may change over time. Holmes (2020) draws attention to this aspect of the positionality statement, noting that it "will necessarily be a

fluid statement that changes as [researchers] develop both through conducting a specific research project and throughout their research career" (p. 4). This concept of fluidity around positionality is also related to issues of "insider-outsider" researcher status in research. However, new perceptions of researcher identity have emerged in recent years, pointing to the "nuanced and ever changing nature of researcher positionality throughout the research process, moving beyond the dualistic insider/outsider debates" (Folkes, 2022, p. 3). I will explore this in more detail below, in relation to my own researcher identity.

3.4.2   Personal Reflexivity

When reflecting on my own positionality in the research, it important, as I mentioned above, not to provide a "shopping-list" positionality statement, but to look at how each of these aspects of myself that I describe relate to the research and how they might influence it. In terms of personal reflexivity, that is, of how my own personal background and experiences may shape the research, I found it interesting to look at the following aspects of my identity: ethnicity, gender, social class, working status. In each of these it is also of use to consider where I "occupy positions of social marginality" or, respectively, "social privilege" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 16). Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2021) definition of positions of social privilege, these for me would be the following: being white, European, Greek (so native in the country I am researching), non-migrant, cis-gender, heterosexual, from a middle-class family, non-disabled, and atheist (even though I am not religious, I have grown up in a country which is largely Orthodox Christian and I celebrate the cultural holidays). On the other hand, being a woman, this aspect of my identity would fall under the positions of social marginality category. However, as the presentation of these categories may not signify much when simply stated, it is useful to examine these in regards with my relationship with the participants of the study, as well as my relationship with my particular research topic.

3.4.3   My Relationship with the Participants

The two different groups of participants in this study, as outlined in the next section, were the educators and managerial staff, with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews, and the students at the school, with whom I conducted classroom discussions. In this section I aim to give an account of my positionality in relation to

both groups. A common concept when considering one's relationship to participants and research environment is the "insider—outsider" binary. As defined by Braun and Clarke (2021), a researcher is an "insider" when they are "in some or many ways a member of the group they are studying" (p. 289), and an "outsider" when they are not. However, as mentioned above, the fluidity of researcher identity must be taken into account, and it has consequently been recognized that it is possible for researchers to be "simultaneously residing in several positions" (Holmes, 2020, p. 7). When reflecting upon my own researcher identity, I found that in many ways I occupied an outsider status, but in others I was also an insider. Furthermore, given the duration of my stay on the island and the daily contact with the participants, my initial outsider status also seemed to fluctuate over time towards a more insider position. In the next paragraphs, I expand on this insider—outsider status of mine throughout the duration of the research.

First of all, being white, Greek, and European meant that I had some shared characteristics in terms of ethnic background with the majority—yet not all—of the teachers and managerial staff that I was interviewing. I had been born and raised in Greece and had experienced the outbreak of the refugee crisis and its representation in the media, while following the news about the developments around this topic and about the government's tactics towards it. So, in one sense, I could be considered an insider, as I was no stranger to the way things worked in Greece and to the effect that the refugee crisis had had on local populations and the reactions it had produced. On the other hand, however, this categorization already seems problematic and unable to fit into a neat box, since, despite being Greek, I had, at the same time, emigrated to another country (Ireland), and was doing research and receiving funding from a foreign institution (Trinity College Dublin). Furthermore, coming from a more urban environment, as opposed to a border-island right on the frontline of the refugee arrivals, my first-hand experiences with the matter were limited, as opposed to most of the participants who lived on the island, as I had mostly engaged with the matter through a safer distance and through its representation in the media. In this sense, I was mostly an outsider to the island and its community, at least initially.

However, this outsider status was neither solid, nor did it remain unchanged. Although in the beginning I was unfamiliar with the island and the work of the school, this slowly began to change. The duration of my first visit at the school was one month, from July to August 2020, during which I volunteered at the school by teaching English classes and conducted a portion of the teacher interviews. By the time I returned to the

school in March 2021, I was already familiar with the island and the refugee camp, and had become acquainted to the staff and the modus operandi of the school. I was therefore not as much of an outsider as I had been during my first visit and the first phase of the research. My second time there, my role was different, as I was now a member of the staff and was assigned my own classes, which constituted me more of an insider than before. Understandably, after spending eight months (from March through to September 2021) teaching at the school, and forming bonds with the teachers and students, I no longer felt as an outsider, but as a member of the school community.

It can therefore be assumed that my status at the school was not clear-cut. Although I began as an outsider researcher who nevertheless shared some common characteristics with the educators and managers, I later became a member of the staff and occupied a more insider position. In order to minimize any adverse results of my outsider status when conducting teacher interviews, I tried to pay special attention to the interview process. This sensitivity was mainly attempted through the type of interview questions that I asked the educators and the managerial staff. As I was an external researcher coming from a European institution, I was aware of this position and of the power imbalances it might create. Therefore, my desire was to approach the data collection with care, sensitivity, and respect towards the people who had been working in the refugee field before me, with a genuine curiosity for their experiences and advice. The questions that I asked were therefore exploratory in nature and aimed at looking into different views on gender issues and feminist pedagogy in education. The starting point for the interviews was to ask educators and managers about their best practices and their experiences and to gain insight from these interviews as to what types of gender issues—if any—had occurred at school and if and how they addressed these or thought these should be addressed. The aim of the interview process was to draw on the expertise of educators and managerial staff on this particular topic, and this attitude was adopted in hope of diminishing any power imbalances that might exist due to the researcher—researched relationship. On the other hand, the fact that I was also part of the "in-group"—at least for the majority of the interviewees who were my colleagues— could also function beneficially, as I was someone who the teachers and staff knew and trusted, as I had already had time to develop some kind of rapport with them.

Moving on to the second group of participants, the students with whom I conducted the classroom discussions, positionality in this case was once more a vital element to be acknowledged, in relation to my previous educational experiences as a

teacher and how this influenced my teaching practice and choices, as well as in terms of the power structures that might arise in the classroom.

Firstly, while I had not worked with refugee students before, I did possess experience teaching English to both children, teenagers and adults during my undergraduate and postgraduate teaching practice, my CELTA certification and during summer programmes in the UK and Greece, but not as a full-time teacher. As at the time of the study I was 25-26 years old, I had never worked as a full-time teacher, as I had been finishing my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and then began my doctoral degree. Therefore, I was relatively young to the field, having however acquired some part-time teaching experience. Moreover, I had some experience teaching students from marginalised communities, the most important one being my volunteering experience in Greece, where I had taught Greek and English to children at a Roma settlement in Thessaloniki, Greece, providing lessons through a programme for children living on the streets. As these lessons were conducted in the settlement, out in the open air, without heating or a classroom, but with a "mobile school" located in the van with which we accessed the settlement, this had provided me with valuable experience of working with children in the field and under dire circumstances. This experience also enabled me to adjust quite quickly to the school and the fluid nature of working on the field. Furthermore, it meant that this was not the first time that I would be working with students of linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds that were different from mine, and this made me more aware of and sensitive towards these aspects during my lessons.

Moreover, I found it very crucial to be aware of the ways in which I occupied positions of privilege in relation to my students in terms of ethnicity, religion, social class, and my role in the classroom. This awareness was necessary in order to ensure the minimisation of these power imbalances through the choice of teaching methodology and content when approaching gender issues and when conducting the student discussions. First of all, I was aware that I occupied a position of privilege in terms of ethnicity, as I was a white, Greek, European woman with a Greek citizenship, whereas the students' status as asylum seekers or refugees in the Greek context placed them in a position of less power. Likewise, even though I am not religious, I was aware of the fact that I came from a "culturally" Christian background, and how that might function in relation to the Muslim religious background of my students and the Islamophobia and prejudice that they are often faced with on the basis of their religion. Finally, as I was a teacher and researcher, and these positions are usually associated with more power than

are, respectively, those of the student and the researched, I also dedicated much thought into this aspect of my positionality. In terms of the first two aspects of my positionality, ethnicity and religion, my approach in mitigating power imbalances was through the choice of material for our lessons. I consciously made the decision to select material that represented women of Arab and/or Muslim background and their experiences, while also paying attention to including texts that had been produced by individuals from underrepresented groups. Finally, in terms of both ethnicity, religion, and my status as a teacher and researcher, adopting a feminist pedagogy methodology played a crucial role. This helped me structure the lessons around material and discussion questions which would allow the students to express their own feelings and lived experiences around gender issues, without any criticism, while also aiming to develop their critical consciousness around gender and other intersecting areas.

On the other hand, the fact that I am a woman and my own lived experience and ideology affected my focus on gender rights and women's issues during the choice of material for our lessons and classroom discussions. I therefore needed to be vigilant about keeping both my male and female students interested, and to make sure that the lessons would appeal to all the students and that all perspectives would be heard. However, I did want to prioritize content that is often underrepresented in the curriculum, so this focus on gender issues was explicit. Furthermore, I tried to involve both female and male students in the discussions, by discussing gender norms that affect both women and men, and by actively asking the students to bring in their own lived experiences in the discussions. My role as a facilitator, rather than an "authority" in the classroom also helped me facilitate, rather than lead the discussions, in order to give space to the students to talk about these issues.

3.4.4   *My Relationship with the Research Topic*

It has been argued that, along with reflexivity of their positionality towards the participants, researchers should also exert reflexivity about their relationship with the research topic that they are investigating. Braun and Clarke (2021) offer some thinking points which can help researchers to contemplate how their previous experiences, world views and personal ideology might affect their positionality in relation to the topic. Drawing on these questions I found it useful to reflect on my own positionality on the topic of feminist pedagogy in refugee education and, paraphrasing Braun and Clarke's

words, to ask myself: "How are [my] positionings and/or life experiences related to [my] topic? What assumptions do [I] hold about [my] topic?" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 18). And of course, how can these potentially affect the way that I am doing research?

In response to these questions, my main assumptions towards my topic are related to my identity as a feminist teacher and researcher who aims to advocate for and support gender equality. In this sense, I needed to be aware of how my theoretical assumptions and my beliefs about gender and feminist pedagogy would function when I was carrying out the study. As a researcher, I am interested in exploring the politics of gender in education and I have examined this topic in previous research projects, such as my Master's dissertation, which was on gender in ELT[3]. Furthermore, I embrace the framework and ideology of feminist pedagogy as a method of teaching, so, as a teacher I have often introduced topics related to gender in the classroom and have explored methodologies pertinent to this. In this sense, it can be said that gender and feminism is something that is important to me and that I would personally pay attention to as a teacher.

This meant that when exploring views around feminist pedagogy and teaching about gender, I had to be careful not to assume that the educators and managers would share the same opinions around gender or the same values as me, or that they would have had the same experiences or training to talk about gender issues in the classroom. This point would also be useful to consider when analysing the data and each participant's perspective. Finally, this meant that, when conducting the classroom discussions with the students, I needed to be prepared to hear opinions that I might personally disagree with and that might be conflicting with each other. In this case, being aware of my students' positionality, their lived experiences and the intersecting aspects of their identities—in addition to mine—would also provide a valuable tool in order to understand the opinions that they would share.

However, even though I have discussed my own theoretical assumptions and ideology to my topic, I wish to draw attention to the fact that these should not be viewed as negative impacts on the project. Rather, they constituted insights into how I can strive for an even more "objective" research process, one that would be cognizant of the

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[3] In my Masters' dissertation I developed a series of lesson plans that explored gender issues in the EFL classroom. However, there is no connection between those lesson plans and the ones developed for the present thesis, as the current ones were developed while on the field, and with the particular refugee students at the school in mind.

positionality and background of myself and my students and would take these into account. The following quote by Braun and Clarke (2021) aptly summarizes this point, as they argue that

> [a]cknowledging your assumptions is essential for taking a step back from them and reflecting on how they shape and inform your research. It's important to remember the question is not whether these assumptions influence the research (trust us, they do!), but how they influence, and how that might matter. Influence is not contamination to be worried about; it is an inevitable part of the knowledge production process (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 18)

Indeed, acknowledging my own emotions, assumptions and ideology, rather than purporting that I have none, was the first step, and a very critical tool which helped me towards designing a more ethical and unbiased research process.

3.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the epistemological framework that binds this study together. Feminist research methodology has been chosen as the most appropriate epistemological framework for the current research, as it aligns with feminist pedagogy and its aims. I have also discussed the essential role of practicing reflexivity as a feminist researcher, and have outlined in detail my accounts on emotional and political reflexivity. Finally, I have provided a positionality statement which relates my more specific thoughts on mitigating power imbalances in relation to my participants, and on addressing how my theoretical assumptions have influenced the project. In the next section, I will provide a more detailed account of how feminist research methodology was employed during the data collection process.

4   Chapter 4: Research Methods

19th March 2021

Today I entered the camp for the first time. I was shocked by the state of the containers my students were living in, those same students who gave me their warmest smiles in class, who wore their best clothes to come to school and who sang and danced with all their might in the school yard. The realisation of this was sickening and brought me down for a moment. As I was pondering on this, a high-pitched voice brought me back to reality: "Hello, teacher Tereza!" It was my student Zahra. "Zahra, can you help me find Mahmoud's container? I need to give him the handout for next week". "Yes, teacher, I show you". Zahra took me by the hand and showed me to Mahmoud's container, and then we moved on to the next student on the list, and the one after that. Zahra was usually silent in class, not very confident about her English, and she seldom raised her hand to speak. But now she was navigating the camp and showing me around with ease, past the containers and the hanging clothes lines—this was her neighbourhood, she knew it like the palm of her hand by now. As we were going around the camp distributing the handouts, I felt like Zahra was enjoying this; she felt great pride in being able to help her teacher, to be the one showing and leading. Outside the containers there were people talking to each other, some even playing music from their phones and chatting to their neighbours. On the containers, writing of all sorts, slogans against the police, slogans for freedom, and drawings of the Gaza strip. The camp, although dreary and cramped, and filled with pain and frustration, had in this moment assumed a dual character—it was a lived-in space were possibilities for connection and for music were also made possible. And its residents, although kept there besides their will, under inhumane conditions, were reclaiming this right, the right to make a space theirs.

After giving out the last handout I thanked Zahra and exited the camp—the police officer locked the barbed wire door behind me.

—Researcher diary excerpt

4.1   Introduction

The present chapter discusses the particulars of the research methodology which was employed for this study. The chapter opened with a vignette depicting my lived experience of encountering life in forced migration on the island, through the narration of an encounter with one of my students in the camp. The vignette pointed to the harsh reality of life in the camp, but also to the possibilities for resilience and resistance. This

is also then discussed in the chapter through an overview of the social and geopolitical context of forced migration to the Greek islands, which better illustrates the research context, and argues for viewing forced migration as an act which can hold possibility for agency and resilience. I then discuss how the research design and aims were developed, also presenting the main research questions. Then, I present the context of the school and background information about the adult and student participants of the study and their recruitment. This is followed by a discussion of the data collection instruments which were used. Ethical considerations of the project are also considered, with specific focus on doing ethical research with students of refugee background. Finally, I present a detailed account of how the data was analysed through reflexive thematic analysis.

4.2 Social and Geopolitical Context

The following subsections provide an overview of the research and political context of forced migration to the Greek islands, as well as of the socio-historical background of Leros as a place of confinement, so as to enable the readers to better understand the experience of refugee students on the island. Furthermore, I discuss the border politics at play on the Greek islands, as well as the frequent dehumanisation of refugees and asylum seekers. While these individuals are often treated as "human waste", I argue instead for viewing forced migration as an act of agency and resilience, and for recognising refugees as capable individuals, as well as for transferring this viewpoint to the educational context.

4.2.1 Forced Migration to/through the Aegean Islands

From 2015 to 2021 the Greek state received a total of 419,882 asylum applications (UNHCR, n.d.). Although there was a notable decrease in the numbers of incoming asylum seekers during the years of the pandemic (2020-2021), a significant number of displaced persons entered Greece for the first time during these years and many still remained in the "temporary" reception facilities as they awaited decisions about their asylum applications to be issued. It is in this kind of context that the present research took place, in a time during which the Greek borders, and more specifically the Greek border-islands were constituted as marginal, yet highly politicized loci, as receptors and lifelines of people fleeing war and persecution, and at the same time as the "dumping sites" of humanity (Bauman, 2004, p. 5-6).

The fieldwork took place on Leros, an island on the country's border. Leros is part of the Dodecanese islands complex in the southern part of the eastern Aegean Sea, close to the border with neighbouring Türkiye. Along with Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Kos, and other smaller islands, it is one of the islands that have primarily received the most asylum-seekers. These islands are located in the north- and south-eastern part of the Aegean Sea, and belong to the North-Aegean (Lesvos, Samos, Chios) and Dodecanese (Kos, Leros) island complexes, which are depicted in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below. Their geographical location, and more specifically their proximity to Türkiye's shores, constitute them a natural crossing point from the coast of Türkiye to mainland Greece. Consequently, these islands have been acting as the place of first reception for refugees arriving to Greece from the neighbouring country, and have been functioning as spaces of waiting before refugees can continue their journey to the mainland and/or other European countries.

Figure 4.1 Map of the Aegean island complexes. [Image credit: Wikid77, Wikimedia Commons].
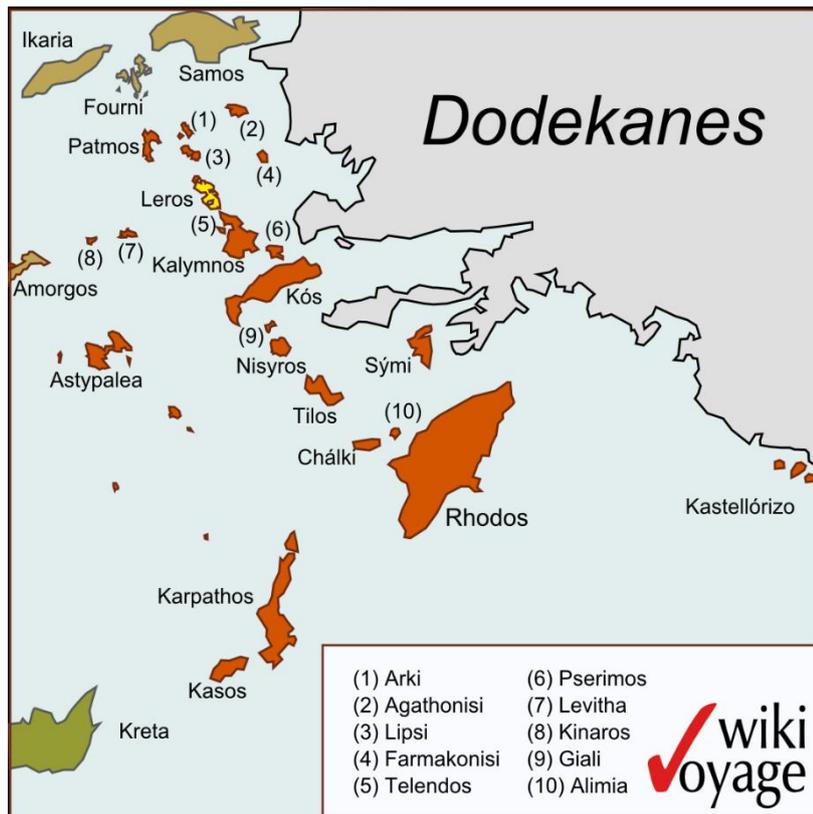
Figure 4.2 Map of the islands of the Dodecanese complex. [Image credit: Bgabel, Wikimedia Commons].

Examining the specific socio-historical background of Leros, as well as the way in which the socio-political context of this area has evolved during recent years is crucial to understanding the particular conditions of reception on the islands. These conditions not only influence the refugees' experience on the islands, but they also shape the construction of the islands as spaces of confinement. An account of these factors is provided in the following sections.

4.2.2   *Migratory Flows and Greece as Borderland*

As mentioned above, the Aegean islands are Greece's main recipients of asylum seekers entering the country. However, it was a series of political decisions taken by Greece and the EU which formed the flows of migration to these islands in recent years, and which affected the experience of the people who were forced to remain in these. In this section I aim to provide a brief overview of these political factors and to describe the situation at Greece's borders. Relating this information is key in order to provide a clearer picture of the political factors at play, and of how these affected the context in which the students and educators lived and worked, and in which the school operated.

First of all, it is worthwhile noting that the Aegean islands are not the only point of entry to Greece. An additional significant route of entry to the country is the land border with Türkiye at the region of Evros. According to the literature, in 2009, the Greek government decided to remove the land mines that were buried in the Greek-Turkish border, therefore constituting that area an easier crossing point than the sea. As a result, from 2009 until 2012 land crossings from the border at Evros were much more frequent than through the islands (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017). However, this changed anew when the Greek government decided to construct a fence at the border with Türkiye in 2012, in order to contain the migratory flows. Following this decision, asylum seekers reverted back to the Aegean route (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017), although it was a more perilous and deadly one, with thousands of people putting their lives at risk to cross the Aegean sea.

In 2015, with the peak of the civil war in Syria, the number of civilians fleeing the country rapidly increased. Combined with asylum seekers from other countries, Greece received more people than the state was prepared to or could accommodate. The so-called "EU-Türkiye" deal in 2016 only aggravated the situation, by confining thousands of people in the Greek refugee camps on the islands. The EU-Türkiye deal was an arrangement made in 2016 in order to engage Türkiye in helping contain the refugee flows from its shores to Europe. In detail, the deal stated that, in exchange for €6 billion and the ability for Turkish citizens to travel to Europe without a visa,

- Türkiye would take any measures necessary to stop people travelling irregularly from Türkiye to the Greek islands.
- Anyone who arrived on the islands irregularly from Türkiye could be returned there.
- For every Syrian returned from the islands, EU Member States would accept one Syrian refugee who had waited inside Türkiye. (International Rescue Committee, 2022)

This deal had severe consequences for the mobility, livelihood and mental health of the people seeking asylum, as it meant that they remained stranded in Greece for months or even years in many cases. During the first years of the statement's implementation, returns to Türkiye were not usually deemed safe by the Greek government, and the following years they were impossible due to Türkiye's COVID-19

restrictions on entry. As asylum seekers were not able to move forward to Europe, and in conjunction with Balkan countries closing their borders, the EU-Türkiye deal resulted in the "the entrapment of more than 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, and especially on the five main island points of entry: Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos" (Oikonomou, 2018, p. 3). This meant that asylum seekers were condemned to live under ghastly conditions, in squalid camps on the aforementioned islands, that were designed to fit merely a fraction of the population that they were actually hosting.

Another political development which further exacerbated and prolonged the asylum seekers' stay on the Greek islands and in these conditions, has been the Greek Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD), issued in June 2021, according to which Türkiye is to be considered a safe country for asylum seekers from the following five countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria (International Rescue Committee, 2022). This has led to asylum applications from nationals from these countries being deemed as "inadmissible" by the Greek state, or to not even being considered at all, thus placing them in a "legal limbo" (International Rescue Committee, 2022). Asylum seekers were consequently stranded on the Greek islands, with no choice of being granted asylum in order to move on to the mainland or the rest of Europe, but also without being able to return to Türkiye due to its non-acceptance policy during the pandemic years. The impact of the 2021 JMD on asylum seekers living in Greece is depicted in Figure 4.3 below.
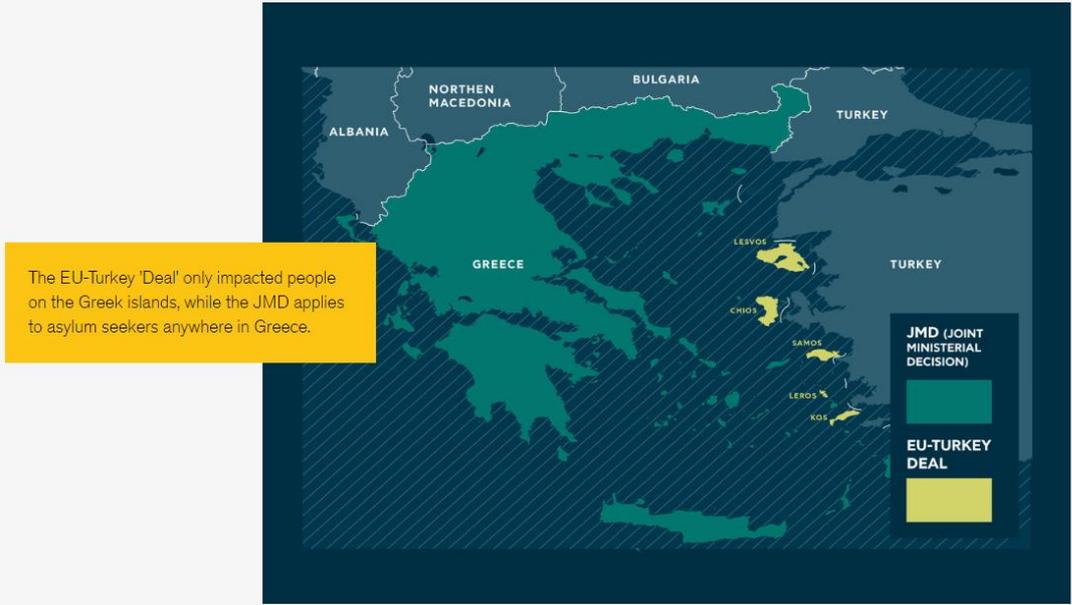
Figure 4.3 The Effects of the EU-Türkiye Deal and the JMD on asylum seekers [Image credit: International Rescue Committee].

This series of political decisions has been commented upon by scholars, who remark on the catastrophic consequences of these measures for asylum seekers, and claim that they form part of Europe's larger policy to create a "buffer zone" for anyone trying to enter Europe, which would constitute of the countries near the borders, such as Greece, Türkiye and other Balkan nations. According to Zaragoza-Cristiani (2017) these buffer zones "have the role of insulating the EU from turbulences, shielding 'core Europe (and its states)' from external threats (generally refugees and economic migrants), and pushing those outside away from the EU's borders" (p. 61). This has resulted in the stranding of thousands of people on the Greek camps, as "Greece has been fenced off by its neighbours and left to struggle" alone with this humanitarian crisis (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017, p. 73).

At the same time, these measures are constituting Greece and, more specifically, the Greek islands as a *borderland*, which is what Banai (2021) defines as "an intermediary space of being whose structural condition is based on inhabiting 'a moving and fluctuating frontier'" (p. 11). Indeed, the Greek islands have been characterised as a place of fluidity, change, and instability. This is because of the particular conditions that the people residing in it have to face; they are constantly at a flux, and are denied the right of having a stable, rooted life. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) definition of a borderland seems particularly pertinent to the migratory flows passing from the Aegean islands. According to Anzaldúa, "a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (p. 3). Although Anzaldúa writes about the Latin American context of border politics, the above extract resonates with the experience of forced migration that asylum seekers coming from the Middle-East have in Greece. This "constant state of transition" that she describes is characteristic of not only the asylum seekers' lives, but also of the humanitarian workers' experience in these contexts, and, in the case of the present study, it also characterizes the case of refugee education, and the students' and teachers' everyday realities.

4.2.3   A Depository for "Human Waste"? Leros as A Space of Confinement

This "constant state of transition" mentioned above, the fluidity and inconstancy that characterizes the whole experience of the refugee population on the islands, is one of the elements that has been commented upon regarding the role of Greece as a reception

country. As anthropologist Neni Panourgiá remarks, Greece is not the final destination for the people who arrive at its shores; rather, it assumes a different character, that of "a sort of refuse, an abandoned utensil (vessel?), along with the boats, the engines, the lifejackets, the abandoned lives and souls in this water grave that the Aegean has become" (Panourgiá, n.d., p. 15). As grim as her description may sound, it proves to be quite true to the situation that has been witnessed on the island of Leros, and it is also connected to the island's history as a ground of exile, a depository of all those who were considered 'unwanted' or 'redundant' by mainstream society.

Figure 4.4 Tents set up by asylum seekers near the RIC. [Image credit: author's own, July 2020].

Figure 4.5 Part of the Leros RIC at Lepida, set up in the front yard of the old mental health asylum, which can be seen in the background [Image credit: Lepida2015, Wikimedia Commons].

Figure 4.6 "Fight for your FREEDOM". Writings on a wall of an abandoned building near the RIC at Lepida. [Image credit: author's own, May 2021].

Figure 4.7 More tents set up by asylum seekers by the sea near the RIC. [Image credit: author's own, July 2020].

As Panourgiá notes, "in essence *there has been no form of confinement that Leros has not known*", as it is an island "that political modernity cast into the space of human refuse" (Panourgiá, n.d., p. 29, emphasis in original). During WWII, the island served as a base for the Italian military, who constructed imposing buildings of modernist rationalist architecture in Lepida, a coastal part on the southern side of the island. The same buildings were later used as a prison for war prisoners, and, following that, during the civil war, as a detention camp for youth guerilla warriors, and a prison for political exiles. Later, from the 1960s until the 1990s, they functioned as a mental health asylum, notorious for its inhumane premises and degrading conditions in which the patients lived. From 2016 until December 2021, the same space was converted into a "hotspot" for the refugees that arrive on the island; more than 3.000 refugees having lived in it at a time, when its maximum capacity was to hold 1000 people instead. Some of these buildings are pictured in Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7. As of December 2021, the asylum seekers were transferred to a newly built, more secluded and better policed prison-like camp on a hill above the previous buildings[4].

Given its multi-layered past as an island of exile, one can remark that, throughout history, Leros has operated as a space for the 'unwanted', for those that the Greek state could not handle and chose to dispose of in a faraway, marginal place: political exiles, war prisoners, unruly youth, mental health patients, and nowadays, refugees and asylum seekers. The term that Panourgiá uses for the island as a space of "unwanted human waste" (Panourgiá, 2020, p. 48, Panourgiá, n.d.), can be connected to Zygmunt Bauman's "human waste" theory (Bauman, 2004), which refers to the creation of a group of subjects who are considered to be redundant by society, and are therefore ostracized from it.

As summed up by Gillian Wylie, Bauman's theory claims that human activity is to blame for this creation of unwanted people, as "the border politics of globalization consigns many people to this category of human waste and then dumps them into refuse heaps of asylum systems, refugee camps or urban ghettoes" (Wylie, 2014, p. 57). Which then, are the subjects that form this category of "human waste"? According to Bauman (2004), "[r]efugees, the displaced, asylum seekers, migrants, the *sans papiers*, they are the waste of globalization" (p. 58). They are viewed by society as "superfluous" (p. 40),

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[4] The new "Closed Control Access Centre" of Leros, as well as that of Kos, were funded by the European Union, which provided a €121 million grant for the construction of the two new camps (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2022).

as no longer needed, and therefore, society tries to find a place where they can be expelled.

As Bauman (2004) remarks, there are some places which are "natural destinations for the export of 'redundant humans' and obvious, ready-made dumping sites for the human waste of modernization" (p. 5-6). This idea that certain spaces are considered the modern "dumping sites" of the planet, comes in line with Panourgiá's argument that Leros has been constructed as a space of "human waste", a space of confinement, due to its various historical connotations and previous uses of the island as a space of exile and confinement in the past. As she remarks, "[w]hether right or wrong, Lerians maintain that Leros has been used as a hotspot because it has the infrastructure of generations of confinement (Panourgiá, n.d., p. 108) since it had previously served as a prison, a mental health asylum, etc. Leros is therefore a vivid example of one of these places, which are "naturally" selected as "dumping sites". What is interesting though, is Panourgiá's observation that Leros was not only chosen because of its pre-existing infrastructure, but also because, as she argues, "[t]he knowledge of a prior confinement produces the *a priori* perspectival futurity of the compliance and submission of the subject on which power relies in order to successfully maintain its enforcement" (Panourgiá, n.d., p. 115, emphasis in original). In other words, in knowing that the island has previously functioned as a space of confinement, this knowledge and feeling of imprisonment is sustained through time and is made even stronger, achieving the compliance to authority of all those involved in this process.

This idea of a "superfluous", "human waste" population that is ostracized to the planet's "dumping sites" (Bauman, 2004), albeit harsh, is echoed by other critics as well. Balibar (2001), for example, comments on how current capitalist societies are to account for

> a reproduction of populations which are not likely to be productively used or exploited but are always already *superfluous*, and therefore can only be eliminated either through 'political' or through 'natural' means – what some Latin American sociologists provocatively call *población chatarra*, 'garbage humans', to be 'thrown away', out of the global city. (p. 25)

Whether they are labelled as "human waste" (Bauman, 2004), "superfluous" (Balibar, 2001; Bauman, 2004), "*población chatarra* (garbage humans)" (Balibar, 2001), or

"naked life" (Banai, 2021), the message that these characterisations convey is the same: that this population is reduced to being lesser, insignificant, and is viewed as a burden to the planet. As the border politics of the European Union have demonstrated, asylum seekers are perceived as redundant, they are unwanted on European territory and therefore disposed of and confined at the borderlands. Butler's (2009) theory of "grievability" can also help us understand this labelling and marginalisation of asylum seekers. As Frkovich et al. (2023) note, Butler remarks on the fact that "we recognize some lives as worthwhile and therefore, if lost, grievable, while others are not seen or recognized and therefore not grievable" (p. 3); in this case, the "non-grievable" lives are those of the asylum seekers losing their lives when trying to reach Europe.

However, even though this conceptualization of asylum seekers as unwanted, "superfluous", and "non-grievable" serves to alert us to the violence that they are subjected to, there has been significant criticism of it. For example, Bauman's theory has been criticized for its phraseology and for describing human beings as "human waste". In particular, Wylie (2014) has provided a strong critique of this theory. Acknowledging that the term "human waste" is used by Bauman to bring attention to how certain humans are treated by society, she nevertheless argues that the use of this term can be problematic, in that it assigns a particular characterization to these subjects, leaving "no space for agency" (Wylie, 2014, p. 65). Even though human waste theory allows us to critique the way that society views marginalized groups of people, and to understand the context of the Aegean islands and the refugee hotspots as spaces of confinement, it is also necessary to be mindful of the negative connotations that this term may carry, and the harm that it may cause. Furthermore, Wylie supports that Bauman's theory and labelling is infused with a "sense of inevitability" (p. 62) that leaves no space for hope that these circumstances can change for people who are living in these conditions.

Rather, Wylie inquires into whether we can talk about "human agents" instead of "human waste" (p. 63). She presents the argument that the choice to make the migratory journey, despite the dire circumstances, is indicative of the asylum seekers' agency, and argues that their "decisions to move despite the borders could be understood as the exercise of a form of global civil disobedience on the part of irregular migrants" (p. 64). Wylie is joined by other scholars who interpret these decisions as agentic, disruptive, and very political acts. Jones (2016) writes about the violent displacement of refugees, suggesting that it is exactly through the act of moving that

these individuals are enacting their agency and disrupting the border politics of forced migration. "By refusing to abide by a wall, map, property line, border, identity document, or legal regime", Jones argues, "mobile people upset the state's schemes of exclusion, control, and violence" (p. 180). In this sense, the act of moving, despite the circumstances that this happens in—or perhaps *because* of them—, is given a new sense, one that is radical, political and powerful enough to contradict Bauman's deterministic view of refugees as "human waste".

Banai's work on "Being a Border" (2021) also makes the argument that embodying border identities does not have to be equal to being human waste. Banai (2021) does not view this identity as "a marginalised pathology", but rather as something which "can also be creative, hopeful, and transformative" (p. 13). This argument seems to resonate with and reinforce the idea of acknowledging displaced people's agency, rather than viewing the violence that has been inflicted upon them as irreparable. This stance also draws on debates about viewing refugee students through a resilience-based approach, as opposed to a trauma-based approach. By understanding the broader politics of human agency in contexts of displacement, it is then easier to transfer this concept to the classroom in particular, and to be aware of the agency and resilience that refugee students are capable of demonstrating.

4.3   Research Questions and Project Overview

This project takes an exploratory approach to feminist pedagogy. The main aim of the research was to explore the use of feminist pedagogy in teaching students with refugee and asylum-seeking status in NGO schools in Greece. However, it is worth noting the challenges faced throughout the implementation of this project, as well as the effects that these had on the design and research questions. Reflecting on the design of the project was an ongoing process, which assisted me in making certain decisions and modifications, and led the project to develop into its final form, as will be discussed below.

Firstly, the aim and data collection methods of the project were reconsidered and modified during the first and second year. The initial aim of the project was to develop and implement a feminist pedagogy curriculum in a school for students of refugee background through action research methodology. The main data collection methods which I was planning to use were my researcher diary, archival student texts, audio-

recorded classroom discussions, and audio-recorded educator interviews. The original research questions (RQs) were the following:

Original Research Questions

- Main RQ: How can feminist pedagogy be used in refugee education?

  - Subsidiary RQ1: How can feminist pedagogy and feminist theory be employed to design an English language curriculum which will be culturally responsive to refugee and migrant students in Greece?
  - Subsidiary RQ2**:** What are the attitudes of refugee educators in Greece towards the use of feminist pedagogy in the refugee classroom?

However, as I was preparing to submit my first research ethics application to Trinity's School research ethics committee in March 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented me with new challenges and great uncertainty regarding the implementation of the project. Following discussion with my supervisor and suggestions from the ethics committee, we decided to split the project into two phases. The first phase involved conducting interviews with educators and managers in refugee education, and was designed so that it could be conducted online, while restrictions for the pandemic lasted. The second phase involved my physical presence at the school, and the design and implementation of the curriculum, as well as the conduction of classroom discussions with the students.

In July 2020, restrictions on travel within Europe eased, and after correspondence with the school's coordinator on Leros, I arranged to visit the school for a month as a volunteer English language teacher. I managed to travel from Ireland to Greece, and to start the first phase of the data collection which involved interviews with some of the educators in the school, as well as from other NGOs on the island and in Greece. The first phase continued into 2021, overlapping with the second phase of the data collection. In February of the same year I was able to travel back to Leros from Ireland and assume the position of an English language teacher. While the second phase of data collection was commencing, I understood that I needed to reconsider the initial aim of the project to develop and implement a feminist pedagogy curriculum. This was deemed as an overambitious objective, which would not be feasible due to the large

amount of time it would require. Furthermore, as I experienced the temporality and fluid nature of refugee education, I realized that designing, implementing, reflecting, and re-designing a curriculum according to the principles of action research (Koshy, 2006) would not be possible in this context, as the student turnover rate was quite high. It was therefore decided that I would employ a feminist qualitative research methodology instead, which would allow me to assume a reflexive, intersectional approach, and to collect data through my diary observations and reflections, as well as through the educator and manager interviews and classroom discussions. This change in design also meant that my original research questions would also evolve. The research questions developed throughout the process of the data collection, analysis and writing-up, as they were continuously informed by the data. The new and final research questions that emerged from the evolving circumstances and the new design of the project were the following:

Final Research Questions

- Main RQ: *Is the ground in refugee education ready for a feminist pedagogy approach?*

    o Subsidiary RQ1: *What are the obstacles to implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in refugee education?*

    o Subsidiary RQ2: *What are the opportunities for implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in refugee education?*

    o Subsidiary RQ3: *How do teachers and students in refugee education respond to a feminist pedagogy approach?*

Furthermore, while I did not develop a concrete curriculum, I strove to include feminist pedagogy practices in my teaching, and I designed a series of lesson plans focused on gender and oppression, which I used with my students, and some of which provided the basis for the classroom discussions with the students.[5] However, the fluid nature of the forced migration context meant that my classes were constantly changing,

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[5] These are discussed at length in Chapter 5.

which led me to plan and develop the lessons week by week, by exhibiting flexibility and adaptability to the context and the group of students each time.

Moreover, the impact of the pandemic in combination with the fluid nature of refugee education presented some added limitations as to the nature of data that could be collected and the participants that were involved. For approximately two months, from March to May 2020, all of the school's lessons were conducted online, according to the government's directives. The strict lockdown and harsh measures which were imposed on the island created a general atmosphere of uncertainty and of metaphorical incarceration. It was under these circumstances that the school continued to operate, and, while each family had been registered with a Skype account in order to join the lessons, the obstacles were many. The poor internet connection at the camp, combined with the reliance of each family on only one device for all their children to join the lessons, limited not only the time that I had available with the students (this changed from teaching each class every day to teaching them twice a week), but also the quality of the lesson that could be conducted in these difficult conditions. It was therefore evident that I could not commence with the classroom discussions yet and that the lessons needed to focus on very basic elements. This led to the postponement of the second phase of the data collection, which involved conducting classroom discussion with the students. This was finally able to commence at the end of May 2021, and lasted until my departure from the school in late September 2021.

4.4   The School

The research was conducted in a school which was set up by a Greek NGO with the aim of providing education for refugee children aged 6-18. My first contact with the school was in the summer of 2020, during which I volunteered there for a month as an English language educator, while also conducting the first phase of interviews with the educators. My second contact with the school took place for approximately seven months, from late February to September 2021, during which I was formally employed at the school as an English language educator. In this period, I continued with the first phase of the data collection, conducting interviews with educators and managerial staff, and I also conducted the second phase, which involved recording classroom discussions with my students, collecting archival texts and keeping field notes and a researcher diary. The latter included my thoughts on my teaching and researching experience, as

well as reflections on my observations about every-day events at the school, with a focus on issues related to gender and feminist pedagogy. During the data collection process, I therefore occupied the two-fold role of teacher and researcher.

The school was set up by a Greek NGO, and funded by an international organization. It had been established in 2018 in response to the increasing arrivals of asylum seekers on the island and the humanitarian crisis that was taking place. Its aim was to provide a means of education for refugee and asylum-seeking children and teenagers who had no access to the Greek formal education system, while they were still awaiting to be granted asylum in camps, or while they were on waiting lists to be enrolled in public schools. During the first years of its operation, the school had hosted up to 100-120 students at one time, aged 6 to 18. However, this number dramatically decreased and was constantly fluctuating during my field research at the school.

At the time of my first visit at the school in July 2020, the number of students enrolled amounted to approximately 80, while this number decreased to around 40 students in February 2021 when I began my formal work there, and continued to fluctuate, dropping to a little more than 10 students by September 2021, which was my last month on the island. A visual representation of the fluctuation of student numbers is provided in Figure 4.8.
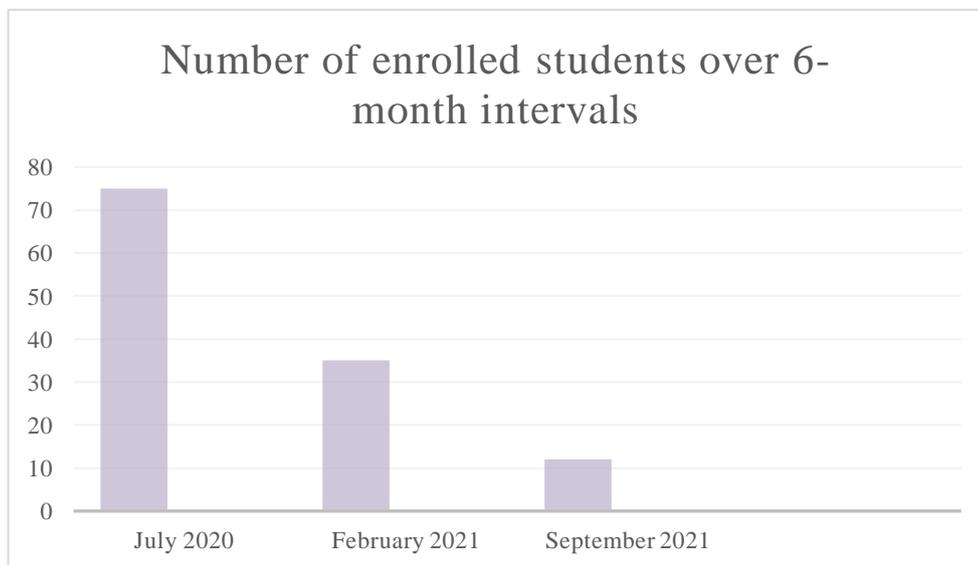
Figure 4.8 Number of enrolled students at the school on Leros from July 2020 to September 2021.

This sudden decrease in numbers was mainly due to political reasons, such as pushbacks, and the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions. As the Greek government

lifted the pandemic restrictions on moving throughout the country in June 2021, many of the students whose families had been granted asylum consequently left the island in the next months to travel to mainland Greece. However, this fact on its own did not account for the decline in numbers, as this was a common phenomenon which had always taken place, as students usually moved on from the island to the mainland after being granted asylum. Rather, it was the decline in arrivals that amounted for this, as increasingly more refugees were being sent back to Türkiye through the process of *refoulement* (illegal pushbacks) even before they had the chance to reach the Greek shores.

The school operated in a non-formal education context, with the aim of preparing students for their transition to formal schooling in Greece or Europe. The curriculum differed from the one that is used in Greek public schools; it followed the "Project" method, based on which a topic was selected each week (and sometimes lasted for a little longer, such as two or three weeks), and this topic was then approached through the different subjects that were taught at school (Greek, English, Maths, Art, Physical Education, Computer Science). The school was staffed by educators, who taught the aforementioned subjects, social workers, who were responsible for providing psycho-social support to the students and their families, interpreters, who provided linguistic support and cultural mediation, and, finally, the managerial and administrative staff.

4.5 Participants

As mentioned previously, the study aimed to involve two different groups of participants: students with a refugee background who were currently enrolled in the aforementioned school, as well as staff (educators and managers) working in the refugee education sector in Greece, whether in the same school or other NGO schools in Greece. The sections below provide more background information about the students and educators and managers involved in the study.

4.5.1 The Educators and Managerial Staff

The interviews were conducted with 8 educators and 2 managers. Out of the total 8 educators, 4 were working at the school in which the study took place, while the other 4 were working in other schools. Both managers were working for the NGO that operated

the school on Leros. Interviewing educators as well as managerial staff was deemed necessary, as both groups had significant contributions to offer to the topic of gender issues and feminist pedagogy in school. Finally, as the school was quite small, the staff worked closely with each other, and decisions were usually taken collectively, after internal meetings which involved the school staff, but also meetings which involved the managerial staff in the central offices in Athens. A clearer infographic of the background of each participant is provided below.

4.5.1.1 Educators

The information provided in Figures 4.9 and 4.10 includes the educators' gender, the subjects they had taught to students with refugee backgrounds, the school in which they were currently working or had worked in recently, and the location of the school. The nationality of the participants has not been disclosed, so as to protect their identity. However, it is worth noting that the vast majority of the participants were of Greek nationality, whereas there was also a small number of participants of different nationality who had migrated to Greece in previous years, or had moved to Greece recently to work in the refugee sector. As can be noted, all of the educators had taught English at some point; some of them were primarily teaching other subjects, but as the situation of the school was fluid depending on the numbers of students and their needs, they had to teach English as well, apart from their main specialization. Although most educators were speaking from their experience teaching children (in SCHOOL1 and SCHOOL2), 3 of them were coming from teaching experience with adult refugee learners. This perspective was also deemed valuable, as the teaching context remained similar and the question of how to approach gender issues with refugee students was pertinent to both contexts. Finally, I included an interview with the school's social worker, as she also conducted lessons with the students, and had many insights to offer on how gender issues were handled.

Anna	Dora	Eleftheria	Ismini
• Educator (English) • Female • Teaching children • SCHOOL1 • Leros	• Social worker • Female • Teaching children • SCHOOL1 • Leros	• Educator (Computer Science, Math, English) • Female • Teaching children • SCHOOL1 • Leros	• Educator (English, Greek) • Female • Teaching children • SCHOOL1 • Leros

Figure 4.9 Educator profiles in SCHOOL1.

Stefanos	Katerina	Myrto	Gavriil
• Educator (English) • Male • Teaching children • SCHOOL2 • ISLAND2	• Educator (English) • Female • Teaching adults • SCHOOL3 • NGO3 • Leros	• Educator (English) • Female • Teaching adults • SCHOOL3 • NGO3 • Leros	• Educator (Greek, English) • Male • Teaching adults • SCHOOL4 • NGO4 • ISLAND4

Figure 4.10 Educator profiles in rest of schools.

4.5.1.2 Managerial Staff

Apart from the interviews with educators, I also conducted interviews with two members of the managerial staff. Figure 4.11 below provides details about their nationality, gender, as well as their roles in the NGO. Both were managers in the NGO that I was working for, with the difference that Melina was the Local Coordinator of the school on Leros, whereas Pavlos was her superior, as he was based in the central offices of the NGO in Athens, and was responsible for overseeing all the schools that the NGO was operating on Leros and another two islands.

Melina	Pavlos
• Local Coordinator • Female • SCHOOL1 • Leros	• Coordinator of NGO1's schools on the islands • Male • Responsible for overseeing SCHOOL1 and SCHOOL2 • NGO1 Central office

Figure 4.11 Managerial staff profiles.

4.5.2   The Students

It is important to acknowledge that the experience of forced migration is different for every individual and depends on a set of factors; likewise, this is true for the educational experience as well. According to David Little (2000), every refugee student has different needs and attitudes towards education, depending on certain variables. Little (2000) identifies some of these learner variables, which are, among others, "age", "mother tongue", "cultural background", "educational background", "previous experience of formal language learning", and "domestic situation". All of these factors can influence how refugee students perceive of education, what value they amount to it, and also how their particular needs in the classroom are formed.

Being aware of this differentiation in the learner profiles of refugee students is vital— heterogeneity in students' linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds was indeed one of the characteristics at the school in Leros, and many of the educators identified this variety in educational levels as one of the challenges of teaching refugee students. Nonetheless, when painting the profile of the research participants in the current study, it is also quite useful to draw attention to some of the features that the particular group of students had in common. First of all, most of the students' countries of origin were countries in the MENA region. The majority of students had arrived from Syria, Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Iraq, and Libya, although there were at times student arrivals from other countries as well. Furthermore, most of the students were of Arabic-speaking backgrounds, so some basic communication between them was possible, although the dialects of Arabic spoken in each country or region of origin of

the students differed significantly. Another related common point was that most of the students were coming from Islamic countries and religious backgrounds. Finally, although the country of origin and intercepting stops along their journey varied for each one, the students at the school had all travelled through the Mediterranean route to seek refuge in Greece, most of them having passed through Türkiye or having stayed at Turkish refugee camps for a while. The time that each student had been on Leros at the time of the research varied, however most of the students were residing inside the island's RIC (Reception and Identification Centre), also known as the "hotspot", or "camp", while some of them had already moved out and were staying at accommodation provided by other NGOs or that they were funding themselves.

Specifically, the two students who participated in the recorded classroom discussions were also coming from a country in the MENA region, which cannot be named for anonymity reasons, and after fleeing their country, they had also lived in other neighbouring countries for some years before ending up in Greece. They were siblings (the sister was 13 years old and the brother 10), and had travelled to Greece with their mother. During their first year on Leros, they had attended the NGO school with no previous knowledge of Greek and very little knowledge of English. They later managed to enrol in one of the Greek state schools on the island, which they attended for a full year. During the summer, while the public school was closed, they came back to attend the NGO school which was operating all year round. It is in this phase of their educational journey that we conducted the English lessons on gender issues and recorded the classroom discussions. The fact that the students had already lived in Greece for two years and had attended both the NGO school and the Greek school, each for a year, meant that their level of Greek was near-fluent, and their English was also at a very good level. Furthermore, due to the fact that they were living outside of the camp and had attended Greek school, they were beginning to integrate into the island's society, more so than the other students at the school who were living in the secluded camp.

4.6   Data Collection

As mentioned previously, the data collection consisted of the following two phases:

- *Phase 1*, which started in July 2020 when I first visited the school for a month to volunteer, and continued until September 2021. This phase involved the recording of the interviews with the educators and managers and was ongoing and overlapping with *Phase 2* as well.

- *Phase 2*, which started in February 2021 when I began my formal employment in the school and continued until September 2021 when my employment ceased. This phase involved my teaching intervention at the school, during which the recording of the classroom discussions with the students, as well as the keeping of my own researcher diary happened.

It should therefore be noted that the two phases were overlapping, as the interviews with the educators and managers continued until the last month of my work at the school. While the thematic analysis of the interviews took place after my leave from the island, this overlap allowed me to gain an initial understanding of the teachers' views around the use of feminist pedagogy in refugee education, at times affecting my planning and teaching practice[6].

As the study follows a feminist approach to research methods, the instruments of data collection employed drew from feminist research methodology. More specifically, the following qualitative tools of data collection were employed[7]:

- Audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with 8 educators and 2 managers (10 interviews were produced in total)
- Audio-recorded classroom discussions with 2 students at the NGO school (7 discussions were produced in total)
- Researcher diary and fieldnotes

In the sections below, I provide some context and information about each of these tools.

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[6] An example of this is provided in section 7.3.1, where I describe my use of the "Linguistic Repertoire" activity to enhance the students' awareness of their linguistic capital, contrary to the viewing of language and culture as dividing barriers by the educators and managers.

[7] While the initial plan also involved the use of archival texts produced by the students, the nature of the lessons did not allow for the collection of a significant number of these, and the scope of the research constituted it difficult to provide adequate space for these to be analysed in the present thesis.

4.6.1   Participant Recruitment

In order to recruit educators for the interviews, I first approached the coordinators of each school, who acted as the gatekeepers[8]. The coordinators forwarded the information about the research to the educators, and those interested made contact with me in order to take part in the research.[9] Furthermore, due to my 8-month stay on the island, I also came across more participants from the other NGO school on Leros, who were recruited through snowball sampling. As the nature of the field made the role of educators in refugee contexts more fluid and adjustable, this meant that most of them had taught more than one subjects. Therefore, the educators selected for the interviews were not strictly English language teachers. However, they had all taught English at some point in their work with students of refugee background. Furthermore, the study included both educators who had worked with children and teenagers, as well as ones who had worked with adults. Another important criterion was that all educators had taught in schools operated by NGO organisations, and were all located on border islands of the south and east Aegean. The managers who participated in the study were recruited through a purposeful sampling method.

The recruitment of the two students who participated in the classroom discussions was again made through the school's coordinator who acted as a gatekeeper. The coordinator informed the students and their parent/guardian about the research with the use of an interpreter.[10] As the students expressed interest in taking part in the study, I then arranged a meeting with the students and their mother, during which I orally explained to them the information on the participant information leaflet. This was done with the help of an interpreter, who translated what I was saying into Arabic, which was the mother and students' home language. The specific students were selected for the research as their age was appropriate for discussing these issues, and as their level of English also enabled them to express themselves in these discussions.

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[8] See Appendix B, for the "Letter to the Gatekeeper".
[9] See Appendix C for the "Participant Information Leaflets" and Appendix D for the "Consent Forms" for Educators and Managers. These have only been provided in their English version, but the Participant Information Leaflets and Consent Forms were provided in Greek to the educators and managers (apart from one educator whose first language was English, who received the English version).
[10] See Appendix C for the "Participant Information Leaflets" for Parents/Guardians and Students and Appendix D for the "Consent Forms" for Parents/Guardians. These are provided in English, but as mentioned above, these were orally translated with the help of an interpreter to the participants' home language, Arabic.

4.6.2   Interviews with Educators and Managerial Staff

The first instrument of data collection were the interviews with the educators and the managerial staff, which were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then translated by me from Greek to English. Qualitative interviews are a tool of data collection which has historically been used by feminist researchers in order to give voice to women and other marginalized groups and to document their feelings and experiences. As Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2007) note, "[t]he logic of qualitative research is concerned with in-depth understanding and usually involves working with small samples" (p. 120), rather than attempting to gauge generalising results. Likewise, the current research involved a small sample of educators and managerial staff, with the aim of providing an in-depth analysis of their interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured; this meant that I used an interview guide with a set of questions to help me during the interview process (this can be accessed in Appendix E). These questions assisted me in directing the conversation towards specific topics that I wished to investigate, such as the teachers' preferred teaching methods, or their experiences with gender issues that had come up at school. However, the structure of the interviews was relatively open, which meant that, depending on the interaction, the order of the questions could be changed, some could be omitted, or others which emerged during the conversations and seemed worth exploring further could be asked. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because, on the one hand, they provide a degree of structure, allowing the researcher to focus on a specific topic, which is necessary in the limited scope of a doctoral dissertation, but, on the other hand, they also combine the benefits of less structured interviews, which "reflect postmodernist, feminist and inclusive aims in wanting to understand the historical and situational factors influencing knowledge production, promoting diverse perspectives and making research more dialogical" (Rizvi, 2019, p. 49). In other words, semi-structured interviews provide more space for the participants to introduce topics important to them, and in this way alter the traditional power dynamics of researcher and researched, as they mostly resemble a dialogue, rather than a strict interview.

The type of interviewing followed in the current research project was informed by the guidelines of feminist interview research. According to Rizvi, feminist interview research aims to do the following: Firstly, it "[r]educes power asymmetry between the

researcher and participants", secondly, it "[e]nables participants to normalize their experiences and discuss them in a safe environment", and finally, it employs "[u]nstructured interviews", which "recognize the emotional demands of being interviewed" (Rizvi, 2019, p. 49). In this study, as a feminist researcher, I aimed to be aware of my positionality during the interview process, and how this could affect the interviewees and their responses. I acknowledged that my identity as a feminist researcher and an educator who advocates for the use of feminist and inclusive pedagogy could influence my expectations of what would be discussed during the interviews, and that I embarked on these interviews with a certain notion of what feminist pedagogy is in mind. However, this awareness of positionality was important in enabling me to look at the interviewing process critically and to approach the interviewees not as an expert, but with a keen interest to learn from their own practices and trust their experience and feelings toward certain teaching practices. As Josselson (2013) puts is, I aimed to use "[r]eflexivity" in order to make "an attempt to recognize [my] own assumptions or preconceived ideas about the person or narratives [I was] about to encounter" (p. 27).

Finally, another element that constituted this type of interviewing feminist, were "the types of questions" that these interviews asked and those they sought to answer (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). The following quote is quite fitting and describes accurately the type of research that the current project aspired to conduct. According to Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2007), feminist (interview) research can be described as the following:

> Research that gets an understanding of women's lives and those of other oppressed groups, research that promotes social justice and social change, and research that is mindful of the researcher-researched relationship and the power of authority imbued in the researcher's role are some of the issues that engage the feminist researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 118).

Likewise, the current project aims to explore the views of educators and refugee students, who are often marginalized or "othered" by mainstream society, and to hopefully gain an understanding of how feminist pedagogy can be used as a method in order to improve the education of refugees and help them develop resilience.

4.6.3 Classroom Discussions with Students

The second instrument of data collection were the classroom discussions with the students, which were also audio-recorded and transcribed. Classroom discussions have been used as a method of data collection mainly in action research in education, and they are usually conducted by teachers undertaking research in their classrooms, by organizing guided discussions for their students to take part in during the lesson. As Burnes (1999) remarks, "[f]or many teachers, classroom discussions are a viable alternative to setting up more formal interview situations" (p. 127). They do not require students to dedicate extra time from their breaks or stay after school in order to take part in interviews or focus groups, and they also remove some of the pressure that more formal interviewing situations could potentially place on students. Presenting a series of teachers' experiences with using classroom discussions for data collection, Burnes (1999) argues that "it is valuable whenever possible to integrate data collection into regular classroom activities" (p. 127). The benefits have shown to be multiple and, among others, include gathering data about best teaching practices, as well as creating a "more open and positive classroom environment" (Burnes, 1999, p. 127).

The classroom discussions in this case, enabled me to record the students' reactions to feminist pedagogy and a series of gender issues that we examined. The discussions were seven in total. They were based on material that I provided the students with, such as literary texts, news stories, videos, etc., all on gender- or oppression-related issues. This material usually drew from the school's weekly topics, adding a feminist lens to these. Indicatively, the lesson plans and discussions touched upon the following topics: clothing and gender, the headscarf and Islamophobia, food/cooking and gender, women's rights to education. More information about these is provided in Chapter 5. The students could talk about these critical issues through the safety of these texts, without necessarily having to personalizes them, although they did end up relating them to their personal and lived experience most of the time, having however first discussed these issues through the safety of the texts. The guiding questions for the discussions were structured in such a way so as to ask for the students' opinions and so as to open up a dialogue, without implying that there were any right or wrong answers. This aimed at creating a safe space and a non-judgemental environment in which the classroom discussions could take place.

4.6.4   Researcher Diary

Another central tool which I employed during the data collection phase, and also during the transcription and analysis of the data, was the use of a researcher diary. The aim of this was to help me document my feelings, thought processes, and experiences as a researcher and teacher in the field. Researcher diaries are a common practice and form an integral part of feminist research methodology, as they are inextricably interwoven with the process of critical self-reflection, and *strong reflexivity*, as proposed by Harding (as in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). The researcher diary acts as a tool of performing this self-critical and self-reflexive action, by providing a space for the researcher to reflect and analyse their thoughts and feelings regarding the different stages of the research process. Reflective diaries are also extensively used by teachers and teacher-researchers. They are described as "personal reflective writing" (Burnes, 1999, p. 90) and are said to promote the professional growth of the teacher, while also "provid[ing] continuing accounts of perceptions and thought processes, as well as of critical events or issues which have surfaced in the classroom" (Burnes, 1999, p. 89). As both a teacher and a researcher, I found that the researcher diary was an invaluable tool which helped me record not only daily critical moments, but also my reflections on my teaching, and on my role as a researcher.

In her study on the feminist EFL classroom, Yoshihara (2017) employs a similar approach, and describes how she made use of the researcher diary as a reflexive instrument during her data collection. In her book, Yoshihara mentions that she kept two types of journals: personal journals and fieldnote journals. Her personal journals were used in order to document her "feminist thoughts, teaching beliefs and practices, philosophical responses to articles [she] read, and all [her] emotions such as happiness and frustration regarding the research" (p. 20), whereas the fieldnote journals were used for "notes about interviews and observations" and her "impressions about [her] participants" (p. 20). As she claims, these journals helped her "to critically reflect on [herself] as a researcher" (Yoshihara, 2017, p. 20), a goal of feminist research which the current research also espouses. Buch and Staller (2007) discuss the of use fieldnotes in feminist ethnography, pointing out how these "are often written as a two-part process" (p. 210). They comment on how sometimes researchers prefer to make "jottings" while they are in the field, which will "help them remember unique turns of phrase or interactions that they will describe and elaborate on in field notes later" (p. 210).

During my time in the field, I was inspired by Yoshihara's work (2017) and adopted many of the elements that she used when keeping a researcher journal. However, I did not make a distinction between researcher journals, but I rather followed the two-part process of taking field notes mentioned above by Buch and Staller (2007). During the time that I was at the school teaching or performing other duties and while I was conducting interviews, I would write down concise notes of phrases that someone had said, events that had occurred, or thoughts that had come to my mind. These were what Burnes (1999) defines as field notes, which she describes as "descriptions and accounts of events in the research context which are written in a relatively factual and objective style" (p. 89). These notes or "jottings" would then be expanded into full diary entries in my own time, and have thus formed the body of my researcher diary. On the one part, the diary entries centred on my teaching, my students' reactions to the application of feminist pedagogy, and on gender-related issues that arose in everyday school life. On the other part, a significant part of the entries focused on my role as a researcher, and my methodological concerns.

Expanding my thoughts on the jottings and writing the diary entries was a reflective and reflexive process, which enabled me to look deeper into my own assumptions, fears, and hopes for the study. The aim of this reflective practice was to enable me to be more aware of my positionality, and the ideology and prejudices that may affect my teaching choices and my choices as a researcher. As Buch and Staller (2007) note, the researcher diary proved to be an extremely critical tool which helped me reflect on the method I had chosen to collect data, on my role as a researcher, and on my "power, position, and influence in the field" in general (p. 211).

4.6.5   Translating the Data

As mentioned previously, after recording the interviews with the educators and managers and the classroom discussions with the students, these were transcribed and recorded by me. Furthermore, while I mainly wrote in English in my researcher diary, there were some sections which I wrote in Greek, which I then translated for analysis. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) aptly note, both the process of transcribing, as well as that of translating should be acknowledged as processes which are not neutral, but in which the researcher is actively involved, as "neither is a merely technical task: both entail judgment and interpretation" (p. 110). This acknowledgement is particularly important for a project which is grounded on a feminist methodological framework, as it

is line with the researcher's awareness of their positionality and their influence on the interpretation of the data throughout these processes. In terms of translation more particularly, Marshall and Rossman (2006) maintain that when conducting research with data sets that have been translated from another language, "there is an ethical imperative to inform the reader that translation has occurred and to address how this […] has been […] managed" (p. 112). It is therefore useful two provide some information about certain choices that I made during the translation process.

4.6.5.1 Educator and Manager Interviews and Classroom Discussions with Students

Firstly, nine out of ten of the interviews were conducted in Greek, as this was the mother tongue of these nine participants and myself, and it was deemed that the participants would feel more comfortable having the interview in Greek. The one remaining interview was conducted in English, as this was the mother tongue of the teacher, and I also felt comfortable holding the interview in English given my experience with the language due to my studies and work as an English language teacher and doctoral candidate living and working in an English-speaking country. Furthermore, as part of my undergraduate studies I had attended courses on translation, which meant that I had some experience with translating texts. This experience that I had with the English language, as well as the fact that my native language is Greek, enabled me to undertake the task of translating the interviews.

During the interviews with the educators and managers, some of the participants used English words which were interspersed in their speech. These were largely, but not solely, related to vocabulary around teaching and methodology (such as "teamwork", etc.), as some of the participants, like myself, were English language teachers and were more familiar with this terminology in English. As mentioned in the table of "Transcription Conventions", in the full transcripts of the interviews (which are not included in the thesis) I chose to italicize these words that were spoken in English, to signify that this was how they were uttered by the participants during the interview. However, throughout the thesis I signal this through the use of a footnote marking this instance whenever a word in one of the excerpts was originally uttered in English. Through this practice I aimed to make the translation process more transparent.

Secondly, while the classroom discussions with the students were conducted in English and therefore did not need to be translated, it was interesting to note that the students used both English, Greek and Arabic throughout these. While the majority of the discussions were conducted in English, the students at times used Greek or Arabic to express a concept that they did not know in English, or to provide further explanation. In order to signify this, in the full transcripts of the discussions I used the system of transliterating the Greek or Arabic words in the Latin script, italicising them, and providing their meaning in English in double parenthesis. For the quotes presented throughout the thesis, the explanation in English was provided in double parentheses, as in the examples below:

> **Fatima:** *That my grandpa, he have dimokratía ((democracy in Greek)), they don't like that, some people from Arabic.*
>
> *(Discussion 1, ll. 393)*
>
> **Fatima:** *No, like you can get the sakoúla ((plastic bag in Greek)) that you put the, er…*
> **Kareem:** *You put the bin.*
>
> *(Discussion 6, ll. 125-126)*

Including this detail helped me to present the classroom discussions more accurately, and allowed for a better understanding of how the students used their full linguistic repertoire during these. Furthermore, the use of Greek also pointed to the fact that the students had begun to integrate in Greek society, were interacting with natives from the island, and therefore at times felt more comfortable to express a concept in Greek rather than English. Finally, during the discussions there were some chunks of speech in Arabic, as the students talked to each other, for example to ask for clarification. My own basic knowledge of Arabic, which I had studied previously for a year, allowed me to understand the gist of some of these utterances or some words which the students used and to therefore help them with the content. I therefore made notes of this or used the Arabic words as well to enhance understanding, such as in the excerpts below:

> **Kareem:** *God, he say that when […] any family which want to be Muslim, she's have to do the things, what he said, erm, Muslim ((asks his sister in Arabic for the word religion)).*

Fatima: *Religion.*
Kareem: *Religion.*

(Discussion 1, ll. 206-210)

Kareem: *No, ah, the difference, because the Greek have ((speaking in Arabic to his sister)) How do I say jazeera? ((island in Arabic))*
Tereza: *Island?*
Kareem: *Like Leros, Chios, here it one country.*
Tereza: *Aha, so Greece has many islands, jazeera, islands. In [STUDENTS' HOME COUNTRY], there are no islands.*

(Discussion 1, ll. 39-44)

Finally, as the students were both learners of English as a second language, their speech contained many grammatical and syntactical errors, or many words which were not used in their "correct" sense. However, my intention was not to present a polished account of the students' utterances, so I transcribed these as they were spoken, only deleting repetitions and sometimes hesitation markers to improve readability for the reader in the quotes used in the analysis. In order to enhance the reader's understanding, I would provide my own interpretation of what the students meant in double parenthesis, as in the below example:

Fatima: *Yeah. Like, mean someone, er, in Europe, come here with hijab, and tall clothes ((meaning long))*

(Discussion 2, ll. 24-25)

Fatima: *[…] you know that man who stay we at the house? ((meaning the man whose house they are staying at)).*

(Discussion 4, ll. 42-43)

Lastly, while the personal interpretation of the researcher during the process of translating the data sets is an existing factor, it is hoped that the present section has provided a transparent account of the choices that I made. By following the above strategies and providing the above details in the transcriptions, I aimed to better capture the utterances of the educators, managers and students during the interviews and classroom discussions, and to provide more insight into their linguistic choices.

4.6.5.2 Researcher Diary

In terms of the language used in order to write my researcher diary, this was largely English, and at times also Greek, which is my native language. As mentioned above, I would first take field notes or "jottings" while at the school or after a lesson, which I would then use to compose my researcher diary entries. I used both English and Greek when noting down my field notes during the school day. In terms of the language that I used to write in my researcher diary, this was mainly English. However, there was a small number of entries that were written in Greek, and which I later translated to English in order to use in the writing up of the thesis. This practice allowed me to engage in a translanguaging process, not limiting myself to English and allowing myself to draw from and write in the language that I felt most comfortable in at the moment. While translanguaging has been largely studied as a pedagogical practice, in this case, translanguaging was also used as a "research method" (Lee, 2022), as it enabled me to draw from my full linguistic repertoire while engaging in reflexive research.

4.7   Ethical Considerations

This section aims to discuss the ethical aspects that were taken into consideration throughout the design and implementation of the research. Firstly, I discuss the foundational points of concern that have been highlighted in the literature on research with refugee populations, and relate how these were addressed in my own research context, through my choice of research design and methodology. The main themes mentioned include the vulnerability of the participants, the issue of obtaining informed consent/assent, the power dynamics between the participants and myself as a researcher, as well as the issue of representation of the students' standpoint in the research. I conclude the section by proposing that these issues were addressed through the use of feminist research tools, which can provide an invaluable means for conducting ethical research with vulnerable populations, such as refugees and asylum seekers. Secondly, I relate the ethical considerations pertaining to the data collection with the educators and managerial staff, and what measures were taken in order to address these.

Most literature on conducting research with refugees highlights the fact that there was, until recently, a lack of guidelines for ethical research in this sector. However, there is an emerging volume of literature preoccupied with this matter which has been growing in recent years, mainly due to political and economic factors which

have resulted in forced migration and a subsequent rise of interest in conducting research with refugee populations (Abdelnour & Moghli, 2021; Bailey & Williams, 2018; Block, Warr, et al., 2013; Clark-Kazak, 2017, 2019; Deps et al., 2022; Halilovich, 2013; Hugman et al., 2011; Müller-Funk, 2021; Schmidt, 2007). Furthermore, a series of official documents were developed, providing guidelines for doing ethical research with refugees, firstly by the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (2007) followed by the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) (2018), which drew from guidelines developed in the Canadian context (Centre for Refugee Studies et al., 2017).

The most recent of these guidelines, the IASFM Code of Ethics (2018), is based on the previous two documents, and it consequently draws on a shared set of ethical principles which inform the proposed guidelines. The principles consist of prioritising the "equity" and "diversity" of the perspectives of those represented in the research, acting with "competence" in terms of selecting the appropriate research methods, and basing the research on "partnership" with the participants. The guidelines developed from these principles are also very similar in all these documents. They include ensuring that people in forced migration contexts have the right to "voluntary, informed consent", that their "confidentiality and privacy" is respected, and that researchers will commit to "doing no harm" and maximising the research benefits for the participants (International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM), 2018, p. 2). The way in which the ethical challenges and their mitigation were considered in the current research was informed by the above principles and guidelines. Specifically, the following three areas were considered:

4.7.1   Vulnerability

As the IASFM advises (Clark-Kazak, 2019), there are a number of different factors which researchers need to be aware of when conducting research with people in forced displacement contexts, in order to ensure that the research is ethical, and that the vulnerability of the participants is protected. Researchers are faced with a set of "particular ethical challenges because of unequal power relations, legal precariousness, extreme poverty, violence, the criminalization of migration, [and] politicized research contexts" (Clark-Kazak, 2019, p. 12), all factors which contribute to the vulnerability of the participants. A number of studies mention the vulnerability of forcibly displaced people as something which needs to be taken into consideration, more so than in other

studies, as this creates additional challenges in terms of protecting the participants from potential harm. In this particular study, the research ethics implications which should be considered with regard to the student participants can be located in their vulnerability due to the following factors: a) their age, b) their refugee/asylum seeker status, and c) their linguistic and cultural background.

However, even though the vulnerability of the student participants is recognised, in order to ensure that they will be treated with respect and protected from any harm, it is important here to note that vulnerability is not equated in this study with total helplessness. Rather, the circumstances in which the students are living and their particular legal and socioeconomic status are viewed as a lens through which their specific situation can be understood, but not as one which totally defines them. According to Block, Riggs, et al., (2013), it is crucial to recognize "the potential vulnerability of research participants as resulting from the circumstances in which they find themselves — rather than locating it within the person" (p. 6). With this conception of vulnerability in mind, it is then vital to examine how refugees and asylum seekers can be treated ethically in research. As Halilovich (2013) notes, "[w]hile it is critical not to treat refugees as powerless victims, it is also important to recognise the power relations in the contexts in which the research takes place" (p. 133).

4.7.2 *Informed consent/assent*

According to McAuley (2020), "the definition of vulnerability as it appears in ethics discourse is primarily centred on the concept of informed consent" (p. 162). Regarding the first factor, age, according to Trinity College Dublin's *Policy on Good Research Practice*, specific attention needs to be given in research with children (participants under the age of 18). In these cases, "[p]arental/ guardian consent is required for research participation of any child or children, and good research practice also requires the child's agreement or assent" (Trinity College Dublin, 2009, para. 4.2.1). In the present study, this was taken into account, by obtaining both the students' assent, as well as their parent/carer's written consent. In terms of the linguistic and cultural background of the students, as their mother tongue was Arabic, great care was taken into clearly communicating the purpose of the research and what this would involve. With the help of an interpreter, I informed the students and their mother about the study, orally relating the information that was included in the participant information leaflet

and the consent form. The purpose of the research was communicated in clear and simple terms: I informed the students and their mother that I was researching how to make education for refugees more efficient, and that I wanted to explore how I could teach about gender issues through the English language lesson. I explained that if they agreed to take part, they would participate in a series of lessons with me over the next two months, during which we would learn and have discussions about a series of issues related to gender. Finally, regarding the refugee legal status of the students, their vulnerability in this sense was protected by making it clear that taking part was optional and they were in no way obliged to participate, nor would this have any effect on their attendance at school.

4.7.3 *Power*

Ethical considerations around power distribution are an issue that most researchers in the forced migration contexts are preoccupied with. As Block et al. (2013) remark, "[g]iven that abuse of power is often the precondition for people becoming refugees in the first place, it is not surprising that a key ethical concern for a number of researchers is the disparity in power between researchers and researched" (p. 7). Unequal power relationships are therefore of utmost concern in research with forcibly displaced persons. Being aware of and considering how to mitigate these is necessary when thinking about obtaining consent, as well as not causing harm during or after the data collection process.

In response to this, a great deal of the literature on ethical research with refugees identifies researcher reflexivity as one of the principal tools which can help in alleviating the accumulation of power in the researcher's hands (Block, Warr, et al., 2013; Fox et al., 2020; Lokot, 2019; Schmidt, 2007). In Chapter 3 I describe in detail how reflexivity was employed in the current research, and focus specifically on how I engaged in emotional and political reflexivity. Furthermore, I propose that employing a feminist research methodology, of which reflexivity is a crucial part, can help ensure that the research conducted is ethical towards participants from forced migration backgrounds. Awareness of researcher positionality and self-reflexivity surrounding research practices can allow researchers to be cognisant of the particular power dynamics involved, and to reflect critically on the research process and how this may affect them or the participants. In her research on feminist values in refugee research,

Lokot (2019) supports "that feminist analysis can offer insights into power imbalances between researchers and refugee communities, and research informed by feminist values can offer potential to redress them" (p. 468).

4.8   Data Analysis

This section discusses the choice of Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) for the data analysis. I explore the benefits of assuming this analytical approach, and present a detailed account of the data analysis process. Furthermore, I demonstrate the critical and reflexive thought process that I followed throughout the analysis, with the aid of excerpts from my researcher diary.

4.8.1   The choice of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)

The data analysis method which I employed for this project was Braun and Clarke's (2021) model of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). I decided to use RTA as an analytical method, as its theoretical underpinnings align with the feminist research methodology that I followed for the project, as well as with the topic in question, namely feminist pedagogy. The "ten core assumptions of reflexive TA" that Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 8) outline are in accord with the theoretical cornerstones of feminist methodology. More specifically, some of these key elements include the attention that RTA dedicates to reflexivity, as well as its acknowledgement of researcher subjectivity and the essential role of the researcher in the interpretation of the data. Braun and Clarke (2021) stress that "valuing a subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher, a reflexive researcher, is a fundamental characteristic of TA for [them], and a differentiating factor across versions of TA" (p. 5). Furthermore, they view researcher subjectivity as "[n]ot just unproblematic, but an asset, especially if reflexively engaged with" (p. 6), something which deeply resonates with the emphasis that feminist research methodology places on researcher subjectivity and reflexivity. Therefore, the choice of Braun and Clarke's (2021) RTA provided me with an analytical framework that I could work with to suit my own approach to knowledge and meaning-making as a feminist researcher. Moreover, it allowed me to navigate the process of data analysis in this particular context of forced migration, while being aware of my own positionality and how my identity as a feminist researcher interacted with those of the participants.

The specific approach of RTA that I followed in my data analysis was a more latent and inductive approach. While the first familiarisation notes that I made on the data were sometimes more semantic and focused on explicit meaning, the coding process later focused on the more latent meaning of the codes. This allowed me to examine in more depth the ideas and perceptions that the participants expressed around gender, trauma/emotions, and culture/language. My approach in analysing the data was more inductive, as it was to a large degree driven by the data, and the research questions were articulated along the way based on the data analysis. However, as Braun and Clarke (2021) remark, approaches to data analysis are usually situated upon a spectrum (p. 10); in this case, although the analysis was mainly inductive, the research questions were also to some extent following a deductive approach, as they were developed in relation to the feminist framework of the project and to feminist theory. My thinking, as well as my analysis of the data was to a certain degree informed by certain theoretical concepts, such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), femonationalism (S. R. Farris, 2017), the deficit vs. resilience framework (Shapiro, 2018; Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019), reflexivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Lumsden, 2019), and feminist pedagogy (Bostow et al., 2015; Crabtree et al., 2009a; Shrewsbury, 1997; Weiler, 1991).

4.8.2 Delving into the RTA process

During my data analysis, I was guided by the six phases of RTA that Braun and Clarke (2021) outline in their book: 1) familiarisation with the dataset, 2) coding, 3) generating initial themes, 4) developing and reviewing themes, 5) refining, defining and naming themes, and 6) writing up (p. 35). During these stages, I continued to keep a researcher diary for the analysis process, a decision which arose organically, as it helped me write out my thoughts and doubts about my course of action. Recording the procedure and writing about the challenges I encountered assisted me in understanding what decisions I needed to make and constituted me more self-aware of my role as a researcher in the data analysis process. My researcher journal acted for me as "a repository for documenting and storing thoughts for subsequent reflection, interrogation, and meaning-making" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 18), assisting me to continue practising reflexivity throughout this stage of the research as well. In order to provide a clearer account of the analysis process that I followed and how journalling about it helped me, I cite some passages from my researcher diary later on in this chapter.

As Braun and Clarke (2021) remark, RTA is a "progressive but recursive process" (p. 36), and this was also my experience, as, although I moved through all of the six phases described in the book, these were not always clear-cut, and I navigated back and forth between them. This iterative process allowed me to rethink my decisions and restructure and redefine my codes and themes. My familiarisation with the data had already started during the transcription and translation process, during which I took notes on the transcripts, as well as in my researcher diary, noting down anything that seemed relevant to the research questions. As I thought this would be enough to start coding, I decided to begin coding in NVivo, a software package which I had not used before, but which I was open to experimenting with. However, I soon realized that this was not suitable for the project, firstly because I felt that I had not familiarized myself enough with the data to start coding and, secondly because I was not comfortable with using NVivo, as is demonstrated in an excerpt from my researcher diary below:

> *This whole process seemed daunting and scary to me, especially in the beginning. However, it is by listening to my own needs and instincts as a researcher that I am making decisions about how I will analyse the data. Starting off by coding on NVivo I realized that I was neither ready to code yet, nor very comfortable with NVivo. This led me to a series of decisions—first to leave NVivo aside for the moment, and second, to go back to the familiarization stage again. Talking to my supervisor as well as a friend of mine who had used thematic analysis before, I discussed about different ways of analysing data manually, and decided I would like to try that instead. I therefore resorted to pencil and paper and this process helped me to take a closer look at the interviews and produce analytic notes on anything I considered as somehow relevant. Slowly, I began to find some interesting points and meaning even in the interviews that I was apprehensive to look at in the first place for fear that they were irrelevant. I made some notes about what it is that I'm looking for in the data, and what I'm not interested in, which helped me determine what I want to focus on. Reading Trainor and Bundon's (2021) paper on doing RTA was eye-opening to me, as I recognized many parts of myself and the bumps and twists in my research process in their description of doing RTA.*
>
> *—Researcher diary excerpt, 28th November 2022*

After finishing the familiarisation process by taking hand-written notes in pencil on the interviews, I felt that I had gained a better understanding of the data set. Even though I had not coded systematically yet, the notes I had taken formed the basis for the codes that I later developed, and I had formed an overall idea of some over-arching themes that I recognized in the data. These initial themes were "gender", "trauma",

"emotions", "culture/language", and "religion". However, as I will explain later on, these themes were not the final ones, as they were merged and renamed in the process of RTA and theme refinement. I then began coding, this time by choosing a colour for each of these overarching themes, as is demonstrated in Figure 4.12 below:
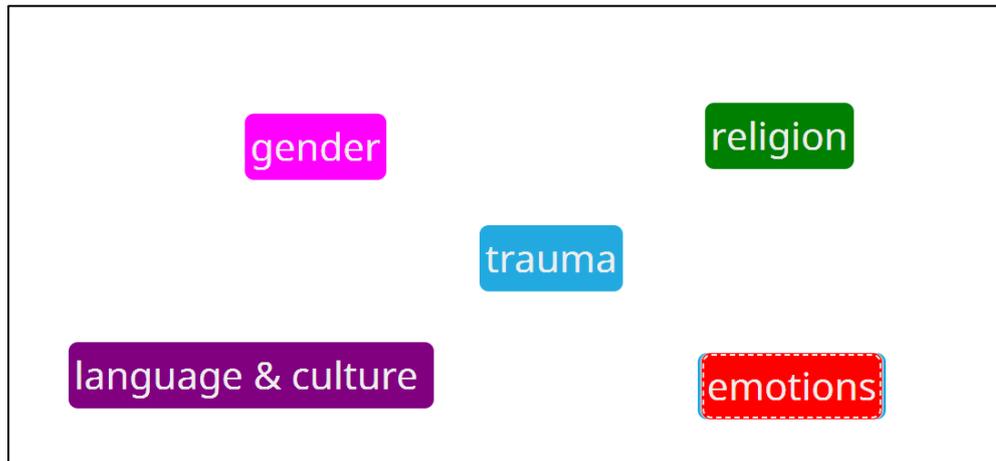
Figure 4.12 Initial over-arching themes, 7th January 2023

I started with the initial over-arching theme of "gender" and color-coded each interview by placing a pink dot next to each line that felt relevant; after that, I went through the color-coded extracts and wrote down the specific codes, which were at most times developed from my analytic notes. At the same time, I decided to record these codes on NVivo as well, so as to make the process of retrieving the coded extracts easier. I followed the same process for all of the initial over-arching themes. Figure 4.13 below demonstrates what the coding process looked like on one of my interview transcripts:
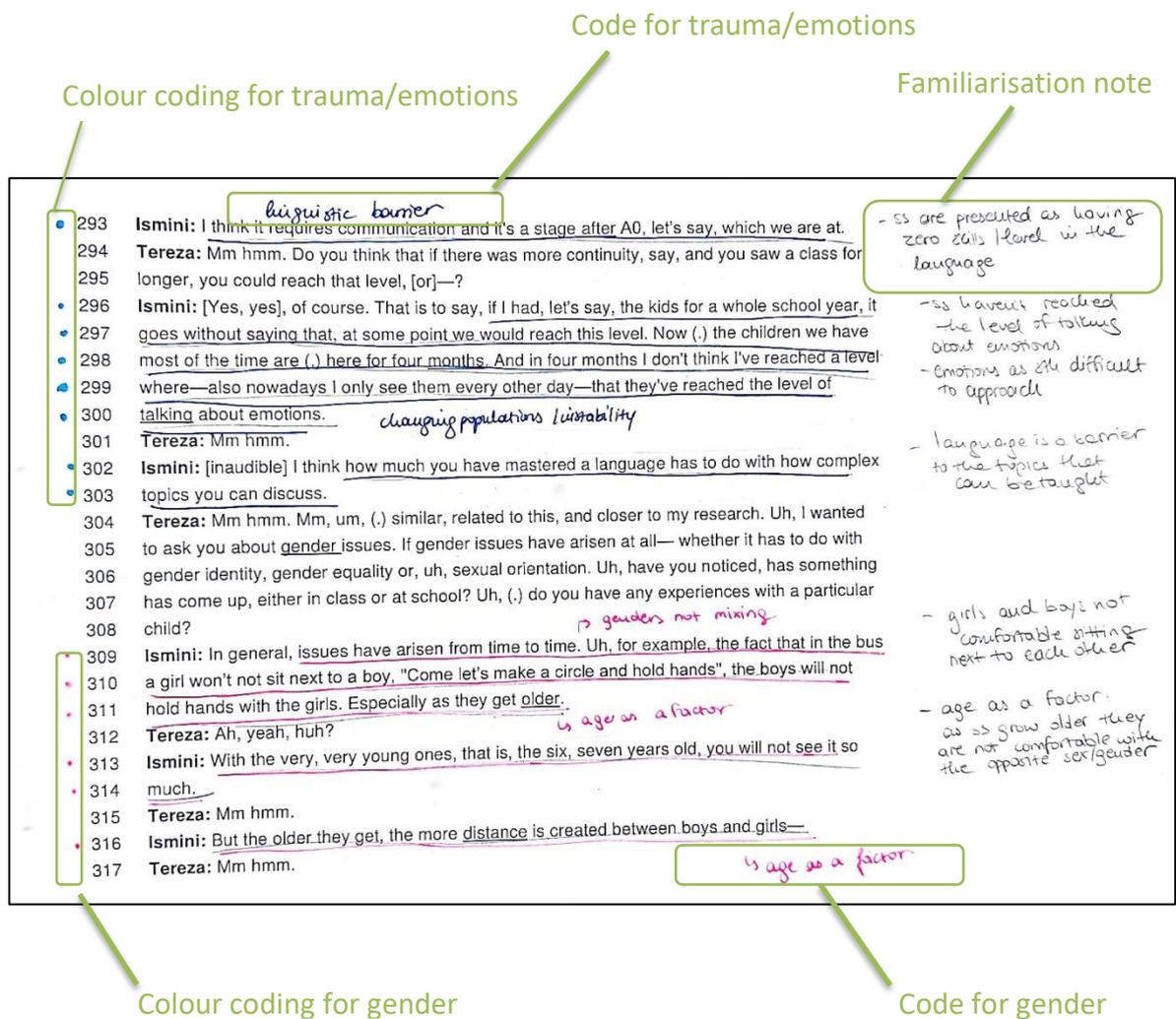
Figure 4.13 Manual coding example of an educator interview for the initial themes of "trauma/emotions" and "gender".

As I proceeded to code for each interview, I also started to develop code clusters. I began to record these in an online mind-mapping website called MindMup[11] While coding manually on the interviews, I transferred each code to NVivo, and then to the online mind-map, gradually adding each code to a code cluster. Figure 4.14 shows how this process developed for the initial over-arching theme of "trauma/emotions":

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[11] www.mindmup.com
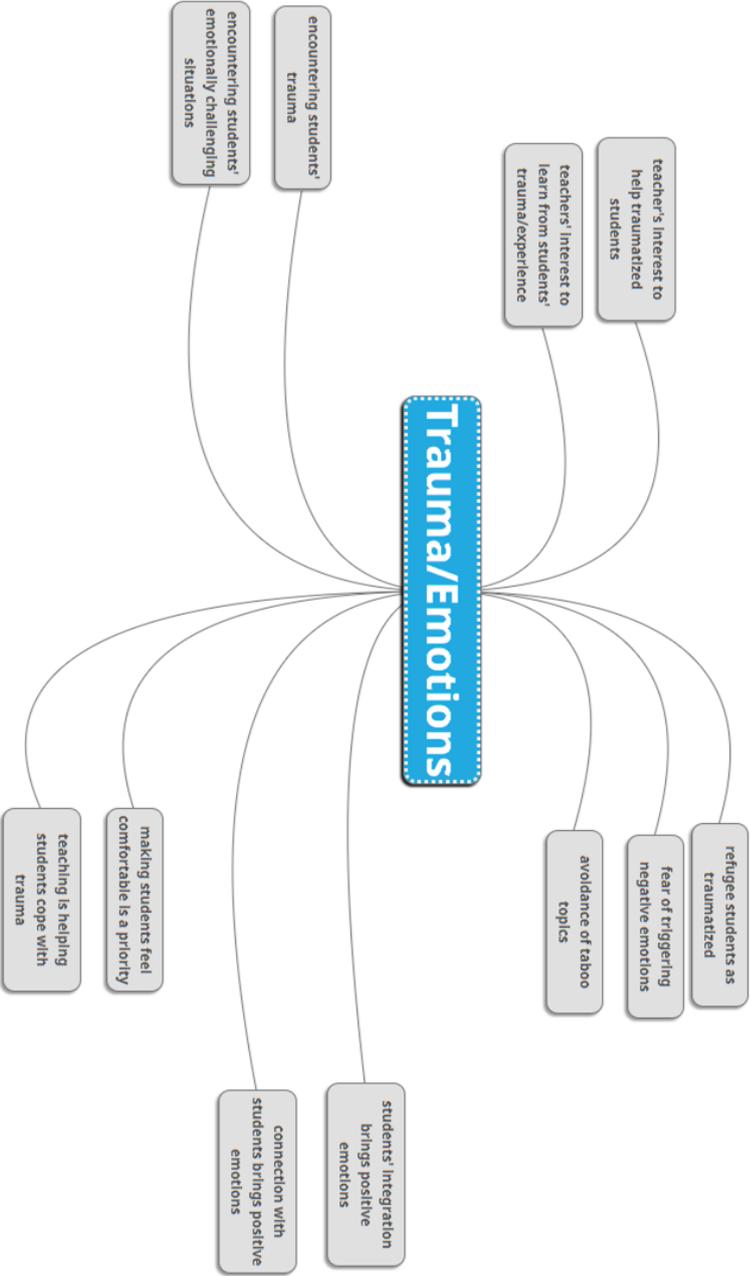
Figure 4.14 Noting down initial codes and starting to form code clusters for "trauma/emotions", 17th January 2023

Following the initial code grouping, more codes were added to the map and most of these were clustered. I then started giving names to these clusters, which gradually formed the subthemes, as can be illustrated in Figure 4.15:
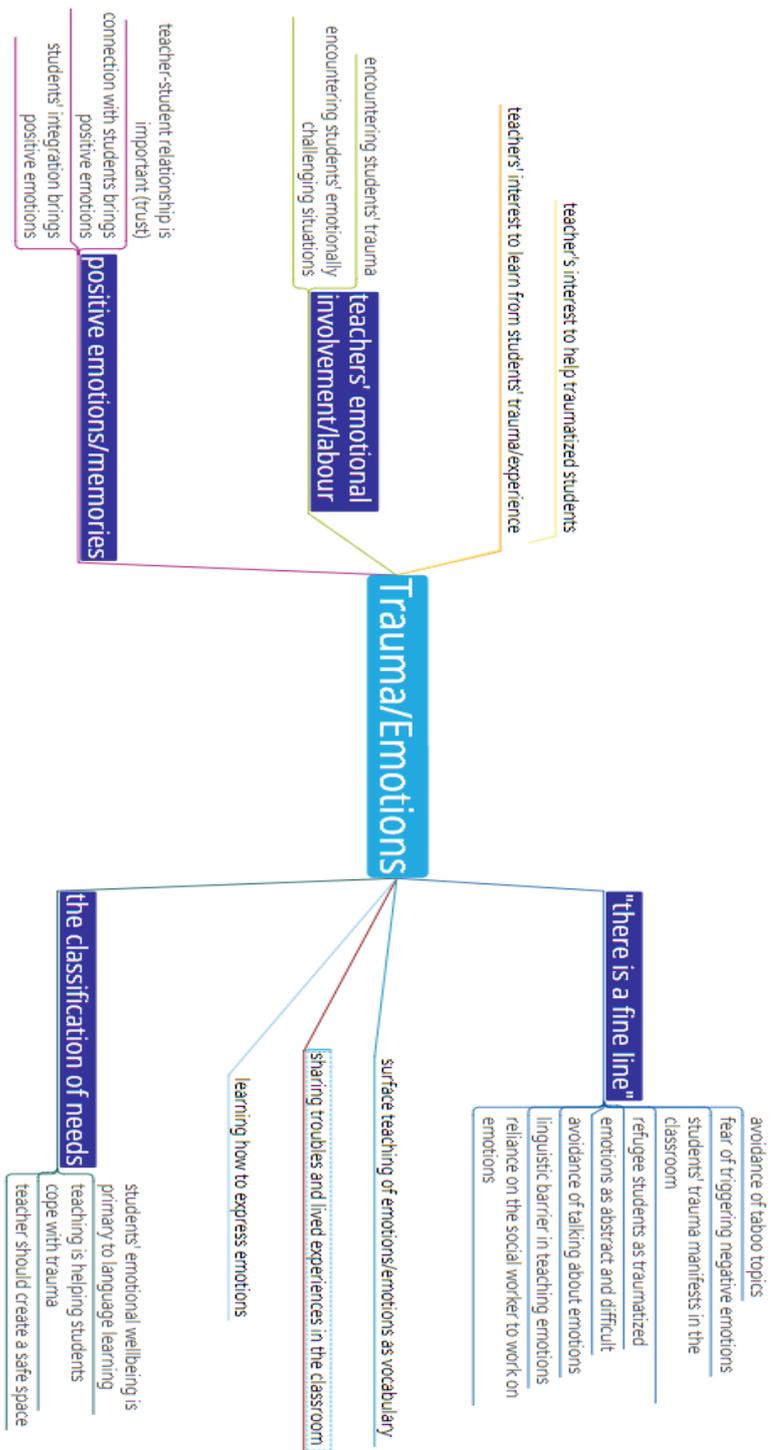
Figure 4.15 Formation of initial subthemes for initial theme of "trauma/emotions".

As coding progressed, so did the development of the subthemes and the clustering of the codes. Figure 4.16 shows what the initial theme of "trauma/emotions" looked like at the end of coding and sub-theme development, before the writing up phase had commenced and before the final theme names were developed:

Trauma/Emotions

deficit vs. resilience
- deficit vs. resilience lens
- students displaying agency/resilience
- displacement as disadvantage

teachers' emotional involvement/labour
- encountering students' trauma and emotionally challenging situations
- teacher's frustration with temporariness/instability
- teacher's interest to help traumatized students
- difficulty/fatigue
- teachers' interest to learn from students' trauma/experience
- teacher's interest to help refugees

positive emotions/memories
- teacher-student relationship is important (trust)
- connection with students brings positive emotions
- sharing experiences/connection
- students' integration brings positive emotions
- teaching as an act of love/caring
- students' progress brings positive emotions

"there is a fine line"
- avoidance of taboo topics
- fear of triggering negative emotions
- emotions as abstract and difficult
- avoidance of talking about emotions
- linguistic barrier in teaching emotions
- past experiences of trauma
- ongoing traumatic experiences affect learning
- refugee students as traumatized
- need for teacher to be understanding
- talking about emotions requires special training
- feeling inadequate
- reliance on the social worker to work on emotions

experiencing emotions in the classroom
- emotions as vocabulary
- learning how to express emotions
- sharing feelings
- sharing troubles and lived experiences in the classroom
- students' need to talk about trauma/emotions
- talking about emotions when something happens

the classification of needs
- students' emotional wellbeing is primary to language learning
- lowering expectations and adjusting pace
- teaching is helping students cope with trauma (teacher as healer)
- healing aspect of education
- teacher should create a safe space
- refugee students appreciate education/yearn for school
- the radical act of listening

Figure 4.16 Subthemes and codes for "trauma/emotions" at the end of the coding phase before writing up and renaming of the final themes, 2nd February 2023

I then proceeded to do the same for the next over-arching theme. The online mind-maps proved to be a very useful tool in my analysis process. As I indicate below, having a visual and schematic representation of the codes and subthemes helped me think of the relationships between these and develop the subthemes:

> *The mind maps have constituted an extremely useful tool for me throughout this process. When finding a segment of text that is of interest, it really helped me to refer to the mind map to see the existing codes and decide which one it is closer to or belongs to, as opposed to having to flick back through pages of interviews or looking at the list of codes in NVivo. Being able to look at a schematic representation was particularly insightful.*
>
> —*Researcher diary excerpt, 5th February 2023*

However, it must be noted that throughout this process, the initial over-arching themes developed and changed, as my understanding of the data set also changed. The over-arching themes that I focused on at this stage were: "gender", "trauma/emotions", and "culture/language", as many of these were merged due to their similar nature. The same happened with the subthemes, which kept being redeveloped, redefined, and renamed along the process, even during the writing up part, as many codes were collated and subthemes were merged or deleted. Again, I made a note of the recursive nature of the analysis process in my diary:

> *I wanted to note today that what I am doing is an iterative process. Even though I have started coding weeks ago, I am constantly going back to previous interviews and recoding or renaming the codes as I discover new ones.*
>
> —*Researcher diary excerpt, 6th February 2023*

Before starting the writing up process, I conducted an initial refinement of my codes and subthemes. However, when I started writing I realized this was not enough; I therefore proceeded to refine the codes, subthemes, and themes even further, so as to enhance subtheme and theme structure:

> *I think I need to refine my themes and merge my codes even further, so that my analysis can be rich. I have too many codes that refer to the same meaning in other words, or that are very close to each other in terms of meaning. I think it is time to let some of these go, and to provide a more concise analysis.*
>
> —*Researcher diary excerpt, 7th March 2023*

This code, subtheme, and theme refinement happened throughout the analysis and writing up process. During the first stage, the initially separate themes of "trauma" and "emotions" were combined, as they were deemed to be covering the same sets of meaning. The same was true for "culture" and "language", which were also combined into one over-arching theme. At the same time, the theme of religion was omitted, as it was not as strong during the coding process.
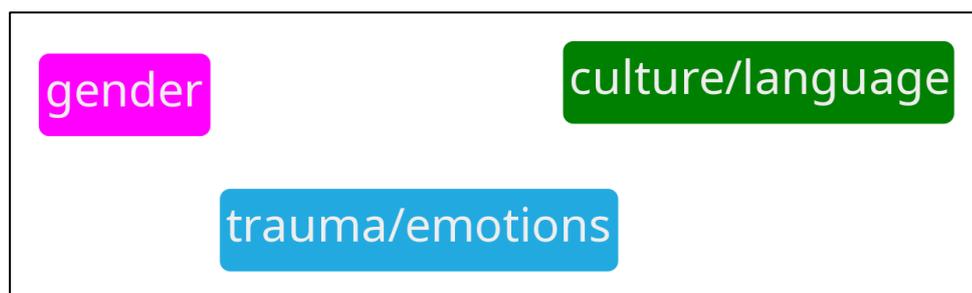
Figure 4.17 Themes after further refinement.

However, after this stage, even further refining of the themes and their phrasing was deemed necessary, as it was felt that the initial over-arching theme names were mostly descriptive. It was decided that a more phenomenological approach to theming the data would allow for better illustrating the "pattern[s] of shared meaning organised around a central concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, I engaged in further refinement of the theme names, so that they would be more indicative of the shared meanings of the subthemes. The approach that I followed for developing a more phenomenological naming of the themes was that of Piazzoli et al. (2023), who developed an approach for this based on Saldaña's (2021) proposal for phenomenological theme creation. Piazzoli et al. (2023) describe this process below:

> […] Saldaña (2021) offers a semantic strategy for theming the data: constructing a theme in the form of a sentence that affirms what "something IS" – that is, what is manifest in the data, and/or what "something MEANS" (p. 259), that is, what is latent in the data. In this study, we adopted this strategy and expanded it to include "something AS" to further capture symbolic meaning. We chose "something AS" as it seemed conducive to express not only the ideas, but also the metaphorical nuance within the themes. (p. 103)

Adopting Piazzoli et al.'s (2023) phrasing of themes as "something AS" allowed me to think more deeply about the latent patterns of meaning in the already existing themes and to rename them accordingly, using the above structure. Therefore, I renamed the previous theme of "gender" as "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", which better illustrates the views of the adult participants about the difficulty of integrating gender in class, as well as the complexity of gender which is viewed as rigid by the adult participants but is presented as more personal and context-specific by the students. Likewise, the theme of "trauma/emotions" was changed to "Trauma as present, but not defining", more accurately capturing the adult participants' ideas around trauma and emotions in refugee education. Finally, the theme of "culture/language" was changed to "Culture/language as barriers", in order to encapsulate the perception of culture and language as barriers in the classroom by the adult participants. The final themes after writing-up and theme-refinement were therefore the following, as presented in Figure 4.18 below:
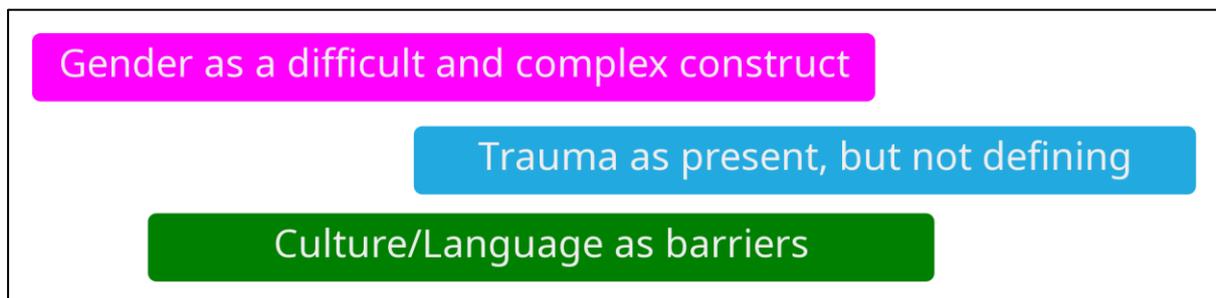
Figure 4.18 Final themes after writing-up, named phenomenologically.

The final themes, subthemes, and codes are presented in detail and analysed in Chapters 6 and 7, which also include the final complete mind maps depicting each theme.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research design and aims, explaining how these changed due to the fluid context of the refugee sector and due to the pandemic. It has provided an account of the school's particular context, as well as more particular information about the educators, managers, and students who participated in the study. The data

collection phases and the instruments (semi-structured interviews with educators and managers, classroom discussions with students, and researcher diary) have been presented. I have also paid particular attention to the ethical challenges which arose while doing research in a forced migration setting, as well as the measures that were taken for their mitigation. Finally, I have described the iterative and reflexive process of analysing the data through reflexive thematic analysis. Before moving on to the presentation of the data analysis, the next chapter provides an overview of my experience with feminist pedagogy in practice. After that, Chapters 6 and 7 will introduce the detailed analysis of the themes and subthemes produced.

5   Chapter 5: Feminist Pedagogy in Practice/Praxis

5.1   Introduction

This chapter aims to give a reflexive overview of the ways in which I employed feminist pedagogy in my own teaching practice. The chapter relates my pedagogical experiences of feminist pedagogy while at the school on Leros through a chronological approach. For each month of the fieldwork, and more specifically of Phase 2 which took place from February 2021 to September 2021, I present below certain extracts from my researcher diary and the classroom discussions with the students. These extracts have been selected as illustrative points or critical moments which serve to provide a context for and further elucidate the themes of the data analysis which are presented in the next two chapters (Chapters 6 and 7). The chapter's aim is to present and reflect on some of these key moments of feminist pedagogy in practice, rather than to provide an exhaustive account of all the lesson plans and teaching practices that I used. For the months of March, April, May and June I relate excerpts from my researcher diary about my teaching with all levels of students in the school. As the recorded classroom discussions with the two teenage students commenced in July, the months of July, August and September below also include excerpts from these discussions to illustrate my teaching practice, as well as the respective lesson plans upon which these discussions were based[12].

Following the overall tone and methodological orientation of the thesis, the chapter assumes a reflexive tone, in line with feminist research methodology and reflexive thematic analysis. Finally, while the chapter is structured in a chronological fashion, I wish to acknowledge that my experience of feminist pedagogy and my learning on the field was not linear. Rather, I kept revisiting and reflecting on the practice and praxis of feminist pedagogy throughout all the months that I stayed on the island.

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[12] Any handouts used in these lessons can be accessed in Appendix F.

March 2021

Having arrived on Leros in late February 2021, in the midst of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to spend a few days in quarantine before commencing my work at the school. Therefore, my first diary entries on my teaching start in the beginning of March 2021. This month was a time of adaptation to the school, the island, and the people, as well as a period of exploration and active inquiry into what feminist pedagogy is and what it could mean for my students, my colleagues, and myself in the particular context and timeframe. I therefore spent the first few weeks attempting to understand my role in the school and to investigate how I could put feminist pedagogy to practice.

During my first weeks there I attempted to introduce gender-related topics to the different classes of students I was teaching, depending on their level and age, as well as to introduce these ideas to the rest of the educators. My first attempts in integrating these issues in my lessons were not always successful, as indicated in the researcher diary excerpt below, which describes my unease and perhaps initial awkwardness in broaching a gender-related topic with female students of Muslim background. As I describe below, for one of my first lessons with a group of students aged 13-16, I had selected a text about a female Muslim athlete who could not take part in the Olympics until the unitard was allowed, with the aim of starting a conversation about clothing, gender stereotypes and religion. However, my students' reaction was not what I expected, as I relate below:

> *Tuesday, 2nd March 2021*
>
> *We read a text about a female Muslim athlete. There were three Muslim girls in class. When I asked what problems the athlete encountered, they couldn't understand the part about her not being able to take part in the games until the unitard was allowed. I tried to explain but felt very uncomfortable and was afraid I might say something offensive, so I decided to skip the question after my first attempt.*

My initial reaction to the students not understanding the question was a feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment, and I did not want to tread into a sensitive and potentially offensive territory. I later reflected on the fact that I should have provided more context and scaffolding in order for the students to be able to understand and

discuss the topic, and to avoid any awkwardness around the topic for them, as well as for myself.

Furthermore, during this initial period, I tried to introduce my ideas of incorporating gender-related issues in the curriculum as part of the weekly topics at school. I relate below an incident which occurred, and how the teachers' reactions brought me deeper understanding of the challenges of implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in a refugee education context:

Friday, 5th March 2021

During the teacher meeting, we were trying to decide on the topic of the week. I suggested "gender equality" but was met with a negative response from the teachers, who were intimidated by approaching the topic. Some mentioned that they found it very hard to discuss these complex topics with the students, especially due to the language barrier. The maths teacher said it was impossible for her to find material related to this topic in order to teach math. [...] Then, some of the teachers started discussing about how they do talk about these issues with the students, just not as weekly themes, but when they arise in certain circumstances (e.g. they remembered the students watching a video of Greta Thunberg, who they admired, or some other examples). [...] The teachers also mentioned that it is difficult to approach these topics with students because they need a lot of preparation and work to be done before they can actually talk about these, and given that students never stay for long, this makes it difficult to do so.

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the discussion that I had with the rest of the educators constituted a learning point for me in terms of how feminist pedagogy can be implemented. Firstly, it pointed me to the initial apprehension or fear that teachers may have towards broaching sensitive and political issues in the classroom, perhaps fearing that they would come across a similar situation as my own experience of awkwardness in the previous diary entry. I also felt that this apprehension was familiar to me, as feminist issues are often met with such resistance. However, being reflexive on my own positionality as a feminist teacher and researcher helped me understand that the educators' reactions were very reasonable, and that ample preparation and training is required in order to integrate such issues into the lesson, especially in a classroom that consists of students of refugee background and from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Finally, it pointed me to the value of a unified, coordinated approach and to the importance of team effort. When one of the

managers, Pavlos, visited the school a few days later, I discussed with him my concerns around integrating a feminist pedagogy approach in the school:

> *Wednesday, 10th March 2021*
>
> *[…] Pavlos replied that just because I suggested it once and it didn't take off, this doesn't mean that I should give up. He also told me something that I hadn't thought about clearly, but that I felt was true as I had begun teaching some lessons on gender issues, while my colleagues were teaching on another project. He said that it's more important that all educators follow the same topic, as the children might be confused if they hear different things from different people and it is preferable that we do something in common. He also told me that I might first need to start by talking to the educators, because sometimes, if we find it difficult to teach something it's because we haven't had the time to process it ourselves, and it won't be a successful attempt if it's not a joint effort. His words gave me great insight into what feminist pedagogy is, and to the fact that it's probably about being able to listen and feel for the needs of the students and the rest of my colleagues, and taking things with their time, rather than engaging in an individual, rushed attempt to approach some subjects. If I first approach the educators, then the effort will be collective, and more successful.*

I found great insight in Pavlos' words, and felt that I started to form an idea of some of the necessary preconditions for implementing feminist pedagogy, such as being aware of the challenges, involving all colleagues, and assuming a coordinated and unified approach. I discuss this point further in Chapter 6, section 6.2.5 in relation to subtheme 5 "Need for a reflexive and holistic approach" which was produced by the thematic analysis of the data.

April 2021

From the end of March and until the first days of May 2021, Leros entered a strict lockdown due to a surge of COVID-19 cases on the island. As soon as I was becoming accustomed to the school and getting to know the students, teaching moved online and we all had to readjust to the new situation. At the same time, I continued reading about feminist pedagogy and observing the way in which the school was functioning, and learning about the different actions that it was or had been involved in. While not openly assuming a feminist pedagogy approach, I found that some of the key elements

of feminist pedagogy were evident in the everyday practice of the school. I relate one of these moments in the diary excerpt below:

Saturday, 24th April 2021

I was just reading an article on feminist pedagogy (Shrewsbury, 1997) and I was happy to discover a connection of Shrewsbury's theory to practical applications at the school where I'm working. In this article, Shrewsbury gives an account of the basic principles of feminist pedagogy, and she outlines three basic ones: "community, empowerment, and leadership" (p. 7). It was upon reading this phrase that I instantly made a connection between the words on the page, and actions that I had seen take place in the school, involving the students. As far as I can understand, the school is actually implementing all three of these pillars of feminist pedagogy, even if teachers initially seem to be apprehensive of integrating gender issues in their classroom. Feminist pedagogy, is, in fact, behind almost all of the projects and activities that the students are involved in. As far as community is concerned, the school has built a strong bond with the local community, by organizing joint activities, for example, the school newspaper, which is produced in collaboration with the rest of the elementary schools of Leros. The students also pay visits to the local animal shelter, another activity which creates a bond with the local community. Empowerment and leadership are also some of its goals, demonstrated in actions like electing class representatives and holding meetings with the school's co-ordinator, during which the students voice their concerns. The student representatives even went to see the island's mayor and to ask him if something could be done about the stray animals of the island. Seeing that the teachers and the coordinator strive for these actions and for the inclusion of these three elements in the school life, which are the backbone of feminist pedagogy, I can't help but wonder: why are the teachers so reluctant to use feminist pedagogy in their classroom and to talk about issues of oppression? Is it the word "feminist" that makes them sceptical, or are they intimidated about approaching such challenging topics?

As is evident in my above reflections, I came to the conclusion that, while initially hesitant towards explicitly assuming a feminist pedagogy approach, the teachers integrated many of its elements into their everyday practice with the students. The three elements of feminist pedagogy that I describe above, community, empowerment, and leadership, were all parts of the activities in which the students were involved, and were made part of the school's curriculum. Thus, while certain elements of feminist pedagogy, such as a discussion of gender and gender issues, were more difficult to integrate into the classroom, others such as the promotion of community and leadership were being made part of the students' everyday experience. This led me to question the hesitancy of the teachers towards a feminist pedagogy approach, and to reflect on the

reasons why it might exist, pondering specifically on the use of the term "feminist" and its reception.

May 2021

In May 2021, the strict lockdown on the island ceased and the COVID-19 measures throughout the country loosened, with schools reverting to in-person lessons as before. I cite below an excerpt from my researcher diary on the day that the school opened again. The excerpt captures the atmosphere of hope and joy on the day:

> *Monday, 10th May 2021*
>
> *Schools opened again today, after two whole months of lockdown and online teaching. It's also the day that I got my first jab of the COVID-19 vaccine, so the day goes hand in hand with an air of freedom of sorts, or at least a hint at it. The students were really excited to come back to school; they were waiting for us outside the camp, forming a line, ready to get into the bus for school, having forgotten that we needed to perform the COVID-19 self-tests first. I was very happy to see them again too, and to welcome them back to the school. My lesson with the teenagers went much better than I expected. I noticed that the students were eager to participate, and that their English had greatly improved, which made me really happy! Even a student whose English level was lower before showed signs of improvement, and the lesson flowed very productively with everyone. I chose a mindfulness activity for the first lesson, the "Personal Weather Forecast", because I wanted the students to take it easy, and reflect on their feelings before and after the reopening of the school. It seemed to work quite well, and they then shared their drawings and feelings with each other.*

The above passage also describes how I attempted to implement feminist pedagogy principles on the first day of being back to school. More specifically, my lesson was informed by feminist pedagogy's attention to emotions, and I attempted to be cognizant and aware of my students' emotions, and to integrate these in the lesson that day. As it was the first day back to school, I opted for a mindfulness activity, which would allow the students to reflect on and process their feelings about this important event, namely the return to school after two months of online confinement in the camp. This activity flowed well and provided a smooth transition for the students on their return to school.

June 2021

As lessons continued throughout the summer, I began to integrate gender and oppression related topics in my teaching in accordance with the school's weekly topic, giving a feminist pedagogy lens to the topics that were selected each week and which were common for all the subjects that were taught in school (Maths, English, Greek, Art, etc.). I illustrate these below through my researcher diary extracts, as for this group of students there was no recording of classroom discussions. I describe below my reflections on a lesson that I developed on the school's weekly topic on "Sports". Assuming a feminist pedagogy approach, I decided to develop my own flashcards and material that would challenge traditional gender stereotypes about sports, and that would provide food for thought and critical thinking for the students. As the students in the particular class were of a young age (7-9 years old) and their English was at beginner level, I attempted to introduce this topic through simple activities that would allow them to engage with the idea of gender stereotypes in sports in an approachable and easy to understand manner:

Thursday, 24th June 2021

Today we were looking at a children's book called "Boys Dance", so as to focus on ballet and dancing and the gender stereotypes that we associate with this. I started the lesson by introducing some key vocabulary that the students would need in order to describe what they saw in the picture book. Even when teaching the students the verbs "dance" and "spin", I discovered that the boys were prejudiced against these as "girly actions". Although they were happy enough to act out "stretch", they were reluctant to dance. When I asked Khaleel if he likes to dance, he said that he does, but when his older friend Mohammed said that he doesn't, Khaleel seemed puzzled and took his response back. It is evident that Khaleel follows Mohammed in what is right and what it means to "be a boy" and what constitutes "boyish behaviour". Therefore, his construction of gender is affected by his friend, although at times his own personal opinion may differ. Mohammed was also very reluctant to act out the verb "spin", and so was Khaleel, who copied his behaviour. When the cultural mediator entered the classroom and I asked him to spin, Khaleel also felt more comfortable to do it too, and he spun, although Mohammed still refused to. The same happened with the verb dance. When I asked Khaleel if he dances, he said yes, and was confused when Mohammed said no. Noha had no problem showing me her dance moves, and even showed me how her father dances. After I asked Khaleel what music he dances to, he also showed me how he dances, and then Mohammed followed. I then showed them the book about boys doing ballet, and they were quite open to it. The boys even tried to identify with characters in the book, saying "This is me, this is Mohammed, etc.". They were impressed by the

116

stretches and the dance moves that the boys and girls in the book could do, and even imitated them.

The above lesson enabled me to broach the complex topic of gender in the classroom, and, despite the students' young age and beginner level of English, to provide an opportunity for them to think about the gender stereotypes that exist around sports, and to challenge these. Reflecting on this lesson in my researcher diary later enabled me to think in more detail about the reactions of my students to the lesson and what these signified about the enactment and learning of gender roles in school. While the students displayed an initial adherence to traditional gender roles, throughout the course of the lesson they became more open to different, non-traditional enactments of gender roles. This was something that I noticed throughout many of the lessons and classroom discussions that I had with the students in the school, as they initially appeared to agree with traditional patriarchal views on gender, but then through our activities and discussions, these seemingly solid views seemed to be in fact much more complex and negotiable.

July 2021

In July two teenage students aged 10 and 13, Fatima and Kareem, joined the school. As mentioned previously in the thesis, it is with these two students that I conducted the recorded classroom discussions. I attempted to integrate these in the school's weekly topics whenever possible. For example, for the weekly topics of "Clothes and self-expression" or "Food around the world", I tried to approach the topic critically through a feminist lens and to integrate discussion points for the students to think critically about their and society's perceptions of gender in relation to the topics of clothes and food accordingly. One such example is related below:

Monday, 12th July 2021

Since the topic of the week was "Clothes and self-expression", I thought it would be a good idea to introduce the teenager students to how clothes are gendered and how this shapes our expectations of how men and women should dress. After revising the clothing vocabulary that the students were aware of, I presented the students with pictures of famous pop icons (singers, actors, etc.) who were not dressed according to stereotypical norms. E.g., Lady Gaga and

Scarlett Johansson were dressed in stereotypically male clothes and with male haircuts, Billie Eilish was dressed in loose, boyish clothes, and some men were wearing dresses or tight clothes, traditionally assigned to women. The first impression of the students was confusion, they did not seem to like what they were seeing and they felt that it was weird, and not what should be happening. It was also probably the first time that they were seeing something like this. I then asked them to share their opinion about this. They were both perplexed, as they were confused about why "men are dressed in women's clothes" and vice versa. Their first impression was that this is not good. Then, Fatima said that since it is a democracy anyone can do whatever they want and wear what they wish, but that she wouldn't wear this and doesn't like it aesthetically. She also said that the Quran mentions that men can't be women and the opposite, so, for her, religion was a strong reason to influence her on this. Kareem also seemed confused and he did not like what the celebrities were wearing. [...] Fatima also asked me if I want to dress like a boy and if I live with my boyfriend or husband. She was probably intrigued about why I was teaching them about this topic. I told her no, I don't usually dress like that, but there are people who do, and others don't treat them with respect, so I believe it is important to know about this topic. After the lesson, I was thinking about if the students actually enjoyed the lesson. It did seem to confuse them, and it might have been easier to just teach them vocabulary about clothes. However, I then thought that gender topics are not always received in a positive way, and that is why this kind of work is needed, since the students will come across more diverse images as they enter and explore the world. Even though teaching about controversial issues may seem tough at first, or it may not be a safe, neutral topic, it is still important for these issues to be discussed.

As is evident in the above excerpt, this lesson was not one that was expected by the students, and the topics were new and unfamiliar to them. However, we held a lively discussion, which was also enabled by the fact that we had had time to revise the necessary clothes vocabulary in the previous lessons. My reflections pointed me to the fact that while such controversial topics are difficult to discuss in an ethnically and religiously diverse classroom, this was not impossible, and the students took interest in sharing their opinions on the topic and their own cultural knowledge. Furthermore, another interesting learning point for me was my students' sincere inquiry about my motives in teaching them about gender stereotypes and clothing. This led to my acknowledgement of my positionality and my own personal views, admitting that I believe that issues of gender equality are important, in line with a feminist pedagogical approach.

Even though this lesson on clothing and gender stereotypes was designed for Fatima and Kareem, the two teenage students with whom I was conducting the

classroom discussions, I found that gender came up in my other classes as well, even with my younger students. I describe below an instance of how talking about clothes brought up an interesting remark on gendered expectations of men and women in relation to clothing with my students aged 7-9:

Monday, 12th July 2021

Today I was teaching clothes vocabulary to the students aged 7-9 and the word "dress" caused some panic in the classroom. Mohammed wanted me to give the dress flashcard to Noha, since only girls wear dresses, and Noha replied to him that boys wear dresses too. I seconded this, and showed him the photos that I had shown the elder students of male celebrities wearing a dress. Mohammed and Khaleel were shocked and didn't like the pictures that I showed them. Khaleel said to me in disbelief: "Teacher, come on, this no boy, this girl", not wanting to believe that David Bowie in feminine clothes was a man. Noha, however, made a very insightful observation when Mohammed said that boys don't wear dresses. She said that in Turkey some boys do, and that Somali men in the camp wear dresses (probably referring to the sarong-like garments traditional to Somali clothing for men). This connection that Noha made was very acute, and showed that she combined her knowledge of other cultures to compare how something considered "abnormal" or deviant in one culture is the norm in another. Mohammed and Khaleel seemed to not change their mind, but I think that they did think about it for a moment, and I could not have come up with a better example than Noha's.

What was interesting for me in the above experience, was not only the students' knowledge of cultural and gendered expectations, but also their knowledge of the ways in which these expectations are also often inverted. More specifically, Noha's comment proved that even with students of a young age or beginner level, it is indeed possible to broach such complex issues, and to open up a discussion for students to think critically about gender.

The exploration of gender issues continued with Fatima and Kareem, and I developed lesson plans for each topic. Each lesson plan then led to a classroom discussion which was recorded. In terms of the topic of clothes and gender, I developed the lesson plan in Figure 5.1 below, which then led to Discussion 1:

Discussion 1: Clothes and Gender

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:

Discussion 1 was based on a lesson plan on "Clothes around the world". Following the school's weekly theme of "Clothes and self-expression", the lesson plan drew from this topic, with the aim of exploring the aspect of gender in relation to clothes as a cultural and gendered practice.

Lesson plan aims:
- For students to explore and write a short description of the different types of clothing in the different countries that they have lived in (their home country, transit countries, Greece).
- For students to compare and contrast these clothing styles between Arabic countries and European countries in terms of gender
- For students to think critically about the reasons behind these clothing practices
- For students to relate these gendered clothing practices to their own lived experience

Brief description of lesson plan:
After a series of lesson plans which introduced the students to vocabulary around clothes and gendered expectations around clothing, this lesson plan was carried out over the course of two different lessons. During the first lesson, the students were asked to use the school's tablets in order to find four images that they thought were characteristic of how women and men dress in Arabic and European countries accordingly. They were given the key words with which to search for the words in Google. The students were then asked to select four characteristic pictures and write a short description of what the men and women were wearing in these pictures. During the course of the second lesson, each student presented their descriptions of these pictures. Following this, a class discussion was held around the discussion questions provided in the handout (see Appendix F) that was designed (How do the styles differ? Are men and women dressed differently in Arabic countries and in Europe? What do gender stereotypes have to do with this?). The students shared their knowledge and experiences around different clothing practices and we discussed the role that gender norms play in how we dress.

Figure 5.1 Discussion 1 lesson plan.

During this lesson the students had much to offer to the discussion on clothes and gender stereotypes, and shared their knowledge of cultural norms and societal expectations. The following excerpt from our discussion with Fatima and Kareem highlights their knowledge of these expectations around the wearing of the hijab (headscarf):

> **Kareem:** *God, he say that when […] any family which want to be Muslim, she's have to do the things, what he said, erm, Muslim ((asks his sister in Arabic for the word religion)).*
> **Fatima:** *Religion.*

Kareem: Religion. But, if they want to say we are Muslim, but we don't wear hijab, they say maybe they are Muslim, but they don't do this.
Tereza: So, it's OK?
Kareem: No.
Fatima: Yes. Kareem, he don't know so much for the Quran and he don't read. We have also and Muslim that when you married any man and your man, your man told you that you can get the hijab…
Tereza: That you have to wear it?
Fatima: That you can get it out…
Tereza: Ah, you can take it off.
Fatima: When we have to make this, some people, wear it, but like this, look, till here ((showing that the hijab allows for some hair to be exposed and is not all the way to the forehead)).
Tereza: Ah, OK.
Fatima: But we have also in [STUDENTS' HOME COUNTRY], we have. And also my mom sometimes wear it, like this.
Tereza: OK.
Fatima: When we go to the playground or somewhere. But the important to don't anyone from your country see you like this. […]
Tereza: Aha. So, does the man tell the woman if she needs to wear it?
Fatima: Mm ((thinking)).
Tereza: Or does the woman decide?
Kareem: When the women go… you and your man go to the sea, in Europe and not too much people, and not too much men, a little bit you can take it off, if your man told you. But if you in your country and in the sea, any place in your country and with people or not people, you can't take it off. They say, "Ah, she's don't, she's take it out, but he [said] no", understand?
Tereza: Mm hmm. OK.
Fatima: I say and this thing. There are ((rules)) in Islam, in our religion, that you can't take it off, you can't, never ever. But, if sometimes that you can…
Kareem: With your man.
Fatima: …with your man.

(Discussion 1, ll. 206-251)

The above excerpt highlights not only the students' awareness of gendered expectations around clothing, but also their awareness of the role that religion plays in the construction of these norms. The students also drew attention to the role of the male voice and authority in dictating the wearing of the hijab, as well as the voice of society if a woman does not strictly adhere to these norms. Furthermore, the students discussed how these norms are context- and location-specific, as they provide examples of how wearing the hijab is always necessary in MENA countries, but also how this rule can be transgressed when a woman is in Greece or Europe. However, through the discussion, the students came up with a reason that these norms exist, displaying great awareness of the rationale behind the religious and societal rules applied on women:

121

Kareem: You know why long? We don't dress in Arabic country this ((short)) clothes, because if you dress this when you go anywhere too much be a man look you and they thinking another something, and maybe they…
Tereza: They come to talk to you?
Kareem: Yes, but we don't, er, we don't dress this, because this something. We dress here ((meaning long dresses)) to only your man he's look you in your home, but outside no.

(Discussion 1, ll. 450-458)

Kareem's words display great awareness of the policing of the female body and its perception as something which must be protected, as well as the role that clothing plays in this policing and protection. They also demonstrate that the students were well aware of topics related to sexual desire and how this is manifested in society. After the lesson, I reflected on the following points in my researcher diary:

Monday, 19th July 2021

I felt very happy during today's lesson, because it seemed like the students enjoyed it, and the material that I chose sparked a very lively discussion. I found that they were not shy at all and were really eager to share with me information about their culture and societal norms and expectations. […] What I gained from this discussion was that the students were very well aware of all the sensitive topics and the rules that govern gender relationships. They were aware of what is considered "ethical" or not, but could also grasp the unequal treatment and gender inequality that is present in many of these relationships and many societal norms.

As our discussion of clothing and gender brought about the topic of the headscarf, I thought it would be interesting to explore this topic further with the students, as it is one which is highly controversial and the students would quite possibly come across these controversies or discussions around the headscarf while living in Europe. This led me to develop the two lesson plans in Figure 5.2 below upon which Discussion 2 and Discussion 3 were based:

Discussion 2: *The Proudest Blue*

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:
The lesson was based on the book *The Proudest Blue*, by the Muslim fencing medallist Ibtihaj Muhammad. The aim was to touch upon the issue of the hijab, as well as Islamophobia and bullying, through the choice of the particular literary text. The lesson was designed to focus on the hijab, as the students had demonstrated interest in the previous lesson on clothing and gender, and the issue of hijab seemed like an issue that troubled them and that they had many thoughts to share on. Therefore, a literary text was deemed as the most appropriate way to approach such a controversial and sensitive topic.

Lesson plan aims:
- For students to listen to an audio version of the book and answer comprehension questions about the plot and the characters
- For students to explore the themes of bullying and Islamophobia through the text
- For student to discuss about the role of the hijab and how it can elicit different reactions
- For students to relate the text to their own feelings/views on wearing a hijab.

Brief description of lesson plan:
The lesson plan was structured into three separate lessons. During the first lesson, the students were asked to answer pre-reading questions about the book and to guess what it might be about. Then, the students listened to an audio version of the book. During the second lesson, we completed the handout (see Appendix F) with reading comprehension questions as well as discussion questions about the book. These questions were targeted not only at the students' understanding of the text, but also at developing their critical thinking skills around the issue of the hijab and bullying. The third lesson then focused on the students engaging in a role-play as a journalist and the main character of the book, in order to explore the character's feelings in more detail.

Discussion 3: Role Play as Asiyah and the Journalist

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:
This lesson was a continuation of the previous lesson on The Proudest Blue, during which a discussion was held around the topic of the hijab and Islamophobia, drawing on the story of the main character, Asiya. The present lesson aimed to help the students explore Asiya's feelings deeper, through a role-play activity, namely an interview between Asiya and a journalist.

Lesson plan aims:
- For students to develop questions that a journalist would want to ask Asiya about her experience of bullying at school
- For students to engage in a role-play in order to explore the character of Asiya and her feelings about the hijab
- For students to think critically about the role of the hijab in Muslim religion and how it is perceived in Euro-centric settings

Brief description of lesson plan:

The lesson plan was carried out over the course of two different lessons. During the first lesson, the students thought of and formed the questions that the journalist would like to ask Asiya, based on what they would like to know about her experience, and also based on the discussion questions. Roles were also assigned. During the second lesson, the students enacted the discussion between Asiyah and the journalist.

Figure 5.2 Discussion 2 and Discussion 3 lesson plans.

As is evident from the lesson plans above, the main topic that the book touched upon was bullying due to Islamophobia. After discussing the book and the reading comprehension questions, I thought it would be interesting to ask the students if they had witnessed similar instances of bullying take place in their everyday life in Greece. While the students initially denied this, they slowly began to recall a similar experience of bullying that they had had on Leros. The topic of the book thus functioned as grounds for narrating and reflecting on their own lived experience, allowing them to personalise the topic that we had just discussed in relation to their own lives. The below excerpt from Discussion 2 contains the students' narration of the episode:

> *Tereza: So, what do you think about this? Is it something that happens often, this type of bullying? Have you seen it happen here? In Leros? In Greece?*
> *Kareem: No.*
> *Tereza: No?*
> *Kareem: Er, ah!*
> *Fatima: Sometimes.*
> *Tereza: Yes, Kareem?*
> *Kareem: Er, like when we… On Saturday we go to play, some boy, he say, "I know to play football, not like…" ((inaudible and in a lower voice)).*
> *Tereza: He said what?*
> *Fatima: "I know to play better", that's what he said. On Saturday we go to the garden to play. We start to play, we and the Greek people. So, we started playing and we said to them that "We will play now". And they said, "Yeah, of course", and the Miss who is there she said that "All of this place for all you. You can go there Kareem play." Kareem, he's better than the boys who play with him football. So, I played with Kareem, to another people who are five and we are two. And Kareem said to them to get the ball, and the boy start ((swearing)) me and said: That "You are Pakistani", you know, and "You are not nice" and "You're black, you can't play good. You have to stop and to go out this place". I stop and I told him that "This place", I told him, "this place is not for you to say to me go or to stay, the first; the second, we are not from Pakistan. And all the country, it's the same"— I told that to the Greek— "All thing it's not different, it's the same. You can't told me that. If you are angry about my brother play better than you, you can say that, we can still be friends."*

(Discussion 2, ll. 115-150)

Through the above excerpt, it is evident that reading *The Proudest Blue* offered a fruitful starting point for discussion, and for the students to relate their own experience of bullying. After the lesson, I reflected on the fact that the students had chosen to share this instance with me, and was happy that they felt comfortable and safe enough to relate such a personal experience and their feelings. True to a feminist pedagogy approach, this lesson had integrated both the lived experience and feelings of the students, as we acknowledged and reflected on these in order to discuss about bullying. Furthermore, the above excerpt demonstrates the students' awareness around discrimination and oppression due to ethnicity and race, as can be seen in Fatima's comment on the boy calling them Pakistani as an insult.

Finally, while throughout the month of July we focused mainly on gender issues, this last lesson was mostly centred around ethnicity and religion, also topics which are relevant to feminist pedagogy's emphasis on the intersectionality of discrimination and oppression.

August 2021

In August, the lessons and classroom discussions with Fatima and Kareem continued, and I developed our lesson plans drawing from the school's weekly topics, as well as from some current affairs that I found relevant and that I thought would interest the students, as I will describe later on. Discussions 4 and 5 drew from lesson plans that I developed based on the school's topic on "Food Around the World", again focusing on this topic through a feminist pedagogy approach. The lesson plan for Discussion 4 is presented in Figure 5.3 below:

Discussion 4: Cooking and Gender

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:
The lesson was developed in line with the school's project on "Food Around the World". The particular lesson focused on exploring gendered expectations related to the preparation of food around the world.

Lesson plan aims:
- For students to watch a video about how the preparation of food takes place in the country of Azerbaijan.

Figure 5.3 Discussion 4 lesson plan.

After watching the video, the students immediately picked up on the gendered division of cooking tasks that we had just watched, and commented on the fact that the woman had undertaken most of the tasks. This led to a discussion about if this is something that usually happens in daily life and why. The students related their thoughts on the video, as well as their own experiences with the division of tasks at home. The excerpt below portrays the students' perceptions and thoughts on gender roles in relation to cooking:

> **Tereza:** *So, we watched the video about the woman and the man in Azerbaijan and what they are cooking. And we wrote down everything that we saw that the woman did in the video, and everything we saw that the man did in the video.*
> **Fatima:** *But here the woman do something more than the man.*
> **Tereza:** *So, what do you think? Who does the most cooking, the most work?*
> **Fatima:** *Of course, the woman.*
> **Tereza:** *Of course, the woman. Why, of course?*
> **Fatima:** *We see in the video that the man, he don't help so much. He just make the tea and start the fire.*
> **Kareem:** *Because, this job for the women ((matter-of-factly)).*
> **Tereza:** *Ah. Interesting, interesting ((in a laughing voice)). What do you mean, Kareem?*

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[13] https://www.youtube.com/@country_life_vlog

Kareem: This job for the women. Not for the man.
Fatima: But he's ((help)).
Tereza: You mean cooking?
Fatima: I'm sorry, but there are not…
Kareem: It's for the woman…
Fatima: There are not right, there are not right.
Tereza: ((to Fatima)) Let's hear him and then you will say what you think. Yes, Kareem. Tell me, what do you think? Do you think that cooking is a job that usually women do?
Kareem: Yes. ((very matter-of-factly)).
Tereza: Why? Are they better at it? Why does this happen? What do you think?
Kareem: Because the man, he is don't will do it very nice. The woman, because she's girl, and she will learn it, and she will do it.
Tereza: Ah, so it's something that you learn, right?
Kareem: Yeah.
Tereza: So women do it because they learn it. If men also learn it, from a young age, will they be able to do it, also well? What do you think, Kareem?
Kareem: If he's need, OK.
Tereza: If he needs to? OK. Yes, Fatima.
Fatime: Teacher, believe me, usually, I believe that the man who will learn… If you look on all the world, who is man more? It's a man, who are cooking. Have so much chef, cooking mans. And, I believe that also, you know that man who stay we at the house? ((meaning the man whose house they are staying at)).
Tereza: Yes?
Fatima: Yes. He make like a chef cooking.
Tereza: Yeah?
Fatima: He's a man and he is cooking. He's Arabic, and he cook. There are not a problem with it from the man. This job is for the both.

(Discussion 4, ll. 7-48)

The above excerpt demonstrates that, while the students, and especially Kareem, initially held some stereotypical beliefs around cooking and gender roles, they also started to think more critically about these through our discussion. Kareem's statements provided an occasion for us to point out the "learned" nature of these tasks, and how they are perhaps undertaken mostly by women because it is something which they learn, and not something which is inherent. Having a feminist pedagogy approach here helped me to take a step back and provide Kareem with the space he needed to share his thoughts, even if I didn't personally agree with him. Rather than telling him that I don't agree or criticising what he said, I offered some questions through which we could critically unpick the reason why it is mostly women who cook. In this way, I wanted to make sure that Kareem felt comfortable enough to share his own views, but also to think about them in a critical manner. Furthermore, Fatima provided more examples of

men who cook, reflecting on her daily life and providing the example of the man who was hosting them. Later, Kareem also became more open to the idea of cooking, describing it as a life-skill rather than a task assigned only to women:

> **Kareem:** *I want to learn to wash and to do the food, because, when maybe I'm big, I don't know, I live alone in one country, I will cook alone, I will wash alone. I have to learn to do it alone.*
>
> *(Discussion 4, ll. 191-201)*

The lesson enabled us to discuss in depth about cooking and gender roles and to explore these in relation to the students' every-day life. The students displayed great awareness of these gendered expectations, but also showed that these are not as rigid or strict in reality.

I further continued to explore the topic of food and gender with Fatima and Kareem during the next days, developing a lesson plan around different food practices around the world, and how these can often be exclusionary of women. This lesson plan is presented in Figure 5.4 below:

Discussion 5: Food and Gender

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:
The lesson was part of the school's project on "Food Around the World" and a continuation of the previous lesson on the division of labour in regards to food preparation. This lesson focused on exploring different food practices around the world that are very gendered and that exclude women.

Lesson plan aims:
- To expose students to different practices and customs related to food around the world that exclude women by reading an article on this topic
- To help students think critically and discuss about these practices and customs and relate them to their own experience

Brief description of lesson plan:
Students were asked to read an article on gender discrimination and food around the world[14] (see Appendix F). Then, we completed a vocabulary exercise, with words that the students would need for comprehending the text and for engaging in the discussion questions. Finally, the students shared their thoughts on these practices and related these to their own experiences around food and gender norms in the countries they have lived in.

Figure 5.4 Discussion 5 lesson plan.

[14] Adapted from https://www.rightsofequality.com/gender-discrimination-in-access-and-consumption-of-food-across-cultures/.

The article that we read and the practices that it described provoked a strong reaction in the students, and mainly Fatima. By now, we had already explored gender stereotypes and equality in a series of lessons, so the students were more able to think critically about the topics that they were exposed to, and to locate any instances of gender inequality. The classroom discussion excerpt below demonstrates Fatima's passionate reaction to the article:

> *Fatima: No, I think that they are not real something! ((passionately))*
> *Tereza: They are not real? These things are from an article online. So, some people did some research and they found that these traditions, they exist.*
> *Fatima: Really?*
> *Tereza: These things happen. It's not that everybody does it, but in some villages…*
> *Fatima: But I believe there are before some years.*
> *Tereza: So, you believe they are old traditions?*
> *Tereza: Yes.*
> *Tereza: They still happen in some places.*
> *Fatima: But they are not right.*
> *Tereza: What do you think about them?*
> *Fatima: Mm, they have to go for the hospital, because they are crazy.*
> *Tereza: ((slight laugher)) They have to go to hospital? Yeah…*
> *Fatima: Really, why all thing? OK, the woman she cook, the woman she cook. She have to eat more than the men, not them to eat more than she. And also the women she tired and works all thing, at the end also to eat.*
>
> *(Discussion 5, ll. 136-153)*

Fatima's feelings of exasperation are demonstrated in the above excerpt, showing that she had applied her own judgement to the reading. However, noticing that the article may have perhaps led the students to this strong reaction, I later reflected on the fact that it would have been good practice to provide some context and scaffolding for the students to think about these patriarchal practices in a manner which would acknowledge the context and their nature as practices which are old and socially constructed.

After completing the topic of food and gender, the last lesson of August that I conducted with the two teenagers drew not from the school's weekly topic, but from certain violent political affairs that were going on at that time in Afghanistan. The school had already received a number of students from Afghanistan during that period,

and, as these affairs were very relevant to the staff and students in the school, I felt that it was necessary to integrate these in our lesson. I explain the rationale for Discussion 6 in the lesson plan provided in Figure 5.5 below:

Discussion 6: The Veil

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:
In August 2021, during the period that these lessons were taking place, the war and the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was exacerbated. The news about the Taliban taking over Afghanistan and exerting their control also reached us in Greece. The violation of women's rights, and especially the newly instilled face veil decree which required women to cover themselves fully when going out in public, was also a much-discussed issue. Due to this, it felt like this constituted an important and current matter to approach with the students, again in relation to women's rights. As we had previously discussed about the hijab and Islamophobia, it now also seemed very fitting to examine a different view on the veil, one that explores how it can become something with limits female freedom. I decided that it would be quite effective to view this through the eyes of an artist, and especially one coming from a Muslim background. Coming across the photograph series (*The Hijab Series*, 2018) of Bushra Almutawakel, a Muslim Yemeni photographer, I felt that they would make for an excellent starting point for discussion with the students. The first series called *Mother, Daughter, Doll*, explores the effect of extreme covering on women, and portrays how this can result in their exclusion from society. The second series called *What if…* looks at the question of "what if men had to wear the veil?" and portrays a man and a woman, and the gradual veiling of the man and unveiling of the woman from frame to frame.

Lesson plan aims:
- For students to be exposed to Bushra Almutawakel's photograph series (*Mother, Daughter, Doll*, and *What if…*) and to be able to describe what they can see in the photographs.
- For students to think critically about these photograph series and to be able to discuss about what point they are making about women's extreme covering.
- For students to relate the discussion back to their own experiences of the veil and to express their own opinion on the matter.

Brief description of lesson plan:
The lesson involved a discussion around the two photograph series described above. The students were given a handout (see Appendix F) with questions for discussion, which were used as prompts for the discussion that was held in class. The aim of the questions was for the students to first of all describe what in portrayed in the photographs, and, on a second level, to unpack the meaning behind this artwork in relation to the veil and extreme covering of women in Muslim countries.

Figure 5.5 Discussion 6 lesson plan.

There were two interesting points which arose from the discussion of the above photo series with the students. Firstly, in relation to the first photo series, *Mother,*

Daughter, Doll, the students, and in particular Fatima, expressed the opinion that they did not like the extreme coverage that it portrayed. The below excerpt demonstrates Fatima's reaction to and thoughts on extreme coverage and the niqab[15]:

> *Tereza: Why don't you like it, Fatima? What do you think about it?*
> *Fatima: I think about it that the womens who don't have… like, when I speak someone, I have stop. That I can't connect them, I can't… and that's mean I can't connect with anyone or with any someone else.*
> *Tereza: When you are wearing this?*
> *Fatima: Yes, I believe that's make me to don't connect with anyone someone else.*
> *Tereza: Ah, why do you think that?*
> *Fatima: Mm, I don't know. I mean, don't like it.*
> *Tereza: Mm. How would you feel, Fatima, if you had to wear this?*
> *Fatima: Believe me, I will don't wear this, I will don't feel about that. We have now in [STUDENTS' HOME COUNTRY] some womens who husband told that you have to wear it, if you want to marry me.*
> *Fatima: I know some people of them who wear like that, but they don't like it, I heard.*
> *Tereza: So if you had to wear it…*
> *Fatima: Yes?*
> *Tereza: You wouldn't like it?*
> *Fatima: Yes, I mean, I don't know if I can. If I have to wear it?*
> *Tereza: Mm hmm. How would you feel?*
> *Fatima: I feel, erm, something that is like in books and clothes outside.*
> *Tereza: Ah, like wrapped?*
> *Fatima: No, like you can get the sakoúla ((plastic bag in Greek)) that you put the, er…*
> *Kareem: You put the bin.*
> *Fatima: The bin, inside and they close it. That not anyone can see me and I don't can speak with anyone, I don't have connected with anyone. Just the people who ((are)) like me, like womens. But I haven't a problem with scarf, er, headscarf. It's very nice, those one.*
>
> *(Discussion 6, ll. 101-131)*

The above excerpt demonstrates that through Almutawakel's (2018) photo series, the students were challenged to think of the headscarf and extreme covering in a different way that the one we had explored through *The Proudest Blue*. Reflecting on the best way to do this and on my own positionality as a white European woman, I

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[15] A piece of clothing usually worn by Muslim women which covers the whole face except for the eyes. The woman, daughter, and doll are pictured wearing the niqab in the second row of the photo series *Mother, Daughter, Doll* (see Handout 6, Appendix F).

decided to expose them to a critique of extreme covering through the eyes of a female Muslim photographer. The visual depiction of extreme covering in the photo series, as well as the discussion questions enabled the students to imagine themselves in the position of the woman and to describe how they would feel. Fatima's response included a very powerful metaphor for extreme covering, as she commented that she would feel like she is wrapped in plastic bag, unable to speak or connect to anyone if she had to wear the full covering. However, even though Fatima expressed dislike towards extreme covering, she still felt comfortable to share her opinion on the headscarf, which she exclaimed that she liked.

Furthermore, the second photo series titled *What if…* also sparked a lively discussion with the students, as they expressed strong feelings of dislike for the man being dressed as a woman, with Kareem exclaiming that he would never wear a hijab, and that men have to be strong. Fatima also laughed at this idea. However, even though the students initially displayed traditional perceptions around the clothing and qualities that a man should display, it was interesting to note how through the discussion and the personalisation of the topic and sharing of their own experiences, they shared a moment from their own life which inverted these stereotypes:

> **Fatima:** *[…] when you pray… We have to dress like the third photo. The women, not the man, the women.*
> **Tereza:** *Ah, OK, you have to dress like that when you are praying, to wear a hijab.*
> **Fatima:** *Yes. And after I get Kareem, I tell him "Come, come and I dress you". He told me "What are you doing"? I tell "Are you my brother?" And he said "Yes" and I get him to wear this ((bursting into laughter)) ((meaning that she dressed him up with the hijab)).*
> **Tereza:** *Ah. ((laughing)) And? It's funny, no?*
> **Fatima:** *Yes, for the house, for to brother, there are not any problem. And then I said to look him and my mom and my grandma, he's seem like my grandma would wear it.*
> **Tereza:** *Yes? It's fun.*
>
> *(Discussion 6, ll. 251-268)*

Fatima's description of dressing Kareem up as a woman in the spirit of play, demonstrates that, even though the students presented these traditional social and cultural norms as very strict and rigid, their own actions and experiences showed that these norms are in fact quite negotiable and open to deconstruction in every-day life.

September 2021

The last lesson plan that I prepared for our classes with Fatima and Kareem was in September, and was in continuation of the previous theme around women's freedom and gender inequality in Afghanistan. I chose a text about Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai talking about her experience with the Taliban. This choice was conscious, as according to feminist pedagogical practice, I wanted to ensure that the material I used would reflect women's and gender issues, and more specifically, the experiences of women from marginalised or under-represented communities. The lesson plan upon which Discussion 7 was held is presented in Figure 5.6 below:

Discussion 7: Malala Yousafzai

Introduction and rationale for the lesson plan:
The lesson was connected to the same topic as the previous lesson, and drew from the news on the violation of women's rights and the limiting of their freedom by new laws in Afghanistan. It was deemed appropriate to touch upon the issue of education for girls and women, and how this right had been infringed upon in the past in a similar occasion in Pakistan. Therefore, Malala Yousafzai's story seemed fitting for helping the students gain an understanding of the situation and for exposing them to an example of a strong female advocate of girl's rights from an under-represented community.

Lesson plan aims:
- For students to read a text about Malala Yousafzai and her encounter with the Taliban and be able to answer reading comprehension questions on the text
- For student to discuss about the importance of Malala's actions for the right of girls to education

Brief description of lesson plan:
The lesson started by reading the story of Malala Yousafzai from the book *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls* by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo (2016). We then discussed vocabulary and comprehension questions about the text. We then watched a video of Malala talking about her experience.

Figure 5.6 Discussion 7 lesson plan.

This lesson with the students gave me further insight into feminist pedagogy and helped me reflect on how complex and difficult issues are often received in the classroom. During the lesson, I realised that the text I had selected was a bit difficult for

the students, which made it more difficult to then hold a discussion on women's rights to education. I consequently decided to play a video of Malala herself talking about her experience with the Taliban, hoping to make the topic easier to understand for the students. However, the discussion was not as lively as I had expected, and the students seemed a bit tired. I noted the following thoughts in my researcher diary after the lesson:

> *Wednesday, 1ˢᵗ September 2021*
>
> *The students were both pretty tired today. They participated in the discussion for a bit, but then I stopped recording. Fatima asked me why I like to teach them about these issues (I think she meant feminist issues). I acknowledged my positionality and answered the truth– I told them that I believe these issues are really important and they are happening around us but are not usually discussed in school, that's why I also chose to do my research on these. Nonetheless, I wondered whether they are not interested in these issues and I should give them a break from all the feminism. However, when I was taking them back home on the school bus, Fatima told me that she looked up Malala on the internet and listened to some of her speeches and liked her very much. This made me realize that the effects of a lesson are not always immediate, but that discussing such issues with the students can spark an interest in them and lead them to research these topics more thoroughly.*

As I note above, Fatima's words on the way back helped me understand that what I had initially perceived as disinterest in the topic on students' part, was not necessarily true. Rather, I realised that this topic was a heavy and complex one, and that the students may have needed more time to process it in order to discuss about it. While the students may not have contributed very actively during the lesson, the fact that Fatima had taken the time to look up Malala on the internet after class to learn more about her signified that the topic had actually sparked her interest. Furthermore, Fatima's question about why I chose these topics for our lessons was a very genuine question of hers, which I approached with equal honesty, acknowledging my positionality as a feminist teacher.

While this was the last lesson plan that I conducted with the students before they left the school, during September I also continued to integrate feminist pedagogy in my practice with the rest of the classes I was teaching. In the following two diary excerpts I narrate how an incident of inappropriate behaviour between the students inspired myself and the rest of the teachers to choose the topic of "School rules" and "Consent" as our weekly topic:

Sunday, 5th September 2021

This diary post is about an incident that occurred at school this week. I did not witness it directly, but I heard something going on in one of the classrooms, and saw Fatima, one of my teenage students run to another classroom sobbing. I was then told that one of the younger boys, Rekan, who is a new student at the school had pushed her and groped her breast. Fatima was then really distressed, she was in great pain and could not attend her lesson due to this. [...] The next two days, neither Fatima nor her brother came to school. [...] When deciding next week's topic for our project, the other teachers suggested that we focus on "School rules" [...] I then proposed another addition: teaching about consent. "What do we mean by consent?" another teacher asked, and I then explained that when teaching younger students we do not need to explicitly talk about sexual consent, but we can even use other everyday life examples to teach it, such as asking for a hug, or asking to borrow someone's pencil. I then remembered another instance a couple of days ago, when I saw the same student who pushed Fatima, Rekan, going around his classmates' desks and spraying them with disinfectant spray without asking them. Not all students were happy with this, so I decided to show him the way to ask them before doing this. However, the language "Would you like me to clean your desk?" or "Can I clean your desk?" would be too long and difficult for him, since he is still a beginner in English, so this posed a problem. I then thought that I should make it really simple for him and the others. I took the spray, stood in front of another student's desk and showed him the motion of spraying, asking the other student "Yes or no?". He immediately got it, and went around from desk to desk asking "Yes or no?" and waiting for the students to reply before cleaning their desk. I was amazed when, a couple of days later, I saw him doing the same thing and asking "Yes or no?" while going around with the spray. I brought this example up in the teachers' meeting, and added that if Rekan could learn this very simple way of asking for consent so quickly, it would definitely be worth trying to teach consent in very simple terms. I also added that I thought it was something essential, since the incident had come up, it was a need that had to be addressed. "How are we going to teach it, though?" was the general question from everyone else. I said that it needs to be researched. I myself did not know how to teach consent, as I'd never done it before, but with some research and some reading and careful planning it could be done.

The excerpt above is indicative of how the incident that occurred between Rekan and Fatima inspired praxis, and a change in our teaching practice in the school, something which was along the lines of feminist pedagogy. Identifying an emerging need of the students, that of learning about consent and school rules, we developed a weekly topic which would address this need. Furthermore, this happened in a collective and cooperative manner, after discussing with the whole team of teachers. This was perhaps a step forward towards feminist pedagogy as I had conceptualised it after Pavlos' insightful advice back in March. Even if we wouldn't all later apply exactly the

same practice to our lessons, we discussed this issue in depth with the rest of the teachers, and merely posing the question of *"How do we teach about consent?"* had enabled us to reflect on how we could implement this in our practice.

Furthermore, through the above incident, I was able to reflect on and learn about the practical implementation of teaching about consent in the classroom. Reflecting on teaching Rekan something as simple as asking *"Yes or no?"* before spraying his classmates' desks enabled me to develop a lesson that would help students understand consent in simple terms. My researcher diary excerpt below provides a description of how talking about consent was actualised in the classroom:

> *Wednesday, 8th September 2021*
>
> *This week I've been trying to implement what we talked about in last week's meeting and introduce the concept of "consent". I tried to keep it very simple, and took it slow, by firstly introducing the necessary vocabulary for students to understand certain circumstances in which consent is needed. I introduced the same vocabulary in both classes (the 7-9 year olds and the 5-7 year olds), and made sure that the students first understood what it meant. I chose simple scenarios which are not necessarily related to sexual consent, but which have to do with one's body, personal space, and possessions, e.g. "give a hug", "borrow your pencil", "share your food", "tell you a secret". The second day, we focused on how to perform these actions, but first we learnt how to ask for consent in order to do so. This was all done through interactive drama activities, during which the students were asked to perform each scenario. We learnt how to ask for consent by simply adding the question structure in front of the phrase that the students had already learnt "Can I give you a hug?", "Can you share your food with me?", "Can I borrow your pencil?", etc. Another important part was to learn how to answer these questions depending on how each student felt. We practiced scenarios in which the student wanted to give consent, and therefore replied "Yes/Yes, of course" and scenarios in which they didn't want to give consent, therefore answering "No/No, sorry". The students got to practice saying these phrases and asking for/giving/not giving consent.. I felt that this series of lessons was successful, because it meant that consent is not such a difficult topic to approach in the elementary classroom, as long as it is done in a simple way that the students can follow, and through simple scenarios that have to do with every-day situations. It also made me feel more open to approaching issues that may seem like too complex or too taboo for the classroom.*

Overall, the incident between Rekan and Fatima and the implementation of teaching about consent developed my understanding of feminist pedagogy in this particular context. I realised the value of drawing from the students' needs in order to inform one's teaching practice and praxis, as well as the importance of a communal approach in

implementing a certain topic. Finally, I came to the conclusion that exploring complex and sensitive issues such as consent with younger students of various cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds is not impossible, but can be implemented through a paced approach which is age- and level-appropriate.

5.2 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has sought to demonstrate how my understanding of feminist pedagogy developed while on the field on Leros, providing a "window" into my daily teaching practice and implementation of feminist pedagogy in my lessons. I have included excerpts from my researcher diary, the recorded classroom discussions with the two teenage students, as well as the lesson plans which I used, and have provided a reflexive account of how I explored and implemented feminist pedagogy throughout my stay on the island. While this chapter is not exhaustive of all my teaching practice at the school, the most critical moments from the researcher diary and classroom discussions have been selected to highlight key points in the fieldwork which were formative in developing an understanding of feminist pedagogy and its implementation in the particular context. Overall, reflecting on these moments has highlighted certain key understandings regarding feminist pedagogy:

- the need for feminist pedagogy to be a communal effort between the teachers at the school,
- the fact that, while they are indeed complex, gender and oppression issues can be explored with students of refugee background, as long as they are age-appropriate and introduced in a paced, scaffolded manner,
- the fact that discussing these issues can shed light into the students' perceptions of gender, which, while initially stereotypical, were gradually shown to be much more context-specific and negotiable,
- and, finally, the importance of acknowledging one's positionality as a feminist teacher in the classroom.

These points are further explored in the next two chapters, through the reflexive thematic analysis of the educator and manager interviews.

6   Chapter 6: Data Analysis I – Gender as a Difficult and Complex Construct

6.1   Introduction

This chapter, as well as the next, focus on the analysis of the dataset according to Braun & Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis model, as discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 focuses on the theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct" whereas Chapter 7 examines the themes of "Trauma as present, but not defining" and "Culture/language as barriers". The subthemes for each theme are presented and discussed below, illustrated by corresponding quotes from the educator and manager interviews, as well as some excerpts from the classroom discussions with the students, and my own researcher diary.[16] The main focus of this research is the topic of gender, and how this is perceived in the refugee classroom, as well as how it can be approached with students of refugee background. The theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct" therefore occupies a large proportion of the data analysis, alongside that of "Trauma as present, but not defining", while the theme of "Culture/language as barriers" is also thematically present though not as pervasive as the former.

6.2   Gender as a Difficult and Complex Construct

The theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct" is constituted of the following five subthemes, which refer to the ideas expressed by the adult participants[17] around the topic of gender:

- "Some things they bring from home"
- The gender equality continuum
- The school as advocate of gender equality
- Gender is a difficult and potentially alienating topic
- A reflexive and holistic approach is necessary

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[16] It is worth noting here, that the selected quotes which are presented in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 were edited and shortened for clarity and readability. Repetitions, hesitation markers and word stress markers were deleted, as it was deemed that they affected the overall readability and flow of the text. Some repetitions and hesitation markers were kept, in cases where they were deemed necessary to understanding the particular emotion that was expressed (e.g. frustration). Furthermore, where longer sections of text were deleted, e.g. when turn-taking was interceded by another speaker's turn, this is indicated by the use of square brackets and ellipses: […]

[17] The terms "adult participants", "staff" and "educators and managers" are used interchangeably throughout the next chapters to refer to the educators, managers, and the social worker who took part in the study, and to distinguish them from the student participants.

The first subtheme, titled "some things they bring from home", refers to the adult participants' views regarding the influence of the students' social backgrounds: specifically, the deeply patriarchal nature of these societies, and how they come to be transferred to the school environment. The second subtheme refers to the "gender continuum;" namely the idea expressed by the adult participants that there is a continuum upon which different countries are placed in terms of gender equality. MENA countries, for this study's adult participants, are perceived to be deeply patriarchal, whereas Greece and Europe are portrayed as more progressive. As a result, the school assumes an "advocating role for gender equality", which is explored in the third subtheme. The fourth subtheme explores the teachers' views as to how and if gender can be approached in the classroom, with most concluding that "gender is a difficult and potentially alienating topic", as it is related to culture and religion: talking about gender entails potentially offending the students. Finally, the last subtheme discusses the adult participants' view that in order for gender to be approached in the classroom, "a reflexive and holistic approach is necessary". Figure 6.1 below portrays the subthemes and individual codes for the theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", which will be discussed in the current section.

Gender as a difficult and complex construct

"some things they bring from home"
- the role of the family in perpetuating patriarchy
- it gets worse with age
- genders not mixing
- the oppressive Arab man
- harassment/women feel threatened
- familial duties hinder women's education

gender is a difficult topic
- sensitivity due to connection to culture and religion
- lack of involvement in gender awareness raising
- addressing gender issues when they arise
- gender is left to the social worker
- teaching gender implicitly/using humour
- language barrier
- lack of training

the gender equality continuum
- MENA countries as inherently patriarchal
- African countries as more progressive than the Middle East
- Greece as similar to MENA countries
- Greece as more progressive/gender-equal
- Europe as the ultimate place for gender equality

the school as advocate of gender equality
- the school as a safe and free space
- the school vs the home
- school should prepare students for European gender norms
- correctional role of school
- integration as a one-way process / students should accept gender norms
- integration as a two-way process/school creates culturally responsive classroom

reflexive and holistic approach
- awareness of positionality and respecting context
- teacher positionality as limitation
- need for reflexivity/teachers need to work on themselves first
- teaching about gender requires teamwork

Figure 6.1 Subthemes and codes for "Gender as a difficult and complex construct".

6.2.1   Subtheme 1: "Some things they bring from home"

The family was one of the most frequently mentioned factors in shaping the students'
views on gender. Throughout the interviews, the Arab Muslim refugee family is
portrayed as following a deeply patriarchal tradition and as submerging the children in
this ideology as well. According to the adult participants, the students are raised in
stereotypical and patriarchal gender norms, which they then also reproduce at school.
These norms are perceived as mostly detrimental towards women and girls, but are also
intolerant of diversity, and paint the picture of the oppressive and violent Arab man,
whether he be the husband, brother, or father. These norms are then described as also
being enacted in school; according to the teachers, some sexist behaviours on behalf of
the students are evident, and the structures that are true at home or in Middle Eastern
and Northern African society in general, are transferred to the educational context.

This subtheme is named after an in vivo code (Saldaña, 2021), a quote uttered
by a participant, which I then used to name the particular subtheme, as I felt that it
encapsulated the adult participants' views on gender being a set of ideas and behaviours
which the students learn at home and which they then transfer to the school. More
specifically, the quote was uttered by participant Anna during her discussion of the
importance of engaging with the parents of the students too in order to tackle gender
issues[18]. This quote is further discussed in detail later on in the present section.

The individual codes from which the present subtheme was developed are
pictured in Figure 6.2 below:

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[18]The in vivo quote was selected from the following excerpt from Anna's interview. The quote is
highlighted in bold:

> **Anna:** *For a lot of things we want to fix here, I think it's mostly the parents that we need to work
> with. Because they ((the students)) spend very few hours here compared to the time that they
> spend at home.*
> *There are problems about that too, boys and girls. [...]* ***Some things they definitely bring from
> home****. Because as children... there are no such differences for children. ((ll. 298-303)*
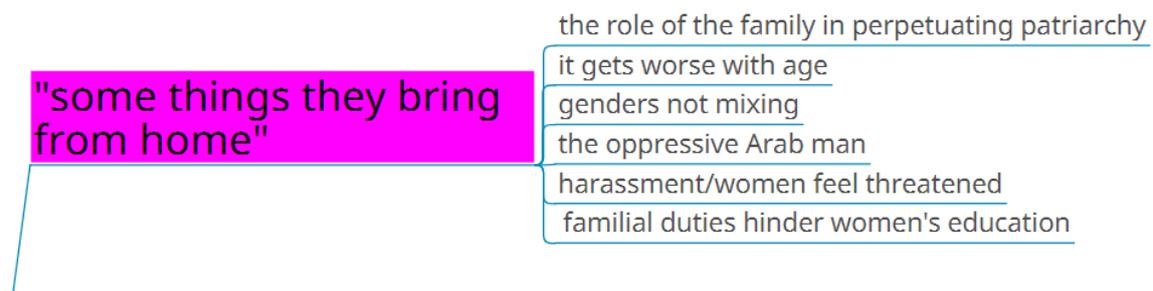
Figure 6.2 Codes for subtheme "Some things they bring from home".

The effect and role of the family, and specifically of the parents, is presented as particularly pivotal in influencing the understanding that the students develop around gender, and is also linked to culture. Many teachers express the idea that the students enter the school with already preconceived notions of gender, that have been instilled in them by their parents and their wider social background, while also attributing these ideas to the students' wider cultural background. One of the teachers, Stefanos, discusses this as follows:

> **Stefanos:** *It comes from their lived experiences, that's what it is. […] That's how they grew up, that's how the parents of children treat their mothers. […] So that's what the children know too, they know that this is true. (ll. 447-451)[19]*

Similarly, Anna also stresses the crucial role of the family, explaining how, according to her, the parents are mostly responsible for the views that the children adopt.

> **Anna:** *Also, it has to do with the individual children, what they are like, and the families as well. […] Because in some families there is no such difference, and they don't fill their heads with things. […] Let's say, we have four children from one family, they all have the same behaviour. And […] it's no problem for a girl to sit next to a boy, whereas, say, in another family all the children may have the same problem. That's why I think it comes from home. From home, from the culture. (ll. 324-334)*

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[19] Each data extract from the interviews and classroom discussions is linked to corresponding lines in the full transcripts through the use of "ll." and the numbers in parentheses.

Although Anna acknowledges that the students' personality and their agency can play a role in what views around gender they develop and what behaviours they engage in, she nonetheless also expresses the view that most of the responsibility lies within the family and the stimuli they receive from home. It is interesting to note the language that is used to describe how parents indoctrinate their children into patriarchal beliefs and ideology, by "filling their heads with things". This phrase, while showing Anna's disapproval, also indicates that the parents engage in a kind of propaganda. Anna also makes a connection between this ideology and culture, claiming that patriarchy is something which stems from the cultural background of these families. This connection is one which is made by other adult participants as well, and which paints the picture of the stereotypically patriarchal refugee family.

As can be seen in the above extracts, the educators discuss the vital role of the family in shaping the students' perception of gender. As a result, they also mention the need for parents to be educated on these matters as well, alongside the students. Melina discusses that the school's effort to educate students on gender matters might go to waste if parents are not also alerted towards these issues at the same time:

> **Melina:** *Because no matter how much you talk to the child, if the child comes home and the father is telling the brother to beat his sister, again, unfortunately, not to say that a drop in the ocean doesn't count, but it was a drop in the ocean. (ll. 193-195)*

Similarly, Eleftheria also points out the need to work with the parents as well, as she believes they are responsible for many of the ideas that the children carry:

> **Eleftheria:** *It might be the parents themselves who have to be worked on, because many things start from there. (ll. 288-289)*

Anna agrees with Eleftheria, also bringing up the need to educate parents and highlighting the effect they have on shaping the students' beliefs:

> **Anna:** *For a lot of things we want to fix here, I think it's mostly the parents that we need to work with. Because they ((the students)) spend very few hours here compared to the time that they spend at home. There are problems about that too, boys and girls. […] Some things they definitely bring from home. Because as children… there are no such differences for children. ((ll. 298-303)*

The fact that many teachers believe that patriarchal and sexist beliefs come from the family is also connected to their observation that age plays a crucial role in the understanding that the students have of gender. Some of the teachers comment on the fact that younger students are not as biased in terms of gender, whereas, as they grow older, they seem to adopt sexist beliefs. This contributes further to the teachers' claim that the parents are to blame for the development of such beliefs, due to the way that they raise and teach their children, indicating that gender for them is a learned concept, something which is socially constructed. Melina, one of the managers, describes below her observations regarding the age factor in shaping gender awareness:

> **Melina:** *What I could say somewhat statistically is that children, from the age of 6 to 11 or so thought more of the female gender than when they were older. That is, when you observed siblings, when the little boy might be 7 and the girl might be 11, we saw an adoration of the female gender, where really the sister acted as a mother, as a teacher, as an authority, whereas when the children grew up, when they went through the stage of adolescence, the woman, the female gender lost power. So, the reality is that when you saw children, siblings at that age, even if a brother was younger, you saw that he had power over the girl. (ll. 152-159)*

The above quote emphasizes how perceptions around gender change with time. Younger students, who have not yet been fully immersed in a culture of patriarchy, are free of stereotypes and norms, and relationships between boys and girls are equal. However, according to Melina, puberty is shown to be a decisive moment in terms of gender awareness, and, as the children grow older, they begin to adopt the sexist and patriarchal beliefs present at home. Melina thus views puberty as a defining moment in the development of patriarchal norms. Furthermore, she makes a comment about the different positions that women can occupy in MENA countries. While the children are young, the caring, child-rearing and loving qualities of a woman are appreciated, whereas as they grow older, women are viewed as inferior and subordinate to men.

The influence of family, and specifically fathers, on their children's school lives is made evident in their unwillingness to mingle with each other, according to the teachers, as is evident by the following quotes by Ismini and Anna:

> **Ismini:** *In general, issues have arisen from time to time. For example, the fact that in the bus a girl won't sit next to a boy, "Come let's make a circle and hold hands", the boys will not hold hands with the girls. Especially as they get older. […] With the very, very young ones, that is, the six, seven years old, you will not see it so much. […] But the older they get, the more distance is created between boys and girls. (ll. 297-303)*

> *Anna: Yes, there are problems between them. Boys don't want to sit next to girls. […] And the opposite, that is, […] the little ones, the six-year-olds, the seven-year-olds, they don't have a problem, but the older ones do. Or if we're doing an activity in a circle, they don't want to be next to the girl or hold the girl, hold the girl's hand. […] Very rarely will you see them working together. (ll. 286-293)*

Some of the adult participants, such as Eleftheria, express the opinion that children are influenced by these gender norms from an even younger age:

> *Eleftheria: Several times we can see that the children have this notion—whether older or younger—that girls should be with girls or boys should be with boys. Or that a girl is not allowed to sit next to a boy, we've seen it several times. (ll. 248-250)*

The gender segregation of girls and boys was also something that arose in a discussion with some students, which I then recorded in my researcher diary. The following excerpt demonstrates how students perceive of the link between religion and gender, and perhaps allows for more understanding into the specific behaviour of the students:

> *Tareq, one of the students started telling me about the schooling system in his country, Syria. He said that in Syria there are some schools just for girls and some just for boys, as well as some mixed-gender schools, depending on the city. His sister Qamar confirmed this. Mahdi, who is from Iraq, said that in Iraq the schools are just all boys or all girls. Then Tareq started describing that even in mixed gender schools, the students are separated in the classrooms, so that girls sit in separate rows than boys. I then asked him why he thinks this happens. "Teacher, in Syria very Islam", he answered. "So, you think religion, Islam, is the reason?". "Yes", he said, "Islam no want boys and girls together". Then, Qamar explained the system to me and she said that when boys and girls are very young they are together in school, but they are separated when they are teenagers. Then, they study together again when they are in university. […] Tareq also mentioned that sometimes teachers make boys sit in the girls' part of the classroom as a punishment. This made me think that if this is used as a punishment, then the students will get the idea that mixing with the other gender is not good and should be avoided, or that they are very different.*
>
> *—Researcher diary excerpt*

The issue of boys and girls not wanting to mingle is something which the adult participants attribute to the family, and more specifically to the male members of the family. The accounts provided paint the portrait of the Arab male, whether that is the

father, the brother, or the partner, as someone who is oppressive and authoritarian, as illustrated in the two accounts by Eleftheria below:

> **Eleftheria:** *In the past, that is, we had two children, siblings, who, say, if his sister was sitting on a bench, and a boy went to sit— not right next to her, on the same bench—the brother went to hit the sister, or scold her. [...]*
> *And they were young kids, we're talking now seven or eight years old, that young. (ll. 252-261)*

> **Eleftheria:** *Another thing is when you hear in the van, girls don't want to sit next to a boy. That is, when I tried to tell a girl "Come on in," let's say, "you have to go," she tells me "Sorry", she says, "my dad— I will have a problem if he sees me". (ll. 261-262)*

In the quotes above we see that the Arab Muslim male, in all of the social roles that he may occupy, is described as an oppressive figure. One of these powerful figures is the father, who is shown as constantly wanting to control his daughter and as regulating and limiting her behaviour not only in the home, but in all other social spaces too, including the school grounds. The daughter evidently fears the father's violent reactions and the repercussions that she will face if she disobeys him. These descriptions tie in with dominant narratives in Western society about oppressive Arab or Muslim men, who mistreat female family members. It also ties in with the generalized fear in Greek society that was sparked with the onset of the refugee "crisis"; a fear that Greek women are in danger of the newcomers, and that refugees from Muslim or Arab countries would "taint" Greece's culture and its purportedly free and gender equal society.

However, there are several counter-narratives provided in the classroom discussions, in which male figures are portrayed differently, deconstructing the stereotype of the limiting patriarchal figure. For example, in the context of Discussion 1 (also discussed in Chapter 5) in which we were examining gender stereotypes in relation to clothing, Fatima describes her grandfather as a man who defies the stereotypes and believes in democracy inside his family. While she is aware of the strict norms that exist in her social circle, her words are also illustrative of the existence of alternate realities and space to defy these norms:

> **Fatima:** *If you ask about the family of my mom, in [STUDENTS' HOME COUNTRY], they will said, all my family and my friends [...] that they are angry about what we wear. That my grandpa, he have dimokratía ((democracy in Greek)), they don't like that, some people from Arabic. And they said: "You*

are grandpa, why you make your daughter, can have sometimes this?", "Why did she go swimming with these clothes and with not mantíla ((headscarf in Greek))? They're wrong!" And my grandpa, he don't listen that and he said "I get my girl a girl, she born a girl, and I let her to go, like a man." She's strong. Not anyone can play with her mind. (Discussion 1, ll. 388-405)

However, the educators and managers mention that the father is not alone in this effort to control the daughter. His metaphorical accomplice is the brother. As demonstrated in the following excerpts by Melina and Dora, the brother assumes the role of the watchful guardian when the father cannot be there, and is designated the role of the protector, even if he is younger than his sister. He becomes overprotective, and keeps a restless eye to ensure that his sister is not engaging in any inappropriate behaviour:

> ***Melina:*** *Many times we had come across brothers actually not allowing their sisters to talk to boys. Uh, sometimes when we had activities that involved dancing, they would forbid their sisters to hold hands with a student of the opposite sex. (ll. 169-171)*

> ***Dora:*** *The biggest problem is with siblings. "My sister is here", "My brother's here, I can't even talk to a boy. I may want to do it, but my brother will see me, he'll tell Dad, and we'll be in trouble." (ll. 298-300)*

Dora continues:

> ***Dora:*** *But, likewise, for boys—we shouldn't talk only about girls—they are assigned the role of the elder brother, "You'll look after her, come tell me what she's doing" or "You're the older brother, you have to take on that role." […] A teenage girl might fall in love with a guy, and she might want to—what's more normal—not to express it to live it, just, in her head, uh, big problem with the older brother […] very big. "Where is she?" […] The older brother is always looking for her: "Where is she?", "Why is he talking to you?", "Why isn't she in her classroom?", "Where did she go now?". (ll. 378-388)*

Dora's words stresses that girls and women are not the only victims of this patriarchal system that is described. Rather, boys are also affected by this, as they are assigned the heavy role of the protector, and are taught to carry the burden of protecting their sister no matter what. This role is presented as something which the boys are conditioned into, and not something which they themselves have consciously chosen. Therefore, even though the role of the overprotective brother is one of the renditions of the oppressive

Arab male figure, Dora also expresses the notion that both boys and girls are suffering under the oppressive rules and the gender norms and roles that a patriarchal society dictates.

At the same time, Dora hints at rules of purity and propriety, as well as at the "policing" of female desire that takes place through this familial structure of surveillance. They perhaps enable further insight into why fathers are so strict with their daughters, and why this message that boys and girls should not mingle has been so deeply ingrained in the students. The ultimate goal is to protect the daughter/sister from illicit behaviour, from other boys or men who will try to engage in romantic or sexual activity with her. The female body and female sexuality here as presented as frail and fragile; they need to be protected at all costs, and this is achieved by policing and limiting them. Several narratives articulate the internalised fear and submission experienced by female students as a result of this over-protection:

> *Myrto: I still remember one girl who was Somali, who was brilliant, she was coming into the classroom, but she told me— when she came to the cinema night we had, we were watching movies— and at some point I see her outside and I tell her "Why didn't you come in?", she says "There are too many men inside and if I don't get the first seat to feel comfortable that, I know, I see everything and I'm safe, I don't want to go in." And she was a girl with nerve, she wasn't some girl, like— so imagine what problems other girls were having. (ll. 263-270)*

> *Dora: Uh, we also had a girls' group, only girls, where, really, the girls were different people within the group, than in the classroom that was mixed. They would take off the headscarf, they would move, their bodies— you saw they were different, lighter, they would express their opinion, their point of view more openly. (ll. 334-339)*

Apart from the father and the brother, another oppressive male figure that is mentioned in the interviews, mostly by the educators who have worked with adult students, is the oppressive husband. In particular, the husband is described as being a patriarchal figure, as he keeps his wife enclosed at home and does not assist her with familial duties, such as child-rearing or house chores. The adult participants discuss how, due to men not engaging in familial duties, women's participation in education is hindered:

148

Gavriil: [...] a lot of times we had couples coming in. [...] And you could see, there was a difference in who, well, how shall I put it, who was more interested. So, you saw men not being so interested, and women being more interested, and the guy wanting to go out, to go smoke [...] and the woman was trying to pay attention, while he loaded her with the baby— [...] because they've come with the baby, because the guy is bored. (ll. 581-588)

The Arab husband appears here as disinterested in education, and as ignorant towards his familial responsibilities. Gavriil continues, discussing how, due to the patriarchal structure of many refugee families, all of the duties fall on the women, which affect their participation in education:

Gavriil: So, many times you had the mother with the baby in her arms, trying to work at the same time. [...] Very familiar picture for me, most mothers worked like that, those who had babies and came to class. [...] And the problems then had to do with the fact that in these refugee and immigrant families that were coming, most of them, we're talking about patriarchal families, so basically the men didn't do a lot with the children, with the babies, and the mothers had— well, they didn't have anywhere to leave them when they weren't in school. So, they had to come with the children and the babies in the classroom. So, I had to be both a childminder and an educator at the same time. [...] This was the biggest issue, and it was a constant issue in these lessons. (ll. 588-600)

Interestingly, the conversations conducted with students cast a much more nuanced light on gender roles in the Arabic family, providing a counter-narrative to the educator and manager's perceptions. In the following conversation from Discussion 4 on cooking and gender (See Chapter 5), Fatima and Kareem are at pains to articulate their father's role in maintaining the house, as if aware of the prejudiced opinions that exist in the Western world about their male family figures. This extract is undergirded with intense emotion, as though Kareen and Fatima actively challenge the notion of the indifferent and authoritarian father:

Fatima: When my dad—it's before he died—my mom when she tired and have to eat food, he told my mom, "Don't work anything in the house". He gets a ready food from my grandmother— my grandma cook and gives him the food, till the house, to don't go and get up and go. And then also, the women have feeling—
Kareem: No, no, when she's have er, born me— Fatima, the first.
Tereza: Ah, when she was pregnant?
Fatima: Yes.
Kareem: Fatima— [She's in the hospital.]

Fatima: [My mom start to—]
Kareem: my dad, he told my mom "Don't, er, cook nothing. You stay there and I will give you all of the food, or your mother.
Fatima: Teacher—
Kareem: --and when my mom come to the home, when she's go from the door, she's look and all the [house]—
Fatima: [look the house] and the stairs—
Kareem: like it's the first day she's married him.
Tereza: Ah ((showing astonishment)).
Fatima: [Teacher!]
Kareem: [Like a new house!]
Fatima: [My dad, my dad—]
Kareem: He put this because they rented new the home—but nothing have. She's go to the hospital and she's come, [he do this ((showing the air-conditioning)) and—]
Tereza: [They put air conditioning?]
Kareem: Yes, and he's do all things in the [kitchen]
Fatima: [Kiría!] ((Ms! In Greek))
Kareem: and he's open it and the home nice. And put this down ((meaning the carpets))—
Fatima: ((Speaks in Arabic to her brother)) My mom told me my dad is really good cooker and good cleaner. My mom go for the hospital to born—*me or Kareem?*—me, me. And my mom stay in the hospital for one week or two weeks, something like that, and the house, they live it from new. So, he clean all thing and make the walls, and, er, cook all thing. You know how much— how much aunt he had, my dad? Twelve, er, twelve [aunts].
Tereza: [But] he did everything himself?
Fatima: With himself! No one from my aunt come or from my [grandma].
Tereza: [Wow.]
Fatima: ((inaudible)) When the women come for the house, they said […] my grandma, they say "I'm sorry Kareem" —my dad's name Kareem—they said, "I'm sorry, Kareem, but the home like a—
Kareem: [Woman!]
Fatima: —[woman] she make all that!
Tereza: ((laughs))
Fatima: And he said "No, the job is for both". Teacher, when my mom told me, I'm very happy, that my dad it's like this man ((smiling)). Not like, ((those)) who say "You make, you do, you all thing, you, you, you".

(Discussion 4, ll. 238-299)

Despite the sentiments expressed by Kareem and Fatima, the study made it clear that patriarchal roles persisted for many students. Perhaps the most detrimental effect of these roles is that it ultimately stopped female students accessing education altogether. This is evidenced in the following excerpts from Katerina, Gavriil and Myrto:

Katerina: In the past, we've tried to schedule [...] the classes that attract most women, so generally those lower levels in the morning, because that's when they can usually get away from the family, from the kids, and come to school. (ll. 392-394)

Gavriil: I taught a morning class, a class that I was in charge of, that had mostly women— [...] in the morning, because they could leave their children at the nursery, at school, etc. Well, but the women couldn't always come to class, because a lot of times the baby would be sick, the child would be sick, so that's a big challenge. (ll. 48-53)

Myrto: I remember the early years, which is, in '17 and '18, we had very few women in class, uh, we were trying very hard to reach out to women, but they wouldn't come along. (ll. 259-261)

The reflective journal that I kept during this study also notices how a female student of mine discontinued class because she was the only woman in the class:

Another observation regarding the new programme that is tailored to older ages (18-24), was regarding the role that gender can play in the dynamics of a classroom. There were two men and one woman in the class, and the woman was quite eager to learn and was really competent in the activities that we engaged in. However, when I asked her if she would come to the next lesson, she replied "I don't know". I then asked her why, and she replied that "Me just one girl", meaning that she is the only woman in the classroom, and that there is no other woman student. I then tried to encourage her to join the lesson by saying that I'm also a girl and that I will be there during the lesson. However, she did not show up the following days. Following this, I had a conversation with the school's social worker about how the fact that I am also a woman, and that the cultural mediator present in class is also a woman did not make her less weary of or less uncomfortable with the fact that she is in a classroom with three men. We discussed how maybe it is also a matter of social status in the classroom (this lead me again to intersectionality), and that she does not feel like she can identify with me as I have the role of the teacher, and don't share the same language or cultural background with her. We then discussed how it might help if I tried to contact her and make out what it is that bothers her and what we can do to change this and help her attend the classes, while also making sure to encourage her that she has potential and it will help her and her family to attend these lessons. Also, we thought that it would be good to make clear what my role would be in the lesson, so as to make her feel more comfortable and closer to me, perhaps by assuming a role which is closer to the students and more friend-like rather than teacher-like. I felt quite disappointed in that she did not show up for the lesson, and also angry at the patriarchy, which is the overarching reason for her no-show. Whether it was her husband who was uncomfortable with her in a classroom with three men, whether her own internalized beliefs and feeling

151

of guilt, whether it was her family duties and her dedication to her three children, I felt like patriarchy was getting in the way of her doing something for herself.

—Researcher diary excerpt

To sum up, this subtheme refers to the adult participants' views of how certain familial structures are transferred to the classroom. The educators and managers stress the role of the family, and more specifically the role of the fathers in shaping the students' beliefs around gender, while also drawing a link between these beliefs and the wider cultural background. The Arab Muslim man is depicted as an oppressive figure throughout all of the familial roles that he occupies, whether that of the father, husband, or brother. This oppressive behaviour results in students of different genders not interacting at school, whether in younger or older age groups, as well as to women facing barriers to their education due to familial duties. Interestingly, a counter narrative to this portrayal emerged from two students, who felt the need to emphasize their father's willingness to carry out domestic duties.

6.2.2 Subtheme 2: The gender equality continuum

This subtheme encompasses the perceptions of the interviewees around gender equality in different countries. I decided to name it "the gender equality continuum", as it refers to the notion that there exists a type of theoretical continuum upon which different countries and cultures are situated in terms of gender equality and "progressive" views around gender, as portrayed in Figure 6.4. The gender equality continuum is related to the sense of self and national self of the adult participants in opposition to "the Other" and to the sense of cultural superiority against refugees coming from MENA countries. The codes that are included in the subtheme of "the gender equality continuum" are presented in Figure 6.3 below and a schematic representation of the continuum is provided in Figure 6.4.
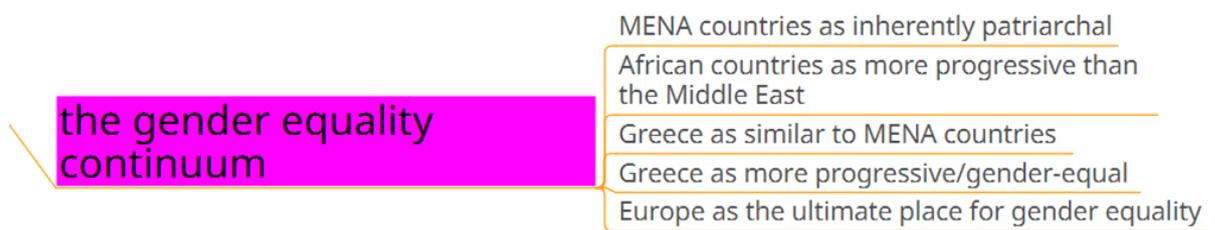
Figure 6.3 Codes for subtheme "The gender equality continuum".

MENA countries are situated on the deep end of the gender equality continuum, as they are portrayed as inherently patriarchal, and as the poorest in terms of gender equality. Gender inequality is described by the study's adult participants as something inherent, a quality which is embedded in the culture and countries that refugees are coming from. It is presented as a given, a trait that the students carry with them; as Stefanos remarks later on, "*gender inequality is something that comes with children, it comes with these peoples*".
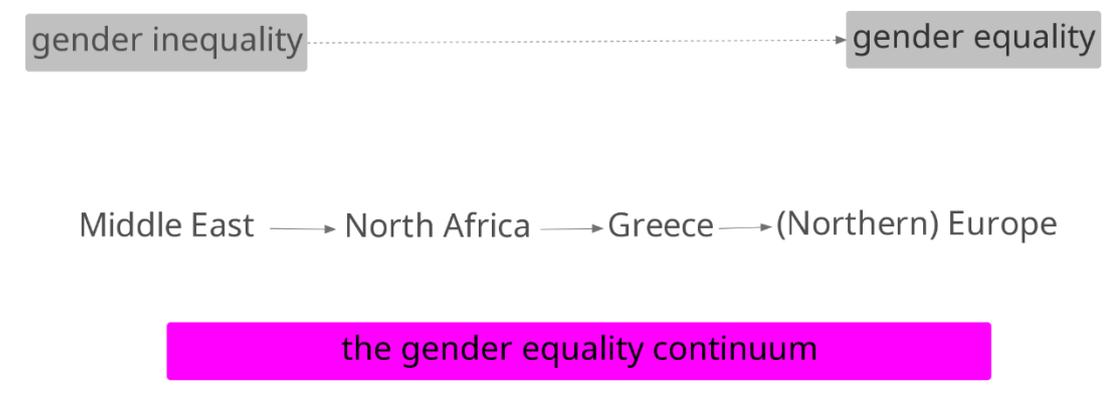
Figure 6.4 The gender equality continuum.

However, there is a differentiation even within the group of MENA countries; African countries are presented as slightly more progressive than Middle Eastern countries, which are always perceived as sitting on the very end of the gender equality continuum, and as steeped in patriarchy. Melina and Myrto mention below that some of the North-African countries which are considered less patriarchal are Congo and

Somalia. The position of women in these countries is deemed more advantageous than in countries of the Levant, such as Palestine or Syria, where the majority of students are from:

> *Melina: ((referring to women's inferior position)) It was mostly in countries like Palestine, Syria, Iraq, whereas on the contrary, we didn't come across it so much with children of African descent. […] I noticed that in those cases there was more gender equality. (ll. 161-164)*

> *Myrto: Yes, ((the classes)) were mixed and sometimes we had quite a few women, particularly from African countries. These ones didn't have as many issues as the ones from the Middle East. (ll. 296-297)*

Melina continues by expressing the view that this difference in terms of gender equality can only be attributed to culture, implying that these gender norms are socially and culturally constructed. "Culture" is presented as something which the students "have", which they carry with them, and which is solid and unchanging. There is a juxtaposition between the students' culture, which is referred to as *"their culture"*, and the implied *"our culture"*, the culture of the educators and managers:

> *Melina: I think that this can only be explained culturally. The truth is that in the Middle East, their— their culture is like that. On the contrary, at least the countries where we have accepted children from, like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, women work, women bring food home. So, I think it's purely cultural, the reason that comes up. (ll. 166-169)*

The case of Greece, the country of reception, is slightly more complex, and not as easy to pin down on the continuum axis. Perhaps also due to its geopolitical location and its history as a "crossroads", an amalgam of East and West, it occupies a space which is fluid, contingent, and its identity depends on the situation and context. On the one hand, it is portrayed by some of the interviewees as different from—and implicitly superior to—MENA countries and as more progressive in terms of gender roles and expectations and the position of women in society:

> *Stefanos: For example, take women's lives in Greece in the earlier years when it was women and the household. The same is true ((now)) in the Arab countries, which are at the stage that Greece was at that time. So, they are several years behind, uh, in perception too. (ll. 438-442)*

Stefanos thus discusses gender in MENA countries as a problem, comparing it to the way things were in Greece many years ago, when women were confined to the domestic sphere. On the other hand, other staff participants assume a more self-critical and less optimistic stance, expressing the view that Greece is actually not so distant from the current conditions in MENA countries, and that Greek society is still very much behind in terms of gender equality. In this view, Greece is closer to Middle Eastern culture than it is to European standards, as Pavlos suggests below:

> ***Pavlos:*** *Uh… in the countries where they ((refugee students)) come from, perhaps regarding some issues we ((in Greece)) are closer than we are to the rest of Europe. I don't think we have such huge differences […]. (ll. 105-115)*

On the one hand, Pavlos also acknowledges the existence of many patriarchal norms and the problematic position of women in MENA countries. Nonetheless, he offers a self-critical view of Greek society, expressing the opinion that Greece is not in a better position, and that issues of gender equality are still very much present in Greek society as well. This cultural similarity between Greece and the MENA region seems to be a widespread belief, as it was also mentioned by the students during the classroom discussions, as Fatima's words below demonstrate:

> ***Fatima:*** *When we say in Arabic, the best country is the same for Arabic— Who is it? It's Greece. If you ask anyone in Europe, they will told the same. That, it's the same—little bit—with Arabic. (Discussion 1, ll. 75-80)*

Pavlos, along with other staff participants, does however, make a distinction between Greece and MENA countries on the one hand and European countries on the other. It can therefore be said that the position of Greece on the gender equality continuum depends on the object of comparison. The identity of Greece is constructed in opposition to an "Other" and is shaped each time, depending on that "Other". When considering gender equality, both Greece and the MENA region fade in comparison to Europe, which is presented as the ultimate place for gender equality:

> ***Stefanos:*** *Our cultures from the Arab world and from the eastern world in particular are very different in perception from what they are in central Europe and in Europe in general and the rest of the world. (ll. 513-515)*

Interestingly, the idealisation of Europe in terms of gender equality is an element which is also evident in the discussions with the students. Fatima describes the

romanticisation of the European man as just, democratic and supporter of gender equality:

> *Fatima: But— but we said also in Arabic, the women— some girls who is 20 years old, they said, "I dream", they don't have a man, "I dream to marry the man, who is from Europe to help me for the food and to cook with me [and to don't say]—*
> *Tereza: [Oh, really?]*
> *Fatima: Yes. To don't make all thing for me.*
> *Tereza: So they think that men from Europe are like this?*
> *Fatima: Yes, and also they said that they dream, it's not really, they will don't have it.*
>
> *(Discussion 4, ll. 303-310)*

It is therefore evident that western Europe, and especially central and northern Europe, the desired final destination for most asylum seekers, is idealized as the far away "Other" and is portrayed as a place where gender equality and women's rights are valued, as opposed to the oriental east, to which it is contrasted. To conclude, the above extracts illustrate the positioning of different countries on different places of the "gender equality continuum". MENA countries sit on the very end of the spectrum, whereas Northern European countries occupy the other end. This positioning along the continuum implies that cultures are viewed as solid, predetermined, and inflexible.

6.2.3   Subtheme 3: The school as advocate of gender equality

This subtheme refers to the depiction of the school as an advocate for gender equality. Throughout the interviews, the school is portrayed as a safe and free space, as opposed to the home. It is seen as the main channel through which the students are exposed to different gender norms and roles and can learn to challenge patriarchal structures. Its ultimate goal is seen as preparing the students for European gender norms, which they will encounter at the end of their migratory journey. At times, the school is also perceived to assume a more interventional, almost correctional role in terms of student behaviour. Finally, according to the staff, the school's utmost goal is to help students integrate into the host society. The adult participants are divided between viewing integration as a one-way process, during which the students are responsible of adjusting

to school norms, or as a two-way process, during which the teacher creates a culturally responsive classroom. The codes for this subtheme are pictured in more detail in Figure 6.5 below:
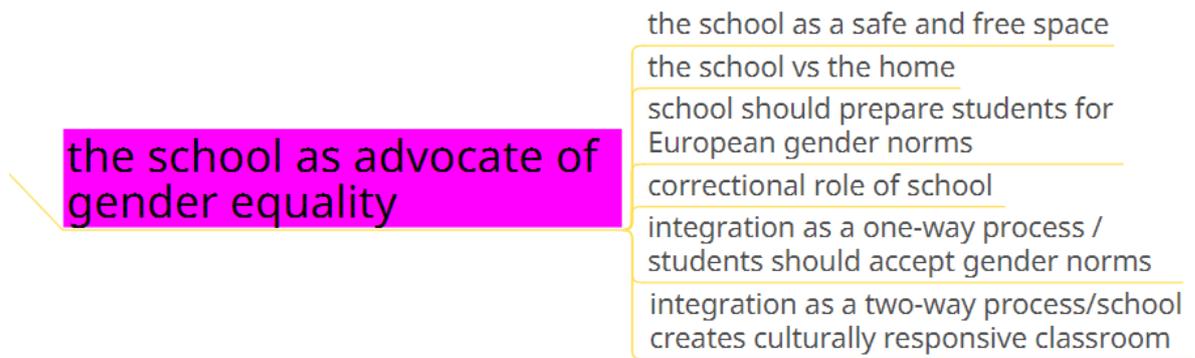
Figure 6.5 Codes for subtheme "the school as advocate of gender equality".

The staff participants describe the school as a safe and free space, where the students can discard traditional gender stereotypes, and can learn to coexist and respect each other in new ways. The school is contrasted vis-à-vis the home, which is depicted as limiting and confining. In a sense, the Arab/Muslim personal space is contrasted to the Greek/Christian public space. Ismini describes below how the role of the school is to help students understand that they are now living in a free society, where they are not limited and do not have to follow the traditional gender roles that were prescribed at the home. The space of the school functions as a sanctuary or asylum, where the students are not controlled by their families anymore:

> *Ismini: With games [we] set the kids free a little. [We] help them to communicate more with each other, to put themselves in each other's shoes. And to realize that they have now come to a society that does not control them so much in this matter... Also, to make them understand that they are not controlled by their families anymore here, at least on the school grounds. It goes without saying, that in their home they may behave differently. But that in the school's space they are freer and safer in expressing themselves and in not caring about other things. (ll. 308-320)*

Dora recalls a classroom incident when the different gender norms of home and school were made explicit. Here, she describes the incident, where, during an activity on gender-awareness raising, she was asking the questions and the students were answering:

> **Dora**: *"Is a boy equal to a girl?" "No."*
> *OK.*
> *"Are a boy and a girl equal in school?" "Yes."*
> *"Are a boy and a girl equal in class?" "Yes."*
> *"Are a boy and a girl equal at home?" "No."*
> *"Are a boy and a girl equal in the workplace?" "No." (ll. 307-317)*

The different perceptions of the students around school and home are evident in the above quote, and the students seem to believe that different rules and norms apply to each space accordingly. The school is also presented as a metaphorical asylum in Myrto's description of a case of harassment of transgender students. Within Myrto's narrative, the school grounds function as a safe space, a space of respect, which protects the students from being maltreated:

> **Myrto:** *At some stage we also had two or three transgender refugees in the hotspot who had also come to class. Although I had heard about a lot of discrimination and attacks etc. outside the classroom, in the classroom everyone treated them very nicely. […] I didn't notice even half a judgmental look, they were all very nice. (ll. 270-275)*

Apart from functioning as a safe and free space, where students can shed patriarchal gender norms, at times, the school also assumes a correctional role, intervening when things escalate or protecting female students and punishing those who engage in sexist behaviours. Ismini talks about how it is the responsibility of the teacher to intervene when gender issues come up, and to make sure that these do not impede learning. The role of the school here is portrayed as more corrective, rather than preventative. If gender issues arise, they are addressed, but there is less provision for awareness-raising in order to avoid these issues from occurring:

> **Ismini:** *((referring to talking about gender issues in the classroom)) Yes, it is something that is needed, especially if you see certain behaviours, you have to intervene to ensure the smooth functioning of the classroom. Let's say, if you want to get the kids to work in groups and they say "No, I'm not sitting with him*

because he's a boy, because she's a girl", uh, you have to intervene, you can't leave it that way. (ll. 334-338)

Katerina and Gavriil refer to more extreme cases, such as those of harassment in the classroom, in which the correctional role of the school comes to the fore. The suspension of trouble-causing individuals from school is the most common solution, as Katerina describes below:

> **Katerina:** *There was a woman last year who told me she had children, but she was here on her own and she told me her husband died. But then in one of my classes, there was a man who she told me— she got very upset and we had to get him to leave the room because he'd been basically calling her a slut and implying that actually her husband wasn't dead, she was a single mother. So, we had to speak to him about that. And he was suspended for a couple of lessons and then he came back. (ll. 372-381)*

Gavriil refers to a similar occurrence:

> **Gavriil:** *We had an experience a couple of years ago when there was a man who came in who—I didn't notice it, but my colleague in the classroom noticed it— who was harassing one of the students, whom we kicked out of class with the help of the social worker. (ll. 564-568)*

Apart from the school functioning as a safe and free space with both an interventional and correctional role, the adult participants mention that the school's ultimate goal is to prepare the students for their final destinations—usually northern European countries—and to equip them with the knowledge they will need in order to adapt to the gender norms that these new host societies follow. Pavlos, Stefanos, and Ismini all comment on the role of the school in acclimatising the students to these new norms, so that they do not feel alienated when they encounter them. Pavlos comments on the importance of such provision and preparation from school and on the value of exposing students to different gender roles:

> **Pavlos:** *Uh, I think it's necessary. When these people are trying to seek asylum and they find themselves in some European countries, I think there should definitely be a part on building awareness and information and providing opportunities for them to look at different roles in a new light, depending on the age group of course [...]. (ll. 119-122)*

Stefanos also argues for educating students on gender diversity and sexualities that deviate from the heterosexual norm. The students' exposure to these diverse expressions

of gender and sexuality in Europe is presented as inevitable, so it is, for Stefanos as others, imperative for students to be accustomed to them:

> *Stefanos: I think it is necessary for this to happen, I think it is necessary to be discussed. I think it's necessary to know that it's not just boy—girl. I think it's quite progressive to know that there are same-sex genders and there are heterosexual genders, so we have to know everything. For better or worse if you go to Europe and you go out, you'll see things and people who, uh— you'll associate with these people, so don't be alienated, don't think it's strange. […] So, it's good to give them a good introduction. What they will actually face and see in their path and in the later course of their lives. So that they can be a little more open-minded and conciliatory for discussion, for socializing, for interaction. We don't label and taboo a person or not hang out with them because he's homosexual or because she's a girl, it doesn't mean that we can't talk together just as importantly. (ll. 509-519)*

It is therefore argued by the adult participants that this acclimatisation and awareness-raising entails the ultimate goal of helping students of refugee backgrounds integrate in the host society. Referring to the Greek context, Ismini also argues that the students need to get used to the new norms that they will come across. Integration is seen as a one-way process, during which the students need to conform to the host society's norms and rules.

> *Ismini: It's a society where, you might go shopping, you're going to stand in line, and in front of you there might be a man or behind you, let's say. So, it will be something that you will encounter in your everyday life and you will have to slowly start accepting it. (ll. 311-313)*

This "acceptance" that Ismini mentions and the idea of the students having to get used to the new rules in the host society is something also present in other interviews as well. In this view, integration is seen as something which happens mostly on the side of the students. They are the ones who need to adapt to the new norms and the way in which society functions there. Stefanos, for example, talks about how students are challenged and asked to engage in new gender roles at school, roles which they may not be used to. The teacher asks the student to perform a task which he would not normally perform at home, and this consists of a learning experience for the student:

> *Stefanos: Uh, many times at an unexpected time we wanted, for example, to drink water, or something, I would say to, let's say, Ahmed: "Ahmed, let's go get*

some water for the class, let's hand out some glasses." Ahmed is a boy though, "Men don't do that," he would tell you. Ahmed may have replied that "Only girls ((do that))". But in that instance, he was forced to, and he poured water for his female classmates. So, we have implicitly achieved our goal. That he too can offer something similar to things that in his mind were only for women, for girls. (ll. 486-495)

Similarly, Gavriil describes his views on how, by exposing the students to the classroom norms, they will be able to adapt to the new situation more easily. The persistence of the teacher in having mixed gender classes, even though some female students may not have felt comfortable at the beginning, is described as beneficial in the long term. In this case too, it is the students who take a step forward to adjust to the gender norms:

> ***Tereza:*** *Were your classes, mixed gender?*
> ***Gavriil:*** *Yes. Yes, since the beginning. […] Which is a matter of principle, I never wanted to have all-women and all-men classes. […] I don't believe in discriminating genders in the classroom. You might say, "You don't believe in it, but your ((female)) students might want this." And even my female students, while in the beginning they might have sometimes been a little bit, uh, how shall we say it now, suspicious, there was no issue in the end because of the atmosphere that was built in class. (ll. 569-578)*

On the contrary, Myrto presents a different view of integration. In this case, the teacher is held accountable to create a culturally responsive environment for the students. Myrto describes how she catered to the need of female students to feel comfortable in class and women-only classes were also established in school:

> ***Myrto:*** *Generally, when I had women in class, I made sure to approach them a bit more and tell them that, for example, "If you want to sit at a specific desk next to another girl tell me once and I'll make sure it happens every time", so they feel more comfortable. We had also organized a women's day every Tuesday, during which men were banned inside [SCHOOL3]. We did some classes and some activities like yoga, cooking, knitting etc. (ll. 275-280)*

It can therefore be said that, while the adult participants in general agree on the need for the school to prepare students for European gender norms and to act as an advocate of gender equality, there are differing perspectives on how this is done and in the way that integration is perceived.

161

6.2.4 Subtheme 4: Gender is a difficult topic

This subtheme revolves around the sentiment expressed by the adult participants that gender is a challenging topic to address in the classroom. The interviewees mention a variety of reasons for this; these include the lack of training to teach about gender, the sensitivity of the topic of gender due to its connection to culture and religion, and the language barrier, which does not allow teachers and students to discuss such a complex topic. The fact that gender is perceived as a difficult topic leads to the lack of involvement of most teachers in talking about gender in the classroom with their students— activities related to gender are usually undertaken by the social workers, and teachers mostly touch upon such issues when they arise, but not as part of the standard curriculum. When they do discuss these, it is mostly through an implicit manner or through the use of humour. The individual codes for this subtheme are displayed in the Figure 6.6 below:
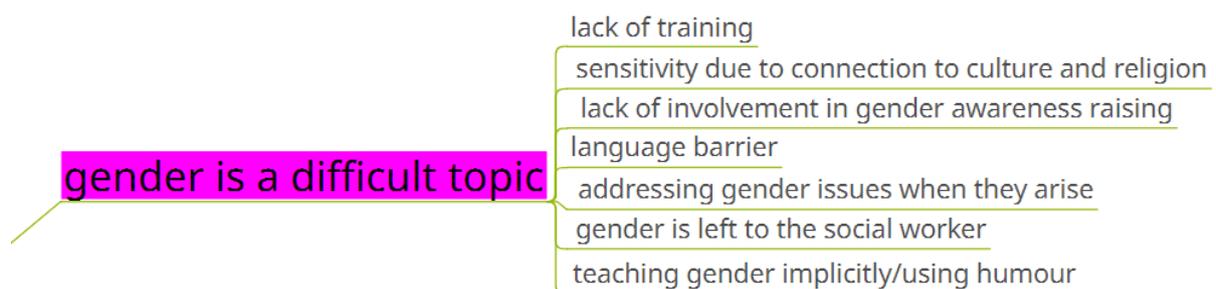
Figure 6.6 Codes for subtheme "Gender is a difficult topic".

To begin with, the two main reasons that the staff mention for considering gender to be a difficult topic are, firstly, the lack of training in teaching about gender, and secondly, the fact that gender is a very delicate topic, inextricable to culture and religion. These two factors are interrelated, as being able to handle and teach about sensitive topics requires knowledge and training on the subject. Another reason which is also mentioned is language; teachers feel unable and unprepared to broach a topic as complex and delicate as gender with students who are only now learning the language. In the following extracts, Myrto, Gavriil, and Pavlos discuss the first two factors, while the language factor is also mentioned throughout some of the extracts:

> *Myrto: It's too hard, without having a translator and dangerous, as well—and without knowing the other culture, that is, I think it would be awesome to have such a programme, but it needs very solid foundations. Otherwise, you could offend people. (ll. 312-315)*

Likewise, Gavriil also reflects on his own uncertainty and the difficulty of introducing this topic without training. His main concerns are the low level of the students, as well as the sensitive and complex nature of the topic due to its connection to religious beliefs:

> *Gavriil: It wasn't always easy to approach this subject. And when I did it, I did it very peripherally. So, you can't open a religious discussion at A1 level or one about the status of women, or at least I don't have the skills to do it as effectively as I have in mind. (ll. 608-610)*

The discussions with the students also suggest that gender issues were inextricably linked to issues of religion. Religion came up in the conversation whenever gender was brought up, and was presented as the main factor behind the gender norms and expectations that we were discussing. An example is provided in an excerpt from a discussion below, during which we were exploring different clothing norms in MENA countries and Greece. Fatima mentions religion as the reason why women can't wear short clothes:

> *Fatima: OK, we have something that we make it, about our religion. About Muslims. I can't have these clothes […] the knees we can't watch it anyone. Just the husband. From seven years and up, seven, six, this, you can, you can wear something until here, to others show it ((pointing to her knees)). After seven till after you have the period, you can't wear the like this. (Discussion 1, ll. 127-144)*

Pavlos also acknowledges the difficulty that such a task entails and strongly argues for the need for specialized training. According to him, it can only be approached successfully in the classroom by people who are interested and trained and sensitized towards this topic, and the lack of such specialized individuals is the reason that gender is not included in the curriculum:

> *Pavlos: Look, I know that through activities it's possibly easier also for people who may not have the expertise to get it across differently. So, it's a delicate subject, it needs special handling and special knowledge and experience. We don't always have the staff to be able to work in that direction. But having staff*

who are sensitized and who try to involve children of different genders in joint actions I think is probably the easiest way. […] There have been discussions in classrooms on various projects from people who could take it a little further. Well, I also know that your orientation was this, and in [ISLAND2], let's say, we had a lawyer who conducted similar projects, so, wherever we had the opportunity, we definitely took advantage of it. We have not always had the opportunities of course from specialized people. (ll. 133-145)

The lack of training leads most teachers to not be involved in teaching about gender, at least in an organized and systematic way. The responsibility is shifted to the social workers, and there is a reliance on them to discuss gender issues, while the teachers do not address these explicitly in class. Even though Eleftheria considers it important to raise gender-awareness and has mentioned some of the issues that have arisen, she states that she does not systematically approach the topic in the classroom:

> **Tereza:** *So, do you think we need to talk about gender issues in class? Have you made any mentions to it in your teaching?*
> **Eleftheria:** *Well, barely, barely. […] (ll. 274-276)*

Similarly, Ismini has some knowledge of how the topic has been approached by the social workers, but also hasn't carried out awareness-raising activities in her lesson:

> **Ismini:** *The truth is that the social workers dealt with them the most, but I remember that it worked. I don't remember exactly what they did now […] Now, about the empowerment part, say, about the professions, about the position of women and stuff, the truth is I haven't gotten round to working on that. (ll. 323-346)*

On the other hand, Ismini and Melina mention that the topic of gender is addressed when such issues arise, and when the intervention of the educator is needed. There is a general apprehension to talk about gender more explicitly, but when a problem emerges, then it is discussed:

> **Ismini:** *((Talking about gender happens)) more on everyday life issues. Because that won't always happen to you. Depending on the population you have. (ll. 341-343)*

> **Melina:** *Many times through various occurrences that happened, like fights between boys and girls, like making fun of each other, like all the things that go on every day in schools, let alone in schools with such a cultural level, our response was to—well, if we were working with topics, the weekly topic should be about gender equality. (ll. 183-186)*

Furthermore, the educators who do discuss gender issues in their classroom mention that when this is done, it is usually introduced implicitly or with the use of humour. Katerina and Gavriil discuss how this implicit approach allows them to navigate such a complex and delicate issue, and to try to open a discussion between themselves and the students and their mostly differing perceptions of gender. Katerina describes how she attempts to hint at gender issues through the material she uses, and notes that what particularly helps her is to do this in a playful spirit. Talking about these issues through the material allows both teacher and students to distance themselves from the topic in question, dispersing some of the awkwardness of the topic:

> *Katerina: When we're reading articles or doing a worksheet and the examples are really stereotypical, I change them you know, like an editable worksheet. So, like "My mom is a doctor, my dad is a house-husband" and I explain what a house-husband is and I say "In Europe, we can also have a house-husband". And, you know, we laugh about it. (ll. 365-372)*

> *[…]*

> *I would hope that by using, you know, articles, uh ESOL textbooks, that issues of gender naturally arise. Talking about songs, for example, you know, romantic songs. We've talked about that before, but made a bit of a joke about it. You know, "Oh, what has this man done and what has this woman done? Well, is it right for him to be feeling like this about his girlfriend that he's lost? Well, what would you do in that situation?" You're not talking about song lyrics. But it's done usually in a humorous way. (ll. 420-427)*

Gavriil discusses how his approach is also an implicit one. He touches upon the challenging nature of talking about women's oppression to his female students, bringing up the language barrier, as well as the sensitivity that is needed for this task. The implicit comparison to Greek gender norms is suggested as a way of getting students to think about their own oppression, without offending them:

> *Gavriil: So, for me to, let's say, go into a classroom and say that "Your husbands are oppressing you and I see it"— Yes, I can explain it, but the reasons I see them being oppressed I'm not sure they'll understand, so you risk losing students to an aggressive […] explanation of human rights and the position of women, as opposed to a more modest one, by explaining to them how women are in Greece. I mean you go completely sideways, describe the life of women in Greece and from there they can take it themselves. From there the student can see the differences for herself and see the Western way of life, which I'm not saying is ideal— there are many problems— but at least you can explain emancipation through that. So, I'm not going to go to her and say, "Oh, your*

men won't let you—, your men don't bother at all, we live in a patriarchy," they won't be able to make head nor tale of it, if I say it in Greek. But by explaining that within Greek couples many times the father looks after the children at home so that the wife can go to work or to class, you're doing the cultural intervention that I can do effectively. (ll. 612-628)

It can therefore be concluded that gender is viewed as a complex and difficult topic, and while most teachers avoid discussing it in the classroom, those who do, assume an implicit or humorous approach to it.

6.2.5 Subtheme 5: Need for a reflexive and holistic approach

The difficulty and discomfort in approaching gender with the students leads the educators and managers to discuss the elements that are necessary in order to achieve this. Apart from the need for training on teaching about sensitive issues, which was mentioned in the previous section, the staff argue that in order to be able to broach this topic, a reflexive and holistic approach needs to be adopted. This approach entails a variety of requirements. Firstly, the educators need to show awareness of their own positionality and of the particular context and situation of the students, which also includes being aware of the limitations of their positionality on what they can discuss. The staff also mention the need for reflexivity, as teachers need to let go of their own prejudices regarding gender, in order to be able to teach about it. Finally, the importance of teamwork is highlighted, as the whole team working in the school needs to support this effort, so that its effect can be profound and long-lasting. The codes for this subtheme are presented in Figure 6.7 below:
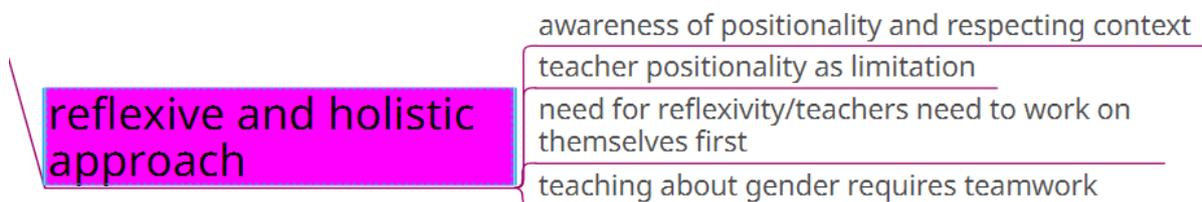
Figure 6.7 Codes for subtheme "Reflexive and holistic approach".

To begin with, the educators and managers talk about the importance of being aware of their own and their students' positionality, and how it is necessary to take into account not only the cultural background of the students, but also their specific

circumstances. While they may be predisposed to judge the students' cultural and gender norms based on European standards, the educators and managers argue that it is actually quite important to try to look at things from a different perspective. In this way, they can better understand and talk about gender issues:

> **Katerina:** *I guess from our point of view, we may disagree with the fact that the women have to bear the brunt of the familial responsibilities and the childcare. On the other hand, in this very chaotic and difficult situation, it gives them a reason to exist. Whereas the men who may have been the breadwinners or probably were the breadwinners suddenly find themselves at a complete loss for what to do.(ll. 396-400)*

Acknowledging that traditional gender norms in Arab families may be contrary to European ones, Katerina nonetheless appreciates that in the present situation it might be harmful towards the students to ask them to violently discard these norms. She goes on to discuss how important it is to be sensitive towards the students' current living conditions and how when talking about gender the teacher needs to be aware not to impose their opinion or Eurocentric norms on the students. When asked about approaching gender in the classroom, Katerina replies:

> **Katerina:** *That's really ((difficult)). I guess it depends on the specific issues, how it's done, which students you are talking to, because our aim at [SCHOOL2] is to help refugees integrate, but not to assimilate. And it's not our place to challenge their culture while they are in this distressing situation. But that's not to say that having discussions about gender can't be valuable and interesting. (ll. 412-420)*

Myrto also discusses the issue of positionality and awareness of context, through the example of a past volunteer at the school. She stresses the need to take into consideration and understand the students' cultural background and their forced migration context, in order for gender awareness raising to be done successfully. According to Myrto, this should not be done in a forceful manner, or in a manner which only takes into account European norms:

> **Myrto:** *At some point we had a volunteer who had studied gender and society and politics etc, and the girl was trying to apply some seminars. Even though she had the best intentions, she was so innocent in her thinking and had only met European women, that when two months later she did a survey to ask them "Why don't you come to class?" and "What do you like?" etc, it made too much of an impression on her that women wrote that "We don't come for religious reasons, because we can't be in mixed classes." So, when you start off not*

knowing something like that— You can't create a program like that. […] I'm pointing out again the point that these people don't have a solution to their basic needs, so going to talk to a woman about empowerment when she doesn't have a roof over her head and a reassurance and food and she doesn't know if she'll even stay in this country, I think there's no point, you have to solve the basics first and then move on to empowerment. (ll. 311-331)

Melina also mentions that being aware of the context and the students' cultural background is also important when a teacher approaches controversial topics. She discusses her own experience when being met with views coming from the students, that she might personally have not agreed with. Melina mentions that in these cases, being sensitive towards the students' views is crucial, and respect is another important element, as is developing a bond of trust with the students:

Melina: […] at older ages what was needed was perseverance and patience to discuss it ((gender)) with them. You might hear extreme views and what you need is to show great composure, as if you were listening to the most normal thing in the world, because the child, let's say, might tell you that women are an inferior being. You ought to show composure, even if what you hear is completely contrary to your whole mentality, you ought to be calm and not make the child feel ashamed, because from there on you've lost the game, you've lost the sphere of trust, you've just destroyed it. Other than that, you'll hear things that you don't agree with at all and you'll get angry, upset, etc. But, it's important to maintain a balance between what you disagree with and how you express that to a child, who takes what it says for granted, has grown up with that view and you suddenly go and tell them that white is black, it's not white, so it's a very difficult process and also related to how you defend the other gender really, which at that time is subject to gender segregation and oppression. So, throughout the whole job what is needed is a very delicate balance between the new information you receive and the information you are trying to give out. (ll. 218-238)

While being aware of one's positionality is definitely necessary and helpful when teaching about gender, the staff also discuss that there are also times when there are limits as to how far they can proceed with the topic of gender, due to their own identities. Gavriil talks about being aware that his positionality makes it harder for him to approach the issue of women's oppression in the classroom. As a white, European man, he finds it difficult to talk to his female students of refugee background about women's emancipation, due to his identity. On the contrary, he remarks that his female

colleague had more success in this and that the female students were more comfortable discussing such issues with her:

> **Gavriil:** *Now that's one of the limitations of having a man teaching a classroom with women only. (ll. 605-606)*

Gavriil continues:

> **Gavriil:** *My colleague could communicate more easily either with jokes or with some things that she could relate her experience as a woman in Greece to their experience as ((female)) refugees. So, it happened— you could see that my students were closer with my colleague about some issues than they were with me. (ll. 630-636)*

Another asset which the staff consider crucial when teaching about gender is reflexivity. In other words, after acknowledging their positionality, teachers need to work on their own prejudices and assumptions, and how these might take shape in the classroom. Gavriil, Pavlos, and Myrto address this need for reflexivity. Gavriil refers to the individual effort that teachers should make in order to eliminate any stereotypes from their thinking, giving the example of racism:

> **Gavriil:** *So, imagine then that in this role, it's a huge responsibility of the teacher, first of all not to be racist, secondly not to reproduce stereotypes even in good heart, which brings us back to personal work. You can't be an educator and reproduce the stereotypes, even the good ones. (ll. 467-469)*

Pavlos also brings up the question of introspection and reflexivity, as he claims that teachers need to be educated on gender issues themselves and to think of how they may have internalized or may be reproducing stereotypes before they can teach students about these:

> **Pavlos:** *[…] maybe some people aren't prepared to hear it themselves, some might experience difficulty in how to do it— they may like it as an idea, but they may not know how to do it, so they might find themselves in an awkward and difficult situation. Some of us, we may have assimilated these roles ourselves, so, we may talk about it and all that's nice, but I don't know who has gotten rid of stereotypes. (ll. 176-180)*

Myrto also shares an example of practicing reflexivity and rethinking how she used a Eurocentric perspective to judge her students on a specific view of gender:

169

> *Myrto: I remember one time when I had a conversation, we only had men in class […] we were talking about shopping and they mentioned the stereotype that the woman doesn't care what she buys because her husband is paying, and I called them sexist, spontaneously […] of course then we solved it and explained it with a smile. (ll. 305-310)*

Using a term to describe what would be considered sexist in her own, Eurocentric, standards, Myrto later realized that more sensitivity was required on the matter, and that it was unfair of her to approach her students in this way, taking into account that they may have not been exposed to different norms before.

Finally, Pavlos points to another element, which he considers to be necessary in order for teachers to be able to systematically and successfully integrate teaching about gender in the curriculum: team-work. Pavlos stresses the importance of a collective and holistic approach, which will be supported by the whole team working in the school. The school as an institution and the staff should be unanimous in how they treat gender issues, and efforts to talk about gender should not be isolated, but should rather be embraced by the whole team, to ensure liability and continuity:

> *Pavlos: If someone is working on this issue and the rest of the team haven't even understood it, what exactly they are doing, what is happening, why this is happening, and if they don't find a way to somehow support this, I'm afraid it's just going to be fragmentary efforts that will be associated with a specific person and in the end they can also be linked to the views that a particular teacher has […]. So, it's never gonna be a part of the whole, the system. Well, that for me is problematic because firstly it is not general and, secondly, it's very easy for a person to arrive one day and leave the next and then what happens, you know, do we just leave it there? That is, if we don't make sure that it's done as a whole and that it's long-lasting, and that it will be relevant to the people who will come down the line, it risks becoming an example that others like, others don't like, and after a year we'll have forgotten about it, and so what? (ll. 183-202)*

This is a point that Pavlos and I first discussed during one of his visits at the school in March 2021, when I had only been working there for a few days, and was considering how I would approach gender issues in the classroom. I dwell on this point further in Chapter 5, commenting on how the discussion with Pavlos proved crucial to my understanding of feminist pedagogy and the need to listen to students' and teachers' needs and to involve the whole school in my effort. It was this conversation which later

led me to ask him to talk about this point more extensively during his interview, as I thought it was quite crucial and had helped me personally as a teacher and researcher.

6.2.6   Conclusion

This chapter has presented the subthemes and codes under the over-arching theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct". The analysis suggests that educators and managers perceive students as deeply imbued in patriarchal norms, which are then reproduced in school. However, this notion is challenged by certain counter-narratives provided by the students. The educators view the school as playing an important role in educating students about gender, but in their vast majority refrain from touching upon this issue, as they consider it to be complex and sensitive. Employing a reflexive and holistic approach is highlighted by some of the adult participants as a method of attempting to approach the sensitive topic of gender with the students.

7 Chapter 7: Data Analysis II – Trauma as Present, but not Defining & Culture/Language as Barriers

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the following two themes that the analysis produced: "Trauma as present, but not defining" and "Culture/language as barriers". While trauma is not traditionally considered to be an aspect of one's identity in the way in which gender, culture, or language are, it nonetheless arose as an over-arching theme, occupying quite a significant amount of space in the teacher and manager interviews and consequent data analysis. The theme of "Culture/language as barriers", which was also present in the data, constituted a considerable theme in itself, albeit not as broad or extensive as the other two themes. Section 7.2 below examines the corresponding subthemes and relevant data excerpts of "Trauma as present, but not defining", while section 7.3 focuses on those of the theme of "Culture/language as barriers".

7.2 Trauma as Present, but not Defining

The theme of "Trauma as present, but not defining" seeks to look into the ideas and responses of the adult participants towards trauma and the manifestation and management of emotions in the classroom. It is comprised of the following five subthemes:

- There is a fine line
- Deficit vs. resilience
- Healing aspect of education
- Teachers' emotional involvement and labour
- Connection

Firstly, the adult participants discussed the difficulty that they feel in managing trauma in the classroom, arguing that "there is a fine line" which they try not to cross for fear of triggering the students' trauma. The second subtheme, "deficit vs. resilience", refers to how students are perceived by the teachers and managers, as they are preoccupied as to whether students should be viewed through a deficit or a resilience lens. The "healing aspect of education" is the third subtheme, and refers to the notion that is expressed that the school as well as the teacher should help the students overcome their trauma. The fourth subtheme is titled "teachers' emotional involvement and labour", as it explores

how the teachers respond to the challenges of refugee education while fighting against a broken system. Finally, the fifth subtheme is named "connection", and refers to all the ways in which, despite trauma and adversity, teachers and students experience moments of connection and gratitude. The subthemes and codes for the theme of "Trauma as present, but not defining" are provided in Figure 7.1 below:
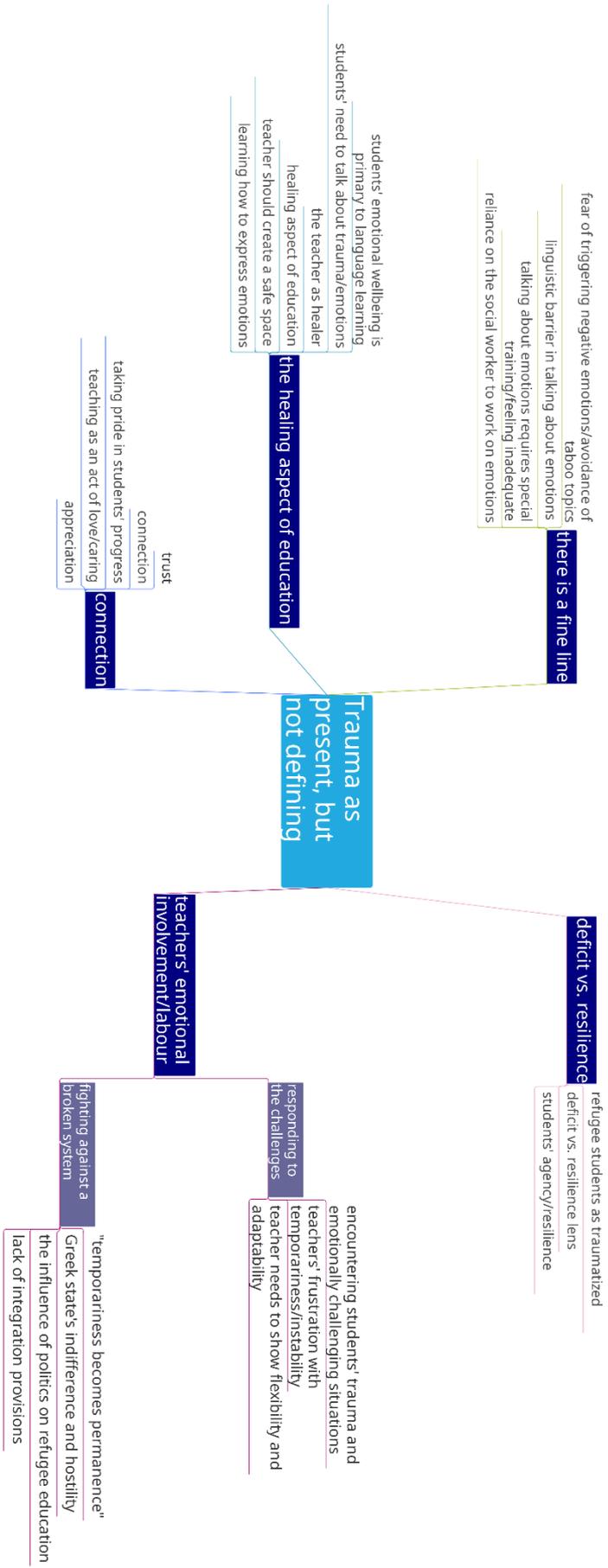
Figure 7.1 Subthemes and codes for theme "Trauma as present, but not defining.

174

7.2.1 Subtheme 1: There is a fine line

This subtheme refers to the attempts of teachers to navigate trauma and emotions in the classroom, while trying not to cross the fine line between what is acceptable to be discussed with students and what isn't. They express a common fear of triggering negative emotions or memories in the students, which leads to either the avoidance of certain topics that are considered as taboo, or to the complete avoidance of discussing about emotions. Language is also mentioned as a hindrance which further complicates talking about such delicate issues. Furthermore, the educators express the view that in order to explore emotions with the students they would need to have special training or to be trained as psychotherapists, and they raise the issue of feeling inadequate to talk about emotions with the students. This view leads to many educators relying on the social workers to assume this task. The individual codes of this subtheme are displayed in Figure 7.2 below and will be analysed in the current section:
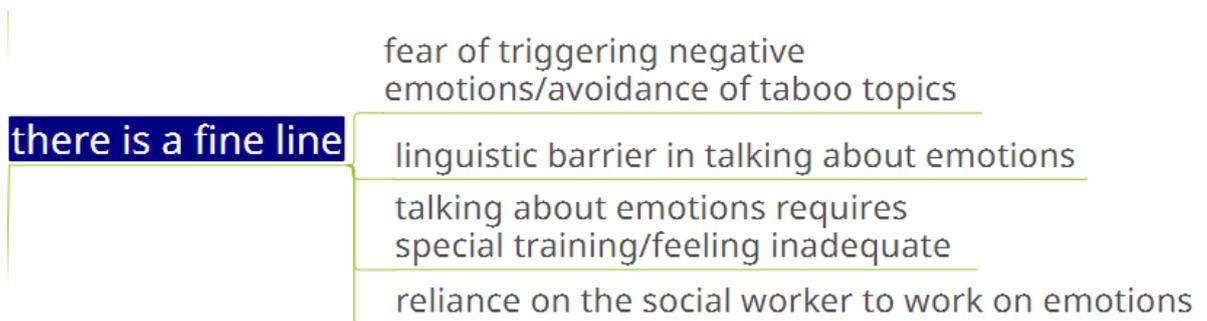
Figure 7.2 Codes for subtheme "There is a fine line".

As mentioned above, a very common sentiment that the educators express is the fear of provoking negative emotions or triggering traumatic memories in the students by asking them too much information or by mentioning a sensitive topic. Stefanos and Katerina discuss how they do incorporate emotions in the classroom, by teaching the vocabulary necessary for students to be able to partake in everyday conversation. However, they remark that it is important not to cross the line by starting a conversation which will become too personal or will make the students feel uncomfortable. Stefanos particularly draws attention to the care that must be invested so as not to push the students to disclose too much information:

175

> *Stefanos: [...] in general, we work on emotions very much in our everyday life. For example, "How are you today? How are you guys doing, are you OK?", "Fine", "Me no fine", you may hear and then we ask for some information, without, of course, making the child feel embarrassed and ashamed to talk, or getting more into the personal aspects of the family, which is not our goal. (ll. 423-427)*

Similarly, Katerina also comments on how emotional support can be offered by the teacher, but only if a relationship of trust between teacher and students already exists:

> *Katerina: And then we teach them, you know, "How are you today?", "How were you yesterday?" [...] some students just play around and they invent an answer, some students really take the opportunity to genuinely tell you how they are feeling and then, if it's appropriate with that student, because hopefully you've built up a bit of a relationship by that point, you could maybe ask them why and offer a bit of support. (ll. 270-275)*

Although Katerina and Stefanos do slightly touch on emotions in class, they caution against treading too far into the emotional and personal world of the students for fear of bringing up trauma and discomfort. Therefore, emotions are mostly taught on the surface, as part of the necessary vocabulary for communication. Gavriil follows a more drastic approach of steering away from any conversation around emotions or taboo topics. He describes the delicate process of trying to create a trigger-free environment for the students:

> *Gavriil: In class I generally try not to discuss, this is my strategy, to not discuss people's backgrounds, I don't ask [...]. For example, I will never talk about, say, swimming in a classroom of refugees, because I know that half of them have probably had their boats capsized, I mean, statistically. [...] I will not speak, let's say, about the sea easily. And a couple of times when I did it, the people in class reacted, they said, "We don't want to hear about it or look at it." [...] Or we're talking about people who have experienced loss, so I'm not going to talk about death [...]. I try to be [...] neutral as to the subjects I choose. (ll. 227-243)*

Another factor that the adult participants mention, and which accounts for their not integrating the topic of emotions in their lessons is language. Emotions are perceived as a delicate topic which the teachers feel they can't properly address or discuss without their students first having acquired a certain level in the target language. Without this level of English or Greek, discussions about emotions can't move deeper

than the everyday small talk. Ismini, Myrto, and Gavriil all mention the linguistic barrier in their interviews. Ismini draws attention to the inability to conduct a deeper discussion which will explore more than just the surface of emotions of the students:

> *Ismini: I think it's an issue that requires a lot of discussion. It requires communication, which you can't have with the children without an interpreter. [...] That is, they can communicate, for example, "He is happy now". But you can't delve very deep. For example, "Why are you happy?", "What exactly do you feel when you are happy?" I think it requires communication and it's a stage after A0, let's say, which we are at. (ll. 264-282)*

Myrto also mentions the same difficulty, adding the extra factor of large class sizes, which makes incorporating talk about emotions in her lessons even more difficult:

> *Myrto: Well, it's a bit difficult to integrate emotions completely because we don't exactly have a common language of communication and their English would make it difficult, and also because we might have 30 or 40 people in the classroom. (ll. 242-244)*

Gavriil explains how he perceives emotions as an abstract and difficult topic, which cannot be discussed without the help of an interpreter; the students' language level is once more seen as a hindrance to achieving communication with them. Gavriil also points out that certain emotions or concepts may be difficult to discuss with the students due to their previous experiences or trauma and makes the point of whether discussing these is indeed relevant to the students:

> *Gavriil: Look, uh, abstract concepts in language teaching are among the most difficult to teach. So how do you teach, "being happy"? Or how do you teach a man the word "peace" when he lives in an area where he has never had peace all his life? (ll. 522-525)*

The teachers' fear of triggering the students' trauma and the linguistic barrier in communicating about emotions are also related to the belief that is expressed by the adult participants that they are not fit to broach the topic of emotions with the students. The staff mention that in order to be able to do this, one needs to have had specialized training, and that this is a job that should be undertaken by someone like a trained psychotherapist. Most of the teachers who mention that they avoid the topic of emotions do so due to their belief that they are not trained adequately to do so, and mainly rely on the work of the social workers, as Ismini describes below:

> *Ismini: Well, the truth is I haven't used them ((emotions)) at all. Because I haven't looked into it, I haven't seen how it can be applied. [...] So, I mostly leave it to the social workers who use the interpreters the most, I let them deal with this aspect. (ll. 261-269)*

Katerina and Anna express the same sentiment of feeling inadequate and again support the view that only those who are officially trained to deal with emotions and trauma should do so. This feeling of not being qualified enough and not being able to handle such situations stems from the fear of the situation escalating and triggering traumatic memories and negative emotions in the students:

> *Katerina: [...] it's hard to know because I'm not a trained counsellor—although you think you end up having a lot of emotional intelligence when you've been a teacher for a long time. But it is my intuition, and it's not backed, you know, by evidence or research because I'm not a counsellor or a therapist, and sometimes it's difficult to know how far you should let those conversations run. Because you have to consider your other students and how far you should try to carefully redirect the conversation to something slightly more positive or relevant, because you have to also be aware that his conversation might be bringing up a lot of stuff for the other students who are in the lesson. (ll. 292-305)*

> *Anna: The truth is I don't ((talk about emotions)), because we have social workers who, they do group activities and they do exactly that. And I also don't, uh, for another reason too, that I'm not sure how much I can—I have a fear from the previous organization—that we should neither ask the children how they feel nor ask them to tell us their story and I don't want them to tell me some information that, you know, that I can't— I can't— I'm afraid of what I might say. Of saying something wrong, something I shouldn't say. A piece of advice I shouldn't have given— given them. So, when something happens, well, I usually tell the social worker. (ll. 230-242)*

Anna also describes the fear of not being able to provide students with a "correct" answer and not being able to help them, implying that the role of the teacher is to always have the right answers and to be prepared for these situations:

> *Anna: And it's difficult for you to know something about a student, because, let's say, I'm neither a psychotherapist nor a social worker, I don't know if I might say something wrong, give them wrong advice. (ll. 268-270)*

What is also evident in Anna's words is the pressure of working in a context of forced migration; the pressure to be aware of trauma and to be sensitive towards the students'

needs and provide them with assistance. It can therefore be summarized that this is a pressure that most adult participants feel, and which leads them to avoid taboo topics or in-depth conversations about emotions, for fear that the students' trauma will be triggered.

This was a feeling which I also felt as a teacher, and with which I identified when close-reading the interview transcripts at a later stage. I recorded a similar occurrence in my researcher diary entry below, in which I describe my thoughts on encountering a students' trauma, my feeling of inadequacy to deal with it, and my worry of providing the "correct" answer. The student disclosed to me and instance of abuse, which led me to have the following reaction:

> *I asked Layla if she was OK now, and I told her that whenever this happens again she should alert another adult who is nearby, and I stressed that hitting is not acceptable and that it is not acceptable for anyone to hurt her in that way. I really did not know if it was the right thing to do or how I should have handled it. Later, I talked to Dora, the social worker, who advised me that I did the right thing, and that the student opened up to me because she felt comfortable and safe to share this with me. […] She then asked me if I wanted to ask Layla about this again and open up the conversation. I replied that I do care about her, but I'm not sure about my skills in handling such incidents and that I would not know what would be the right thing to say to her. Dora then replied that I don't always need to have answers to everything, but that sometimes all the students need is to feel like they are being heard and they just need someone to listen to them.*

> *—Researcher diary excerpt*

When this issue later came up during the interviews, Dora shared her thoughts on the importance of teachers shedding the expectation that they always need to provide the students with answers. Rather, Dora emphasizes the need to empathise and be honest with the students:

> **Dora:** *[…] what I always remind myself and my colleagues is that it's best at that moment when you feel this way, to tell the student that "I hear what you're telling me, but I don't know what to say". You don't always have to be the one who knows everything and the one who will solve everything. Be honest with your feeling that "I can't manage at that moment. 'I hear it, but I don't know what to tell you, or what to do, or anything'." And I think that works for the kids when they hear it from you. (279-282)*

It can therefore be summarized that the educators' avoidance of talking about emotions in the classroom stems largely from the fear of triggering traumatic responses in the students. Furthermore, the educators feel inadequately trained to handle these responses, and are pressured by the notion that as teachers, they need to always provide the "right" answer to the students' problems. However, the social worker's perspective and my own researcher diary extracts point to the need for teachers to acknowledge their vulnerability and to empathise with and actively listen to the students.

7.2.2   Subtheme 2: Deficit vs. resilience

The present subtheme seeks to capture how the adult participants of the study view students of refugee background in terms of trauma and resilience. On the one hand, the staff mention that trauma does manifest in the classroom and refugee students are viewed as traumatized individuals. Trauma is mentioned as a factor which cannot be ignored in the name of resilience—it does exist and this needs to be acknowledged. However, the staff also express the need to look at the students through a resilience lens, a lens which will allow them to be treated as any other child of their age, regardless of the traumatic situations they may have been or may be going through. They share their accounts of attempts to encourage the students' agency in the classroom, while also relating stories of students who displayed agency and resilience. The following codes portrayed in Figure 7.3 will be discussed in relation to the present subtheme:
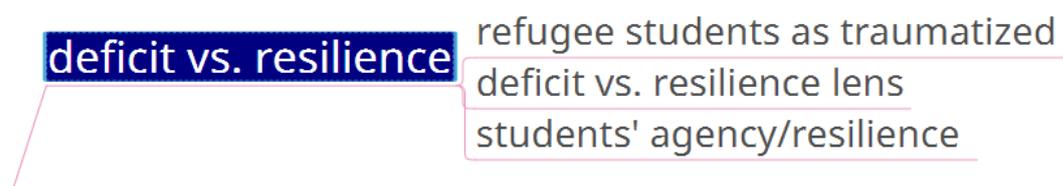
Figure 7.3 Codes for subtheme "Deficit vs. resilience".

To start with, the adult participants present accounts of how trauma does indeed exist in the classroom and refer to the fact that the students have gone through traumatic situations which have affected them in their present life. Certain behaviours that the students display constitute proof that trauma is present and affects their school life, as Gavriil describes below:

Gavriil: [...] we're all talking about deeply traumatized and also multiply traumatized people [...]. (ll. 216-217)

Later on, he describes an example of this traumatisation manifesting in school:

Gavriil: Let me give you an example, to make it clear for you. In [PLACE NAME] [...] a social worker told me that every time the bell rang the first days, the refugee students would take their bags and run away, because they thought that bombs were going to fall. (ll. 482-485)

Anna also stresses the difficulty and the tragic nature of the situation that the students are in, and the need to be aware of this as a teacher. The traumatic effects of displacement on the students' wellbeing are highlighted by Anna:

Anna: Whatever the reason they left their country, [...] they are in a situation that is difficult, difficult for these children. [...] a child who leaves home— not bringing a small toy with them, it's tragic not to have it with them. Now imagine what it's like not to have their home, not to have their neighbourhood, not to have their friends. (ll. 81-86)

However, the staff mention that constantly regarding the students as traumatized individuals is not a very helpful approach. Myrto, Anna, and Katerina discuss their thoughts on preferring to view students through a resilience lens, rather than one which focuses on trauma and deficit. Myrto shares her experience and explains how this enabled her to look at the students as able individuals who can be challenged educationally:

Myrto: At first, I was very nervous about it, but I was used to the language schools I worked in, especially in the last few years they asked us to have the lesson only in English, even for the Greek children, so I was used to having the lesson only in English. So I applied that logic and I also applied the logic that I'm going to give you a challenge, that is, [...] I'd rather you don't tell me your sad story and I pity you, I'd rather see you as a regular student and see how far you can get with that challenge, no pressure, so the lesson was only in English. (ll. 137-142)

Likewise, Anna talks about her attempt to not discriminate against students on the basis of their trauma. She discusses how she prefers not to know the particular traumatic events that certain students have been through, so as not to let this affect her

disposal and behaviour towards these students. Anna comments on how only viewing students through a lens of trauma may lead to teachers being overly lenient with them and not treating them equally to their classmates:

> **Anna:** [I]t's hard for me to keep this information and then in my own mind I do make a distinction between the children [...] If I know that a child went through a very, very difficult situation, well, when I enter the classroom, I can't treat them like I treat the other kids, with the same rules. I might say to one person, "OK, be quiet now," and to another person who I know is troubled by something, for the same reason, I may not say it to them, and then this can create an awkwardness between them as well. [...] Or, let's say, we had a little kid who was always sitting underneath the table. All the time. And I didn't know if there was a story behind this. The kid was just doing this—without being, you know, disruptive or being naughty, so I let him do that. After a while, the rest of them started doing it too. And OK, that's where the lesson gets lost and I can't explain to the other kids that "No, leave him be". (ll. 244-264)

Pavlos, on the other hand, is more sceptical towards the resilience lens, and talks about how he is unsure that focusing only on resilience can truly help the students. Although he agrees that trauma is not the sole defining aspect of a student's identity, he claims that trauma still exists and cannot be overlooked:

> **Pavlos:** We used to talk about trauma, now we're talking about resilience, so, things have changed a bit. I'm not sure that in five or ten years we won't have discovered something else. I mean, for me, trauma continues to exist. It's not just resilience that's left. [...] I don't think those who talk about resilience question trauma, but anyway, it's as if we're just leaving trauma behind now by seeking resilience, that's what I feel. [...] I think this part does exist, but we can't ignore what has happened behind it. I mean, when we see children in housing hiding under their beds when a police car passes by, OK, let's talk about resilience, but we also we have to talk about trauma. (ll. 246-269)

Pavlos further explains his insistence on acknowledging trauma and discusses his critical view of resilience being used as merely a buzzword, pointing to the fact that it may not signify any real change in attitude, despite the good intentions of those who utilize it:

> **Pavlos:** I will draw again a small parallel to mental health, because we used to talk about rehabilitation, then came recovery—it reminds me a little bit of this now which was about how people could recover from mental illness and stand on their own two feet. I think that few professionals believe that truly. And I'm not talking about books and theories and stuff, because many of these analyse them very well, but in reality, and in everyday life it's hard to view the person in

front of us as equal and consider him as a person who can stand on his own two feet and overcome whatever difficulty he had. I think there will always be the gaze that something has happened that he cannot overcome, that we will need to help him, we will need to provide him with things, he will not be able to ((do)) anything, without actually seeing if he can. (ll. 278-292)

Therefore, it may be said that even though the resilience lens is adopted and advocated for by other adult participants, Pavlos strongly cautions against its superficial use and highlights the difficulty of changing the way that students with a refugee background are viewed and of totally eliminating the "trauma gaze".

However, those adult participants who do argue for a resilience lens share their experiences of students displaying agency and resilience, as well as their own efforts to help the students develop these qualities. Katerina describes her attempt at being honest with the students and acknowledging their present difficult situation and their displacement, without, however, letting this become a defining aspect of their identity. What is pivotal in this effort of hers is giving the students the choice to decide what they will write about and which image of themselves and their homes they want to portray. In this way, it is acknowledged that displacement is a temporary state, and the students are given the opportunity to remember or envision other parts of their identity as well:

Katerina: With the more advanced students, when we read articles or when we're doing vocabulary related to the home, for example, I don't shy away from the fact that they are now living in containers […] but I'm talking about their current situation. You know, I'll give them a choice. I say "You can write about your home now, you can tell me about your caravan, or you can talk about the home you lived in before, or you can talk about the home you would like to live in", and I think that gives people the space to choose the option that is going to be best for them, you know, emotionally, to deal with. (ll. 275-286)

Stefanos also shares an example of students displaying agency, this time through the individual choices that they make regarding their language learning. He relates how some of the students who had decided to stay in Greece made the conscious decision to prioritize learning Greek against other languages, something which he defines as a very important marker of displaying agency and taking initiative:

Stefanos: I think it's about where each person will place more emphasis and what they're most interested in learning. I mean, I have children who are interested in learning Greek. But why? Because they want to stay in Greece. And automatically, they restrain it, they put borders, essentially, so as not to advance

in other languages. [...] Which is a choice, it's very important. It is very important to make choices and to know what you want; that what you choose is what you really want and that it's not something that was forced on you by someone else. (ll. 197-210)

The agency and resilience of students is further discussed by Myrto, who introduces a series of examples of students who took their learning into their own hands. Myrto describes how it was mainly thanks to the students' own initiative and agency that they succeeded in overcoming any obstacles in their learning, as it wasn't always possible for teachers to provide them with individualized help. The fact that they "*stayed despite the difficulties*" is the encapsulation of resilience:

> **Myrto:** *[...] they might have had learning difficulties, they might have been illiterate in their own language, and you couldn't actually help these people. So, you understood that whatever they achieved they would achieve by themselves, because if you have 30 people in class, you can't give them more time. [...] This was the case all the time, we had mixed levels in classes all the time. [...] It was the students themselves who solved it, let's say, due to their need and their desire to learn. So, they stayed despite the difficulties. (ll. 64-72)*

Furthermore, Myrto mentions two particular stories which have made an impression on her, stories of students of hers who showed resilience and managed to succeed despite the odds. The following two stories portray the persistence of these students and their commitment to learning, which ultimately lead them to succeed, whether this success involved passing an English exam, or even simply reading a word out loud:

> **Myrto:** *I remember a gentleman who must have been 40-50 years old, he had great difficulties. He must have not been able to read in his native language, write and read, and yet he did not leave the class, he stayed for months and suddenly after months he managed to read in English, and he was beside himself. That was one of the most beautiful moments. (ll. 76-79)*
>
> <div align="center">***</div>
>
> *I have another example, it's a person who's currently an interpreter at the hotspot. He was 18 years old, he came to us, didn't speak a word of English, and within six months he had reached B1 level. He didn't pass his first certificate. [...] I haven't been able to get to that level that fast with anyone else, right? [...] I started 2-3 months before the degree, before the exam date. This guy didn't pass his exams. He dug his heels in, he studied a lot again. The next time—he stayed in Leros a long time—the next time he passed the B1. He is currently an interpreter inside Leros hotspot itself, working, and he has evolved just fine. (ll. 98-109)*

To conclude, this subtheme encompasses the teachers' and managers' perceptions of students. Although it is acknowledged that trauma does exist and it manifests in the classroom, the adult participants mostly argue for a resilience approach, which will allow each student to be viewed as a multidimensional individual. Stories of students displaying agency and resilience in education function as points of resistance to the predominant narrative of trauma.

7.2.3   Subtheme 3: The healing aspect of education

This subtheme encompasses the adult participants' notions around the purpose of refugee education, and the sentiment which is expressed that education in contexts of forced displacement assumes a healing quality. This is justified by the fact that the students' emotional wellbeing is considered as the most important goal, and even as primary to language learning. The educators mention the students' need to talk about their trauma and emotions in the classroom, and the need for teachers to provide a space for them to do so and to listen to them. The teacher thus assumes the role of the "healer", and it is their duty to create a safe space for the students, and help them deal with trauma, more than it is to teach them a language. The staff mention that learning how to express emotions in school is important and can be beneficial to students of refugee background. The codes for this subtheme are presented in detail in Figure 7.4 below:
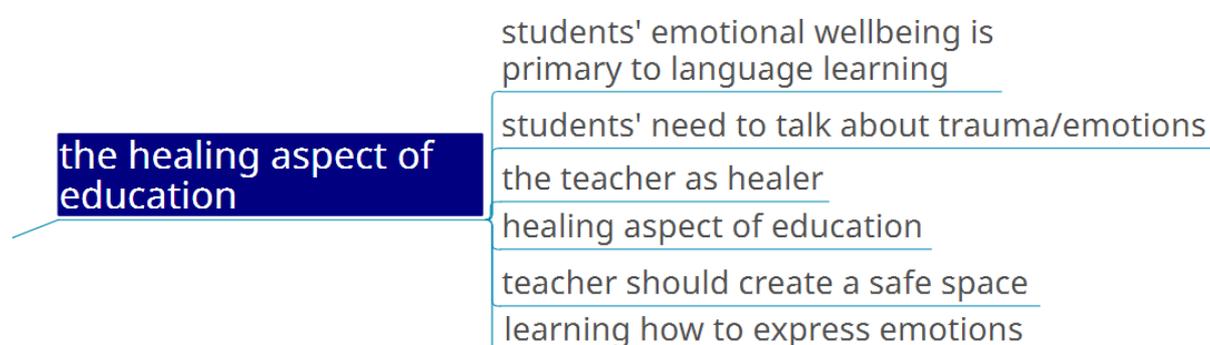
Figure 7.4 Codes for subtheme "The healing aspect of education".

A common idea that the adult participants express in the interviews, is that in the context of forced migration it is of utmost importance to ensure that the students are feeling safe and secure. They argue that the students' emotional wellbeing should be prioritized above all else, and that teachers should not be too preoccupied with following a lesson plan, as they should be with making the students feel comfortable. Myrto mentions that she would advise a new teacher in the forced migration context the following:

> *Myrto: […] to not be too set on getting the material and the lesson right, as much as to get people to see that someone really cares about them. (ll. 120-122)*

Similarly, Gavriil discuss the importance that he gives to ensuring the wellbeing of the students, and to building rapport with them, rather than adhering to a strict lesson plan:

> *Gavriil: Well, my lesson doesn't have too much structure. I don't rely so much on structure as on making them feel comfortable. I'll come in, we'll say hello, I'll ask a couple of things in simple Greek to sort of activate their linguistic sense […], but also to see what they did throughout their week, or since the day I last saw them. (ll. 287-293)*

The reason that both Myrto and Gavriil give for this prioritization of emotional wellbeing above any other goal is the fact that students who have not fulfilled their basic needs, such as accommodation or food, cannot be expected to make education a priority. The conclusion is that, although language learning is quite important, it comes second to tending to one's basic needs and mental and emotional health:

> *Myrto: Well, one thing is that these people don't have their basic needs secured, so it's hard for them to think about the value of education, or the recreational aspect of education. […] Um, so I think most successful centres of refugee education— informal education, function as safe areas, rather than educational centres. That is, we do not expect to cover some material etc., we want people to feel that they have a place where they are welcome, that has a better atmosphere than the hotspot.(ll. 21-27)*

> *Gavriil: A second issue is that they haven't solved their livelihoods. You can't ask a person who has housing issues, health issues and a thousand other issues, to be serious about language learning at the same time. Although it is necessary, but it is not always possible. (ll. 44-46)*

186

As the adult participants stress, tending to the students' emotions and mood is the priority in this context. In fact, they underline the critical role that education can play in helping students overcome their trauma, and they discuss not only the therapeutic role that education can have, but they also introduce the idea of the teacher as "healer". Myrto discusses the ways in which going to school can help students achieve a sense of purpose amidst the agony and boredom of being stranded in an overcrowded refugee camp for months:

> **Myrto:** *((The priority of the teacher should be)) to help them forget their problems. So, we were explaining this to the students, we told them that, even coming here once a day and making a schedule for the day, for example, "Oh, 10 to 11 I have class", is a good start to get out of the emotional swamp you're in, and I think that works. So, to look at it differently. (ll. 124-127)*

As mentioned above, in the greater context of the healing aspect of education, the teacher is also thought to assume a healing role. Gavriil discusses how in his pedagogical role, he felt that a substantial amount of his responsibilities were related to dealing with trauma, rather than language learning:

> **Gavriil:** *[…] when you are a teacher in the refugee sector, fifty percent of it is teaching, the other fifty percent is managing the experiences of these people. (ll. 213-216)*

Gavriil therefore introduces the idea of the teacher as a healer, as a figure whose responsibility it is to provide the students with the necessary conditions that they need in order to overcome their trauma, and to feel safe enough to reengage in educational activities:

> **Gavriil:** *So, the role of the teacher is essentially […] the role of a— we're aiming for "healer[20]", actually, a therapeutic ((role)). Both therapeutic as well as pedagogical. He should make the refugee student feel comfortable in the classroom again. Feel comfortable that he can get back to learning, and not be afraid that bombs will start falling on heads again, that someone will come in one morning and throw him out of school. […] This part, apart from the psychosocial part, it is the teacher's job to help him, even indirectly, to help him overcome it. To create an environment in which the refugee student feels safe. That's the first part and then comes the teaching part. (ll. 471-489)*

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[20] The word "*healer*" is used by Gavriil in English in the original transcript in Greek before translation.

This idea of creating a safe space is mentioned by the adult participants as one of the responsibilities of the teacher, as it is important to the wellbeing of the students. Myrto discusses her efforts to include new students in the classroom, by making them feel welcome and building an atmosphere of belonging:

> *Myrto: In English class I was trying to welcome and give a lot of attention to the person who suddenly entered a class and was a stranger, to explain to him, to be smiley, to make him feel welcome and get him to come back, and I would explain it to the other students as well right away that "We will be open to new people", which usually succeeded. So, they would come back, and slowly, although at first it seemed difficult to them, e.g. they might not understand my accent or something, they would acclimatize and follow along. (ll. 51-56)*

Dora also refers to the importance of safety, remarking that it is especially critical in the case of students with a refugee background:

> *Dora: [...] In this population, I think it's more important for children to feel safety and understanding. (ll. 269-271)*

The healing aspect of education, as well as the necessity for the teacher to act as a healer and create a safe space, is linked to the particular needs of the students. As the adult participants remark, many students feel the need to share and discuss their feelings or their experiences of past or on-going trauma in the classroom, as this offers them relief. Stefanos mentions an example of an activity during which students might bring up traumatic experiences or trouble that they are currently going through due to their situation of displacement. The students feel the need to share how they are feeling, and carry the burdens and trauma that their parents are experiencing, as, for example, in the case of a rejection of their asylum application:

> *Stefanos: Well, a lot of times when the children, when we were working on that theme, they would say "Today me no good" or "Me today sad", "Me today happy", "Me today sad because mama, baba", I don't know, "no good", or something like that. The usual stuff, I mean, they got some rejection— a rejection of their case. (ll. 414-420)*

Katerina also draws attention to the need of her adult students to discuss past traumatic experiences in the classroom, and discusses how urgent and pressing this need to share was for some students, and how the language learning goal came second in these cases.

> *Katerina: I've got a Syrian student who used to be in the Syrian army, the Assad's army, and he's struggling with his application and his decision. He likes to talk about his situation and the circumstances he was in in Syria. The fact that he was in prison, and it becomes very heavy, very quickly. (ll. 286-290)*

Further on, Katerina also highlights the importance of creating the space and time for the students to share their feelings, and draws attention to the radical act of listening, which is the only help that the teacher can sometimes offer in these circumstances:

> *Katerina: But because it's a small group at the moment, I don't shut down those kinds of conversations immediately. I sort of create the room. And for example, if I've got a group of Syrian students who are all kind of bringing up those similar experiences, I listen, let the conversation run for a while. Obviously, it's very hard to start correcting English in those situations. It's more about just letting the people speak. (ll. 307-312)*

Katerina continues with another example, which also demonstrates the acute necessity of some students to vocalize their trauma, and how this covered a major part of classroom conversations. Once more, language learning was proven to be less important to the students than sharing what was troubling them and processing their trauma, to the point where Katerina felt challenged and decided to set some limits:

> *Katerina: ((referring to one of her students)) […] all he wanted to do was to speak about what happened to him and his family in Syria. What's happening to them now, what happened to him in Türkiye. And it's yeah, it's difficult. After that, at the end of that week, I decided to not allow that to happen anymore and to carry on following the curriculum to try and encourage the students to attend so that they knew if they didn't come, they were actually missing out on the curriculum and not just missing out on a one-to-one chat with me. (ll. 324-335)*

Given the major role that emotions play in the forced migration educational context, some adult participants point to how they try to integrate activities around emotions in their lesson. This is, however, mainly undertaken by the social workers, as can be understood from the following extracts. Dora, as a social worker, discusses how she believes that it is vital that students learn how to recognize and express their emotions, and describes the activities that she uses for this purpose:

> *Dora: I talk about emotions a lot. Even if our topic is fruits, it will have to do with whether they are happy when they eat them or not, there will always be an emotion in every subject. There are also projects solely on emotions, during which children are asked to learn vocabulary, how they express emotions, how their face looks when they express a certain emotion. And many of the exercises,*

whether on handouts, or role plays etc, have to do with how I felt at the time that this happened. [...] We notice them ((the feelings)), there is no feeling that is right or wrong, so we don't feel guilty when we feel them, we accept them and from then on we think about how to express them. This is work that is being done all the time ((within her classroom)). (ll. 220-237)

However, when asked about the value of integrating emotions in other lessons as well, Dora states the general absence of this provision in other subjects. She does however, express the belief that acknowledging and expressing emotions on the part of the teacher, can be done in a very simple way and can be beneficial to how students themselves consequently learn to express their own emotions:

> **Dora:** *Well, I'm not sure that it's being done very much. Yeah, it could be done. We should not underestimate it because we're learning addition or because we're learning the alphabet. [...] Even with the simplest thing, the teacher going in and saying "Hello, I'm very happy to see you". To express it at that moment. It may not be a lesson like "Now I'm going to be happy to see you", but just to express it, or that "I'm very tired today, I'm very sad", the children learn. (ll. 249-258)*

Stefanos also acknowledges the importance of students learning about emotions and lists a variety of activities that have been utilized in his school to help build awareness around emotions. However, he also emphasizes the important role that the social worker assumes in this whole endeavour, mentioning that this task was mainly her responsibility:

> **Stefanos:** *Yes, of course. We have generally done extensive projects about emotions, with miming, with frames that we have designed and a child presenting an emotion behind the frame, which expresses their feelings, for example, on that day. [...] We generally integrated them a lot. We also have the social worker of our centre, who was continuing this and she was also practicing it, her work was integrated in the programme and she did the social-emotional part, which is very important. (ll. 412-422)*

It can therefore be concluded that emotions play a critical role in the education of students with refugee backgrounds. The adult participants emphasize the responsibility and the ability of the teachers and of education to create a safe environment and provide support, which will help students in the process of healing from their trauma. Allowing students to express their need to talk about trauma, as well as teaching them how to recognize and manage their emotions are ways in which teachers can assist students.

7.2.4 Subtheme 4: The teacher's emotional involvement/labour

Apart from the teacher's responsibility to assume the role of the healer, the staff discuss about the overall emotional involvement of the teacher in the refugee education context, and about the emotional labour that teachers are sometimes called to perform. The present subtheme is divided in two parts; the first one is named *"responding to the challenges"* and revolves around the emotional responses that teachers and managers have in relation to the traumatic and emotionally challenging situations that they are met with. The second part of this subtheme is titled "fighting against a broken system" and entails the frustration of the adult participants with the way that the refugee issue is treated by the Greek state, as well as their efforts to continue their work in spite of it. The two parts of the subtheme are pictured in Figure 7.5 below:
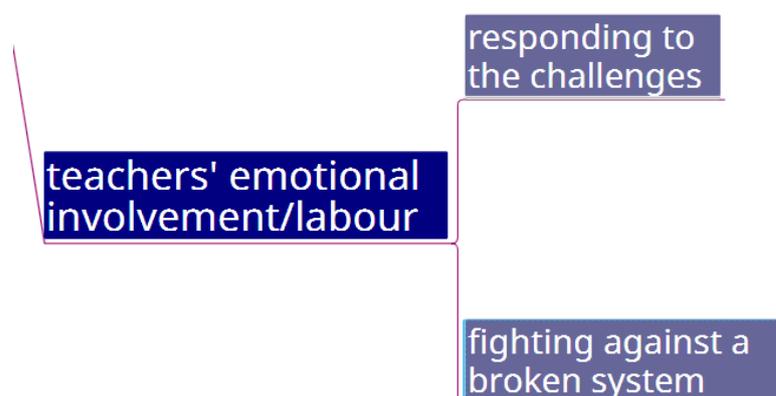
Figure 7.5 Two parts of the subtheme "Teachers' emotional involvement/labour".

The first part of the subtheme, "responding to the challenges", more specifically encapsulates the following codes: firstly, the adult participants discuss the impact that encountering students' trauma and emotionally challenging situations has on them, and the emotional challenge that comes with this. Furthermore, a prominent feeling that is expressed is that of frustration due to the constant changing of populations and the temporariness and instability that characterize work in the refugee education sector. Due to this temporariness, which does not allow for ample contact time with the students,

and which results in the continuous fluctuation of the student population, the adult participants discuss about the importance of teachers exhibiting flexibility and adaptability, so as to survive these circumstances. The individual codes for "responding to the challenges" are pictured in Figure 7.6 below:
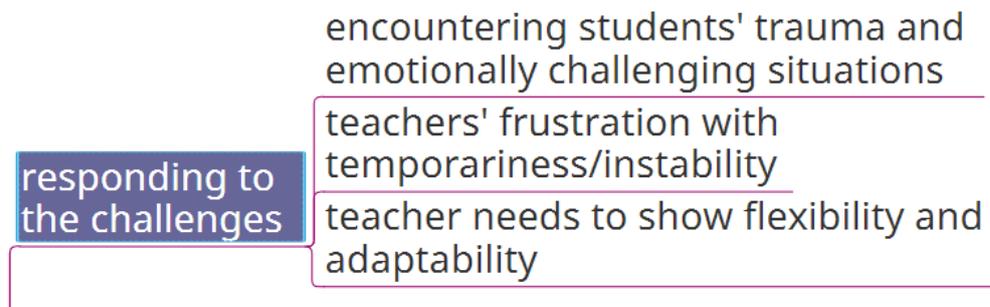
Figure 7.6 Codes for "Responding to the challenges".

To begin with, the adult participants discuss the emotional challenge of coming across instances of the students' past or ongoing traumatic experiences. Whether they witness these experiences directly themselves, or through the students' narrations, the adult participants describe how taxing and emotionally draining this process is for them. Anna discusses the great emotional distress that coming across a student's traumatic story might induce, highlighting her inability to manage this emotional response in the classroom, and the need to conceal it from the students:

> ***Anna:*** *I might, I might, I might cry. That's what I do ((in an almost nervous laughing voice)). My eyes fill up with tears and I don't want the child to see this. It's not easy. (ll. 272-273)*

Melina also describes the brutality of encountering the distressing conditions under which refugee students were living during the height of the so-called "crisis" on Leros. She stresses the difficulty and emotionally challenging nature of working with children who were in dire condition:

> ***Melina:*** *I can remember a very intense period during my work at [SCHOOL NAME], when in 2019 the population at the Leros RIC had increased tremendously, a population that was over 3,000 people, while the capacity was only for 1,000. It was a period during which we saw children who didn't have access to basic things like taking a shower, like clothes, like food. So,*

overcrowding was also an issue that was evident in the classroom, in the teaching space, where you had 20, 25 children in one class—there may have been 5 different languages— therefore, it was more of an hour during which the teacher was trying to maintain composure in the classroom and not so much to teach it. [...] While at the same time there was the psychological pressure that you receive when you see a child who is really ragged, who is dishevelled. (ll. 81-91)

The staff highlight the effect that encountering these traumatic and distressing situations has had on them, and stress their lasting impact on their memory. For example, although my interview question to Gavriil was oriented towards his positive memories from teaching, he feels the need to narrate some negative memories first. This points to the potency of these encounters with trauma, which have a lasting effect on the educators. Gavriil mentions his memories of coming across students' trauma below:

***Gavriil:** [O]ne negative memory I have is that I had a student ask me if I knew where she could find a pawnshop. Because she wanted to sell her earrings, because she had no money to buy food. [...] and another student who had arrived and [...] I will never forget that, although your question was a positive one, we also knew the story of a child who had come from Lesvos [...] But when they arrived at Lesvos they had lost their sister in the sea. Well, neither the social services nor the UNHCR ever believed them that the child was in the sea. They said, "You're just saying that so you can get refugee status". A month later the kid was washed out by the sea, decapitated. [...] A fish had eaten her, as you understand, so we're talking about terrible traumatization, re-traumatization. Well, the kid, 14-15 years old, came to the classes and asked me if I could find somewhere to make the tombstone for his sister [...] to take her to Lesvos [...] This is something I will never forget. (ll. 185-213)*

The grim pictures that are painted in Gavriil's words accentuate the violence of working in a forced displacement setting and of encountering these situations, experiences, and memories. The emotional strain that this creates for the teachers and managers is great, and it shows how emotionally involved they are in this process of teaching students with a refugee background.

Encountering students' traumatic experiences is one factor which causes emotional strain on the teachers and managers. Another factor which is presented as a major challenge is the temporary nature of refugee education. The staff discuss how the perpetual change of the student population and the overall instability of the setting causes them great frustration. Dora discusses how this impermanence destabilizes the

structure of a traditional school year framework and how this can be difficult for a teacher to navigate:

> **Dora:** *[…] what's mostly difficult for me is the movement, that is, a child can be here from one day, up to a maximum of a year or so. The constant change of the group, the class, is one of the elements that I find most difficult. […] If we take into account that in a public school there's a beginning, middle, and an end and there's a time frame of a few months when all the kids will progress to the next school year, the next grade, in this case this is lost so it must somehow be replaced with another teaching pattern […]. (ll. 55-68)*

Similarly, Ismini expresses her discomfort and frustration with this movement and transiency, stating that it also affects the quality of learning that can happen in the classroom. It results to limited contact time with the students and disrupts the progress that has been made, while creating a more challenging multi-level classroom:

> **Ismini:** *One thing that troubles me a lot is the constant change in the population, that the children may have been here for a year, but because we have no free spots in the school, they may only come for two months and then leave. Uh, so you don't have enough time to work with them a lot. And, also, that we are constantly going into classes, in which, you may have made some progress, and as soon as a new child comes along you will have to adapt your teaching a lot in order for this child to participate too, yes, that's what the biggest challenge for me is. (ll. 29-34)*

The lack of time that Ismini mentions is one of the problems created by the temporality of refugee education. Gavriil also points to another issue which arises, namely the fatigue that teachers start to feel when they have to repeat the same material multiple times due to the renewal of student population:

> **Gavriil:** *[…] they have a terrible shortage of staff, especially qualified staff and especially experienced staff. So, therefore, we have an, uh, temporariness, which tires out both the beneficiaries of the programmes and the workers themselves. And of course, for me as a teacher, it was incredibly tiring, that was the biggest wear and tear, coming in to teach the alphabet fifteen times and the basic words and basic communication twenty times. (ll. 103-109)*

Myrto refers to the same issue of temporality and instability and to the teachers' efforts to cater to an ever-changing student population:

> **Myrto:** *[…] in Leros people and children don't know how long they're going to stay, so the teachers, both in [SCHOOL NAME], as you know, and us too, we had to keep adjusting our schedule to new people, to welcome new students, but*

also to maintain the interest of the old, not to reproduce the same things all the time. (ll. 35-38

The ephemeral nature of work in the refugee sector is also highlighted by Pavlos, who offers his perspective as a manager. Pavlos points to the difficulty of managing a school and setting goals when the future is unclear and the employees themselves are on short-term contracts:

> **Pavlos:** *Well, I would say the biggest difficulty is the non-stability of these programmes, uh, that is, when we are always on three-month or six-month timescales, it is difficult to plan, as well as to organize, and to support, and to face cancellations and disappointments, because you have no horizon ahead of you. (ll. 25-28)*

The instability and temporariness that the adult participants are met with leads them to discuss that, in order to survive in this kind of environment, they need to develop and display the qualities of flexibility and adaptability. Melina argues that being rigid and insisting on a specific target can be detrimental, as it can lead to feelings of frustration and disappointment when this target is not being met. Rather, she argues for teachers to display flexibility and to adapt to the students' needs, not just for the benefit of the students, but to protect their own morale as well:

> **Melina:** *Well, it's certainly very important when you start a lesson to have a goal, to have an educational goal. Nevertheless, what I think is important is to not be absorbed by this goal. If you want to teach the letter "A" and ultimately get to a point where [...] you haven't been able to get it across to all the children— that that shouldn't cause you disappointment. You must feel strong even because you are offering this good to the kids and doing so in the best possible way. With love, with patience, with all the things we take for granted, but which are difficult to maintain in a class with so many students and so many stimuli. So, then, being fixated on that goal, I think, takes away your confidence and spoils your mood. (ll. 95-103)*

Myrto also discusses the importance of being able to adapt one's material to the circumstances, claiming that stability is something which cannot exist in the context of refugee education, and therefore trying to follow a fixed curriculum is doomed from the beginning:

> **Myrto:** *[...] you could have made a lesson plan for that particular day and not have the students you were waiting for and you had to change it completely on the spot. You change it on the spot, you find something else and you do, like a*

conversation class or something easier. So, you have to be very flexible and to not expect that all your lessons will go just as you want them to […]. But, yeah, it takes a lot of flexibility, I think, which is why it doesn't actually work— in my opinion you can't have a fixed curriculum no matter how much you try to make it perfect, it will be met with practical difficulties. (ll. 48-60)

Katerina also discusses the ways in which her school attempts to cater to and to consider the instability and uncertainty of the refugee context, by offering students different options and by following a more flexible approach regarding student placement in groups:

> *Katerina: […] we're very flexible in terms of the placement of the student. We don't do placement tests. We use like assessment-for-learning strategies to gage where our students should be after placing them in an initial level. And we also say that students can attend a class above their level, if there is space in that class, to help them be stretched and challenged. And it means that—because we're not so formal in our approach and rigid—it means that, you know, students can stay as long as they like in a level— not as long as they like, because if, if they make progress, we move them on. But for example, there's no pressure to move on if they are not ready, if they have not made the progress sufficient enough. We can just let them repeat the course. (ll. 48-59(*

The flexible approach that Katerina describes is deemed as more appropriate for working with students of refugee background, as it is more oriented towards their needs and takes into account the fluid and changing nature of the context. Teachers and managers alike express their frustration with the impermanence of the context, and highlight the importance of being able to adapt to new circumstances and display flexibility.

The second part of the subtheme, entitled "fighting against a broken system", seeks to describe the frustration and anger that the staff express towards the Greek state, and their efforts to work in what is described as a failing system. The state is presented as indifferent and hostile towards asylum seekers, causing their marginalization from society. At the same time, the staff argue that there is no provision for the integration of these individuals, as they are not welcome in Greek society, and are considered as "temporary", which is why the state does not provide for permanent solutions. Finally, the staff discuss the effect that political decisions have on refugee education, and the difficulty of having to adapt to these. The individual codes are presented in Figure 7.7 below:
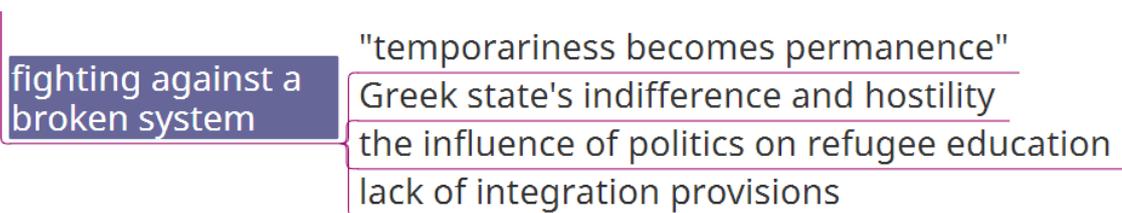
Figure 7.7 Codes for "Fighting against a broken system".

To begin with, the indifference and hostility of the state and of society in general is something which the adult participants comment on. Gavriil shares his experience of receiving indifference from state factors when it comes to providing help to refugees and asylum seekers:

> **Gavriil:** *[…] you have to deal with the suspicion and the […] "couldn't-give-a-damn" attitude of social services, who would rather not serve you and have peace of mind, than get involved in a process that is indeed part of their job but will bring them more work in the office, to put it this way. (ll. 56-59)*

Gavriil continues, explaining how he attributes this to a general hostility of the state towards refugees and migrants, which he claims has been amplified after 2019, which is the year that the right-wing party New Democracy came into power and took over the governance of the country. Gavriil mentions that the state has since then exhibited not only indifference, but also hostility through various means of excluding refugees and migrants:

> **Gavriil:** *Greece, at the moment, its national state policy is hostile to refugees and migrants and this is evident in all levels of education. I mean, not the school unit, we're talking about the central decisions of the Ministry, so to speak. You can tell by the fact that they cut off their social security numbers for many months, and so the children couldn't register for school, and so, they couldn't go to the hospital. So, you see it from a systemic point of view, the opinion of the Greek state. Mostly, after the 2019 elections. Before that, it was more isolated, there was a more friendly attitude from the state. (ll. 90-97)*

Pavlos also refers to the hostile demeanour of the state and of state mechanisms and argues that they also engage in a propaganda against refugees and asylum seekers, contributing to their marginalization in society.

> *Pavlos: Another problem is definitely the difficulty of the local communities to accept anything different. The non-organized attitude and efforts of the state, I mean at the state level to raise awareness and make appropriate campaigns. […] the state, instead of organizing campaigns or efforts to raise the awareness of people on these issues of social exclusion, on the contrary uh, through various statements, even by high-ranking executives, it triggers situations that bring about violence, extreme racist phenomena. That is, when we have racist speech from the people in power, what should we expect from the people of the country? (ll. 42-52)*

As Pavlos argues, stereotypes and hate speech are something which starts at state level, and is consequently reproduced by the citizens, due to lack of awareness. Myrto also refers to the marginalization of students with a refugee background, talking more specifically about the local level. She describes the deliberate exclusion of certain students from education, due to their refugee status:

> *Myrto: I've heard stories here in Leros where the school principals did not want the children to come to school and they were saying that they have more students than they did, in order to exclude some children. (ll. 32-34)*

Apart from the state's indifference and hostility, the staff also mention the state's inability and unwillingness to provide integration measures for refugees and asylum seekers. Pavlos, Gavriil, and Myrto agree that the Greek state is not interested in integrating refugees and asylum seekers. Pavlos mentions this as one of the greatest challenges in working in refugee education:

> *Pavlos: ((One of the challenges is)) definitely the way that the refugee issue is being managed. In terms of where people live, what hopes we give them and what opportunities to integrate. And this is also another problem, that Greece has never, ever worked for integration, whether before, with the miserable refugee camps, or now, with the prison-like centres. In both cases, a different approach, but I can't say that either of them was supportive or inclusive. So, it reproduces marginalization […]. (ll. 56-62)*

Gavriil also claims that integration is also neglected by the state, which is presented as disinterested in working for integration:

> *Gavriil: The state gives no support. […] The state gives no support, they never cared. And they're not interested, Greece has no integration policies and they're not interested in integrating refugees yet. (ll. 84-88)*

Myrto also draws attention to the lack of integration provisions, specifically in education, claiming that the lack of provision for refugees to learn the host language is a sign that the state does not care for them integrate:

> **Myrto:** *Well, let's say now that in Greece there is no coordinated education from the state, they do not oblige them, e.g., to learn Greek as they do in Germany, which I find very wrong. (ll. 27-29)*

The hostility of the Greek state and the lack of interest that it shows towards the integration of refugees and asylum seekers is, according to the adult participants, connected to the reason why this situation of marginalization and living in horrid conditions is perpetuated. Gavriil and Pavlos talk about the lack of incentive of the Greek state to assume action, and of the treatment of the refugee "crisis" as something temporary, which is prolonged indefinitely. Gavriil explains:

> **Gavriil:** *[…] this is how I interpret it. That this temporariness becomes permanence. That is, it is the policy of the state to provide a temporary service, knowing that you will have to do it again and again and again and again and again. That's it, it's a temporariness which has now become a permanent state. (ll. 113-116)*

Gavriil's remark that temporariness becomes permanence is also echoed in Pavlos' words, who also remarks on the deliberate treatment of the refugee issue by the state as something temporary, due to the state's unwillingness to provide help and permanent solutions. He states that another great difficulty is the following:

> **Pavlos:** *[…] the fact that the refugee issue itself was treated from the outset as something temporary that did not allow the creation of more permanent structures […] of course the international organizations that support these efforts are used to working in a state of emergency. Which to some extent is understandable—working in an emergency situation for a while—but when this need seems to be more permanent and stable structures are needed, both at the level of equipment, as well as building infrastructure and staff level etc, […] So the fact that they give us a temporary, solution to work with a permanent problem is, I think, the greatest difficulty. (ll. 30-39)*

It can therefore be said that the adult participants express their anger and frustration at the way that the refugee issue is handled by the Greek state. As Pavlos states, people working in refugee education are given "temporary solutions" to resolve "permanent problems", while the state disregards the issue.

Finally, Melina mentions another factor which causes the frustration of teachers and managers, namely the fact that the constant political decisions taken by the government directly influenced refugee education and the way that the school was supposed to operate. Melina also refers to the period after 2019, when the political scenery in Greece changed, describing the political changes and legislations that were issued as unfavourable towards refugees and asylum seekers, as well as towards those who were working with these groups. She describes the difficulty of having to follow the political developments and adhere to the new regulations, which were not always favourable towards the students:

> *Melina: From the coordinator's position what was very difficult was how delicate the balance was between really standing up for children's rights and their access to education and how your hands were tied by, uh, the political background, the funding body itself, so that's where I faced the biggest internal conflict, so to speak [...] There were also very, very big changes and a huge period of crisis when the government changed. [...] from 2019 onwards, there were many changes in the field of education and in the refugee sector, and this was a major change and a difficulty that needed special attention to be dealt with. [...] Initially we had become followers of the political developments. That is, you have to follow the media to see the new government directives, the developments in the political arena. So, it was something that was going along with the political developments. It was not something separate, because it touched upon both the education and the refugee issues. (ll. 61-76)*

This frustration with the temporality of the situation and the strict measures taken by the Greek state was something which I also recorded in my researcher diary while on Leros. During a period when the lockdown measures were constantly changing, this exacerbated the already transient nature of working in the refugee education context. The following extract also draws attention to the emotional work that was required of myself and my colleagues while working at the school:

> *19th March 2021*
>
> *We are under a strict lockdown, due to some cases of covid19 on the island. The school is operating remotely, and we will be going to school only three days per week, and teaching only one class per day, which means that I'm teaching English only twice per week. This new situation has brought great strain on all of us, and we are all emotionally drained from the continuous lockdowns and the reckless measures that the Greek government is taking, which are not actually stopping the spread of the virus, but are only achieving to limit our freedom, whilst totally ignoring our mental health. The new measures have affected my mood, and oftentimes I've thought that any attempt at normalcy is futile, since things change every so often, and it is impossible to find a stable*

programme. It is much harder to teach online, and the other teachers told me that when this happened in the past not many students joined the lessons, and that their internet connection was unstable, so I know not to expect much.

—Researcher diary excerpt

To sum up, this subtheme revolves around the emotional involvement and labour that teachers and managers invest in their work in the refugee education sector. The adult participants share their experiences encountering traumatic situations, and focus on one prominent factor which causes them frustration, the temporariness and instability of the context. Furthermore, another factor which causes fatigue and stress is the indifference of the Greek state towards the refugee issue, and the staff are trying to struggle against this broken system.

7.2.5   Subtheme 5: Connection

As can be concluded by the above subthemes, trauma and emotional strain are very much present in the refugee education sector and constitute a considerable concern of both teachers and managers. However, another topic which the adult participants also mention, and which seems to arise in spite of trauma, is that of connection. The present subtheme revolves around testimonies of human connection that the adult participants describe, manifesting that these types of meaningful connection do in fact exist, despite the difficult circumstances that the teachers and students are interacting in. Firstly, they talk about the significant role of the relationship between the teacher and the students, and emphasize the importance of trust between the two. Furthermore, they express how much they treasure feeling connected with the students, and they share instances in which this connection is achieved. Taking pride and being happy for their students' progress and achievements is also a form of connection that is mentioned by the staff, and teaching is presented as an act of love and caring. Finally, another way through which connection is manifested is through the appreciation that the students show for their teachers and for education in general. The individual codes for this subtheme are pictured in Figure 7.8 below:
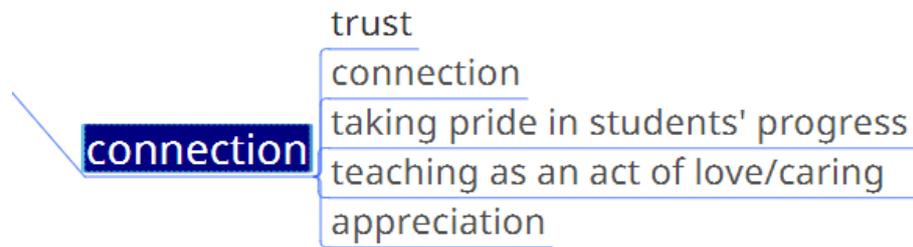
Figure 7.8 Codes for the subtheme of "Connection".

As the adult participants discuss, a form of connection that they feel with the students is that of trust. Eleftheria provides an example of the students asking her for help and relying on her to assist them with their problems, something which she interprets as a signal of trust and of a successful teacher-student relationship:

> **Eleftheria:** *[…] when the little ones, come and ask you "Eleftheria, this", "Eleftheria, I have this problem", "Eleftheria—", I mean, the fact that they trust you is also nice feedback you get from the kids. (ll. 95-97)*

Furthermore, the adult participants describe the relationship between the teacher and student as highly important, and discuss how in order for this to be successful, it needs to be based on trust. Gavriil stresses the criticality of the connection between the teacher and student, portraying the teacher as one of the most influential characters in the student's life:

> **Gavriil:** *The teacher is the figure that the refugee student trusts most after his parents. This is the greatest bond that the refugee will have, it will be with the teacher, it will not be with the UNHCR lawyer, nor will it be with the social worker. He'll be with him more hours than with his parents. (ll. 462-465)*

On the other hand, Myrto also mentions that due to the disappointment that some students have received from certain NGOs, they have lost their trust in people who work in these, so the effort of regaining their trust as teachers is not always easy. However, once this is accomplished and the trust between teachers and students is developed, then this has positive outcomes on the students' achievement:

> **Myrto:** *I think because they come in contact with several NGOs and some do a very good job, some not, at first, they're a little… they don't easily believe that you're doing some good work, uh, but if they see that you're doing a good job*

and it depends on the person that we're talking about, they hit the ground running. (ll. 95-98)

Furthermore, the staff mention more particular instances during which they feel that connection with the students is achieved. When asked to relate positive memories or experiences that have stayed with them, most adult participants refer to instances of connection, whether within or outside of the classroom:

> ***Eleftheria:*** *In general, when you explain to them how to do a trick, they tell you this, all together, "Do this", "Aah" ((smiling)) and you get them to understand what you want—this is a beautiful moment (ll. 92-95)*

Eleftheria continues:

> ***Eleftheria:*** *[…]. Uh, or when I see them outside and they greet me, it's very beautiful. This connection, that is, with the children. This is what mostly stays with me. (ll. 97-100)*

Eleftheria describes a moment of connection when performing magical tricks in class, as well as when her students greet her outside the classroom. Similarly, Katerina and Myrto also discuss instances during which they felt connected with their students due to the effect that their teaching had on them. Katerina shares an example of the students and her bonding over a song that they used in class, and of how this shared experience was so powerful that it was transported outside of the classroom as well:

> ***Katerina:*** *[…] I remember last year after banging my head against the wall, trying to teach them the time both in analogue and digital, which people just could not get. […] we'd all had enough of doing the time. And I used the song "Rock Around the Clock", you know, "One two three o'clock, five o'clock, rock" with gaps, […] and they absolutely loved the song and people would just sing it to me whenever I saw them on the street. My students sent me a little video of them sat on the beach by the sea and listening to this song and clicking their fingers and doing their homework. So, little things like that where something sticks with them and they really enjoy it, and then they use it to sort of like, reaffirm their relationship with you as their teacher, because you've got this shared little joke. (ll. 157-170)*

Myrto relates a similar experience of connection with the students, which shows the impact of a song that she used in class. The songs that both Katerina and Myrto mention function as linking devices between teachers and students, which allow both parties to build a sense of connection and shared knowledge, while also maintaining this connection outside of the classroom as well:

Myrto: So, I'm going to tell you that one time I was teaching the ABC and I taught them the alphabet song and I said, OK maybe I'm teasing these people who are grown up people, adults, etc. And then the volunteers told me they were singing it on the bus while they were going back. (ll. 155-157)

Katerina shares her thoughts on this, highlighting the significance and value of connection in the classroom, which according to her is one of the reasons for becoming a teacher:

Katerina: […] I think a lot of us become teachers because we really appreciate and value human connection and human flourishing, helping people to be the best that they can be and to access the services that they deserve to be able to access. So, you know, when you have a moment where everybody's laughing in the classroom, those kinds of moments are really magical. (ll. 183-189)

Apart from the connection between teacher and student, the educators and managers also draw attention to the importance of the students being connected with the wider social environment of the host community. Ismini and Melina mention the criticality of helping the students come into contact and feel connected with the local population, whether on school trips or joint events. Ismini discusses the sense of joy that she feels when students socialize in the local environment:

Ismini: The truth is that what makes me happy is when I see that the children are having a good time. In other words, it can also be outside teaching hours. When we've gone on an excursion, let's say or, the other day, say, we had taken to the kids to shop at a grocery store. I liked it, seeing them participate, wanting to tell the shopkeeper, what they want. Then we gathered and sat down and ate the food. So, it mostly makes me happy when I see that the children are socializing. (ll. 246-254)

Melina also stresses the significance of the students being exposed to the local population and vice versa through joint activities, mentioning the value and joy these brought to both the teachers and managers, as well as to the students and how this can build a strong basis for integration:

Melina: I think that the most important activities that were organised through [SCHOOL1] was the actual playtime with children from the local community. These were actions that achieved a wealth of objectives. So, for the child to actually play, to enjoy, to interact, to feel warmth from the local population. I think that all the actions that will be unforgettable for me and I think they will be unforgettable for the children too, are the actions that involve playing with children from the local community. So, they really were steps into the future.

The children were receiving so many stimuli that, you could see that it was changing their mood. (ll. 125-131)

It can therefore be said that connection, whether between teachers and students or students and the local community is described as bringing about feelings of joy and as having positive outcomes for the students' integration in the local society.

Furthermore, the staff also mention the feeling of taking pride and rejoicing in their students' progress, something which points to the relationship that exists between teachers and students, and to the fact that the teachers are emotionally connected with the students and care about them. Eleftheria discusses this feeling of pride and satisfaction that comes with a student's academic or emotional progress and maturation:

> *Eleftheria: […] what I generally take away from this job is really this feeling of satisfaction that we feel when we see the children progress, when we see the children achieve things, whether it's their smile that they give us in return, or it can be a greeting outside ((of school)), when they see us, either the fact that we see children slowly growing up through school, learning new things or changing their behaviour, which is a big issue as well, so, to see a child become calmer along the way, to be able to accept certain situations. (ll. 297-303)*

Gavriil also talks about the fulfilling effect of seeing his students make progress, despite the difficulties, mentioning this as one of the positive memories that have stayed with him from his experience:

> *Gavriil: […] I'll always remember my students, that they started in September and they didn't speak any ((Greek)) and by May they could have a basic communication, they could count—very important to be able to count—to be able to ask "How much is this?", "How much is that?", […] from the point where I was communicating with signs, to always, at the end of the year, get to the point where I could talk and give instructions to the class, and you could see that they could understand. This is a big step, and it was fulfilling. (ll. 178-185)*

This progress that students display is also linked to resilience, which was mentioned earlier. Witnessing the students' educational journeys and their progress and resilience is one of the most touching memories that the educators narrate, and it is a moment of connection and admiration for the students and how far they have come. Katerina describes a similar account of a student's progress and the feelings this caused her below:

> *Katerina: […] one of my students last year was 25. He was a builder from Palestine, and he'd obviously had quite a negative relationship with education,*

he used to tell me through Google Translate how he used to skip school all the time. Rest of his family members were very successful and had quite academic careers. And it was just lovely to see his sort of journey with English. And I remember, I think in my last week, in December after him being really reluctant to read or to do anything—basically quite often I would catch him watching football on his phone under the table, he would behave like a 15 year old—um, he read out a paragraph, and I actually didn't believe that he could read at that point, and he pulled out this paragraph really beautifully. (ll. 172-181)

The fulfilment and pride that teachers feel for their students' progress is also linked to the idea that teaching is a vocation of love. The educators and managers express their view that teaching in the refugee context is an act of love and caring, as the teacher is connected to the students in an emotional way and care about their whole person and not just their academic progress. Gavriil talks about the wider responsibility that a teacher feels towards the students, especially when they are experiencing difficulties, highlighting the caring nature of the role:

> **Gavriil:** *[…] when you're a teacher, well, you can't just see your student for the two hours that he comes to class, but you have to think about his life outside class as well. (ll. 662-663)*

Anna also mentions the love and care that the teachers dedicate to their work, explaining how this is something which keeps her motivated in difficult times. The work of the teacher is described as a vocation, as something which has a sacred purpose, that of providing love and care to the students, and Anna advises teachers the following:

> **Anna:** *[…] To love what they do and the children they're doing it for and to not forget what they're here for. This is very important for me because even after four years, even though I'm tired, I do not forget why I am here and why I am teaching these children. (ll. 66-71)*

Similarly, Myrto relates an example of a field trip with the students, likening the teacher-student relationship to that between a parent and child. Myrto emphasized the caring and nurturing aspect of the teacher's role, pointing to the warm environment that this creates for the students:

> **Myrto:** *All the times— it's at least 6-7 times that we went to exams together and I accompanied them like they were kids and they saw it as a field trip, actually, because it was something beyond the hotspot and so on, it was something*

completely different, we were all taking pictures together, we brought them
snacks. It was a little excursion, during which we had a great time. (ll. 159-162)

However, this love/care relationship is not one-sided. The staff discuss how the students are also grateful for the effort of the teachers and of education in general, and how they show great appreciation, mainly due to the fact that they may have been deprived of these types of connections and opportunities due to displacement. Myrto describes the trust and appreciation that students of a refugee background show, and the great esteem which they hold for their teachers:

> ***Myrto:*** *[…] refugees will spoil you as students, because they have too much*
> *appetite for learning and they hang on your lips, as opposed to, say, young*
> *children who are forced to come to language schools by their parents and who*
> *don't appreciate your effort so much. Refugees will spoil you. (ll. 127-130)*

7.2.6   Conclusion

This project's second theme of "Trauma as present, but not defining" is one that highly preoccupies the adult participants. They mention their fear of triggering the students' negative memories and trauma and feel inadequately trained to broach the topic of emotions. Furthermore, even though they acknowledge the existence of trauma, most argue for viewing students through a resilience lens. This is also connected to the notion which is expressed that education should help students heal from trauma; therefore, the students' emotional wellbeing is prioritized against language learning, and the teacher is described as assuming the role of a healer. In addition to this role, the teachers talk about the emotional involvement and labour that they invest, as they respond to emotionally challenging situations and the fluidity of the context, while at the same time facing the challenges that the political scenery creates. Finally, despite the adversity of the context, the staff also describe ways through which they experience connection with the students.

7.3 Culture/Language as Barriers

The third major theme revolves around the notions that are expressed by the adult participants in terms of the role that culture and language play in the classroom. It comprises of the following three subthemes:

- Culture and language as dividing barriers
- Cultural conflict
- School and learning culture(s)

Firstly, I present the idea of "culture and language as dividing barriers", which hinder communication between teachers and students, and, secondly, the notion of "cultural conflict", which according to the adult participants is present between the students. Finally, I discuss the idea that the students need to adapt to the present "school and learning culture(s)". The subthemes and codes for "Culture/language as barriers" are pictured in Figure 7.9 below:

Figure 7.9 Subthemes and codes for "Culture/Language as barriers".

209

7.3.1 Subtheme 1: Culture and language as dividing barriers

This subtheme refers to the attitudes of the adult participants towards interculturality, multilingualism and mixed levels in the classroom. The sentiment that is described by them is that this variety in student background, in terms of language, culture, or prior education, poses a challenge for the teachers. Language is described as a barrier, and the staff express that they experience difficulty in communicating with the students effectively. Furthermore, the students' linguistic background is seen through a deficit lens, as it is perceived to obstruct them in learning a second language, like English or Greek. The variation in student levels and prior knowledge is also presented as a challenge which teachers in refugee education are called to manage. The codes of this subtheme are presented in Figure 7.10 below:
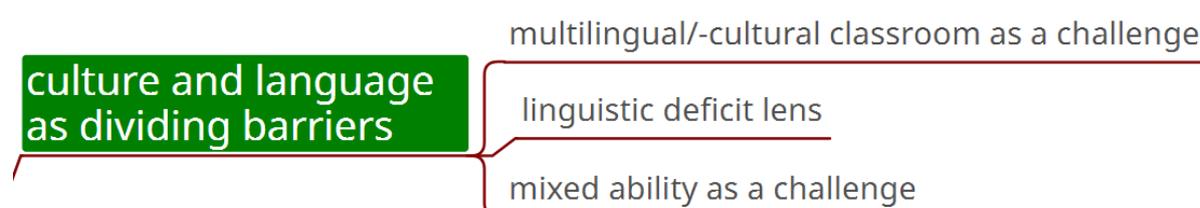
Figure 7.10 Codes for subtheme "Culture and language as dividing barriers".

Firstly, the adult participants comment on the challenge of navigating a classroom which comprises of students from multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Dora mentions interculturality as one of the biggest challenges that she has faced when working with students of refugee background. The difference between the countries of origin and cultural backgrounds of the students is emphasized in her words:

> **Dora:** *[…] ((talking about the biggest difficulty)) it's definitely the intercultural aspect, it's definitely that in a classroom there can be kids from different countries carrying different cultures […]. (ll. 52-53)*

Gavriil also draws attention to how interculturality may present some difficulty for teachers, especially due to lack of training to work in an intercultural classroom. He

argues that the problem is more systemic, stemming from the inability of higher education to adequately prepare prospective teachers to work in intercultural contexts. Gavriil highlights the personal effort that teachers need to invest in order to cope with interculturality in the classroom:

> **Gavriil:** *[…] The majority of teachers in Greece at the moment, let's say, have no idea about intercultural education. And if they did, it would be because of attending some seminars, it wasn't in the curriculum of the universities back then. So, it's very difficult to suddenly find yourself in an environment and have to apply principles that in Greek universities, the literature is about twenty years behind. […] So that's an issue, so it takes a lot of personal work, a lot of personal work […]. (ll. 437-446)*

In addition to culture, language is also mentioned as one of the obstacles to achieving communication with the students. The teachers find multilingualism to be a challenge, not only between them and the students, but also between different groups of students as well. Eleftheria refers to language as one of the main difficulties of teaching students with refugee backgrounds, and language as seen as a barrier, rather than a way to communicate and reach understanding:

> **Eleftheria:** *The beginning was kind of difficult, right, until I could adjust, until I could see how these various barriers to communication with children can be overcome, because of, especially the language barrier. (ll. 18-20)*

Ismini also brings up the issue of language when it comes to students communicating with each other. In this case too, not speaking the same language functions as a hindrance, which keeps students from working with each other. Multilingualism in the classroom is presented as an impediment, which complicates the teaching and learning process for teachers and students:

> **Ismini:** *[…] that also involves the difficulty, when you ask them to work together, that they don't communicate easily with each other. Usually there is an outcome. Just sometimes one person may end up doing everything. I mean, the person who does not speak the language of the majority population may be left a little behind. (ll. 90-93)*

Similarly, Stefanos discusses the challenges that teaching a multilingual classroom might entail. He argues that despite it being a difficulty, teachers can learn to manage the diversity of languages spoken in the classroom:

211

Stefanos: Yes, it is ((a difficulty)). And in general, when you have a class in which you may have five different languages, it is. For example, you may have Lingala, others may speak French, another one may only be able to speak but not write. We ((meaning the teachers)) might speak Greek, English and, I don't know what else. […] if I have five desks, which are all ((speaking)) different languages, I have to deliver the lesson in a common way, with a common goal, so that when I have students with that background again, I can do it just as well, so that I can have a greater effect on my students, right. […] In general, multilingualism is difficult in the classroom, but it is manageable. It comes with experience, for better or worse, and with the limits you set in your class. (ll. 268-284)

It can therefore be understood that the intercultural and multilingual character of a school for students with refugee background is considered as a challenging environment by the adult participants. Moreover, it is not only the existence of many languages in a classroom that is considered as a difficulty. The staff discuss how the mixed ability and the variations in prior education and knowledge of the student population present a challenge for them as well. Anna talks about the difficulty of catering to different needs and student levels, and of the pressure to engage beginners, as well as more advanced students in the same teaching hour:

Anna: For me it's definitely that—because I teach English—it's that the children have different levels, and in a classroom—now we have up to 10 children, but before the quarantine we had 20 children in a classroom, and all 20 have different levels. So, it's difficult to find an activity that will interest both a student who has never been to school and doesn't even know the letters and another who can read. (ll. 27-33)

Dora also draws attention to the variety of levels that can exist in the classroom and to the fact that there is this challenge of being able to maintain the interest of students who have different educational levels. Dora suggests that peer teaching is a strategy that helps manage this mixed ability in the classroom, allowing students to cooperate and learn from each other:

Dora: Well, I think that all of us who work here use it ((peer teaching)), because we also notice differences in the levels of the students' learning, so someone who's a little better, uh, so as to not get bored, so as to understand that he has mastered what he already knows while the other kids are having a hard time, uh, in his own way he transmits it to his classmates, which works quite well both for him and for the rest of the children. […] it is a technique that is useful, especially in this school where there are many levels in one classroom, but it

also helps the children themselves learn better. Taking on roles in the classroom. The teacher shouldn't be the only leader, they should cooperate. (ll. 99-110)

Stefanos also touches upon the issue of mixed ability in the classroom, drawing attention to the fact that it is necessary to have awareness of this variation in the students' educational background, and to set clear goals in order to provide the students with a lesson that will cater to their needs:

Stefanos: *Generally speaking, ((setting)) goals, because sometimes we can teach the cognitive part and think that the word "good morning" is easy and self-evident, and a child who comes from Syria may be 16 years old and illiterate in his language. We have such students, who are 15-16 years old, who don't know how to write in their own language. (ll. 221-226)*

Furthermore, Stefanos, as an English teacher, describes the variation in students' prior knowledge of English, which he argues is dependent on the education that they have received in their home countries and the wider socioeconomic and linguistic background of these countries:

Stefanos: *[…] there are children who have some knowledge of English. […] They've seen five or six signs before they go from Afghanistan and Syria to Türkiye, English signs, on their way to Greece. A "welcome" sign, they've seen it. However, I have noticed that there are batches and batches, so to say, of children. That is, there are some children who understand English much more easily because they have a little or a lot of background in the language. Let's say, the children who come from Kuwait, which used to be a very, very rich country, right. Likewise, Syria was very, very well off, they were countries that were once very well off economically […] as well as countries from Africa. There were children from Congo and Somalia, who had a very good command of English, who spoke Lingala and French, and they basically knew the Anglo-Saxon script. It was easier for them to write from left to right, than for the students from the eastern countries, who found it more difficult to understand both English and Greek respectively. (ll. 171-194)*

In addition to describing the challenge of teaching a classroom in which the students have different prior knowledge of the language and different educational backgrounds, Stefanos also hints at the influence that the students' home language can have on their learning of a second language. This is a notion that is mentioned by other adult participants, as well, who describe the students' linguistic background as a barrier, an aspect which makes language learning more difficult for them. In this way, the staff

focus mostly on the students' linguistic background as a deficit. Ismini, for example, mentions the students' inadequate education in their own home language as a hindrance to them learning a second language. She too talks about a barrier in communication with the children:

> *Ismini: OK, definitely it is a big challenge for children to learn a foreign language while they can't even communicate well in their first language. Uh, what helps a lot is gestures, images. Sometimes interpretation, but not always. So, basically, there is this difficulty in communication. (ll. 46-50)*

Likewise, Stefanos discusses the difficulty that students face in learning Greek or English, arguing that their knowledge of their home language interferes and makes it more difficult for them to learn a left-to-right script language. The difficulty that the students face is strongly emphasized, and the students are described mostly through a deficit-based approach, describing what they cannot do, rather than an asset-based one:

> *Stefanos: […] it's very, very difficult for them to understand, especially children who have capability essentially, when they're used to writing from right to left and we present them with a completely different writing system, it's very, very difficult for them to absorb this. And it happens, it's more difficult for students who are teenagers than it is for children who are younger, because they don't have a lot of knowledge of their mother tongue, so it's a little easier, a little smoother for them. (ll. 134-146)*

This linguistic deficit approach is also evident in Anna's description of the difficulties that the students face with language. The students are described as confused, unable to grasp the new information and languages that they are encountering. The notion that is expressed is that the students are the ones who need to adjust to the new environment, and again emphasis is placed on their deficit, on the skills and knowledge that they do not possess:

> *Anna: The young children don't focus, because they don't understand the language, they don't understand English or Greek. And for these kids it's just some sounds that are bursting out and they can't communicate. And it's difficult. By the time they understand what they have to do, it takes a long time, and these kids are not used to our schedule and some of them have never been to school, and they need a lot of adjustment. Some others have been, but over there the schools are different, so they're very confused. (ll. 42-49)*

It can therefore be summarized that culture and language are seen by the adult participants more as dividing rather than uniting elements in the classroom. This variety

in student background poses a challenge for the educators, and calls for certain teaching approaches in order to be navigated. Furthermore, language is viewed mostly as a barrier, and the linguistic deficit of the students is emphasized.

At this point, I felt it was relevant to relate an instance from my researcher diary, which discusses an attempt to move away from the deficit lens which is discussed in this section and to emphasize the linguistic and cultural capital of the students. To this end, I decided to use the "Plurilingual Portrait" activity, as outlined by the Council of Europe's "Language Support for Adult Refugees Toolkit" (Council of Europe, n.d.). As described by Kusters and De Meulder (2019), plurilingual portraits are "empty whole-body silhouettes in or around which research participants color or draw languages, language variants or other aspects or modalities of communication" (section 1.). The students are then asked to fill in these silhouettes to portray their linguistic repertoire, choosing different colours for the different languages that they either speak or have some type of competence in. The linguistic repertoire has been described as "a tool that encourages participants to engage in a metapragmatic reflection on their communicative practices and resources" (Busch, 2021, p. 201), enabling them to gain a better understanding of the linguistic capital that they possess. It has therefore been proposed as a valuable tool in work with refugee students (Council of Europe, n.d.), as it can be a helpful tool for students to explore their rich linguistic repertoire and strengthen their sense of self-worth. This was also my rationale for including the plurilingual activity in some of my lessons with the students, as I wished to offer the students a space where they could explore their linguistic capital, thus moving away from the deficit lens through which refugee students are often viewed.

I describe below my attempt to use the "Plurilingual Portrait"[21] activity (see two examples of completed portraits by two of the students in Figure 7.11 below) and the positive effect that it had on the students' self-esteem:

> *I thought it would be interesting to make use of the students' multilingual profiles and make them aware of how rich their linguistic repertoire is. I first demonstrated the plurilingual profile activity with them, and before I could explain that they would now have the chance to do the same, they were eager to share with me how many languages they speak. They were then amazed at counting how many languages they speak; I explained that even if they just knew a word or a phrase in a language they could put it down (this meant that one*

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[21] For more information please see: https://rm.coe.int/tool-38-plurilingual-portrait-a-reflective-task-for-refugees-language-/16807171bc

student, having lived in many countries and knowing more than one dialects of Arabic, ended up counting that he can speak 8 languages in total! And he seemed really proud of himself!). What also amazed me was that the students put down each other's languages as well (two speak Dari and two speak Sorani), since, in the few weeks they are in school, they have already taught each other words from their home languages enough that they can say that they speak these languages. This step for me is a big one, since in order to be willing to learn a language, it means that you respect it as valuable, and that is what teaching about diversity is all about.

—*Researcher diary excerpt*

Figure 7.11 Two of the students' completed "Plurilingual Portraits". The names of the students have been blurred for anonymity reasons (personal archive, September 2021).

As highlighted above, the use of the plurilingual portrait activity with my students was of great value, as it functioned as a reflective tool which allowed them to focus on their own linguistic capital and strengths. Furthermore, it fortified the relationships between the students in the particular classroom, as it led them to share their respect for each other's languages by including these in their linguistic repertoires. Moreover, in terms of my own practice, reflecting on these points helped me better understand the value of

including the students' home languages in the classroom, as well as of activities that help students become aware of their own capital of cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Finally, the above reflection suggests that drawing on the students' linguistic and cultural repertoires can help focus on resilience and can improve their self-esteem. However, as the quotes discussed in this section demonstrate, the difficulty and complexity of the context might lead teachers to interpret this as a linguistic and cultural deficit on the side of the students.

7.3.2   Subtheme 2: Cultural conflict

This subtheme refers to how culture was viewed as a dividing element when cultural conflict occurred between students. Adult participants discuss that they have witnessed instances during which cultural differences and disputes take place between students. They also talk about how they are trying to solve these disputes through groupwork and various joint activities, which are used in the classroom as tools to enhance intercultural understanding between the students. Moreover, the adult participants describe the existence of multiple layers of oppression in the classroom, as discrimination exists even among the students themselves, depending on their cultural background. The specific codes of this subtheme are presented in Figure 7.12 below:
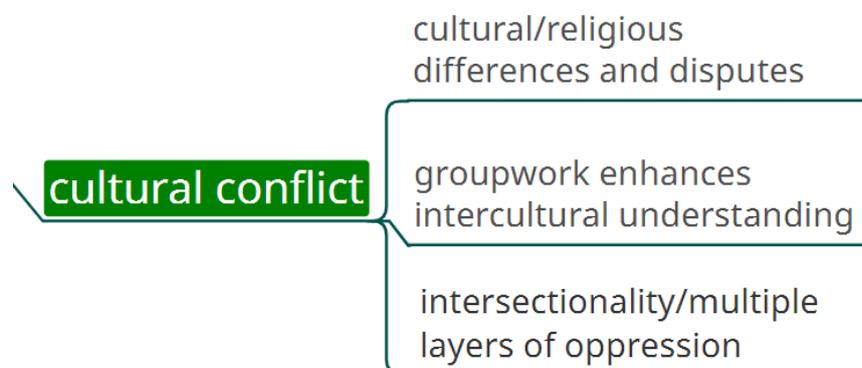

Figure 7.12 Codes for subtheme "Cultural conflict".

To begin with, the staff mention instances of hostility between groups of students from different countries of origin. Stefanos attributes this to their religious beliefs and their tendency to socialize within their own ethnic/cultural group. He describes the students

as unwilling to work with each other, and language, together with ethnicity and culture create distinctive borders between them:

> **Stefanos:** *It was very, very difficult because the children, when they come from Eastern countries, as we know they are very different in the religion part. They're much more introverted kids, they interact more with people who are from the same countries […] only from an Eastern background. In the beginning, I had children who didn't talk to— let's say the Arabic speakers with the Farsi speakers. […] Let's say, "We are Arabs" and "We are Afghans", "We can't hang out, no, we don't match, we don't, we don't, we don't, we don't". (ll. 39-49)*

Anna describes a similar occurrence that took place in her classroom, when students from different cultural backgrounds were asked to work together for an activity. Again, culture, as well as language are presented as the main barriers in allowing students to interact and cooperate with each other:

> **Anna:** *Uh, and I wanted us to create a comic together, create a story and draw it. There was a great, great difficulty, because on the one hand, well, the children didn't want to cooperate with each other. They told me ((it was)) because of the language, because the three children spoke Farsi and the other three spoke Arabic. And there was a complaint, because "I can't understand— I don't understand Arabic." And I said, "You don't need to understand Arabic, they will speak English." (ll. 203-212)*

Eleftheria also refers to this type of conflict between the students, attributing it to a larger scale conflict that happens at national level, which the students then reproduce at school. The role of the family in perpetuating prejudice against other ethnicities is again highlighted, and Eleftheria stresses the conflict the hostility between certain groups of students:

> **Eleftheria:** *[…] there may be various reasons for this ((cultural conflict)), it could be the sense, the impression they have about other ethnicities, in general, the kids themselves or the elder ones, right, parents and so on. It could be some cultural conflict or national conflict. So, some countries, let's say, don't get along so well, to put it in this way, with other countries and respectively, the people of these countries have a confrontation between them. (ll. 310-315)*

Finally, Gavriil also hints at this cultural clash, mentioning the fact that certain groups of students cannot be asked to work together, because of the conflict that exists between their wider cultural and ethnic backgrounds:

> *Gavriil: Teamwork [22]works when you have people who are—I won't say culturally ((compatible))— when you have people who can somehow get along. So, in some tasks [23]you can use it. (ll. 498-499)*

However, some adult participants do mention that in order to help the students develop intercultural awareness and to learn to work together, using groupwork and joint activities helps. Stefanos argues that even though these practices do help, the process is long and difficult:

> *Stefanos: But OK, through practices and participatory processes and group work, in, mixed groups with basically different countries and different peoples together—and effort, of course, because you don't achieve it overnight—well, we got an outcome. (ll. 58-60)*

Similarly, Dora also discusses the value of using activities that allow students to get to know each other and to become exposed to each other's backgrounds. However, Dora's words also point to another notion that is expressed by the adult participants, that of intersectionality. Namely, she discusses how this cultural conflict that was mentioned earlier is quite complex, as prejudice and discrimination do not exist only between the local population and the refugee population. Rather, there is conflict between different groups of students as well, and there are multiple layers of oppression which are evident in the classroom. Dora stresses the importance of raising the students' awareness towards different cultures that they may be prejudiced against:

> *Dora: Then usually, in order for the kids in class to get to know each other better—which is definitely important that they know all of each other's names, now they are from different countries so this helps a lot—to realize that in here we're boys, girls, we're from another country, from another culture, maybe we speak another language, and they accept all that diversity, because it's not just us who are Greeks and the Syrians and the Palestinians have come to our country, it's also that I have a Palestinian and African and Somali classmate and from so on and so forth, so this is good for them to hear since they are experiencing it. (ll. 169-175)*

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[22] The word "teamwork" is used in English by Gavriil in the original transcript in Greek.

[23] The word "tasks" is used in English by Gavriil in the original transcript in Greek.

As Dora mentions, this multi-layered oppression can take place between, for example, students from the Middle East and students from North Africa (e.g. Somalia). Anna also brings up the same example, referring to certain prejudices that exist in the classroom:

> *Anna: There are problems about that too, boys and girls. Who is from Syria, who is from Palestine, they don't like Somalis. (ll. 301-302)*

Stefanos reaffirms the above, pointing once again to the intersectionality of oppression. He makes the observation that, even though some students have been oppressed and discriminated against, they themselves become oppressors towards other students of different cultural background:

> *Stefanos: So, between them they basically had, in quotation marks, […] a racist background, even though they have also faced it […] and it has hurt them during their journey, they themselves did it unwittingly, I suppose. (ll. 51-56)*

The issue of intersectionality of oppression was also something that I noticed throughout my work at the school. In the researcher diary extract below I describe an instance of this issue manifesting one day at school, in which the topic of race and skin-color came up:

> *Today I was sitting at the teachers' desk at school. On that desk there is a calendar with photos of various children-refugees and there was a page with a black student in a classroom. One of my students, Rekan, was running around the school and at some point he came to me and pointing at the student on the calendar said to me: "Look, teacher, black!". His English is at a beginner level, but even with these three words he managed to communicate his message perfectly. He saw the student who had dark skin and this probably shocked or amused him as he might not have seen someone with darker skin before. He also said it in a sort of cheeky, slightly mocking way, which means that his perceptions around darker skin and people of colour had been influenced from what he had heard around him and were stereotypical. This incident also brought to my mind some comments and memories that the teachers had told me about previously about some racist incidents at school. They mentioned how often students from countries like Syria, Palestine, etc. would make fun of students from Somalia, and how the word "Somali" was used as a racial slur, in order to demeane someone. I distinctly remember one instance from my own teaching last year as a volunteer, during which one student of Arab background called a student from Somalia, "Somali" instead of using his name, and how this had degrading overtones. The incident with Rekan caught me off guard; on the one hand I thought that as a kid, he was probably making a comment at something that struck him, like he encountered something new and different for*

the first time, and came to me, his teacher, to show me his discovery, with an inquisitive tone, as if to ask me for an answer. "Yes", I replied to Rekan, acknowledging what he had told me, but not acting like it was something unusual, or weird, or giving any way for mocking comments to follow. In my head I was already planning an activity for the next lesson, on skin colour and diversity.

—*Researcher diary excerpt*

It can therefore be concluded that cultural conflict is something which the adult participants highlight as a major issue, which hinders the smooth coexistence and interaction of the students. Although the students have themselves experienced oppression and discrimination due to their refugee status before, oppression is multi-layered and exists between the students as well. The staff argue for the development of the students' intercultural awareness through activities and groupwork.

7.3.3 Subtheme 3: School/learning culture(s)

The third subtheme refers to the notions regarding school culture(s) expressed by adult participants. More specifically, the adult participants express the idea that there is a school and learning culture barrier that the students are facing in their current educational environment. They attribute this difficulty of the students to integrate to the fact that the educational system and the school culture and methods of learning in the countries of origin of the students is different. According to the staff, education in MENA countries is more traditional and teacher-centred than it is in Greece. Due to this, they emphasize that students need time to adjust to the new school and learning culture and it is important for teachers to choose culturally responsive methodology. The codes of this subtheme are pictured in Figure 7.13 below:
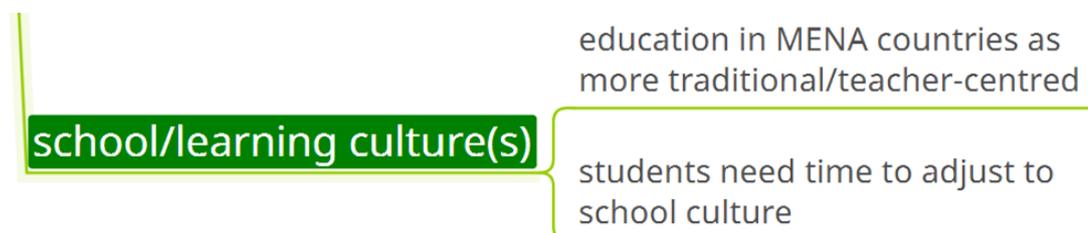

Figure 7.13 Codes for subtheme "School/learning culture(s)".

One of the ideas that the adult participants express is that the students are used to different learning cultures, and that schooling in MENA countries is unlike that in Greece. Myrto describes the educational system in MENA countries as more traditional, claiming that students are easily amused with activities that Greek students would consider mundane, as a result of only having experienced a strict teaching methodology in their countries:

> *Myrto: Well, I noticed that the simplest activities that a teacher would teach you in a school or a language school, which seemed boring to you, to them, were very, very nice, because they have another educational method in their own countries, it's more conservative, I mean, let's say, […] I have a board game which had numbers in the boxes and […] it had questions inside and we'd roll the dice, and you'd land on a question and you choose who to ask the question to. A very, very simple activity that they went crazy about. (ll. 213-218)*

On a similar note, Anna discusses the method of groupwork, claiming that it is difficult for it to be used with students coming from MENA countries, as it is a way of learning that they have not used in the past and are not familiar with it:

> *Anna: I actually don't use group work that much, because it's not certain if the kids can understand what the goal is […] that's why I need, let's say, an interpreter to explain it to them, because they can get lost. And they haven't learned how to work as a team and they can't understand why it's important. It takes time, a lot of time to explain it to them so they can understand and do it. (ll. 174-181)*

Katerina also shares her thoughts on using groupwork in the classroom, echoing Myrto's opinion that the educational system of MENA countries is more teacher-centred and traditional, and that the students might not be familiar with these types of activities. She stresses the importance of being aware of the fact that the students may not be used to this kind of school or learning culture, arguing that it is necessary for teachers to design culturally relevant activities and to display cultural sensitivity:

> *Katerina: And I think, because in Middle Eastern countries and African countries, it tends to be that their education systems rely on a more traditional approach, where the teacher is more of an authoritarian figure, they use more rote learning. Then I think it's unrealistic to straightaway throw them into a more European or British sort of classroom where you're doing group work and pair activities that are very independent and rely on a kind of level of independence and discipline. So, I personally go quite slow to begin with in introducing group or pair activities and sort of build on that. So, they*

understand my expectations when they're doing those kinds of activities and they can all participate and get something from it. (ll. 81-91)

This idea that students may not be used to more collaborative work in the classroom is also expressed by Gavriil. He too is reluctant to introduce groupwork straight away, while also pointing to the fact that students need to be eased into this new mode of learning:

> **Gavriil:** *[...] because a lot of people come from cultures that are teacher-centred, you can't start teamwork from day one. It is something that you have to build gradually, to take yourself out of the centre of the educational process and transfer it to the students. In that sense, yes, I do use it, but we use it when a buffer [24]interval has passed, 1-2 months, so they can understand how the classroom works, and work within that framework. I do use it, I'm just telling you, it depends on the student material, it's not a panacea, I can't use teamwork [25]for everything in a refugee classroom. (ll. 501-512)*

It can therefore be concluded that the staff view education in MENA countries as more traditional and different from the Greek system, arguing that the students need to adapt to the new environment. They particularly refer to this need of the students to take their time to adapt to the new school and learning culture in general. The concept of time seems to be of utmost importance, but it is also something that causes frustration to the teachers, as it is unattainable in the specific context of forced migration. Anna discusses this notion below, explaining how the students require much time to get used to the school culture, something which is not always possible:

> **Anna:** *Yeah, they need time to adjust before we start the lessons. Something which we don't do and which we don't have time for. (ll. 55-57)*

Similarly, Dora draws attention to the difficulty certain students may be experiencing to perform a task that would otherwise be considered as simple for a child of their age, highlighting the students' need to adapt to the new environment:

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[24] The word "buffer" is used in English by Gavriil in the original transcript in Greek.
[25] The word "teamwork" is used in English by Gavriil in the original transcript in Greek.

> *Dora: Uh, on the other hand, in the beginning for some of them it may be difficult to adapt to sitting on a chair, to understand that this is a classroom, there are some rules within it.(ll. 45-47)*

Eleftheria also draws attention to the same issue, stating how certain students might require extra time to adjust to school and to obtain certain skills which they may not have been exposed to or learned yet:

> *Eleftheria: What I find difficult is the fact that a lot of kids, let's say, if you ask them to cut a piece of paper, you might have lines around the frame that you want them to cut, but they may not understand it. So, it's the lack of stimuli, I believe, the fact that they've never experienced it before, they've never seen it before in their own school or in their lives before, because a lot of them haven't even gone to school before they come to us. (ll. 39-43)*

Therefore, what the adult participants suggest, is that teachers should be aware of the time it might take for the students to adjust to their new environment, and to acquire the necessary skills. Taking things slow and setting achievable goals is highlighted as a useful strategy, as Eleftheria outlines below:

> *Eleftheria: […] lots of body language and slow steps, because a lot of the time we grown-ups take some things for granted, so we move a little faster. "Oh, that's easy, we understood it, let's go on." It takes a little persistence on some of the things we do, even if the kids think they know them, many times we need to repeat them over and over again. (ll. 82-85)*

Ismini also recommends the same strategy, stressing the importance of not rushing the students, alluding again to time, while also being realistic about goal-setting.

> *Ismini: Another thing is to set small goals. For example, you shouldn't expect the child to learn all at once, say, all the verbs by heart. Uh, bit by bit, small goals to firstly get the child talking, to help the child learn how to articulate, to have the courage to speak, even if he says something wrong and if he feels like it, to communicate. (ll. 124-129)*

To conclude, the adult participants emphasize the great effort that the students need to devote in order to adjust to the new school and learning culture. They attribute this to the aforementioned notion that the new Greek schooling culture is different to the one that the students are used to, arguing that education in MENA countries is based on more traditional methods and is less student-centred. The adult participants conclude

that students need time to make this adjustment, and point to the importance of being aware of this as a teacher.

7.3.4 Conclusion

This second section of the chapter has examined the perceptions of the adult participants around the role of culture and language in refugee education. Culture and language are viewed mostly as hindrances and dividing, rather than uniting forces. The teachers and managers feel that multilingualism and interculturality is difficult to navigate in the classroom, and that the students' linguistic background presents challenges in their learning of a second language. Furthermore, they describe instances during which cultural conflict occurs at school between different groups of students, pointing to the fact that there exist multiple layers of oppression in the classroom. Finally, the adult participants mention the need of the students to adjust to the new school and learning culture that they are now in, stressing the difference between the more traditional educational systems that they may have been exposed to in contrast with the one in Greece. The next chapter will gather the three major themes identified in this research project and critically examine these findings with a view to responding to the research questions.

8   Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1   Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a critical discussion of the research findings and the analysis of the themes presented in the previous three chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and 7). The first section of the chapter discusses the implications of intersectionality and the interweaving nature of the themes, as this constitutes a critical element in understanding the findings. I then provide a brief overview of the themes, in order to aid comprehension of the discussion. Following this, the themes are discussed in relation to the research questions which were posed in the beginning of the chapter. I identify the potential obstacles of implementing feminist pedagogy in a refugee education setting, while also discussing the respective opportunities that may arise. Finally, I discuss the implications of the study, as well as its limitations, and provide suggestions for future research.

8.2   A Note on Intersectionality

Although at the beginning of this project the element of gender was the primary concept that I set out to explore, I was also conscious that my approach needed to be underpinned by an intersectional perspective. While focusing mainly on gender, I was aware that other factors, such as cultural, religious, and linguistic background, would also be relevant in doing research with students of refugee background and would need to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the intersectional nature of feminist pedagogy also suggested that I would need to pay attention to all the aspects of the students' and teachers' identities, as well as their intersections and the forms of oppression that might exist due to these.

During the data collection and the months that I was on Leros, I started to gain a more concrete understanding of how these factors were interweaving with each other in the school environment and how they were, in fact, very much interrelated. Although I was mainly focusing on gender, I understood that ethnic, religious, and cultural background, were all factors which I noticed throughout my fieldwork, and which I needed to address in a feminist pedagogy classroom. After analysing the data, I found

that these interrelations were even more pronounced in the teacher and manager interviews, the classroom discussions, and my own researcher diary. This was also evident through the overarching themes that I identified and developed from the data, as these included not only the theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", but also that of "Trauma as present, but not defining", and "Culture/language as barriers". While trauma might not traditionally be considered as an aspect of one's identity per se, such as gender, culture, or language, through the analysis I found it to be quite a prominent theme, which was perceived by the teachers and managers as a major concern in refugee education, and, for the most part, as a defining experience of the students' identities.

Finally, even though these themes are presented and discussed as separate unities in the previous two chapters, and although there is a rationale that I followed towards this particular theme development, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the themes are in effect closely interrelated. Although, for example, I developed a separate theme on "Culture/language as barriers" which focused mostly on the perceived linguistic and national/ethnic differences, there were many links between this theme and the theme of "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", as gender norms and stereotypes were also portrayed as cultural elements. Likewise, the deficit perspective of viewing refugee students which was discussed under "Trauma as present, but not defining" was also a relevant element when it came to "Culture/language as barriers", as there were many references to the students' perceived linguistic deficit. For this reason, I argue that being aware of the intersections and links between the different themes is crucial to developing a better understanding of these.

8.3 Overview of the Themes

In the previous two chapters I presented the themes which I developed through the process of Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis model. The three main overarching themes which were developed were (i) "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", (ii) "Trauma as present, but not defining", and (iii) "Culture/language as barriers", whilst each was composed of a number of subthemes, which sought to portray more specific sets of meaning. An overview of the themes is provided below, in order to better illustrate the connections that will be drawn to the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study.

The first theme, "Gender as a difficult and complex construct", encompassed the adult participants' beliefs on how gender is enacted by the students and their families and on how the topic of gender can be approached in the classroom. The first subtheme, "some things they bring from home", referred to the view expressed by the teachers and managers that patriarchal beliefs stem from the family culture of refugee students, and the Arab male figure was portrayed as oppressive and as mainly responsible for perpetuating these patriarchal norms. Patriarchy and stereotypical beliefs around gender were attributed to the students' cultural background, and the adult participants discussed their views on how gender equality in MENA countries is quite low compared to Greece, and even lower compared to Europe, thus positioning the countries on a perceived "gender equality continuum". Furthermore, the role of "the school as advocate of gender equality" was contrasted in relation to the perceived limiting space of the home, and the adult participants expressed the opinion that it is the responsibility of the school to prepare students for European gender norms. However, they voiced their apprehension to approach gender in the classroom, mainly due to its sensitivity, its connection to religious and cultural beliefs and the lack of training on their side. There was therefore a general sense that "gender is a difficult topic", while the adult participants mentioned that it was usually approached more implicitly or through the use of humour. This sensitivity of the topic of gender led the staff to highlight the need for "a reflexive and holistic approach" when teaching about it. They stressed the importance of developing awareness of their teacher positionality and of the context of forced migration, as well as of a joint team effort.

The second overarching theme was that of "Trauma as present, but not defining", which revolved around the adult participants' perceptions of trauma in the refugee classroom and on their views around the integration of emotions in the lesson. One of the points that the adult participants mentioned was the avoidance of emotions or trigger topics in the classroom, as they claimed that "there is a fine line" which teachers need to be aware of in order to avoid triggering the students' trauma. This was also related to their feeling of inadequacy to deal with emotions and trauma, their belief that special training is required in order to do so, and consequently their reliance on the social worker to deal with emotions. While there was a general agreement that trauma is something which exists and which needs to be acknowledged in the classroom, the staff also discussed their preference of viewing the students through a "resilience rather than deficit lens", relating stories of students who displayed agency and resilience.

228

However, they also pointed to the need for education to help students deal with trauma and argued for the "healing aspect of education". The need to ensure and prioritize the students' emotional wellbeing was emphasized, while the role of the teacher as a healer was also stressed. The adult participants also mentioned the "teachers' emotional involvement and labour" that takes place when working in a forced migration setting. They talked about the two sides of this emotional toll, the first being the strain of dealing with the students' emotionally challenging situations and the temporary and unstable nature of the context. Secondly, they also referred to the emotional drain of fighting against the Greek system, which exhibits hostile and indifferent politics towards refugees. However, the staff discussed how, despite these emotionally challenging and traumatic situations, there were many instances during which "connection" was able to take place between them and the students. They emphasized the value of human connection and trust, and described the act of teaching as an act of love and caring.

The third overarching theme, "Culture/language as barriers", centred around the perceived difficulty that these create in refugee education in various ways which were expressed. The adult participants portrayed "culture and language as dividing barriers", and viewed the multilingual, multicultural, and multilevel classroom as a challenge on the part of the educator and manager. Furthermore, the students were portrayed through a linguistic deficit lens, and language was described as a dividing rather than a uniting element. The adult participants also discussed the "cultural conflict" that takes place in the school due to cultural or religious disputes between the students, highlighting the intersectionality of oppression, and stressing the role that groupwork can play in overcoming these conflicts. Lastly, culture was also mentioned as an obstacle in relation to the "school and learning culture(s)" that the students need to get used to. The adult participants expressed the view that the students need time to adjust to the Greek educational system, not only due to the effect that displacement has had on their learning, but also due to their claim that the educational system in MENA countries is more traditional, teacher-centred and patriarchal than that of Greece.

8.4 Returning to the Research Questions

In this section I aim to connect the findings from the discussion chapter to the research questions which I initially set out to explore: Is the ground ready for feminist pedagogy? What are the obstacles and what are the opportunities?

I found it useful to look at the themes that the analysis produced through the prism of each research question, as well as through the viewpoint of each of the actors involved in the study; the educators and managers, the students, and myself as a researcher. In order to consider the question of if the ground in refugee education in Greece is ready for feminist pedagogy, it would therefore be helpful to examine this through the respective obstacles that exist in the field, as well as the opportunities that may arise through this effort.

Certain subthemes that resulted from the data analysis indicate the difficulties that implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in a refugee education setting in the Greek context might entail. These include the ways in which gender, culture, trauma, and language are perceived by the educators and managers, as will be explained below. However, the analysis also points to multiple opportunities for feminist pedagogy to be implemented in and to benefit refugee education. These include the benefit of adopting a reflexive and holistic approach, its emphasis on emotions and healing, as well as its aim to empower students and foster resilience. Below I examine the obstacles mentioned above; after the examination of each obstacle, I discuss the opportunities that feminist pedagogy can present in overcoming it.

8.4.1 The Label of Patriarchy and the Complex Nature of Culture

One of the obstacles of implementing a feminist pedagogy approach with students of refugee background is the lens through which teachers and managers view the students, and specifically, "their" culture and beliefs around gender. The conclusion that is drawn from the data is that teachers and managers view culture in a different, more monolithic way than the way that culture is described through the students' accounts in Chapter 5 and selected excerpts in Chapter 6. The concept of the "gender equality continuum", as well as the representations of the oppressive Arab man (father/brother/husband), both place MENA countries and the students in a negative light regarding gender equality. What is implied is that the students and their families come from deeply oppressive and patriarchal cultures and societies and that this patriarchal mindset is very difficult to

change. The teachers argue that this results in the students exhibiting sexist behaviours in school and perpetuating these patriarchal structures and norms that they inherit from family and culture.

In other words, the students and their families are viewed through the label of the "patriarch", which is considered as synonymous to being an Arab Muslim refugee. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the "othering" of migrants and refugees, especially from a Muslim background, is a common phenomenon in Western societies (Farris, 2017; McPherson, 2015). This study confirms that othering takes place in the discourse that is used by the teachers and managers, as the students and their families are portrayed to be different due to "their" culture and religion. Moreover, this othering is also linked to the concepts of "sexualization of racism" and "racialization of sexism" which Farris (2017) discusses, and which refer to the perception that sexism and patriarchy are primarily characteristics of the MENA region.

Although patriarchal structures may well be present in many of the countries of origin of the students, the picture that is painted by the interviewees does not allow for any other perspective to be heard. This monolithic representation of culture and of the "Other" is problematic, as it predetermines the ways in which students and their families are expected to behave, leaving no space for these patriarchal norms to be disrupted. The label of patriarchy, through which teachers and managers view the students, might then become more problematic in implementing a feminist pedagogy approach than any potential patriarchal belief itself that the students may hold. As McPherson (2015) argues, although it is crucial to acknowledge the patriarchal structures that exist and the gender inequalities that refugee women may be facing, it is important to ensure that their subjectivity and agency is not erased through these representations (p. 4).

Therefore, while the teacher and manager interviews may be pointing to existing issues of sexism and patriarchy and how these affect gender expectations in school, at the same time there exist counter-narratives in the data that disprove this and offer different perspectives on the matter. These counter-narratives, provided through the discussions with the students and my researcher diary reflections in Chapter 5 (and certain excerpts in Chapter 6), offer different instances and examples of how the students and their families perceive of and "do" gender. While the students are aware of societal expectations and pressure to conform to gender norms and roles, they also offer examples of figures in their family that defy these stereotypes. One example is the story

of Fatima and Kareem's father in Discussion 1, who is portrayed as a caring and kind husband who helps their mother with the cooking and the house chores (see Chapter 6, section 6.2.1). Furthermore, although the students may at first glance seem to agree with patriarchal views, they then present examples from their everyday life that demonstrate that there is, in fact, leeway and space to play with these strict gender norms and do otherwise. A characteristic example is in Discussion 6, when Fatima and Kareem disapprove of seeing a man dressed in a hijab—typically considered a woman's garment—but later on share how they themselves play with these gender norms when Kareem dresses up in typically women's clothes at home in the context of playing (see Chapter 5, August 2021). The counter-narratives that the discussions with the students provide, point to the criticality of including their voices and experiences in the research. McPherson advocates for the importance of such narratives in research with refugees, as they allow for dominant narratives to be deconstructed. Drawing on Foucault, she argues that "[i]ncreasing opportunities for embodied marginal subjects to offer different perspectives to the dominant discourse can be useful in illustrating that dominant discourses are contingent and potentially moveable" (McPherson, 2015, p. 6).

It can therefore be argued that these counter-narratives offered by the students demonstrate that culture and beliefs around gender are not as narrow, strict, or predetermined as the teachers and managers describe. Rather, what is observed through their accounts is that culture is, in fact, much more complex, fluid, personal, and context-specific. In fact, the students themselves describe how gender norms and expectations change depending on the place and context. An example of this is portrayed in Discussion 1, where Fatima describes how her mother sometimes wears the hijab a little looser in Greece, but mentions that "the important [thing is] to don't anyone from your country see you like this" (see Chapter 5, July 2021). This demonstrates how culture changes according to the setting, and how these gender norms that the students follow are relative to the context and can indeed be bent. This perception of culture is more attuned to theories that highlight its fluidity and malleability, such as Bhabha's (1994) theory of the hybridity of culture. As Barker (2008) points out, "[c]ultures are not pure, authentic and locally bounded"; rather, "[t]hey are the syncretic and hybridized products of interactions across space" (p. 27), and this is exactly how culture is shown to operate through the students' accounts.

To summarize, this difference in perception of culture and the gap of communication between teachers and students constitutes one of the challenges of

implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in a refugee education setting. In order to approach issues of gender with the students, teachers must first examine their own prejudices and the beliefs that they hold about the students and their respective social and cultural backgrounds. The label of the backwards, uncivilised patriarch is deeply ingrained in Western thought, and used against students of refugee background and their families, without allowing for any space for different stories and examples to be heard.

8.4.2   *The Importance of a Reflexive and Holistic Approach in Teaching About Gender*

As explored in the above section, one of the obstacles of implementing feminist pedagogy in the Greek refugee education context is the fact that teachers and managers often view students through the label of patriarchy, assuming that they are coming from a rigid, limiting, and patriarchal cultural background. This finding, as well as certain observations by the adult participants indicate that feminist pedagogy, and more specifically the feminist tool of reflexivity can indeed be very beneficial in this context. The analysis of the interviews and classroom discussions, as well as my own researcher diary reflections, suggest that a reflexive and holistic approach is necessary, as it will allow teachers and managers to become aware of their own prejudices and how their positionality functions in teaching refugee students about gender.

Firstly, the observations of the teachers and managers imply the need for reflexivity and awareness of context if teachers wish to broach the issue of gender with students of refugee background. The staff explain how gender is a very complex, sensitive, and difficult issue, as it is related to culture and religion, and are worried that addressing gender issues entails the danger of insulting the students. This concern of the teachers was something that I also shared when I was embarking on my fieldwork and considering how I could incorporate gender issues in the classroom (as described in more detail in Chapter 5). The staff all mention the criticality of being aware of the students' current context, and of how their own views and lived experience may be influencing how they perceive of the students. Furthermore, they discuss the limitations that their positionality might exert on them talking about gender.

These findings can therefore be connected to the need for reflexivity, which is principally a feminist tool. While existing research focuses mostly on the role of

reflexivity in doing research with students of refugee background (Abdelnour & Moghli, 2021; Schmidt, 2007), there is scarce research on using feminist pedagogy to promote reflexivity in refugee education. The present study and findings make the specific connection between these, arguing that feminist pedagogy can provide the valuable tool of reflexivity to teachers who wish to discuss the sensitive and complex issue of gender. As the findings suggest, reflexivity is not only necessary in order to help teachers and managers see beyond the label of patriarchy and narrow perceptions of culture, but to also equip them with the tools to approach gender in a sensitive, context-aware manner with students of refugee background.

8.4.3   *Hesitation and Fear Around Trauma and Emotions*

Another obstacle in implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in refugee education, is the way in which educators and managers feel about encountering trauma and dealing with emotions in the classroom. The subtheme titled *"there is a fine line"* shows that there is much fear around trauma and emotions on the side of the educators. This constitutes an obstacle in following a feminist pedagogy approach, as feminist pedagogy advocates for the integration of students' emotions in the classroom, and for drawing on these and on personal and lived experience as valid ways of knowing.

As the data shows, the teachers are wary of triggering any sort of traumatic responses in the students by mentioning taboo subjects or by asking questions which are too personal or too emotional. While some teachers mention that they engage in teaching emotions as vocabulary, learning about emotions is shown to take place mostly on a superficial level. The teachers describe how avoiding any emotional or taboo subjects is their way of ensuring that traumatic memories or emotional responses will not be triggered in the students—and sometimes, in themselves as well. This great difficulty in dealing with trauma and emotions in the classroom concurs with existing research, as trauma is often mentioned as one of the main challenges that teachers face in refugee education (Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020).

Furthermore, the teachers argue that they are not adequately trained to deal with the students' trauma and with their emotional responses, as has been observed in previous studies (Barrett & Berger, 2021; Nastasi et al., 2011), and mention that the responsibility of this task is mostly shifted to the school's social workers. The feeling of inadequacy that the teachers express stems from their belief that one needs to be a

trained therapist or counsellor in order to approach such issues with the students, which is why they refrain from entering this territory. This feeling of inadequacy and the subsequent reliance on social workers to discuss the topic of emotions with students is something which has been observed in previous studies of teacher training on trauma (Mayor, 2019; Nastasi et al., 2011). In fact, the sentiment described by many of the adult participants that they might say something wrong or may not have the "right" answers has also been discussed in previous research by Nastasi et al. (2011), who noticed that "[t]eachers expressed concern that they might not always know what to say in response to students sharing their feelings, [and] that they would become overwhelmed with their own feelings" (p. 546). This sentiment is also something which I reflected on in my researcher diary (and further discuss in Chapter 3), as I felt the same when encountering my students' traumatic experiences, such as when my student Layla disclosed to me an experience of abuse. The feeling of inadequacy may stem from the teachers' justifiable fear of causing more stress to an individual that has been through traumatic situations. Indeed, Hayward (2017), among others, cautions that great attention must be paid by teachers who are not trained in dealing with trauma when handling sensitive subjects in school, so as to ensure the emotional wellbeing of the students.

The lack of training on handling trauma and emotions that the teachers mention is one of the obstacles in implementing a feminist pedagogy approach. However, I argue that this feeling of inadequacy which is present both in the teacher interviews and my researcher diary, as well as the overreliance on the social worker to deal with emotions, denote the existence of a broader issue which is related to perceptions around the role of the teacher. In other words, it is related to the traditional perception of the teacher as an all-knowing figure, who should always possess the correct answers and be able to answer all of the students' questions. Not having the "right answer" and not being able to handle one's feelings are thoughts which largely preoccupy the teachers, and these are deeply connected with traditional expectations of the teacher to be a figure of authority and a "provider" of knowledge. Yet, as I discovered through my own reflections and my discussion with the school's social worker (see subsection 7.2.1), it is neither possible nor necessary for teachers to always be equipped with the "right" answers. Rather, a crucial and helpful skill in such cases of encountering trauma is that of active listening, and of providing the students with the space to be heard. I discuss

this point in the section below, arguing that it provides an opportunity for feminist pedagogy to assist in refugee education and its healing aspect.

8.4.4   The Healing Aspect of Education/The Teacher as "Healer"

As mentioned above, the educators' fear around trauma and emotions and the sensitivity of navigating trauma in the classroom constitute an obstacle to implementing a feminist pedagogy approach in refugee education. However, despite this obstacle, the present analysis points to the existence of multiple opportunities for feminist pedagogy to in fact assist educators in handling trauma and emotions in the classroom. Firstly, the educator and managers' belief that education should assume a healing role ties in with feminist pedagogy's attention to emotions and their integration in the classroom. Secondly, the emphasis that the staff place on human connection and on developing trust with the students is also linked to feminist pedagogy's view of education as an act of love and care and its attention to the concept of "community". Finally, acknowledging that teachers do not need to know all the "right" answers and that through active listening they can help students in their healing process is related to feminist pedagogy's view that the role of the teacher is not that of an all-knowing authority.

   To begin with, even though the educators mention that they steer away from emotions in order to avoid triggering trauma, at the same time they recognize the great value that learning and talking about emotions can have for students of refugee background. In fact, they not only mention the students' urgent need to share their emotions and talk about traumatic experiences in the classroom, but they also discuss how the students' emotional wellbeing needs are more important than language learning needs and should be prioritized in this context. The teacher thus assumes the role of a "healer", a therapeutic role, and is presented as a figure whose primary responsibility is to create a safe and warm environment and assist the students in healing from trauma, rather than being focused strictly on language learning. These findings are in accord with previous literature that stresses the importance of learning about emotions in refugee education, and the critical role that teachers and education in general can play in the students' healing process (Barrett & Berger, 2021; Demirdjian, 2012; Hayward, 2017; Mayor, 2019; Moldenhawer, 2022; Tweedie et al., 2017).

I propose in this study that feminist pedagogy can help teachers to balance this "fine line" that they are wary of treading and to provide an environment which will support the integration of the students' emotions and experiences in the classroom. Feminist pedagogy, as mentioned in Chapter 2, operates against traditional patriarchal pedagogies which forefront reason and logic. Instead, it aims for integrating emotions and lived experience in the process of learning, and values these as equal methods of knowing and learning (Boler, 1999; Bostow et al., 2015; Fisher, 1987; Paechter, 1998). As Bostow et al., (2015) propose, "[i]dentifying the relationship between experience, emotion, and action will help students bridge the classroom and the "real world," the personal and the political, theory and practice". In a feminist pedagogy classroom, students have the chance to validate their need to share their emotions and experiences, and to make sense of these, as they are incorporated in the lesson. An example of this are the classroom discussions which were conducted throughout the fieldwork, and through which the students had the chance and the space to share their lived experiences and their feelings on certain chosen topics related to gender, as presented in Chapter 5. Integrating emotions and experience in such a way allows students to feel validated and places their own experience as a starting point in the discussion, something which contributes to the overall healing dimension of education.

Furthermore, the adult participants discuss another aspect of their teaching, which is also in accord with feminist pedagogy practices, and which assists in building a warm environment and in promoting healing. This has to do with "connection" and with the relationships that are developed between teachers and students. What I noticed throughout the data analysis was that the educators and managers tended to narrate their experience of working in refugee education through stories of their former students. These stories frequently included instances during which connection took place between the teachers/managers and their students; they involved feeling proud about their students' progress, feeling appreciated by the students, and feeling that connection and trust has been achieved between them. Ultimately, they described the teaching profession as an act of love and caring. Indeed, the development of meaningful relationships and trust between teachers and students in refugee education has been argued to provide a strong basis for healing to occur and for students of refugee background to recover from trauma (Hayward, 2017; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020).

This aspect of building connection and community and of the importance of love and caring in education is strongly associated with feminist pedagogical practice. bell

hooks, who has written extensively on the value of love and care in education, interprets love "as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust" (hooks, 2003, p. 131), most of which are elements that were mentioned by the teachers in this study, and which indicate the development of meaningful relationships between them and the students. Furthermore, McArthur and Lane (2019) examine the concept of pedagogical love and caring in teaching, claiming that this is a "central tenet of authentically caring and healing pedagogies" (p. 65). It can therefore be claimed that the feminist pedagogical practice of love and care can be beneficial in the context of refugee education, as it promotes the development of relationships between the teachers and students based on trust and connection, which consequently creates a warm environment where healing can occur. It can therefore be stated that the teachers' accounts of instances of connection were in fact examples of a feminist pedagogy of love and care in action.

Finally, another point which demonstrates feminist pedagogy's fit for refugee education is its attempt to deconstruct traditional power dynamics, roles, and hierarchies in the classroom and its attention to the act of listening as a pedagogical tool. As was mentioned above, one of the obstacles in implementing a feminist pedagogy approach was the teachers' feeling of being inadequately equipped to deal with trauma and of not possessing the right answers. As I previously discussed, I suggest that this feeling is related to traditional perceptions of the teacher being an all-knowing authority who possesses knowledge and answers to the students' questions at all times. However, my own experience of encountering trauma in the classroom and my reflections on my discussion with the schools' social worker pointed me to the fact that this is not always possible. I came to the conclusion that these traditional expectations of teachers can be harmful, and that it is necessary to acknowledge that they too need to be viewed as humans, who are allowed to be vulnerable in front of the students and to admit that they do not possess all the answers. Furthermore, I came to understand the importance of active listening, which in such cases, is required in order to help the students feel heard and understood. I argue that feminist pedagogy can be of use in such cases as it advocates for reconceptualizing the roles of the students and teachers in the classroom (Crabtree et al., 2009a; Morley, 1998) and it also proposes practising active listening in the classroom (Stetz, 2001; Walters Hinshaw, 2011). In this way, this disruption of hierarchy places more emphasis on relationships rather than hierarchy (Morley, 1998), allowing teachers to inhabit a different role than usual—that of the active listener, who

is there to support the students by simply being there. The following extract from my researcher diary is indicative of this key learning point for me, and of the role that active listening can play in a feminist pedagogy approach:

> *Layla came to me again and told me that her father had hit her.*[26] *She then showed me the scars. I didn't know how to handle it, but spoke to her in a soft and calm manner, and sat down with her. I didn't ask her many questions, I understood she just wanted me to be there with her. Through my experience with Layla, I understood that as a teacher, I don't need to be an expert. I just need to be understanding. I became more aware that I need to give my students space to share their feelings, rather than trying to give them answers. It helped me realize that they just want me to listen to them, or even to sit with them in silence, as in Layla's case.*
>
> *—Researcher diary excerpt*

8.4.5   Language and Culture as Barriers / Focusing on Deficit

The final obstacle in implementing feminist pedagogy that was produced through the analysis, was the perception of language and culture as barriers by the teachers and managers, and the focus on the students' perceived cultural and linguistic deficit which was expressed through the interviews. This would make it difficult to implement a feminist pedagogy approach, as the teachers felt that, given the language barrier, it is hard to discuss about complex issues like (gender) oppression or emotions, which are central tenets to feminist pedagogy. Furthermore, a deficit lens is one which is contrary to a feminist approach in teaching, as feminist pedagogy seeks to promote the empowerment of the students, and to focus on resilience rather than deficit.

According to the teachers, the multilingual, multicultural, and multilevel classroom was something which was presented as one of the main challenges of teaching refugee students. The teachers felt unprepared and inadequately trained to manage such a diverse classroom and stressed the inability of the Greek state to prepare them for this context. These findings agree with previous studies in the Greek context, in which teachers also identified diversity in the classroom as a challenge (Papapostolou et al., 2020) and discussed the lack of training to work with students of refugee

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[26] The act of active listening mentioned here is explored in regard to my stance towards my student at this vulnerable moment. Additionally, the matter was disclosed to the school's social worker and coordinator, who undertook the legal part of dealing with cases of abuse.

background in a multicultural context (Maligkoudi et al., 2018; Mogli et al., 2020; Papapostolou et al., 2020). The teachers particularly commented on the inability of the students to work with each other due to cultural and linguistic differences and conflicts, something which was also observed in Papapostolou et al.'s (2020) study. The teachers mostly identified this diversity in language, culture, and level of education as a difficulty, rather than an opportunity.

Furthermore, language was often viewed as a barrier to communicating with the students, both for managing the classroom, as well as for engaging in deeper conversations about more complex issues. Previous studies in Greece have also recorded how language is perceived as a barrier by teachers (Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020) and how the lack of the students' exposure to the Greek (host) language is considered as the primary challenge in teaching students of refugee background (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019). The teachers also presented the students' home language(s) and their educational background as an added barrier to learning English or Greek, emphasizing the difficulty that the students are facing. The discourse used was deficit-oriented, focusing mostly on the great difficulty that the students are met with and their lack of skills, rather than on their linguistic capital.

Finally, the teachers also mentioned that students need time to adjust to the school and learning culture(s), as they argued that these differ from the ones that they have previously experienced. The need for adjusting to the school and learning culture(s) of the host country has also been observed by previous research, which has explored the difficulty of Syrian refugees to adjust in a more communicative learning environment (Ćatibušić et al., 2019), and the teachers' reliance on more traditional methods of teaching due to the students' low language level (Papapostolou et al., 2020). What is of interest, however, in the present study, is the emphasis that is placed on these cultural differences, and the juxtaposition of the Greek educational system versus the one in MENA countries. The feminist lens that the present study employs allows us to observe how the motif of comparison—which is also evident in the subtheme of "the gender equality continuum"—is employed by the adult participants, as the education system in MENA countries is presented as more traditional, strict, and patriarchal, something which the teachers claimed made it difficult for the students to adjust to the purportedly more progressive and communicative Greek system. Once more, the previous educational experiences and cultural background of the students are viewed

through a deficit lens, and are thought to be one of the barriers in their integration in school.

To conclude, the analysis derived from the data points to how language and culture are mostly viewed by teachers and managers as barriers in the classroom. The students are viewed mostly through a deficit lens when it comes to language and culture. As has been argued by previous research, the beliefs that teachers hold about linguistic and cultural inclusion in refugee education are of utmost importance in order to understand what takes place in their teaching (Maligkoudi et al., 2018, p. 97). Furthermore, I argue that understanding the teachers' perception of the students and their ideas about culture and language in refugee education is crucial, as they affect not only their practice in the classroom, but also the ideas that the students develop about themselves. If teachers are negatively predisposed towards the students' abilities and view the students through a linguistic/cultural deficit lens, then it is less likely that they will follow a pedagogy which seeks to empower the students and allow them to recognize the potential of their linguistic and cultural capital.

8.4.6   *Moving Past Deficit/Trauma to a Resilience/Strengths-Based Approach*

While the data analysis suggests that students are often viewed through a linguistic and cultural deficit lens, there were, however, some adult participants who discussed the dilemma of focusing on trauma or resilience, and expressed a preference for viewing the students through a resilience lens. Furthermore, some adult participants related stories of students who displayed agency and resilience, which serve as counter-narratives to the mostly predominant discourse of deficit and trauma. These findings suggest that feminist pedagogy is crucial in helping teachers develop a resilience perspective, due to its emphasis on the empowerment of students. Moreover, the examples from the data confirm that employing a feminist pedagogy approach is feasible in the refugee context, and that, although the predominant discourse is that of trauma and deficit, there are instances of teachers and managers who recognize that resilience is also possible.

To begin with, some of the adult participants discussed that, although trauma is present in the classroom and is definitely a factor that needs to be considered in refugee education, they prefer to view their students through a lens of resilience. They described how they do this through more specific pedagogical choices in the classroom, as well as through regarding their students as capable individuals, and not as solely defined by their traumatic experiences. Multiple scholars have drawn attention to the negative

consequences of the medicalization of trauma in refugee education and on the need for students of refugee background to be viewed through a resilience lens instead (Pieloch et al., 2016; Shapiro, 2018; Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019). The choice of some staff participants to view their students as resilient and equal individuals agrees with recent research in refugee education, which moves away from the trauma and deficit perspective, focusing rather on the "agency, resilience, social capital and other 'funds of knowledge'" (Shapiro, 2018, p. 5) that the students possess. Although not all interviewees focus on these aspects, there are some who do, and who explicitly discuss this conscious choice of theirs to view their students as capable individuals.

Furthermore, the stories that the adult participants narrate are testimonies to the fact that the students are capable of developing resilience and displaying agency. These stories centre largely on language learning, and on how certain students were able to overcome adversity, how they persisted in their language learning journey, and ultimately made progress and achieved their goals. The connection between language learning and the development of resilience has been explored in previous research on education in forced migration contexts (Capstick & Delaney, 2018; Erling, 2017). Furthermore, some studies have also drawn connections between the liberatory and consciousness-raising aspect of critical pedagogy, and how this can help with developing the resilience of refugee students (Imperiale et al., 2017). This study therefore suggests that feminist pedagogy's aim to empower students is linked to the aim of education in forced migration contexts to develop students' resilience. Empowering students through critical and feminist pedagogies can take the form of helping students develop their agency and independence, of making them aware of their skills and abilities, and self-worth (Shrewsbury, 1997) with the goal of ultimately helping them develop resilience and cope with trauma.

8.5   Implications of the study

This section seeks to interpret the study's conclusions with regard to the implications that they suggest for research methodology, practice and policy in refugee education. Section 8.5.1 examines the methodological implications of the study, and section 8.5.2 focuses on its implications on practice and policy in refugee education.

8.5.1   The Value of a Feminist Approach in a Forced Migration Research Setting

> *This is academic humility: the knowledge that anyone can teach us something.*
> *Perhaps this is because we are so clever that we succeed in having someone less*
> *skilled than us teach us something; or because even someone who does not seem*
> *very clever to us has some hidden skills; or also because someone who inspires*
> *us may not inspire others. The reasons are many. The point is that we must listen*
> *with respect to anyone, without this exempting us from pronouncing our value*
> *judgments; or from the knowledge that an author's opinion is very different from*
> *ours, and that he is ideologically very distant from us. But even the sternest*
> *opponent can suggest some ideas to us.*

—Umberto Eco, *How to Write a Thesis*

In September 2021, as my fieldwork on Leros was drawing to a close, I began to reflect more vividly on my whole endeavour at the school, and on how my positionality as a feminist researcher had functioned throughout my teaching and data collection. I was particularly thinking about how my own ideas, beliefs and values regarding feminist pedagogy might have affected my stance towards the students, as well as towards the other teachers and managerial staff in school. While I had been passionate about including issues of gender and oppression in the curriculum, I was also conscious that I did not wish to impose my views or teaching methodology on the teachers. I was especially cognizant of this when I took my turn in suggesting topics for the school's weekly "theme" that we would all focus on, as I wished to introduce feminist topics or issues related to oppression, provided that there was a general agreement on this. This led me to enter a dialogue with the teachers, and to understand how their apprehension towards approaching such issues was because of their complexity and difficulty, as well as because of what the teachers termed as "the language barrier" between them and the students. However, I continued to share my best practices with them as I approached some of these issues in the classroom—I discussed with them about what worked well and what didn't, and about their own doubts and thoughts on the matter.

Furthermore, my conversation with Pavlos one of my first weeks there (see Chapter 6, subsection 6.2.5) alerted me to the fact that feminist pedagogy cannot be a solitary effort, and that it can only be successful through a holistic and collective effort. Finding the perfect balance between advocating for feminist pedagogy and being mindful of the teachers' needs and doubts about such an approach was a challenging

task. However, a conversation with the managers towards the end of my time there made me realize the importance of feminist research methodology, and how this had, at least to some extent, allowed me to be more sensitive of my research environment and more reflexive about my own role in it. During my last week at the school, I had an online videocall with the managers of the NGO, Pavlos and Nikolas, after which I recorded the following in my researcher diary:

> *During our goodbye call, Nikolas told me that he admired me for what I had achieved. He said that, even though I came to the school as an "outsider", a researcher, I nonetheless managed to become part of the team, to approach my topic and do my research by creating a dialogue, rather than imposing my views. He also quoted a part of "How to Write a Thesis" by Umberto Eco, which discusses the positionality of the researcher and how it is important to not impose your views when doing research, or assume that you are superior to your participants. His observation filled me with great joy, as it was a tiny sample that my research had adopted principles of feminist methodology and ideals about positionality and the role of the researcher.*
>
> *—Researcher diary excerpt*

The above diary entry reinforces the value of a feminist research methodology in the given educational context, and points to the importance of reflexivity and awareness of positionality. While Eco's quote may not be coming from a specifically feminist background, the concept of "academic humility" (Eco, 2015) which he introduces relates to feminist reflexivity and to being open and sensitive to other viewpoints.

Furthermore, reflexivity and positionality also proved to be vital in my lessons with the students, during which I included topics related to gender issues. In Chapter 5 I relate how, while approaching these issues with the students, I was constantly reflecting on how they were reacting and responding to these topics, being mindful that I wanted them to enjoy themselves and to not become tired of the focus on gender and oppression. After each lesson, I reflected on how it went in my researcher diary, and there were days that I felt that the students were not responding with the same excitement as previously. However, I noticed that, even when the effect of the lesson was not obvious immediately, I later understood that the students had in fact taken interest in the topics that we were discussing. An example of this is narrated in the below entry from my researcher diary (which is also discussed in Chapter 5), after we had completed a lesson reading a text about Malala Yousafzai.

> *The students were both pretty tired today. They participated in the discussion for a bit, but then I stopped recording. Fatima asked me why I like to teach them about these issues (I think she meant feminist issues). I acknowledged my positionality and answered the truth– I told them that I believe these issues are really important and they are happening around us but are not usually discussed in school, that's why I also chose to do my research on these. Nonetheless, I wondered whether they are not interested in these issues and I should give them a break from all the feminism. However, when I was taking them back home on the school bus, Fatima told me that she looked up Malala on the internet and listened to some of her speeches and liked her very much. This made me realize that the effects of a lesson are not always immediate, but that discussing such issues with the students can spark an interest in them and lead them to research these topics more thoroughly.*
>
> —*Researcher diary excerpt*

The above incident is an example of how feminist issues are often met with some struggle and perhaps doubt in the classroom, as is any subject which is not traditionally part of the established curriculum. Being conscious that I wanted the students to enjoy the topics that we discussed, I was often concerned about this. However, as I realized in the above case, the effects of feminist pedagogy are not always instant. Even though it may not have always been obvious the beginning, I later saw evidence that reflection and engagement with the issues that we were discussing in the classroom was indeed taking place.

Moreover, the above entry is also an instance of how I attempted to acknowledge my positionality as a teacher and researcher in the classroom. When Fatima asked me why I chose these topics, I paused, pondering on how to answer. I understood that it was a genuine question; as a student, she was wondering why I was teaching them about feminist issues and why I was so passionate about them. I decided that the answer was very simple; I could just be honest with her and be open about my views and beliefs. I explained why I believed these issues are important, and why I'm researching them, in this way acknowledging the beliefs and values that I carry into the classroom as a teacher and researcher.

To summarize, I argue that feminist reflexivity and awareness of positionality, both elements of feminist research methodology and feminist pedagogy, were vital tools that assisted me in my dual role as a researcher and teacher.

8.5.2   *Implications for Practice and Policy*

The study's findings suggest multiple implications for practice and policy in the refugee education sector. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data point to certain needs of refugee education and educators.

Firstly, there is a need for training for educators on how to approach sensitive issues like gender with the students, as most of them indicate the complexity and sensitivity of the issue.

Secondly, the findings highlight the importance of attending to the students' emotional wellbeing and suggest that training on how to deal with emotions and trauma in the classroom would be beneficial for the teachers, as most of them acknowledge the importance of talking about emotions, but fear to do so in case traumatic responses are triggered.

Thirdly, the analysis suggests that the lens of deficit—both cultural and linguistic—is very often present in the way that students are viewed by the teachers. Therefore, refugee education could benefit from a pedagogy that allows students to be viewed through the lens of resilience, and which focuses primarily on a skills- and strengths-based approach.

These needs indicate certain practical implications for refugee education and suggest that adopting a feminist pedagogy is necessary and that its elements would be beneficial for students of refugee background for the following reasons. Firstly, assuming a reflexive stance can help educators acknowledge their positionality and overcome the prejudice and bias that refugee students are often met with. The findings point to the importance of assuming a reflexive, holistic, and context-sensitive approach in order to talk about gender issues with students of refugee background, something which can be achieved through a feminist pedagogy. Furthermore, the findings suggest that emotions need to be fore fronted in the refugee classroom. Teachers need to ensure that they integrate activities that involve talking about the students' emotions and that there is space for the students to do so. Finally, training teachers on how to value the student cultural and linguistic capital would also be beneficial and promote a skills-based approach in viewing students. At the same time, including activities which can enhance the students' agency, autonomy, and critical thinking can help them develop resilience.

8.6   Limitations of the study

In accord with good feminist practice, the reflexivity that I engaged in throughout this research project allowed me to consider certain limitations of the study. This section examines these limitations, which centre mainly around the following areas: the limited access to participants for the study (mainly students), the analysis of the classroom discussions, and the ethical considerations around my positionality in the research.

As further discussed in Chapter 4, one of the limitations of the project is the nature of the data that could be obtained during the second phase of data collection. The fluid nature of the context of refugee education, the high turnover rate of students at the school, as well as the strict COVID-19 restrictions and the move to online lessons for two months, significantly reduced the amount of contact time that I had with the students. Furthermore, the total number of students at school was reduced, mainly due to restrictions on travel from Türkiye to Greece, as well as due to the illegal pushback operations conducted in the Aegean, which resulted in the decrease of arrivals on the island of Leros from February to September 2021. These factors significantly limited the number of students who could take part in the classroom discussions, which were ultimately conducted with two students, who were the only teenager students at the school at that time. That being said, it is apt to note that qualitative research does not aim for "generalisability" as more quantitative positivist research does, but rather aims "[t]o gain rich, in-depth understanding", and as a result does not view smaller samples of participants as a limitation (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 6). While having access to more participants could have provided for a richer analysis, it is also important to acknowledge the located-ness of this study and the fact that it represents the specific and situated experiences of teachers and students in the forced migration education context on the island of Leros, rather than claiming generalisability or seeking to capture the experiences of all educators or refugee students in Greece.

Finally, while I did my best to assume a reflexive and self-aware feminist stance throughout the study, I wish to acknowledge the limitations of my positionality as a researcher, and what these entail in terms of ethical considerations. Even though I strived to be aware of the effect of my positionality during participant recruitment and data collection, and to take the necessary measures to alleviate any potential harm, I am aware of the power dynamics that were involved in doing research with students of refugee background. By using a gatekeeper to recruit students for the classroom

discussions, and by obtaining informed assent from the students and informed consent from their parent, I aimed to ensure the students' informed and voluntary participation. Furthermore, throughout the lessons, by employing the feminist tools of reflexivity and self-awareness, I strived to create an environment in which the students could feel safe enough to relate their ideas, even if these were different from mine. The rich conversations in which we engaged and the amount of information that the students shared with me, suggest that this was, to a satisfactory degree, achieved.

8.7   Suggestions for future research

This study has sought to introduce and provide insight into the use of feminist pedagogy in refugee education, an area which is little explored in the forced migration education context. While the analysis hopes to offer valuable understanding into this untraversed area by looking at the opportunities and obstacles for feminist pedagogy to be implemented in the Greek context, it has also opened up many avenues for further research into the practice and policy of refugee education.

Firstly, the findings of the study suggest the need for teachers in refugee education to be introduced to feminist pedagogical practices. Many staff participants acknowledged the need for a reflexive approach in refugee education, as well as one which takes into account the emotions of the students and allows teachers to include these in the educational procedure. Moreover, there were some staff participants who, at the end of the interview, expressed an interest to learn more information about feminist pedagogy. In light of these findings, certain avenues for further research would prove to be especially necessary and beneficial. These could include th the possible development and implementation of a training course for teachers on how to use feminist pedagogy in the refugee classroom, as well as the development of more specific guidelines or a curriculum based on feminist pedagogy for the refugee classroom.

Furthermore, another suggestion for future research would be the further exploration of refugee-background students' views and reception of a feminist pedagogy approach. This study pointed to the significance of including students' perspectives in refugee education research, and to the power of counter-narratives to deconstruct dominant hegemonical views around culture (McPherson, 2015). It is hoped that the present study, having pointed out this value of students' voices, will encourage

these voices to be further explored, included, and considered in research on refugee education.

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APPENDIX A – Research Ethics Approval Letter (Amendment)

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application	Academic Year 2020/21
Applicant Code	TT74
Applicant/Supervisor Name	Tereza Mytakou / Prof Lorna Carson
Title of Research	Developing a Gender-Sensitive English Language Curriculum for Refugees
Date of this letter	10/09/2021

Dear Tereza,

Your amended submission (dated 10/09/2021) for ethical approval for the research project above was considered by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin and has been approved in full.

Please note:
(i) On completion of research projects, applicants should complete the *End of Project Report Form* (which can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/slscs/research/ethics/) and submit one electronic copy (to slscs@tcd.ie)
(ii) The REC requests, in particular, that you attend to your commitments regarding the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you every luck with your research.

Best wishes,

Dr Ciarán Kenny
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

Scoil na nEolaíochtaí Teangeolaíochta,
Urlabhra agus Cumarsáide,
Coláiste na Tríonóide,
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APPENDIX B – Letter to the gatekeeper

Letter to the gatekeeper

Dear [Name of the relevant staff member at the NGO],

My name is Tereza Mytakou and I am a Ph.D. student at the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences at Trinity College, Dublin. I am currently researching refugee education, and more specifically how English can be taught to refugees and migrants in Greece through a feminist pedagogy curriculum, which will raise awareness about gender issues through the teaching of the English language. The title of my research project is "Developing a Gender-Sensitive English Language Curriculum for Refugees and Migrants in Greece: An Intersectional Approach", and my supervisor is Professor Lorna Carson.

I am writing to you, because I would like to ask you to act as the gatekeeper for my study. I would greatly appreciate your help. Please take as much time as you need to read the details about the study and decide whether you would like to be involved. I am at your disposal to any questions you may have about the study. To the best of my knowledge, there will be no risk or harm caused to the persons involved.

For this study I am asking your help as gatekeeper to collect research data from your organization in the following three ways. Firstly, I would like to audio record some group discussions that we will have in class with the students. Secondly, I would like to take field notes during the lessons, and use any texts, drawings or presentations that will be generated by the students during their lessons with me, in order to analyse and discuss them in my research. Thirdly, I would like to record any classroom discussions with the students that are relevant to my research. These discussions will last approximately 15-20 minutes, and will take place during my lessons. I will only make use of data that is relevant to my study, and I will do my best to ensure that the students remain anonymous and unrecognizable.

I remain at your disposal for any further questions. I thank you sincerely for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Tereza Mytakou

APPENDIX C – Participant Information Leaflets

Educators and Managers

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

**"Developing a Gender-Sensitive English Language
Curriculum for Refugees and Migrants in Greece"**
Information Leaflet for Educators and Managers

Dear Manager, dear Educator

My name is Tereza Mytakou and I am a PhD student at Trinity College
Dublin, Ireland. I would like to ask you your consent for your participation in
a study that I am doing as part of my PhD degree. The study's aim is to
design English language lessons for refugee students in Greece, which will
be based on feminist pedagogy.

Information about the study
The study's main aim will be to develop an English language curriculum
based on feminist pedagogy and teaching it to a group of refugee
background students in Greece. As a first step, and in order to develop my
curriculum, I will also be interviewing teachers who have worked with
refugee background students in Greece, and asking them about their
experiences in the refugee classroom and their views on feminist
pedagogy's role in it. All interviews will be conducted through Microsoft
Teams Videoconferencing.

Why is this study important?
Learning English is an important skill for students with a refugee
background. My aim is to research how English classes can respond to their
needs and become as effective as possible. I believe that using feminist
pedagogy as a basis to design English lessons could help make these more
meaningful for refugee students. I am asking you to participate in this study,
because I also think that talking to other refugee educators will give me
valuable feedback in this design. This study may not have any direct benefit
for you or the students, but it may help us understand how to design better
English language lessons for refugee students in the future.

Do I have to take part? What if I change my mind?
Your participation in this study would be valuable. However, you are not
obliged to take part. If you agree to participate, I will contact you in order to
arrange an interview at a date and time that suits you. If, during any part of
the study, you decide that you don't want to take part, you can stop by just
letting me know.

What will I need to do if I decide to take part?
I will invite you to take part in a one-to-one interview with me, which will
last around 40-50 minutes. During this, we will discuss about what elements
you feel are useful in the refugee classroom, and if you think that feminist
pedagogy can have a place in it. Our interview will take place through

Microsoft Teams Videoconferencing and will consist of both audio and video. However, **only the audio** of the interview will be recorded, so as to keep track of what you say as accurately as possible.

How will my data be used?
Data from this research project may be published in the future in linguistic or educational journals, or may be presented at conferences. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Only you and I will have access to the original recordings and all copies.

How will my data be protected?
All of your data will be treated with confidentiality. I will transcribe your interview and make it anonymous so as to protect your identity. The original audio files from the interview as well as the anonymized files will be stored on a secure drive provided by Trinity College Dublin in a double-encrypted and password protected file. Your name will not appear in the research, as I will give each participant a pseudonym. All files will be accessible only by you and me. They will be kept on the secure drive for 7 years after the publication of my research, and then deleted. If you wish to make any changes or delete parts of your interview, you will be able to do so up until I anonymise the interview.
This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin.

Further information
If you have any questions, or would like to know more about this study, I am happy to answer.

Thank you very much for your time!

Tereza Mytakou
Ph.D. Student,
School of Linguistic, Speech,
and Communication Sciences,
Trinity College Dublin
mytakout@tcd.ie,
+306938955113

Academic Supervisor:
Dr. Lorna Carson,
Head of School of Linguistic, Speech and Communications Sciences,
Trinity College Dublin
carsonle@tcd.ie

Parent/Guardians

Parent/Guardian Information Leaflet

Developing a Gender-Sensitive English
Language Curriculum for Refugees and
Migrants in Greece

Information Leaflet for Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Tereza Mytakou and I am a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. I would like to ask you your consent for your child to take part in a study that I am doing as part of my PhD degree. The study's aim is to design and test English language lessons for students in Greece who have a refugee background, in order to make them more effective.

Information about the study
This study will take place at [SCHOOL 1] in Leros. The English lessons in my study will based on feminist pedagogy, which means that they will have the following characteristics:

* the classroom will be inclusive to all students,
* we will talk about topics like gender equality, inclusivity, discrimination,
* we will value our previous experiences and emotions as part of the learning process,
* the students will have an active role in creating the lessons with me and telling me what they want to learn or do in class.

Why is this study important?
Learning English is an important skill for students with a refugee background. We want to make sure that these English classes will be as effective as possible, and that they will respond to their needs.

Does my child have to take part? What if we change our minds?
Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you allow your child to take part, I will also ask your child if they agree. If so, they can take part. If you to say no, it won't affect your child's education at the centre. If you or your child change your mind after the lessons have already started, they can stop at any time. Just let me or [name of contact person at ARSIS LEDU] know and I will arrange this.

What will my child need to do if s/he decides to take part?

Your child will attend my English class. and I will audio record some of the group discussions that we will have in class. I will also use some of the writing, drawings or presentations that your child will create. All of this will be anonymous – no names will be used.

How will my child's data be used?

Data from this research project may be published one day in academic journals, or may be presented at conferences. Your child will not be identified in any work.

How will my child's data be protected?

Your child's name will **not** appear in the study. I will give your child a code instead of their name. Information will safely stored in a secure online file provided by the university, protected by passwords. You can look at the class discussion records and tell me if want me to delete something from it. The study has been approved by the university.

Further information

If you have any questions, or would like to know more about this study, you are welcome to contact me by phone (+306938955113) or email (mytakout@tcd.ie) or ask [COORDINATOR'S NAME].

Thank you very much for your time!

Tereza Mytakou
Ph.D. Student,
School of Linguistic, Speech, and Communication Sciences,
Trinity College Dublin
mytakout@tcd.ie,
+306938955113

Academic Supervisor:
Prof. Lorna Carson,
Head of School of Linguistic, Speech and Communications Sciences,
Trinity College Dublin
carsonle@tcd.ie

Students

Dear Student,

My name is Tereza Mytakou and I am a researcher at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. I am doing a study about teaching English to students who have a refugee background and who are now living in Greece.

*

I am doing this study because I want to find out how to design better English lessons for students who have a refugee background. [NGO 1] has agreed to let me be your teacher at [SCHOOL 1], and your parent/guardian has said that you can take part in my English lessons.

*

If you agree to take part, we will have English classes together. During these classes we will talk about topics like gender and inclusion, and we will use our personal experiences and emotions in order to learn. We will have some class discussions, and I might record those to use them in my research. Also, I will use some of the writing, drawings or presentations that you create during our lessons. I will not include your name in my research.

*

What if you don't want to take part? You are free to say yes or no. If you change your mind after the lessons have started and don't want to be in the study anymore, you can stop. Just tell me or your parent/guardian and I will arrange this.

*

If you have any more questions or want to know more information before you decide, you can ask me or [COORDINATOR'S NAME]!

APPENDIX D – Consent forms

Educators and Managers

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Educator and Manager Consent Form

"Developing a Gender-Sensitive English Language Curriculum for
Refugees and Migrants in Greece"

**This consent form consists of 10 sections. Each section contains a
statement. If you agree with the statement, please fill the box next to it
with your initials. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research!**

I have read and understood the Information Leaflet. The information was fully explained to me, and I was able to ask any questions that I had about it.	
I understand the purpose of the study, and how my data will be used.	
I understand that I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.	
I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.	
I have been informed of any potential risks or benefits of the study.	
I agree to being contacted by the researcher by email/phone as part of this research study.	
I agree to allow personal information about me to be shared with third parties, including academic research institutions, for the purpose of applied linguistics research.	
I understand that personal information about me will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.	

Participant Signature: **Date:**

Researcher Signature: **Date:**

273

Parent/Guardians

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

"Developing a Gender-Sensitive English
Language Curriculum for Refugees and Migrants in Greece: an Intersectional Approach"

There are 10 sections in this form. Each section has a statement. Please put your initials in the box next to the statement if you agree. Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements.
Thank you for participating!

Statement	
I confirm that the Information Leaflet was translated to me in my language by an interpreter. The information was fully explained to me, and I was able to ask any questions that I had about it.	
I understand the purpose of the study, and how my child's data will be used.	
I understand that my child can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason. I understand that deciding not to take part will not affect his/her current or future classroom participation.	
I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my child's name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I or my child will not be paid for taking part in this study.	
I agree to class discussions with my child being audio-recorded.	
I have been informed about any risks or benefits of the study.	
I agree to being contacted by researchers by email/phone as part of this research study.	
I agree to allow personal information about my child to be shared with third parties including academic research institutions for the purpose of applied linguistics research.	
I understand that personal information about my child will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.	

Researcher Signature: Date:
Participant Signature: Date:

Parent/Guardians

274

APPENDIX E – Interview Guide/Questions

Educators

- When and how did you start working with refugees? What made you become involved in refugee education?

- What do you think are the greatest challenges of teaching refugee students? What advice would you give to a new teacher who is about to teach in a refugee classroom?

- In your experience, what were the most fulfilling moments of teaching refugee background students? What are your fondest memories?

- How would you describe your teaching method in the refugee classroom? Would you say it is more teacher-centered or student-centered? Could you describe some of the activities that you use and that you think work really well for refugee background students?

- What do you think of the use of emotions in the refugee classroom? Do you talk about your students' emotions with them? Have you tried to incorporate them in your lesson? Why / why not?

- Has the topic of gender (gender identity/gender equality/sexual orientation) come up in your classroom? What are your experiences related to this topic?

- Do you think it is possible to talk about the topic of gender in the refugee classroom? Have you tried to approach it? If yes, what was your experience? If not, why?

Managers

- When and how did you start working with refugees? What made you become involved in refugee education?
- What do you think are the greatest challenges in co-ordinating and managing educational programs/ schools for refugee students?
- In your role as a manager, what were the main challenges that the teachers faced and conveyed to you? What do you think was the cause of these challenges?
- Did any issues related to gender (gender inequality, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.) come up in the schools, that were made known to you? If yes, could you give some examples?
- How were the above issues dealt with by the school?
- Do you think it is important to approach gender issues with refugee students? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- What are the possible challenges in this? How should this be implemented in school, according to your experience?
- Do you think that the schools that are/were under your supervision try to approach gender issues, whether that is through different targeted actions and events or through the school's curriculum? If yes, how? If not, why not?
- If not, why do you think this doesn't happen? What are the difficulties in approaching this matter, according to what you have heard from the teachers or from your own experience?
- What do you think the role of the teachers should be in this approach? Should they work together to form a common agenda when approaching these topics? (This question is based on a discussion I had with one of the managers previously, so I will ask them to expand on this further)
- Do you think that the schools' curriculum and actions promote the development of students' resilience? In what ways?
- Do the schools focus on developing the students' critical consciousness? If yes, how? Do they approach more general issues of oppression through the curriculum and activities implemented?
- Do you think that there is reflexivity about power relations in school? Do you think this is important in the refugee class for teachers and staff?

APPENDIX F – Classroom Discussion Handouts

Discussion 1 Handout: Clothes and Gender

Clothes around the world!
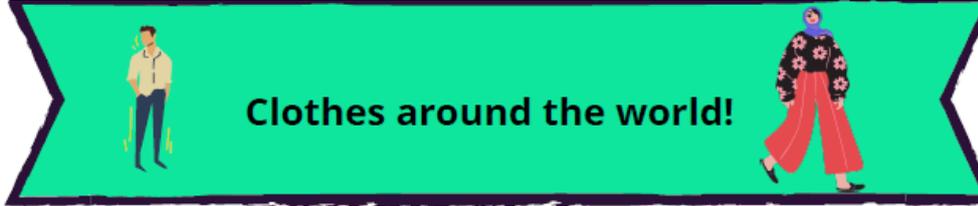
Activity 1.

Step 1: Find a photo of a man and woman in an Arabic country and one of a man and a woman in a European country.

Step 2: Write a short description of what they are wearing.

Step 3:

What differences are there in the way these people are dressed and why? Are there any similarities?

Activity 2. Discussion!

- What do you like about these styles and what don't you like so much?
- Has your style changed now that you live in Greece? Would you wear the same clothes if you were in an Arabic country?

Discussion 2 Handout: *The Proudest Blue*

"The Proudest Blue"
a book by Ibtihaj Muhammad

Before we read

Activity 1:

- What does the color blue mean for you? What feelings does it bring you?

- What do you think "the proudest blue" means? How can a color be "proud"?

- What do you think this story is going to be about?

• •
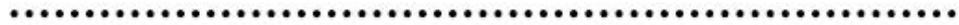
Activity 2:

- What is the story about?

- Who are the main characters? What are they like?

- When and where does the story take place?

- What happens?

Questions for Discussion

Activity 3:

- What does it mean to *whisper*? When do we whisper?

- Why is the girl whispering to Faiza about her sister?

- How does Faiza answer and why?

Activity 3:

- How does Faiza describe her sister's hijab?

- How does the boy describe Asiya's hijab?

Activity 4:

Mama's words:

"Don't carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them."

What is Mama's advice for Faiza and Asiya?

What do her words mean? What does it mean to "drop others' words?"

Discussion 5 Handout: Food and Gender

Who eats what?

In many countries in **Africa** and **Asia**, women usually eat after feeding the entire family. When there is not enough food, women usually eat the leftover food. Women are not supposed to eat in front of anybody. They do this to show love and respect to their husbands and sons.

Boys and girls do not eat the same food. Boys eat more nutritious and tasty food.

In **India**, girls fast or sacrifice food from a very young age, hoping to get married or to get a good husband. Women fast many days each year for the health and well beings of their husbands, and sons. They can't eat from sunrise to sunset, sometimes even without a drop of water.

In **Nepal**, women on their period can't eat milk, yoghurt, butter, meat, and other nutritious foods. The typical diet during menstruation is dry foods, salt, and rice.

Adapted from https://www.rightsofequality.com/gender-discrimination-in-access-and-consumption-of-food-across-cultures/

Activity 1. Match the words to the pictures

fasting, leftover food, nutritious, feed, sacrifice

2. Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think about these traditions?

2. Have you heard of anything similar in the places that you have lived?

3. Do you think these traditions should continue or not? Why?

Discussion 6 Handout: The Veil

Boushra Almutawakel, a photographer from Yemen who wears a headscarf, opposes extreme covering because it makes women disappear. (International Museum of Women)

- What do you see in the picture?
- What changes in each picture?
- What do you think is the meaning of this series of photographs?

By photographer Boushra Almutawakel

- What is happening in the photos?
- What do you think about a man wearing a veil?
- How would you feel if you had to wear a veil?
- What do you think is the photographer trying to say?