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Introduction

This paper explores agency through humour and time amongst a group of Pakistani young men who reside, or recently resided, in a refugee shelter for unaccompanied minors in Athens, Greece. It asks how jokes about alternate futures amongst this group might challenge the slow, structural violence which places these young men on the margins of society in terms of work, space, and temporality. Despite a lack of anthropological work on humour, particularly amongst migrant communities, this ethnography takes up humour as an analytical tool due to its pervasive presence in the shelter and its challenge to the discourse of victimhood and pity of migrant children. I ultimately argue that conventional theories about the role of humour fail to fully account for the temporalities that these jokes around futurity evoke. This paper also sheds light on the various constructs of time at play within the lives of these young men and how these are disrupted in the moment of the joke. It asks what modalities of agency emerge during these jokes when we employ Deleuze's non-linear syntheses of time and seeks, ultimately, to look beyond conventional assumptions of youth agency and structural inequality, and to question the premises upon which such conventions are built.

When I first began visiting this NGO-run shelter from 2017-2018, my role was to provide educational activities, and I had no inkling of a future where I would revisit a year later for research. I returned in the name of this research for a month-long field visit in July 2019 to spend two hours a day observing and chatting with its residents. I returned to the setting with memories of the space, of the individuals I had met, of the stories they had told me, meaning this project was, for me, an emotional as much as an intellectual endeavour.

Almost all of the young men whom I had known when I previously visited as a provider of

non-formal education had moved away in the year between my visits. Most had turned 18 and moved to other parts of Greece for work whilst some had crossed the border to Italy illegally and a couple had been legally united with family in Europe. Irtaza, however, was still living there when I arrived, and he seemed proud to introduce me to his new group of friends. He and five of his close friends from Pakistan became my interlocutors – and I got to know them well through visiting the shelter and ‘hanging out’ with them for a few hours each day. Irtaza was 18 when this research began whilst Azlan, Arish, Adnan, Meerab and Muhammad were between 15 and 17 years old. All were from Gujrat, Gujranwala, Mandi Bahauddin or Sialkot in Pakistan’s Punjab province; cities with high levels of illegal migration to Europe (Aksel et al. 2015: 27; Butt 2018). Every boy travelled to Greece over land via the Iran to Turkey route using human smugglers with their immediate family remaining in Pakistan, except Muhammad and Irtaza whose brothers travelled to Europe a few years before they made the journey. Throughout this paper, I will refer to the site as the ‘shelter’ and have changed all names and personal details to protect the identity of the interlocutors involved.

Towards the middle of my month-long field visit, Irtaza moved into an independent flat and began to engage in informal work, cleaning and painting houses. Despite telling me many times that he shouldn’t keep returning to the shelter now that he is 18, he still visited the shelter every day, usually for an hour or so. During one such visit, whilst I am sitting at the dining table with a social worker and an interpreter who works for the shelter is smoking on the balcony nearby, he cracks a joke which has all four of laughing together. The joke emerges from Irtaza telling the social worker about his new job, describing how he likes his boss but that the work is hard with long hours and a pittance of a salary. Getting up to leave

and as he walks casually out of the room, he adds that after a few weeks he will perhaps have made a lot of money and will become the King of Greece. He says that the first thing he will do is deport the interpreter sitting on the balcony. Whilst we laugh and the interpreter begins to mock-protest, Irtaza walks confidently out of the room without a second glance and I am left wondering what to make of this joke which has united the three of us in humour and an imaginary of a topsy-turvy world where the hierarchies are upended. What makes this funny is our common knowledge of his marginalised position and the outrageous and ridiculous notion that the roles could be reversed so absolutely that he could become the ruler of a country from which, he tells me, he may well one day be deported.

Kuipers writes 'a joke is a joke only if it is repeated: only at the moment of repetition does a joke become a joke, a "social event" instead of an individual creation' (2006: 6). Indeed, this was far from the first time I had heard a joke where the future was re-imagined amongst the group, and it was repeated in various formulations, the most common being the refrain that a few of the group might hide in my suitcase during my journey back to England whilst the rest would be left behind. Outside of the joking context however, conversations about the future were starkly different. Meerab talked seriously, and gravely, about how dangerous the journey to cross the border with Italy might be, how the Channel crossing was yet more dangerous. Irtaza shared his fears about the problems with his papers and the struggles he would face because of this. Muhammad told me that well-paid work was hard to find, that bosses were often cruel, that he was always tired but that he had to work to send money home at the end of the month. During a community meeting, held weekly between shelter staff and all of the boys from the shelter, the young men were asked to share where they

see themselves in three years' time and their future goals. Muhammad scoffs and responds that he only hopes he might be alive tomorrow and cannot imagine anything beyond that. What are we to make of these young mens' resistance to discussions of the future and their simultaneous, elaborate entry into imagining it in the world of jokes? In the case of Muhammad, these two approaches to the future were expressed in the very same hour, marking an incongruence that became commonplace during my visits to the shelter. It raised two apparently contradictory approaches to a question often posed in migration literature: 'what future is being imagined in these places of distancing and exception...?' (Agier 2018: 13).

I will first locate this paper in the wider literature before detailing this ethnography's background and methodology, in order to then illustrate the ways that external forces locate Pakistani immigrant youth on the margins of power and thus as victims of structural and slow violence. I will then closely examine instances of these jokes about alternate futures, in the context of theories around the functions of humour. Rather than dismissing these jokes as the anxiety of the oppressed, I explore the qualitative 'time' of the joke as tension and appeal to the rejection of the linearity of time popularised by Bergson and Deleuze to explore how these young men exercise agency during futurity jokes. What emerges is the complexity of various constructs of time at work in the lives of these young men, and their use of moments of humour to laterally evade structural constraint.

Youth agency, humour and time

As we saw with the global outcry to the image of Alan Kurdi washed up on the shore near Bodrum in Turkey, child migrants are commonly depicted in humanitarian literature and the media as embodying the plight of the victimised refugee; but regularly in the arms of mothers and often the very young. Malkki suggests that children have become the ideal representation of the refugee because they embody a 'powerless being with no connections to history, traditions, culture or nationality' (Malkki 1995: 11). This image of child as victim is echoed in the little academic work that exists on lone migrant children, mostly in the disciplines of social work, psychology and health. Studies include an exploration of mistrust amongst unaccompanied minors in Ireland (Ní Raghallaigh 2014) and work on mental health problems among migrant children in Norway (Jensen et al. 2015). Such literature abounds with terms like 'neglect', 'hardship' and 'difficulties', inadvertently denying agency to the individuals concerned, and relying heavily on interviews which, as I will discuss, is problematic. In light of the independence developed by many of my interlocutors in journeying to Europe alone and their own perceptions of themselves as young men rather than children, distinct categories of the vulnerable child and the self-sufficient adults are blurred in this context, as I argue that we need to move beyond seeing youth as powerless victims and instead consider where their agency might lie.

Structure-agency debates are ubiquitous in migration studies. Agency has been explored by looking at motivations for migration (Ahmad 2011; Killian et al. 2012; Vlase and Voicu 2014), by arguing for the spatial and cultural imaginaries forged through transnational practices (Appadurai 1991; Schiller et al. 1995) and by analysing the transformation of public spaces through camp construction and inhabitation (Agier 2002; Peteet 2005). Some youth-centred scholarship has explored migration in the context of childrens' aspirations for their futures,

with agency understood either as a capacity to pursue migration (Crivello 2015) or as a mediation between two sets of cultural norms (Fassetta 2011: 145). Rather than being oriented around the migration process itself, this paper considers agency in a different frame, as ‘a sense of boundary-crossing creativity’ (Mavroudi et al. 2017: 14), a subversion of repeatedly performed norms (Butler 1993; Butler 1997; Butler 1999) and as ‘becoming’ according to Deleuze, as we will explore in Chapter 3. Whilst literature on youth agency often highlights the themes of joking and fun (Dyson 2014; Krishnan 2015) and Goldstein’s (2003) ethnography of a Brazilian favela focuses on the preponderance of humour in a space of marginalisation, I want to go beyond the accounts of humour sketched out in these ethnographies by exploring the temporal aspects of my interlocutors’ jokes about the future specifically.

A key temporal theme in scholarship on asylum-seekers and migrants has been waiting and the uncertainty this gives rise to (Conlon 2011; Mountz 2011; Robertson and Runganaikaloo 2014). Whilst I will explore the constraints on the lives of my interlocutors which ostensibly confine them to such a limbo, this paper builds on a body of literature on time which foregrounds the complexity of time perceptions in anthropological analysis (Bear 2014; Gell 1992; Munn 1992), to explore temporal interruption during jokes. Recent work on time has begun employing notions developed by Bergson and Deleuze, including Hodges (2008) who endorses Deleuze’s concept of duration ‘as a candidate for the temporal ontology of a modern self-reflexive social science’ (Hodges 2008: 40) and Nielsen whose ethnography focuses on illegal squatters in Maputo, Mozambique, who ‘engage with futures that will never follow the present’ (Nielsen 2014: 178). Moroşanu and Ringel’s (2016) volume on temporal agency also focuses on ways to outmanoeuvre the future, which they refer to as

‘time-tricking’. This paper contributes to these explorations of temporal agency and non-linear conceptualisations of temporalities. My decision to narrate the jokes in the present tense reflects an effort to portray the humour as I perceived it and to re-create, in a small way, the temporal incongruity for which this paper argues.

Field site, methodology, positionality and limitations

There are 48 shelters for unaccompanied minors in Greece similar to the shelter where I conducted my fieldwork (EKKA 2019). All house children who arrive in the country without immediate family or kin (with the exception of brothers) and who are referred to the shelter by the National Centre for Social Solidarity or EKKA. The shelters provide accommodation, food and a social worker for each child in their care. The shelter where my interlocutors live also ensures schooling and pastoral support with a psychologist, lawyer and interpreters on hand. The space is inhabited by unaccompanied minors of several different nationalities including Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis, Pakistanis and Palestinians, making it a multilingual and multinational space. The majority of these individuals arrived in Greece relatively recently, from a few months to two or three years ago and spend between a few months to a year at the site. Rather than conduct a traditional ethnography bounded by the physical space of the shelter and its residents and staff, my focus is on a friendship group who have nationality (Pakistani), religion (Sunni Islam) and language (Urdu, with some Punjabi words and phrases) in common. My decision to focus on Pakistani young men specifically is because this demographic makes up 30% of the recorded (and almost certainly underestimated) 3,792 unaccompanied minors in Greece (EKKA 2019) and yet very little research of any sort has focussed on this group.

Due to the vulnerable position of those in the study, I had to carefully consider the potential psychological impacts of conducting this fieldwork. I attempted to mitigate these risks by communicating my movements and the boundaries of my role clearly and keeping in close contact with staff at the shelter. The individuals involved in this research had usually undergone several interviews with police, lawyers and social workers regarding their presence in Greece. In my experience, such exchanges often lead to mistrust of those interviewing or taking notes, the creation of a power dynamic between interviewer and interviewee and the development of certain tropes and stories perceived as 'desirable' amongst migrants in order to further asylum claims etc. What's more, most of the young men in this paper told me that they find interview situations stressful and thus, for ethical reasons, I refrained from recreating them as far as possible in my fieldwork. Bourdieu highlights the potential futility of my enterprise here by pointing out the inevitability of a relationship of inquiry in fieldwork and the resultant biases (Bourdieu 2007: 166), whether or not interviews are used. Such biases are perhaps inevitable in this work which is enmeshed 'in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities' (Clifford 1986: 9). My relationship with my interlocutors was inherently unequal, not only because I am legally an adult but because I am from England, a desirable destination for many of my interlocutors. My ability to come and go freely from England, demonstrated by my return to the shelter after a long absence, provides merely one example of our inequalities as lived. My awareness of this throughout the research, and my awareness of its impact on my interlocutors, brings to mind a longer history of European and British colonisation and subjugation. It also forces me to reflect on whether the agency I perceive amongst my interlocutors is simply a reflection of my own guilt or desire for freedoms vis-à-vis this

group. By closely analysing agency theoretically, I seek to at least partly overcome such charges.

On a Tuesday evening early in my fieldwork, a theatre group are preparing to perform for the shelter residents and the boys are settling themselves on plastic chairs on the balcony. As latecomers assemble in front of the performance space, Arish roves between the audience members shouting 'chocolate! chocolate!' with a plastic bucket filled with plums and nectarines perched on his shoulder. Everyone erupts with laughter and I get the sense that I have arrived in a community of 'laughing people' (Bakhtin 1984: 474). In focussing on this humour, I try to avoid the discourse common amongst refugee advocacy groups where alleged migrant voices become one-dimensional and decontextualized to suit the agenda of the organisation (Cabot 2016: 604-605). Despite hearing shocking details about the treatment of these young men at the hands of authorities and human traffickers, my decision *not* to focus on these stories of migration is partly due to my discomfort with asking how my interlocutors got there and why, with its implicit judgements of morality and pity and appeal to constant justification, and partly because, when prompted to tell their stories of migration, I had the strong impression that 'the words had the frozen slide quality to them, which showed their burned and numbed relation to life' (Das 2007: 11). Just as Das felt that scholarly accounts of Partition seemed ghost-written, I was haunted by the idea that my words could never express even a part of the harrowing conditions of travelling from Pakistan to Greece.

A female entering the all-male space of the shelter is not unusual as many of the shelter staff and volunteers are or had been female. However, my behaviour was unusual in this

context due to my expressed desire to 'hang out' with the group as an equal rather than take a formal role of responsibility or leadership, and because I spent so much time in their living space rather than in the shelter's upstairs office. With downcast eyes and a shy smile, Adnan confided in me that I was the first girl he had spoken to in Urdu since his arrival in Greece. As the weeks pass by, I hear many stories about girls in Europe and Pakistan, from Meerab who tells me he has 130 girlfriends across the world, to Azlan who daringly asks, in a community meeting, whether the shelter could organise one girl for every boy. After such jokes, my interlocutors were often keen to clarify that they considered me to be 'their sister' and during my final week, Azlan announces that I have become a boy due to spending so much time with the group. Whilst this elicits much laughter, I am secretly pleased at this joke in its suggestion that the boundaries of gender have been somewhat broken down during my fieldwork, and that I am firmly considered in a non-romantic sense by the group. Whilst the emergence of friendships is common in fieldwork, my feelings swung between concern that my behaviour might be misconstrued and worry that I was subconsciously stereotyping my interlocutors by considering them to be preoccupied with my gender. These anxieties led me to reflect on assumptions about gender inherent in my social and academic world that I might be projecting onto my interlocutors. Thus, whilst masculinity is not an explicit focus of this research, gendered logics may play into practices of humour and bilateral perceptions in this paper.

One limitation of my approach was the short time I spent in the setting. I often felt that I was only managing to capture snatches of information and could not allow the complexity of a situation to crystallize fully over time. This process was made even more challenging by my occasional difficulties in communication due to my lack of complete fluency in Urdu,

particularly in the Punjabi-influenced slang used by my interlocutors. The limitations of language were somewhat transcended due to our joint efforts at communicating in a mixture of Greek, Urdu and English, and I found that betraying a lack of understanding of certain words and phrases allowed for natural explanation and humorous reactions to moments of confusion as well as the exchange of learning and teaching English and Urdu. When it came to gaining consent, I used an interpreter to ensure full comprehension for the reasons for my presence although the question around consent for those who are under 18 and whose guardian is the shelter centres around agency itself. With this demographic, there is never complete certainty that a young person's decision to take part in the research is made freely, considering the acceptance of my presence by the shelter and the potential compulsion to say 'yes' to adults. Through building trusting relationships with my interlocutors and excluding reference to the young men whose ability to consent might, I felt, be compromised, I tried to mitigate these risks. The shelter, who provided written consent before I gained my interlocutors' oral consent, requested that I not take direct quotes from my interlocutors, which is why I include no direct quotes in this paper, except where the same phrase was repeated by many people, which the shelter informed me was acceptable. As Das and Kleinman tell us, language provides 'not only a message but also the subject to be projected outward' (Das and Kleinman 2001: 22). The subject here is a very shadowy reflection of my interlocutors due to my inability to share their humour in their own words. Yet inevitably and even with the ability to quote directly, ethnography produces 'fictions' since they are always 'something made', 'something fashioned' (Geertz 1993: 15). My work inevitably makes and fashions my interlocutors just as my presence and recognised identity as female and European inevitably disrupted space and practices of humour,

shaping what and how I perceive my interlocutors' lives, and, of course, my decisions on what to share in this paper.

Chapter 1: Slow, structural violence

I want to situate this ethnography with an acknowledgement of structural violence in the lives of these young men which casts doubt on hopeful futures and seems to leave no room for agency. Galtung defines structural violence as inequality with no perpetrator but part of a structure of power (Galtung 1969: 170-171). In its most extreme form, structural violence against migrants is both physical and symbolic because, not only do many migrants die or suffer injuries during border crossings from Pakistan to Greece but many bodies are never recovered nor formally identified, showing 'the extent to which their bodies, in death, do not seem to *matter* to the rest of us' (Ahmad 2009: 317). Rather than the fast violence of these brutal deaths at the border, I characterize the workings of violence in the lives of these young men as slow violence which 'derive[s] largely from the unequal attention given to spectacular and unspectacular time' (Nixon 2011: 6) and builds on Galtung's understanding of structural violence by attending to 'questions of time, movement, and change, however gradual' (Nixon 2011: 10). It is much more difficult to locate the workings of slow violence, like unrelenting labour, spatial and temporal relegation and being privy to the changing tides of external forces in the case of my interlocutors, when compared to acts of violence that occur in spectacular time. The notion of a migrant crisis for example, tends to revolve around the act of migration itself, conceived of as a temporally immediate event of fast violence. As Berlant reminds us, a 'crisis' is more of a judgement than a factual description as it implicitly appeals to heroic action and is an externally oriented temporality

for events which can be facts of life in ordinary time for those at its locus (Berlant 2007: 760-761). Rather than an interrogation of where agency lies within complicated power structures like the state, my focus here is on my interlocutors' subjective expressions of violence in terms of employment, space, and time, and how these interact with discursive and material factors.

1.1 Jobs on the margins

Out of the window of the coffee shop where I write my fieldnotes, I see Pakistani men working in the streets of Athens, pushing around carts of scrap found by sorting through bins and skips, selling roses to couples on dates and cleaning the very windows through which I stare. Such work in the informal economy is characterized by long hours, low wages and poor working conditions. Irtaza quits his first cleaning job after two days because his boss was constantly shouting at him and the outdoor work in the Athenian summer heat had become unbearable. Both Muhammad and Irtaza now work in construction as part of a larger team for around 20-25 euros per eight to ten-hour shift. Irtaza shows me photos of the ornate rooms in the house on his phone and describes the nausea induced by breathing in paint fumes all day. He says that he has decided against joining friends as a dish-washer in Mykonos because accommodation in Mykonos is so expensive that over ten boys live in one room, and sleep in shifts. Muhammad and Irtaza discuss the sending of remittances back to their families in Pakistan as an obligation rather than a choice, considering the money their families have spent on smugglers to get them to Europe. This sheds light on the pressures on these young men from absent family and the imbrication of their lives with those in Pakistan via mobile phones. Arish is the only young man who I speak to with experience of

work in seasonal agriculture which employs mostly Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants as labourers in Greece. He worked on a family friend's farm after his arrival but found the conditions so unendurable that he fled to Athens after a week. Media attention was brought to the plight of such workers in 2013 when a farm foreman in the Peloponnese area of Manolada started shooting at migrant workers because they complained about unpaid wages. This act of 'fast' violence emerged from the largely ignored slow violence of life as an undocumented migrant worker in Greece, which many media sources have described as 'slave labour' (Baboulias 2013; Smith 2014; Zakaria 2019). Even for those who are not yet working but on the cusp of adulthood like Adnan, Arish, Meerab and Azlan, their awareness of their imminent job prospects makes it easy to understand their reluctance to seriously engage in plans and dreams about the future.

1.2 Spaces of ambivalence, embarrassment and marginalisation

Greece occupies the edge of Europe, sharing land and sea borders with Turkey. Heath Cabot's work shows how the marginalizing effect of being on this physical periphery is underscored by the impact of EU intervention, particularly when it comes to asylum law (Cabot 2014: 23-40). She points out that the discourse propagated amongst European media sources and NGOs often characterizes the country as 'backward and disorganized, with corrupt, arcane bureaucracies and violent police' (32), using its alleged failures as an advocacy tool to encourage changes to asylum law on the European level but ultimately alienating Greece yet further. Herzfeld (2002) describes Greece as a crypto-colonial state, as a country which is 'nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence' (Herzfeld 2002: 901). Such recent

dependencies on EU bodies to remain a member of the Union, on the IMF and the European Central Bank throughout the Greek government-debt crisis of 2007/08 and on European policy to respond to refugees and asylum seekers reaching Greek soil have reinforced its marginal position. There is an ambivalence towards the status of Greece amongst my interlocutors. The Manolada shooting incident highlights xenophobic attitudes towards South Asian migrants in the country and my interlocutors talk cryptically about the problem of 'fascists', 'mafia' or 'bad people' in Greece. During a debate about Greece's merits as a destination country, Muhammad wins the argument by asserting that, based on information from his brother living in Germany, far more money can be made in every other European country. Material and discursive factors interplay here to inform subjectivities of ambivalence around the possibility of a positive future in Greece.

The shelter is located on a main road on the periphery of the city centre, surrounded by residential buildings with no sign or indication of its purpose from its exterior. It comprises several high-ceilinged rooms, with one to four bunkbeds to a room, two communal living spaces, a large balcony and the shelter offices which are mainly occupied by staff. My interlocutors called the shelter '*ghar*' ('home') and most expressed preference for this space in comparison to the other state structures housing migrants with which they were familiar, such as camps, 'safe zones' dedicated to unaccompanied minors within accommodation sites, and detention centres which they refer to, in English, as 'jail'. One similarity between all of these structures is that all those within are grouped together and placed there by the state based on their refugee or migrant status, arguably marking the shelter as a 'state of exception' (Agamben 1998: 168). Unsurprisingly, the shelter is located in one of the poorer areas of Athens which both Irtaza and Meerab assert their distinction from, with Irtaza

suggesting that it is a place of depravity and illegality from which he would move away if he had the choice, and Meerab deriding the poor-quality, stolen items he tells me are peddled on the surrounding streets. This suggests the perception of their locale, not only as a space of economic and social marginalisation, but as a space of embarrassment.

Euro-centric labelling and the accompanying dictation over a future through granting or refusing asylum suggests that *any* European space where my interlocutors inhere is one manipulated by state power and thus on the margins and limits of the political order. The practice of taking fingerprints at the first location in Europe where a migrant arrives using Eurodac technology, the EU fingerprint database, means that the migrant cannot seek asylum in another European country thereby limiting their possibilities for movement and narrowing their identity to imprints of digital imagery. When it comes to asylum claims, Pakistani young men tend to receive a very high number of rejections. To use the first quarter of 2017 as an example, 77% of Pakistani childrens' asylum claims were rejected compared to 34% of Afghan children whereas no Syrian or Iraqi child received a rejection during this period (UNICEF 2017: 18). For the young men in this research, this makes the space of Europe more 'hostile' and their futures more uncertain than many of the young men of other nationalities with whom they live. Indeed, a source of tension in the shelter sprang from an awareness of these disparities, with accusations that certain individuals 'deserved' asylum more than others. Knowledge of the likelihood of a rejected asylum claim amongst my interlocutors also seemed to fuel the notion that there was 'no point' in learning Greek, taking school seriously or even going to school in some cases. The disparity in treatment of nationalities reflects the dichotomy between economic and forced migrants. All of my interlocutors would likely be considered economic migrants according to the

UNHCR definition (UNHCR 2006: 14), even if binaries between the economic and political reflect the requirements of institutions (Fassin et al. 2017: 163) rather than the multi—faceted motivations for migration from the perspectives of migrants themselves (Bhimji 2018).

1.3 State-dictated temporalities and bureaucratic time battles

The Greek/European state temporally constrains the lives of the young men in this research through age-determination assessments and enforced waiting. The determination of age is particularly relevant for my interlocutors who are in their late teens. This legal assessment of the age of the child involves a physical assessment by a paediatrician, an assessment by a psychologist and a social worker and potentially x-rays of the teeth or wrists as final proof, if there are any concerns that the child may not be a minor. This process removes the agency of having authority over one's own age, as well as determining how that young person will be treated in Greece, in terms of support from the state. As Cabot writes and as we have seen through the disparities in judgements on asylum claims: 'in the politics of refugee recognition, this power is asymmetrically concentrated in the agents of the state and the law, highlighting the role of juridical and state sovereignty in uttering the "word" that, ultimately, makes subjects recognisable as refugees' (Cabot 2014: 165), and for my interlocutors, the "word" that makes someone recognisable as a child or an adult too. After the status of 'child' has been determined, these young men await future deportation, family reunification or asylum acceptance; waiting which Bourdieu reminds us, 'implies submission' (Bourdieu 2000: 228). During this limbo of waiting, external forces dictate dates around which the near future is oriented. Irtaza, for example, told me that the papers which

will allow him to work legally in Greece will be up for renewal this December and will almost certainly be rejected, creating his own personal timeline which is dictated by the state. This coheres with Jane Guyer's (2007) account of contemporary approaches to the near future being punctuated with events such as court dates marking a deportation decision with the result that 'people's actions and imaginations pivot around compliance and delay, synchrony and avoidance' (Guyer 2007: 418).

For those in the shelter, 'the regularized rhythm of quotidian bureaucratic life' (Mathur 2014: 151) was inescapable. Through the printing of individual monthly timetables for each resident, and the repetition of the timings for school and excursions during community meetings and on posters displayed around the home, the shelter staff stressed the importance of respect for clock time. Amongst my interlocutors, frustration directed at the shelter tended to spring from these rules around dictated temporalities, such as the rule that friends from outside the shelter could only visit between 5pm and 7pm or that one had to return to the shelter by midnight to secure pocket money that week. Adnan told me that one of the worst things about living there was staff's refusal to provide access to the kitchen outside stipulated mealtimes, meaning that his preference for staying up late and sleeping until the afternoon was thwarted by hunger pangs. I witnessed several rebellions to this shelter-dictated time including Muhammad turning up over an hour late to our consent-taking meeting, Adnan trying to persuade the cook to provide him with food before dinner time and Irtaza stalling the departure for an organised visit to the park to play cricket by claiming that the balls were lost, only for them to be found 20 minutes later in his own bag. Due to shelter staff's exasperation at the lack of respect for 'bureaucratic time' amongst the shelter residents, one rule instigated shortly before my arrival was that excursions would

leave at the time stipulated and there would be no waiting for latecomers. Based on conversations with staff, there were several 'common sense' reasons for the bureaucratic 'keeping' of time: to ensure the fair and organised allocation of resources such as lawyers, psychologists, food and education for each of the 30 young men in their care in light of a small staff team and various demands and expectations from beneficiaries, to provide clear boundaries for children who may have lived a life with little to no experience of institutionalised clock-time and to prepare these children for an independent life in Greece, where time-keeping was seen as a necessity for successful survival. Yet, from the perspective of some of my interlocutors, the dictates of 'bureaucratic time' and the ensuing 'time battles' were perceived as exercises in power, as shelter staff manipulate the boys' movements in the name of order, and the young men, in turn, compel staff to wait for them or force staff to break their own rules. These clashes and their mediations deserve a more detailed analysis of the bureaucratic workings of the shelter, but point to the emergence of agency in response to the dictates of externally imposed time constructs.

Chapter 2: The functions of futurity jokes

In light of these temporal impositions, I turn to jokes which re-imagine a future where these structural constraints of labour, space and time are miraculously overcome. This incongruity means that such jokes can be defined as black humour, a term first used by André Breton (1966) to refer to comedy where laughter emerges from tragedy. Freud (1916) argued that such jokes allow for the relief of anxieties which are difficult to express in ordinary life. Since the young men I worked with often refused to engage with me in serious questions about the future but delved so naturally into this humorous futurity where the constraints to their

contemporary life dissolved with comic ease, this Freudian interpretation of the jokes as a form of relief from anxiety about the future is appealing. Another key focus of work on humour tends to be its social function. As Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) put it, ‘identity display (ID) and relational identity display/development (RID) can be the most important functions of joking’ (282). I will focus on two further examples to the vignette detailed in the introduction, to understand further the individual circumstances in which this humour is situated for these young men. In each, the ‘fantasy’ of the re-imagined future is dwelt on for a little longer than during quick quips about who might return to England with me or join the Pakistan cricket team tomorrow. This allows for a more expansive picture of the individuals’ imagined future, which I explore here in light of both Freudian and ‘relational identity’ theories of humour.

2.1 The King of Greece

When Irtaza describes himself as the King of Greece within the joke described in my opening vignette, I cannot help but think of the ways that he does indeed exercise the sort of power over others’ movement that a King might – but only within the space of the shelter, a space that he ironically no longer formally occupies. A joke amongst myself and the interlocutors is that Irtaza is the ‘*mālik*’ of the friendship group, which they later describe as meaning their boss or master. It is Adnan, grinning, who pokes fun at Irtaza by calling him this at first. But when I pursue the issue, Adnan protests that Irtaza is not their ‘*mālik*’ but simply a very good friend. The relationship between Irtaza and the other boys, particularly Adnan, affords Irtaza the highest status. The other boys fetch food from the kitchen for him, Adnan willingly lends Irtaza his smartphone for several days and, if a trip outside of the shelter to

take a walk or play cricket is suggested, the other young men will usually only attend if Irtaza joins. Irtaza openly exercises this power by often dithering over whether or not he wants to join an outside activity, and observing the group following his lead. There are some practical reasons for Irtaza's leadership position: he speaks English more fluently than most of the other boys and so often facilitates communication between his friends and outsiders (including me), and he has been at the shelter for longer than anyone else in the 'group'. His reference to himself as a King, then, reflects his status amongst his friendship group in the shelter and asserts this continued power despite his move to a new apartment. His social status could also explain his confidence in imaginatively deporting the interpreter who holds a position of institutional power within the shelter as well as indicating his joking, friendly relationship with this interpreter.

However, we could also see the joke as a relief of anxiety around his audience's potential perception of Irtaza as a pitiful figure. Whilst other young men are nearby, the key audience members for the joke are myself, a social worker and the targeted interpreter. Any potential commiserations around his new job, which might be ripe to emerge in the context, are wrenched away as he sweeps us all into a common imaginary of his enviable rather than pitiful future. The transformation of compassion into laughter could suggest that laughter functions as a sort of anaesthetic revealing 'an absence of feeling – it has no greater foe than emotion' (Bergson 1911: 4). I am reminded of McCullough's (2008) description of laughter amongst an Australian Aboriginal community when one man performs a clumsy dance performance and another mimics him mockingly. McCullough argues that shame around the other man's failure to perform an Aboriginal dance emerges from anxiety about the perception of the Aboriginal community before the White Other, which is eased and

dissipated through communal laughter: 'the laughter...was a defiant gesture to the onus of living under the perceptions of others' (McCullough 2008: 283). This also raises questions about whether this humour suggests an implicit acceptance of the cruel incongruity which drives the impossibility of these young men genuinely having power over their futures.

2.2 Muhammad's return to Pakistan

When I ask what Muhammad will be doing this week, a rather banal and pointless question since I already know that he works every day except Sunday when he sleeps or plays cricket, he responds that he will go back to Pakistan for two years and then come back to Greece again. Based on our conversations around his nostalgia for his village and family, there is a moment when I fully believe this to be a reality and I respond with 'really?!', 'why?', 'how will you get back?' He tells me, grinning, that he will simply take a flight so that he can spend time with his family because he has not seen them for a while and misses them. He says that he will go to see his parents first, then visit his friends, and that he will bring gifts for everyone from Greece. He says he might wander around, see a match by his friends' fighting dog or even join a local wrestling match himself, since he professes to be small but strong. After he swiftly admits that this is a joke, I tell him that I want to visit Pakistan in future, and that if he returns to Pakistan one day then I might visit his village. This short fantasy subverts the usual narrative of plans to move to European countries, instead celebrating a return to the country from which one has left, and provoking our shared, knowing smiles at its obvious distance from the realms of immediate future possibility. I reflect afterwards that my response is also an attempt to subvert a narrative where few

Europeans that my interlocutors meet will travel to the countries from which these young migrants come.

Muhammad had risked his life in order to reach Greece and was seeking asylum there; the notion that he would prefer to be in Pakistan is completely contrary to these practical actions and I never heard him express this desire outside of this joke. He did however regularly reminisce about life in Pakistan: he told me that he and his brother were local wrestling champions and how his mother made the best '*nīmbū pānī*' (a version of lemonade that can be spiced with salt and cumin). The clearest expression of his anxiety at being away from Pakistan and his family outside of the joking context was during a craft session. He asked for a piece of paper and a pen, and, paying no heed to the activity or its objectives, wrote a short paragraph in English about how much he missed his sister and mother, and glued it to the front of the wardrobe in his room. However, Muhammad also expressed pride in his ability to provide for his family, for taking up opportunities in Greece and for earning his own money. For example, he said that his sisters were now able to go to a fee-paying school thanks to his remittances, and that, unlike his friends, he never missed summer school despite his work schedule. He also regularly showed me his new purchases, including a pair of new sunglasses and a second-hand bicycle, asking me to guess how much each had cost and emphasizing that he had bought these things with his own money which his friends were unable to do. His friends often admired his purchases, suggesting that his spending power was considered a source of social capital within the group. His anxiety around being away from Pakistan seemed to be entangled in the opportunities offered by his working life in Greece.

Muhammad also expressed ambivalence at the difference between the way he and his friends spent their time. Muhammad left for his job at 5am in the morning, returning to the shelter at around 4pm, and going to the summer school arranged by the shelter from 5pm-7pm. In contrast to this schedule of labour, Adnan, Meerab, Arish and Azlan spent a lot of time 'hanging out' in squares close to the shelter, taking long phone calls from family members, sleeping until very late in the day and playing games and watching Bollywood movies on their phones. My notion of how much time these young people spent in such activities was probably warped by the fact that my fieldwork took place during the school summer holidays, but having spent a year in the shelter previously, these tasks seemed to fill a significant portion of time throughout the rest of the year too. I detect both anxiety and judgement in Muhammad's teasing accusation that all his friends do is eat, sleep and go to school 'a little'. He uses the term '*timepass*' to describe his friend's activities, which Jeffrey defines as 'the notion of being surrounded by an expanse of featureless time' (Jeffrey 2010: 470). When I ask the group what this term means, there is a general consensus that it means 'enjoying' which Muhammad agrees with, although he adds that *all* his friends do is 'enjoy'. This ambivalence is expressed in his imagining of a return to Pakistan. Whilst his appeal to gift-giving suggests the wealth and status of a returnee from a European country, and coheres with 'classical accounts of the migration process' (Ahmad 2009: 312), his appeal to multiple options for spending leisure time if he were to return to Pakistan could suggest a desire for the free time that his friends 'enjoy'. As well as an expression of relief from the anxiety of being apart from his village and family, this joke denotes both the possibilities and limitations that Muhammad perceives in his participation in the labour market.

2.3 A minor earthquake

During my fieldwork, several minor earthquakes impacted Athens, one of which was felt quite strongly in the city, causing minor structural damage to buildings and reported widely in international press. I was not at the shelter during this bigger tremor, but I was present the following week when shelter staff instruct us to evacuate the building as there had apparently been a small quake which could be followed by a larger one. We congregate on the street across the road from the shelter, and I sit on the kerbside whilst a spontaneous game of cricket is played behind me. Meerab takes a seat next to me and asks me what might happen if the shelter building falls down. Without waiting for my response, he proceeds to allocate European countries to himself and the shelter residents in the case of the shelters' collapse. There also seems to be a metaphorical blurring here between the buildings neighbouring the shelter structure and desirable European countries. He points at various buildings that we can see from our vantage point, explaining that he would move into the fancy apartment building across the road which he calls Spain, and that Adnan would be allocated the abandoned and rubble-filled building, Italy, to the left. I struggle to follow his logic but find his excitement at the potential for momentous positive change based on the trembling of the earth strangely infectious. I tell him how I would easily be able to visit everyone in their countries if they are all here together, and he laughs along, reassuring me that everyone would remain friends and spend time at each other's houses, pointing out that his Spanish home would be particularly spacious. I laugh in response and am about to ask what furniture he might have in Spain, when the fantasy is quickly ended as a cricket ball rolls into the street and Meerab runs out to catch it. A shelter staff member cries out as a car slams on its break and Meerab just about manages to cross the road with

the ball safely in his hand before the car passes by. He then runs over to join the impromptu cricket game, leaving me sitting alone on the kerb.

This incident illustrates both the casual way in which such jokes can emerge and the creativity in Meerab's ability to imaginatively transform the shifting of the earth into a reversal of the structures which keep him in Greece. One of Meerab's close friends from the shelter made the illegal crossing to Italy during my first few days of fieldwork, and Meerab seemed quite preoccupied about whether, and when, he might leave Greece in light of this. He told me that his parents wanted him to leave, because conditions in other European countries were supposed to be better, but that he did not want to leave his friends or his girlfriend behind. In a sense, he seemed far happier to engage in discussions about the future than any of the other young men, although our conversations tended to drift into fanciful humour rather than sensible discussions around what he might do, and I began to question whether he was being serious about leaving at all. I also wondered whether his constant joking about an imagined future in Europe might be helping him to build up the momentum in his mind to make the difficult journey. After this minor earthquake and Meerab's subsequent joke, I reflected on how he might genuinely find this decision easier if his present home crumbled away and he had no choice but to flee.

Meerab was the youngest in the friendship group and treated as such. I once saw him bringing a jug of water from the shelter to Azlan and a group of friends who were sitting in a nearby square and, at another time, he was instructed by the other boys to source a cricket bat for everyone's use. Yet he matched this treatment of inferiority with assertions of masculine power, telling me that he had started several fights with other boys and that he

could beat up the others if he so wished. Whilst I cannot tell the extent to which such boasts were due to my presence, other boys in the group told me that Meerab 'always' makes such empty threats of violence. Whilst Irtaza's joke confirmed his position in the peer group as a leader, Meerab's minor earthquake upended the hierarchy of the peer group towards one in his favour. He imaginatively transformed into the more powerful figure of his bravado as he took ownership of the fanciest home on the block with his friends located in substandard accommodation around him. In contrast, Muhammad's joke took him out of his peer group altogether and into a social world of his past, bringing with him the material benefits afforded by his labour yet without the time constraints such labour had imposed.

Chapter 3: Agency over time

Often the logical conclusion to joking as anxiety relief or an expression of social identity is the dismissal of the agentive value of such jokes with refrains like 'it's just a coping mechanism', 'it's escapism' or 'he's just showing off'. But, as Michael Taussig puts it, 'any explanation that uses function...tells us next to nothing about the metaphors and motifs that the cultures have elaborated in response to their new social condition' (Taussig 1980: 15). Without denying the social and psychological functions of these jokes, I want to take seriously the motifs of alternative futures used by my interlocutors, by challenging our 'common sense' approach to time. Billig points out how Bergson's idea of duration in time can be used to critique conventional theories of humour, which implicitly rely on a belief in a sudden change in 'time' during the joke, without being able to adequately account for what this might mean or when and how this might occur (Billig 2005: 109). As Billig puts it:

‘we imagine, even experience, a sudden disjunction in time. But each moment shades imperceptibly into the next’ (ibid.).

Bergson (1988) was the first to conceptualise time qualitatively, as events co-existing in a continuous multiplicity, rather than being understood spatially, like beads following each other on a string. This conceptualisation of time as durational multiplicity was developed by Gilles Deleuze who claimed that past and future were dimensions of the living present, synthesized in retention and anticipation, rejecting our commonplace understanding of time as a linearity with the static present preceded by the past and followed by the future (Deleuze 1991; Deleuze 1994). In order to analyse what exactly happens to time during my interlocutors’ jokes, I want to think about time as ‘a culturally specific construct that combines ways of structuring daily activities with broader meanings about the past, present, and future’ (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017: 3). Having already looked at the perceived imposition of bureaucratic time and the divergence in social constructions of time between Muhammad and his friends, I will examine a joke where ‘my own duration...serves to reveal other durations that beat to other rhythms, that differ in kind from mine’ (Deleuze 1991: 32). In looking closely at a joke which exposes these durational multiplicities, I conceptualise the ‘quality’ of the joke in affect as ‘tension’ and then explore how this tension unsettles chronological time in futurity jokes, and what this means for agency.

3. 1 The *Azān mazāq*

It is my first week in the shelter and I am sitting on the sofa in the living room with Adnan and Muhammad in the early evening. Tiny pieces of paper are scattered over the floor

around us, as we have been working on a craft project to make a large wall map of the world, using little bits of ripped-up magazine paper of different colours to mark out the countries. Adnan passes me his phone and asks me to choose an English song on YouTube to play from his phone. I take the phone and pause for a moment to think through my choice. During this pause, the *Azān* (ritual call to prayer) begins playing from his phone as it is installed as an app to announce each prayer time. It feels to me like the atmosphere in the room suddenly changes and, whilst the doors to the living room are open and we can see other shelter residents queueing for food from the kitchen, I get the impression that the three of us are enclosed in a qualitatively different space. I hand Adnan's phone back to him wordlessly and bend down to slowly clear away the scrap paper from the floor. Adnan admonishes me for this and tells me to sit back down on the sofa. I apologise, suddenly worried that I have been very rude and silently chastising myself for feeling the need to be constantly 'busy' rather than happy to simply sit. Holding my water bottle, several moments pass in what I perceive to be awkward silence. Only a few metres away, a boy walks past the living room doors eating a piece of bread, and I notice that Muhammad seems to be using his phone. I feel it must be safe to take a drink of water from the flask in my hand so I take a tentative sip. Both Adnan and Muhammad wave their hands dramatically for me to stop, glaring at me, repeating that it is the '*Azān*' in hushed tones. I dramatically repeat 'sorry, sorry, sorry' and both young men respond by urging me to be quiet.

Moments after the *Azān* ends, both boys smile at me and repeat that it was a '*mazāq*' (joke). This announcement of '*mazāq*', dictated by the end of the call to prayer, feels like a release from a different quality of time which held all of us together in place. The phone is swiftly handed back to me to choose an English song, the tidying-up of the papers continues

and I feel immediately relieved at the swing back to an experience of time over which I have control. This incident is illustrative of the varying rhythms in temporal durations. Whilst the joke is sparked by an externally driven religious timing, it is Adnan who pulls the strings and dictates my personal experience of time, transforming my comfort in constant movement through time into awkwardness and restlessness. Despite Muhammad's aforementioned differentiation from the other boys in their freer ability to '*timepass*', his knowledge that this is a joke and his familiarity with the *Azān* and its suspension of the norms of bureaucratic and personal time cuts through this disparity, enabling him to join Adnan in the social time of the joke. The fact that Muhammad uses his phone during the *Azān* underlines his power during the joke, whilst my movement, even to take a sip of water, is comically prohibited. In the context of slow violence, the joke allows for a reversal of roles; whilst I may have free movement around Europe based on my British nationality, these young men who lack such free movement on a wider scale can dictate my movement during the time of the joke. In order to understand such agency further, the palpable tension I feel as an affect between the before/after and the 'during' of the joke warrants further examination.

3.3 '*Ko'ī tension nahīn*'

Schieffelen tells us that 'teasing creates tension, as one is never completely sure which way an interaction might swing, owing to the unstable nature of many of the teasing frames' (Schieffelen 1986: 167). Jokes which create such tension, like the '*Azān mazāq*', were a common encounter during fieldwork. Another example was when Arish told me that he had a wife and child, proving this with recourse to a photo of him and a woman as his phone background. It was soon revealed that the woman in the photo was actually the cleaner of

the shelter, which met with raucous laughter from the entire group. The fact of the *mazāq* was usually revealed after only a few minutes, the tension of keeping it a secret usually too much to bear and made very evident by everyone's stifled laughter. A common refrain following a joke, particularly a teasing joke, was '*ko'ī tension nahīn*' ('there's no tension'). It marked the qualitative change from the world of the joke to the world outside of the joke. It was also often addressed to me when I looked concerned that a joke was walking the line between fun and attack or that humour might spill over into anger. This was the case when Meerab's parents in Pakistan had delivered a shalwar kameez from Pakistan to the shelter, and Muhammad was half-jokingly attempting to buy it from him for 10 euros whilst knowing that the shipping for it had cost many times that. Muhammad marched over to Meerab's bottom bunk bed aggressively and was attempting to stuff the 10 euro note in Meerab's pocket. A few of us ran over to the scene with concern that physical violence might erupt yet both boys relaxed their bodies with reassurances of '*ko'ī tension nahīn*' and collapsed into laughter. The suggestion that there was no tension, along with the change in physical embodiment from a warring to a relaxed and laughing posture, suggests that there *was* tension present within the 'time of the joke' but that this was a tension that could easily be relinquished, rather than a tension which holds the person in its grip.

In Laura Ring's (2006) analysis of tension in a Karachi apartment building, she appeals to a 'mindful body' (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) which '(willingly) bears tension without outburst or collapse' (Ring 2006: 83). This frame is helpful in understanding the embodiment of tension in the moment of the joke which withholds laughter until the moment for '*ko'ī tension nahīn*' in its aftermath. Ring also reminds us that: 'learning to take on and bear tension...requires...a new kind of emotional exchange or "sharing"' (Ring 2006:

86). The notions of sharing and exchange in the time-space constructed through the joking world was evident in all of the occurrences of jokes in the shelter. Even when I began to realise that I was being duped, it felt wrong to break the tension by calling out, 'it's a *mazāq*, I know! Stop tricking me!' Sometimes my incredulous cries of 'really?' all felt part of the act as I became a willing participant in this social 'joking time' where agency changed hands. In Gooptu and Krishnan (2017)'s paper on the increased use of the English term, 'tension', in South Asia, they draw on Cohen's work with Indian respondents who view tension as a disruption of routine and balance (Cohen 1998: 194). Whilst I never picked up on the use of 'tense' or 'tension' amongst the group except to negate it following a joke or conflict, there was a sense of the restoration of balance and routine via this negation. Defining tension as a disruption of an expected logic or balance, often by holding opposing forces in synthesis, throws into sharp relief the differentiation between the 'teasing' jokes, such as the '*Azān mazāq*', and the jokes concerning a fantasy of a desirable future. In the former, my expectation of control over my experience of time is thwarted and upturned whilst the joke-teller bears the tension that comes with not knowing whether their target will 'fall' for the joke. In the futurity jokes, the tension is generated through a denial of the logic of temporality by subverting the conventionally linear past, present and future. In so doing, I argue that radical modalities of agency emerge.

3.4 Agency in a quake in time

Deleuze set out his theory of time into a structure of three syntheses of which the third is the most relevant for our analysis of these jokes about imagined futures. In this third synthesis of time, Deleuze appeals to a cut or 'caesura' in time, encapsulated in Hamlet's

appeal to a 'time out of joint' (Deleuze 1994: 88). This cut brings a series of pasts, presents and future becomings together in synthesis. Voss describes it thus: 'the irrational cut indicates an intensive depth, an outside or virtual event, which breaks with the empirical continuation of space and time' (Voss 2013: 212). These jokes become these cuts, or quakes in time if we are to follow Meerab's metaphor, allowing for a break from the respect of linear time which holds my interlocutors in undesired jobs, spaces and futures. These structures are what 'one leaves behind in order to 'become', that is, to create something new' (Deleuze 1995: 171). In the example of Muhammad joking that he will go back to Pakistan this week, this collapsing of the past, present and future into one moment of fantasy is acute, since, in conventional terms, Muhammad's past lies in Pakistan and, like most of my interlocutors, he tells me he will return to Pakistan in a few years to see his family again. The fantasy alters the conventional temporalities of these pasts and futures into something totally non-linear in the tension of the joke, where past and future cannot be extricated from a present which flees the empirical.

Perhaps the most extreme example of the dissipation of the logics of chronological time in Deleuzian becoming is Meerab's post-earthquake imaginings. The first step in Meerab's joke, of the collapse of the shelter in the event of an earthquake, is well within the bounds of socially sanctioned chronology. Yet from this point on, there is no logical explanation for how these buildings within our eyeline might become countries and nor does Meerab feel the need to create any new spatial or temporal logic to make meaning. The natural catastrophe to bring about the destruction of the shelter, the transformation of buildings into countries and the sudden easy movement for shelter residents to these countries come together in potentiality, leaving behind meaningful steps from past to present to future.

Becoming, for Deleuze 'divides itself infinitely in past and future and always eludes the present' (Deleuze 1990: 5). The 'common sense' present of my interaction with Meerab involved the structural integrity of the shelter, the known difficulties of his access to other European countries and the new possibility of an imminent earthquake, all of which were somehow eluded and held in tension in the created world of the joke. We had together stepped away from the bounds of the living present and into a world where there was no clear sense of direction in either the movement of time or space. Meerab had pulled us away from the linear time of lived experience and into the creative, non-linear time of his joke.

Understood in this way, we can see modalities of agency arise at two levels. There is firstly agency in the decision to perform the joke. According to Butler's theory of performativity and subjectivity (Butler 1993; Butler 1997; Butler 1999), recognition is required in order to become a subject and recognition itself requires gestures and acts related to a social norm. The ritualization of such performed norms creates an idea of an essential identity. Yet according to Butler, there are pauses between rituals when the practice of agency through subversion is possible. She explores these subversions in the context of gender in *Undoing Gender* (2004) but her findings can also be applied to the setting of the migrants in the refugee shelter: 'if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred...if I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose' (Butler 2004: 3). Whilst the expected performance or norm in the un-chosen social world of my interlocutors is to deny the possibility of a future, the joke provides a subversion of this expectation by imagining and

verbalising a positive future. Similarly, in the case of the '*Azān mazāq*', the expected performance is for the resident of the shelter to follow the temporality of the leader of the craft activity and yet the joke allows for utter subversion of this expectation. Such subversive structures dispute claims to 'naturalness and originality' (Butler 1993: 125). Clare, however, contests that Butler's formulation of agency fails to account for temporalities and that 'agency emerges in the process of becoming, not in the mysterious moments between beings' (Clare 2001: 59).

This leads us to our second and more radical modality of agency, as a Deleuzian 'becoming' which emerges through a denial of the linearity of time which traps these young men in the situation of slow violence evoked in Chapter 1. The joke-teller, with his creative ability to obliterate the chronology of time in that moment, becomes the King of Greece, a person who can move so easily between countries that he only needs to decide which one or the young man who is totally at ease in his village, without the pressure to work long hours in Europe and send money back home. Through humour and its 'quaking' of time, the creativity of Irtaza, Muhammad and Meerab liberate the future from its present impossibility. In the 'tension' of the joke, these young men are free from external agents and their timelines, whether that be the state with their dictates of age and date, the shelter with its bureaucratic rhythms, or the labour market with its denial of 'timepass'. They thus become free from the structures which inhibit their ability to imagine a positive, desirable and different future.

Conclusion

Through a consideration of the structural constraints in the lives of these young men, the conventional functions of jokes and an analysis of what happens to constructions of time in these instances of humour, I have shown how temporal agency can emerge through humorous fantasies about the future. Without denying the functional and social role of these jokes, the Deleuzian approach to time allows us to attend more fruitfully to the emergent tensions and temporal complexities in these instances of humour. In heralding the agency and creativity of these young men, I do not suggest that my interlocutors overcome all of the limits of slow violence. Such forms of becoming are only possible in the quakes made possible within the world of the joke, which cut it away from constraining labour patterns, spatial marginalisation and temporal relegation. This means that it is a form of lateral agency, defined by Berlant as ‘inhabiting agency differently in small vacations from the will itself’ (Berlant 2007: 779). Whilst Krishnan (2015) employs this concept to explain the telling of rape jokes by women in Chennai’s hostels as opportunities for a pause in their projects of predictable, middle class life, I suggest that these jokes around the future allow for a freedom from the task of contending with pervasive structural inequities. This means that the modalities of agency which emerge through these jokes exist alongside the denials of agency we have seen when these young men are asked to seriously contemplate their futures; they allow for temporary ‘vacations from the will’ (Berlant 2007: 779) rather than sustained, revolutionary resistance. Berlant aptly describes these modalities of agency thus: ‘of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency without shattering; embodying alongside embodiment’ (Berlant 2007: 759).

The aim of this study was idiographic; we cannot generalize from these findings to the condition of any larger group. Instead, my hope has been to challenge the discursive framing of unaccompanied minors as helpless victims, contribute to an understanding of the ways in which agency might be exercised in cases of acute structural inequity, and to question the constraints on *our* ability to see agency due to our tendency to think of time as linear, spatialized and progressive. As Pandian (2012) puts it: 'time seemed to be unfolding as an orchestration of distant forces and flows, but people here were still actively engaging these powerful vectors of influence and consequence' (Pandian 2012: 553) and, to go yet further, upturning these vectors of consequence through the temporal agency of laughter and jokes. My focus on temporalities in the lives of my interlocutors opens up questions about how the spatial and the temporal are intertwined and intersect. May and Thrift (2001) remind us of the 'unhelpful dualism moving around the foundational categories of Space and Time' (May and Thrift 2001: 1) and, whilst this ethnography is grounded in the space of the shelter, further work could foreground space and movement to show how this is bound up with constructs of time and impinges on possibilities for agency. For example, the transformation of public spaces through cricket games and the incorporation of the imagined space of South Asia or Islam through one's phone warrant further exploration. Practices of humour amongst these young men also raise questions around masculinity, care and friendship, and the ways masculine accounts of power might be undergirded by the sorts of jokes we have looked at. Whilst responses to such questions would require a longer study than space allows for here, this ethnography has tried to show that 'critical voices and lines of flight are there, in the margins of power and knowledge, and our listening/reading/writing can pull them from the shadows cast by contemporary common sense' (Biehl and Locke 2010: 335).

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