Integration and urban citizenship: A social-psychological approach to refugee integration through active constructions of place attachment to the city

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Abstract
The current research explores refugee integration through the analysis of active constructions of everyday life in Greek cities. It draws from critical social and political psychology literature that explores spatial aspects of intergroup relations and developments in citizenship and migration studies. For the purposes of the study, 25 walking interviews with refugees from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, and Syria were conducted in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Interviews were analyzed with tools and concepts of critical discursive social psychology. Analysis indicated three main repertoires related to corresponding space nuclei: “city squares and surrounding areas as minorities' spatial nuclei,” “political spaces as urban enclaves of belonging,” and “neighborhoods as un/familiar places.” Each of these broader compounds represented different people-place dynamics and presupposed different citizenship constructions and claims. These constructions entailed different ways of positioning oneself and others and constituted the ground for redefining integration based on local experiences and multilevel connections with urban networks. Drawing on these findings, the article proposes to reconsider integration through the concept of urban citizenship to explore everyday politics of intergroup relations in contexts of migration.

KEYWORDS
Greek cities, place attachment, refugee integration, social psychology, urban citizenship
INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, when 1.3 million asylum seekers, primarily from Syria and Afghanistan, arrived in Europe, Greece was portrayed as the gateway to the European Union and a transit country for refugees seeking to relocate to Northern Europe (Tazzioli, 2017). Nevertheless, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2022), in early 2022 approximately 115,000 refugees and asylum seekers still remained in Greece, building their lives in the Greek cities and struggling with bureaucratic state mechanisms and negligence. Since 2015, neither of the two consecutive Greek governments attempted to establish a refugee integration policy, leaving issues such as refugees’ accommodation and daily needs to the hands of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and civil society (Vergou et al., 2021). The representation of Greece as a transitory stopover and the construction of refugees as “temporary” largely served as justification for disregarding the issue of refugee integration and keeping it off the agenda of migration policy and research.

This study aims to address the neglected question of refugee integration in Greece, using theoretical and conceptual tools derived from critical social and political psychology perspectives on integration and developments in citizenship and migration studies. Theorizing integration as an urban and local strategy rather than a linear process, the article shifts attention toward people–place bonds and refugee everyday practices and, using mobile methodologies, explores the ways in which aspects of the physical/urban environment constitute resources in the construction of processes of integration and belonging.

Urban and migration studies and new perspectives in the social and political psychology of integration

Social psychology has largely approached refugee and migrant integration through the lens of acculturation theory (e.g., Berry, 1990; Berry & Sam, 1997; Krsmannovic, 2020; Kunst et al., 2021). Recent approaches have incorporated critiques applied to early acculturation research regarding essentialization of cultural differences and consideration of power inequalities as well as mobility decisions and conditions of travel and settlement (e.g., Bowskill et al., 2007; Figgou & Baka, 2018; Zisakou & Figgou, 2021). Gamsakhurdia (2018) identified processes of continuous progressive reconstruction of culture and adaptation to new environments through the concept of proculturation, whereas other studies have highlighted migrants’ different strategies in different historical, cultural, and local contexts (García et al., 2019).

Addressing the criticism that acculturation models overemphasize culture at the expense of politics, Hindriks et al. (2015, 2017) proposed a political acculturation model based on political participation strategies. The need to move beyond acculturation as a matter of minority versus majority culture is amplified by the ever-increasing diversity of “host” societies to which migrants are meant to integrate (Verkuyten, 2018).

Bottom-up integration processes and place attachment

Apart from state policies and top-down integration processes regarding formal participation in social institutions (Arar et al., 2020; Ortlieb et al., 2020; Vogiazides & Mondani, 2020), research has also recently drawn attention to bottom-up integration procedures. In the last two decades, migration research has examined the lived local experiences of migrants, giving emphasis to place attachment and spatial dimensions of integration through migrants’ urban strategies and practical aspects of carrying on a life locally (Buhr, 2018; Lynnebakke, 2021; Taff & Aure, 2021; Van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). According to Low and Altman (1992), place...
attachment is multidimensional, including biological, environmental, psychological, and sociocultural processes, and it involves notions such as place identity, belonging, and rootedness (Low & Altman, 1992; see also Manzo & Perkins, 2006). As Low (1992) highlights, the various aspects of place attachment do not function independently, but as part of a conceptual whole.

Rowles (1983) has foregrounded the physical, social, and autobiographical dimension of place attachment. On the one hand, Rowles suggested that the physical dimension involves body awareness and intimate familiarity with the environment, whereas the social dimension is dictated by social ties within the community. The autobiographical aspect, on the other hand, stresses people's relationship with places of the past. Other authors emphasize the political aspects of place attachment that are related to the political nature of community activities and the idea that every use of space is a political act (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Low (1992) further explored the political aspects of place attachment through relations of citizenship, political participation, and landownership.

These dimensions highlight that the concept of place attachment has both tangible and symbolic aspects, being related both to the physical environment and to meaning-making processes (i.e., how physical environments are constructed), which involve relationships with other people and the political significance of people's representations of space (Casakin et al., 2021; Di Masso et al., 2020; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006).

Research on migration and place attachment has explored the ways in which migrants form social relations and networks in their new neighborhoods and cities of residence and the contribution of these relations to integration (Back & Sinha, 2016; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Other studies have put emphasis on place-making processes and on the ways in which migrants consolidate local and transnational ties in order to cope with often unwelcoming receiving societies on their own terms (Ehrkamp, 2005; Gomes, 2021; Mitchell & Sparke, 2020). In this strand of research, place-making has been understood as a strategic response to exclusion, alienation, and difference experienced by migrants. Focusing on the implications of place attachment and integration on staying intentions in the place of residence, Lynnebakke (2021), for instance, studied the ways in which local material aspects (e.g., nature, climate, and localization) contributed to belonging processes. In the same vein, Ehrkamp (2005) showed that Turkish migrants in Germany who were able to create new places of identity and belonging on a neighborhood scale expressed feelings of comfort and safety, and they engaged more meaningfully with the receiving society (see also Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2021). Furthermore, Buhr (2018) studied the ways in which migrants' urban “apprenticeship” (i.e., the knowledge and skills required to use urban space) affects their spatial integration. Through the analysis of in-depth interviews and participants' visual representations of their local mobility and time–space diaries, this study showed that physical attributes of place function as key social and material spaces for multicultural encounters and integration into the local society.

Contributing to this field of research, this study aims to investigate the ways in which, on the one hand, spatial exclusion and, on the other, in situ spatial experiences and place attachment affect integration and coexistence. It also aims to investigate the potential of urban and local approaches to citizenship to constitute a useful lens in the study of spatial, everyday aspects of integration.

**Toward urban citizenship and spatial/urban aspects of intergroup relations**

**Performatively expressions of citizenship**

As Isin and Wood (1999) put forward, citizenship “can be described as both a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity” (p. 4, italics in original).
Isin (2017), in later conceptualizations of citizenship, argued that citizenship is enacted not only by exercising rights but also by actively claiming them. These concerns are linked to what Isin called “performative expressions of citizenship.” Performative citizenship is a transformative process that “signifies both a struggle (making rights claims) and what that struggle performatively brings into being (the right to claim rights)” (Isin, 2017, p. 506). In other words, citizenship is an act whereby becoming a citizen is realized through (the very act of) making citizenship claims. This perspective is aligned with a processual critical social psychological approach to citizenship as an everyday practice of constructing, negotiating, and negating citizenship rights in lay interactions of everyday life (Andreouli, 2019; Andreouli et al., 2017). Though political science as a whole tends to focus on more “extraordinary” acts of citizenship (see Neveu, 2014), a social psychological perspective sheds light on the more “mundane” everyday practices of citizenship (Andreouli, 2019).

Urban citizenship and performative acts of place-making

In this study, we examine everyday citizenship through the lens of performative acts of spatial appropriation and place-making. We employ the concept of urban citizenship, which has been used to signify bottom-up, spatial aspects of citizenship and puts the city at the center of political, social, and economic attention (Holston & Appadurai, 1996). According to Baubock (2003), urban citizenship is tied to the legal status of someone whose rights are derived from the ius domicilii principle, namely, the status of being a resident of a city. However, local forms of citizenship are not limited to legal status or formal political participation. For instance, according to the performative approach outlined above, urban citizenship can be considered as a practice of everyday right-claiming (Aust, 2019; Isin, 2000). As Isin (2000, pp. 14–15) puts it, drawing on Lefebvre, citizenship implicates a “practice of articulating, claiming and renewing group rights in and through the appropriation and creation of spaces in the city.” This relationship with space underscores the everyday practices of urban citizenship and the potential of citizens (including refugees/migrants) to become skillful agents of life in the city through emplaced claim practices and efforts to establish their presence in the city of residence (Buhr, 2018).

Citizenship and spatial (exclusionary) dynamics

Similar concerns related to spatial/local aspects of citizenship have attracted the attention of recent social psychological studies on citizenship and intergroup spatial relations (Di Masso, 2012; Dixon et al., 2006; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005; Gray & Manning, 2014, 2022; Ropert & Di Masso, 2021; Stevenson et al., 2015). Social psychological research in this field has examined locational forms of citizenship through which people negotiate issues of access and appropriation of public space (Di Masso & Dixon, 2015; Di Masso et al., 2011) as well as spatial segregation and exclusion (Dixon et al., 2006; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). Dixon et al. (2022) and Hocking et al. (2018) studied people’s mobility strategies (routes, locations, pathways, and destinations) and patterns of “microecological segregation” in Belfast, as well as conditions that can create spaces of integration, using a great arsenal of geographical and visual methods such as walking interviews and GPS-based mapping. In another study in Santiago, Chile, Ropert and Di Masso (2021) showed that residents stigmatized as dangerous and dissident are often confined in certain neighborhoods, and this is both a by-product and a source of social exclusion.

In a study concerned with the development of mixed areas in the regional capital of Belfast, Stevenson and Sagherian-Dickey (2018) examined the ways in which residents’ understandings of citizenship and place include and accommodate diversity and difference. They argued that understandings of the relationship between community identity and geographical territory
serve not only to deny rights but also to warrant peaceful coexistence. In other words, place-based citizenship was used to construct public space as consensually shared and to support incoming residents' integration. The social and political psychology studies cited above explore spatial aspects of intergroup relations in divided communities and/or investigate local aspects of citizenship in stigmatized areas.

To sum up, local aspects of citizenship may be related to the legal status of the resident, whereas an opposing perspective would stress the relationship of citizenship with performative acts that include active claim-making. Borrowing concepts from the second perspective and following the aforementioned social psychological literature, our study emphasizes the everyday emplaced practices and discourses that can establish and legitimize (or delegitimize) the presence of those whose status is not guaranteed. This perspective on citizenship can be a useful approach for studying integration, as it is grounded in people's everyday activities, which are considered an important (although often excluded) part of integration research.

In this sense, this article aims to contribute to this field (a) by focusing on political and social psychological aspects of refugees' spatial integration in the two largest Greek cities and (b) by exploring the ways in which they renegotiate their identities within city environments and make use of urban spaces and resources while constrained by emplaced power asymmetries.

**METHODS**

**Participants and interviews**

For the purposes of the current study, we conducted walking interviews (Evans & Jones, 2011). Walking interviews are conducted in participants' local environments where researchers “walk along” with respondents (Dixon et al., 2022). They are appropriate for the investigation of emplaced aspects of identity and constitute a valuable tool for qualitative research because they provide situated knowledge “saturated with meanings derived in (and from) the immediate social and cultural settings” (Dubé et al., 2014, p. 1093). Walking interviews took place in the two largest cities of Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki) with 25 refugees ranging from 19 to 51 years old, coming from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, and Syria. Fourteen of the participants self-identified as men and 11 as women. The educational and professional backgrounds of the participants varied. Five of them had completed tertiary education (with two also having postgraduate degrees), 10 participants had completed upper or lower secondary education, and 10 had completed primary education. Participants' length of stay in Greece varied between 6 and 10 years. During the recruitment procedure, we sought out participants from different ethnic and educational backgrounds and gender categories, opting to achieve maximum diversity in the construction of local integration processes. Participants possessed a high level of Greek language proficiency. Language proficiency—despite the fact that as a participation criterion, it excludes groups of refugees whose experience could enrich our understanding of integration barriers—was considered important in order to generate (unmediated by translation) data appropriate for in-depth qualitative/discursive analysis of the integration challenges and opportunities.

The participants were recruited using snowball procedures. All walking interviews were conducted between May 2021 and March 2022. Prior to the interview, participants were provided with a printed informed consent, and their understanding of the purposes and procedures of the study was confirmed. Each participant was invited to plan a walking route including places

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1We refer to participants as “refugees” based on their identification as forcibly displaced and not because of their legal status.
of importance to them (places that were part of their daily routes, places that they frequented with their friends, or places that they have associated with their life in the city). On the day of each interview, the first author walked along the route with each participant while conducting the oral interview. Walking interviews were semi-structured along four topics. The first involved questions related to participants’ place of origin and migration path; the second part included questions about the personal meanings attached to the places participants chose to include in the route; the third part referred to job trajectories, housing, participation in local groups, and social relations; the fourth, final part of the walking interviews included questions on participants’ future plans. During the walking interview, participants were encouraged to take photographs with their mobile phones of places that they considered important and to send them to the researcher via email. The duration of each walking interview varied from 1.15 hours to 2.20 hours. Interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed, and participants’ names were anonymized.

Analytic procedure

Analysis used principles and tools of critical discursive social psychology (Edley, 2011; Wetherell, 1998). The first analytic stage involved familiarization with the data through continuous reading of interview transcripts and using participants' photographs to visualize the spatial details of the places that participants said were important to them. This analytic stage indicated that interview questions elicited two main types of accounts. The first included biographical accounts concerned with participants' social and professional life before and after their arrival in Greece as well as future plans. The second concerned emplaced accounts (i.e., descriptions of places and of practices and networks located in specific urban spaces). These two types of accounts were interconnected. For example, constructions of sequence (by expressions like then or next) or consequence (by expressions like so; Taylor, 2006) were used to provide vividness and facticity (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992) in place-based relations. On the other hand, life stories were inescapably linked to places. Although the distinction is not clear-cut, in this article our focus will be on emplaced accounts.

The second stage involved an attempt to identify interpretative repertoires or, in other words, regularities in terms of content, “habitual lines of arguments comprised from recognizable themes and common places” that, according to Wetherell (1998, p. 400) organize accountability. As Wetherell puts it, lines of arguing should not be elaborated upon and “spelt out” in detail. One fragment or phrase can make relevant argumentative contexts and resources. Three main repertoires were identified based on three space nuclei, respectively: “city squares and surrounding areas as minorities’ spatial nuclei,” “political spaces as urban enclaves of belonging,” and “neighborhoods as un/familiar places.” Each of these broader compounds represented different people–place dynamics, place-making, and spatial integration processes.

Subsequently, we analyzed selected excerpts, examining the ways in which participants’ accounts of their lives in the city were embedded in the concerns and stakes of local interactional contexts as well as wider political, cultural, and biographical contexts that shape their understandings. Our focus in this article, in particular, is on the ways in which spatial accounts may be used by participants to make emplaced accounts and position themselves toward integration and citizenship. We understand positioning as the processes of mobilizing temporary and intelligible versions of self and others for varying rhetorical ends (e.g., blaming and justifying) and with varying consequences (e.g., by being assumed to be a member of a community or placing oneself in particular ways in an intergroup conflict). Looking particularly at constructions of spatial relations, we examined how the urban/local resources that the city affords are mobilized by the participants to build their (place) identities. Other discursive tools/strategies that we used included “footing shifts” (Goffman, 1981) and “facticity building strategies” (Edwards & Potter, 1992) oriented to manage accountability concerns and stakes in talk-in-interaction.
Below, we present the findings of our analysis using exemplary quotations from every repertoire. These quotations were selected for their clarity, density, and specificity, as well as their ability to convey the complexity of the people–place relationship. They all have been translated from Greek to English.

ANALYSIS

City squares and surrounding areas as minorities' spatial nuclei

The first repertoire is introduced by an extract from the walking interview with a Palestinian refugee who first came to Greece in 2012 on a student visa and was working on his bachelor's degree in Thessaloniki. At the time of the interview, he worked as an interpreter for asylum seekers. In Extract 1, the participant explains his relationship with “Navarinou” Street (officially known as Dimitriou Gounari), a pedestrian road in the center of Thessaloniki (Figure 1).

Extract 1

I: So here we are in Navarinou [street]. Tell me, what is your relationship with this place?

FIGURE 1 Dimitriou Gounari Street. Source: P1.
PI: Well, I like that it is a pedestrian street. I am generally in favor of pedestrian areas in the city. I always want there to be sidewalks. Here, you can see a lot of people but also a lot of different people. That is, you will see people from other nationalities, so when you walk, you say, “Oh well, I'm not alone.” So, this is nice. You will see tourists, but at the same time, people who sell things who are foreigners, or you will hear other languages, so you say, “I'm not the only one here who is not Greek.”

P1, 28, Palestine, Thessaloniki

The walking interview with PI was conducted in the city center, starting by the seafront of Thessaloniki, from which we headed toward Navarinou Street, a place that concentrates a complex assemblage of different people: young people with alternative lifestyles, migrants, dissident groups, artists, and university students, as well as people who are homeless. The street is also famous not only for its low-cost street food, but also for street drinking and the numerous groups concentrating day and night to enjoy the open, pedestrian space (Kapetanou, 2023).

PI included Navarinou Street in our interview route and chose it as one of his most frequented places. The interviewer's question about PI's relationship with the street mobilized his consequent account. The participant starts out by stating that it is a pedestrian street. The lack of pedestrian areas in the city, as well as its “strategic” location in the city center, near the city's largest university and numerous bars frequented by students, make it a significant location for the participant and for other young adults. Apart from a place frequented by young people, the Navarinou area is represented as a city “common” or “community” that connects people with different backgrounds and origins (“different people,” “other nationalities”). The participant mentions that the multicultural coexistence in the city (transient tourists as well as resident migrant owners and vendors) makes him feel that he is not alone. He positions himself as one of the many foreigners who are actively engaged with city life. The participant's distinction between tourists and migrant workers (which juxtaposes temporariness with more permanent forms of residency) serves to align himself with the latter, actively claiming his position not as a national but rather as a local citizen among ethnically diverse others. Daily activities are not limited to temporal forms of being in a place (i.e., tourists) but are linked to investment and attachment to a place, shaping aspects of place-making. Interestingly, this feeling of not being alone is attributed to an unspecified universal “you” (“you are not alone”), which universalizes the importance of this specific place and expands his feelings to other international people living in the city. At the same time, the participant's account constitutes representations of an “active” or “ideological” place attachment (Hummon, 1992; Lewicka, 2011) related to everyday dynamics beyond length of residence and born-and-bred rootedness.

The participant's account includes a twofold story of integration and different ways of self-positioning. On one hand, place attachment and feelings of belonging locate the speaker in the international community of the city (and by implication) outside the national Greek community. On the other hand, the public place of the square and its surroundings can be an important enclave of integration. Although the space of integration is traditionally considered in terms of national space (FitzGerald et al., 2018), in this case, a specific urban place replaces national space as the principal space of integration and becomes the node of a more locational form of citizenship.

One of the multicultural enclaves in the city of Athens is the neighborhood of Omonoia and its surroundings. The following extract is part of a walking interview in the center of Athens—more specifically, in the Omonoia neighborhood. PI7 is a refugee from Bangladesh. He first came to Greece in 2011, also on a student visa. At the time of the interview, he had been working as an interpreter for asylum seekers (Figure 2).
Extract 2

I: How did you come to know Omonoia Square?

P17: Because all the Bangladeshi community is around the Omonoia Square. In the place we are heading to [Geraniou Street], you will see a lot of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, or Afghan people living there, so this is very close to them. Whenever they have time, they go to the square in order to speak with their families, meet someone there, or even make videos for TikTok, among many other things.

[…]

P17: This street is called Geraniou, but there is another interesting name; we call it Banglagoli because all the Bangladeshi people are gathered here, so they changed the name. If you ask any person, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Afghans, that you want to go to Banglagoli, all of them will tell you, “Oh, this is close to Omonoia Square,” so you can go and find it. They are sharing houses here, and also there is a mosque here. Everyone is living close to this area, so the community has grown.

P17, 38, Bangladesh, Athens

Omonoia is a neighborhood in the center of Athens that has been stigmatized as one of the most dangerous in the city. P17 chose to begin the walking interview at Omonoia Square, as it is a significant meeting place for him. In Extract 2, the participant refutes the inter- viewer's starting assumption that Omonoia is a place that he would have discovered through active exploration of the city. Instead, Omonoia is represented as a place that many migrants are familiar with even before they arrive in the city (see also Noussia & Lyons, 2009) because it is widely known that a large part of the Bangladeshi community is concentrated there. P17 identifies Omonoia Square as the center of community activities and the nucleus around which local life is organized. Again, the construction of a demarcated community where minorities limit their presence inside specific places to perform most daily activities

2From 1925, Omonoia Square has been subjected to various forms of remodeling and reconstruction, with the latest one in 2019–2020, when an old fountain from 1958 was restored. In practice, the municipality made significant changes, preparing the area for a new era of gentrification (Hatziprokopioiu & Frangopoulos, 2016).

3As Noussia and Lyons (2009) mention, “Omonoia Square itself provides a first gathering point for migrants from all areas, because of its critical nodal position in Athens' internal and external public and semipublic transport networks” (p. 613).
is connected to the exclusion of migrants from any other city place. From this vantage point, Omonoia can be seen as a community created by marginalization dynamics that force migrants to remain in one place. At the same time, this concentration in specific places can be considered migrants’ response to exclusion and hostility in order to be protected from police and state abuse.

The participant constructs Omonoia as the center of the Bangladeshi community, describing its activities with the pronoun *they* as he proceeds to distance himself from the community’s activities and daily life. Adopting a distant footing (Goffman, 1981) and using the pronoun *they* instead of *us*, he positions himself as representative and mediator of the Bangladeshi community (something that is potentially related to his work as an interpreter). The participant mentions a series of activities that help people become attached to the square and develop a place identity, while at the same time remaining connected with transnational or virtual spaces beyond the square. Bangladeshi migrants are constructed as able to maintain strong connections to their homeland while living in the new city of residence and having access to their networks back home (see also Brådåtan et al., 2010).

Moving to Geraniou Street, the participant mentions that among different ethnic communities, the street is known as Banglagoli. When referring to the act of renaming a street, the participant adopts a close footing, shifting from narrator/mediator to active member of the community and principal of the talk (Goffman, 1981) and positioning himself as part of this specific action. Omonoia is an area right inside the Athenian historic center, which is commonly associated with a supposedly ethnic Greek history and tradition. Place renaming is an act of place appropriation and an effort to gain and maintain control over specific territory, as well as to establish and build a new toponymic heritage that brings a different geographical knowledge to the fore (Giraut & Houssay-Holzschuch, 2016). The act of renaming the area can be seen as an act of performative citizenship that signifies a political process of reconstructing a collective identity and destabilizing power relations that non-Greeks develop in order to actively make a claim for spatial inclusion. These acts can be seen as substantial parts of social (in terms of social ties) and political (in terms of claiming presence and rights in a place) forms of place attachment.

**Political spaces as urban enclaves of belonging**

Political spaces can be another urban location that transforms a sense of belonging and place attachment. The following extract is part of a walking interview conducted in West Thessaloniki with an Iranian refugee who works as a carpenter. The participant in this extract discussed his involvement in Yfanet, a political squat in Thessaloniki. Yfanet, an abandoned textile factory, has been a squat since 2004. From the start, squat residents and other people involved in its activities have actively supported migrants by organizing demonstrations and protests for legalization and contributing to housing projects for migrants.

**Extract 3**

*I:* Are there any important places for you that you would like us to go to?

*P11:* Yes, Yfanet is a place that I tend to go to very often. That place, for me, is like a second home. They are very friendly. I have a lot of friends there. I like that place a lot.

*I:* Okay. Yfanet is a political squat. Do you have any political activity there or are you involved in any political activities there?
**PI1:** I don't do that because I am a little bit scared about, you know, if you are a refugee, if the police come or if something happens, this is a very big problem for us. And my friends keep telling me that. So I participate in the squat but in a more “behind the scenes” way. Okay, I can do it, but for now I don't want to. PI1, 35, Iran, Thessaloniki

In this extract, PI1 constructs Yfanet as a “second home,” stressing his physical attachment and intimate familiarity with this place. It is a place he visits often and that many of his friends are involved with. However, the interviewer's direct question about engagement in squat politics appears to shift the narrative from the squat as a friendly community to the squat as a political space, bringing to the foreground a tension between the personal and the political. This, in turn, seems to mobilize a different position for the interviewee, from an insider of the squat’s community of friends to a somewhat reluctant insider of the squat as a political space. The dilemmatic positioning of the participant (member of the community of friends but not a fully active member of the political community) is related to different spatial and ideological constructions of the squat, as well as to diverse personal and political people–place attachments. The tension between feelings of belonging and fear is depicted by the use of spatial metaphors (“like a second home” vs. “behind the scenes”), where “home” refers to a pronounced and “easy” sense of community while “behind the scenes” conveys a more wary and distanced form of political participation. This distinction stems from the recognition of his legal status, which makes him vulnerable to legal consequences that seem to frighten him (“if the police come or if something happens, this is a very big problem for us”) and holding back from practices that could be seen as transgressive. This “reluctant citizenship” blurs the boundaries between what is a habitual or transgressive (cf. Isin, 2009), ordinary or extraordinary (Neveu, 2015) form of political action.

PI3, a refugee from Egypt and an interpreter in the refugee field, guided us to the center of Thessaloniki, starting from the Roman Forum, a central place located on the upper side of Aristotelous Square. In the following extract, the participant recounts the multiple ways he has engaged with migrant politics over time and the connections with people and places he has developed through this action.

**Extract 4**

**PI3:** In the beginning, I met some people in Idomeni because there was this “no border kitchen.” I started with them. Most of them were international, and there were barely Greek people there. After, I started to hang out with some anarchists who occupied a building called “Orfanotrofio” [orphanage], and I started going there. I stayed there for a couple of months, and I started to build my life from that point. Then, I started to take Greek lessons at Aristotle University in the Faculty of Modern Greek Language and then I started to search for a job, and I started working with NGOs as an interpreter. There is no program for integration or housing in Greece. You are surviving on the streets. In the time I was in Idomeni, Greek government began to evacuate everything and hide refugees in camps, far away from the cities. So people occupied Orfanotrofio. I joined them and I started my first steps from there until I became this person now.

**I:** Orfanotrofio is now closed, I think.

**PI3:** Yes, they evacuated it.
I: So, what happened with the relationship you used to have with your friends there? Where do you meet them nowadays?

P13: I meet them in various places, in “Steki Metanaston” [migrants’ social center] when it was open. We meet in squats and music festivals or rebetiko nights because I like to listen to rebetiko. We also meet each other in demonstrations. So, I am always in contact with them. Gradually, you start building a relationship with those people in this way. P13, 29, Egypt, Thessaloniki

This extract is a part of P13’s account of how his social integration and relations with local people have evolved. The speaker uses a narrative structure (Edwards, 1997) to construct his gradual building of relationships with different urban places and people. He starts with his first arrival at Idomeni, a temporary camp created in the north of Greece as a result of the closure of the Balkan route to Western Europe. The participant mentions his participation in an international solidarity group in Idomeni called the “no-border kitchen,” a project made to cover refugees’ basic needs. In his narrative, the participant makes reference to institutional negligence and constructs integration as a process located in specific places where people from different backgrounds interact. In this way, integration into the national community is juxtaposed with integration into local networks of ethnically mixed communities.

An important political space for the participant is a housing squat for migrants in West Thessaloniki called Orfanotrofio 4 (which means “orphanage” in English). The participant refers to the Orfanotrofio housing project as the starting point of his life in Greece, juxtaposing it with state asylum policies that cordon off migrants in remote and isolated refugee camps. Engagement with “illegal” activities and spaces emerges as a performative act (Isin, 2017) of urban citizenship in order to cross from an unlivable life imposed by the state (Isin, 2017) to a more independent life.

In the participant's narrative, Orfanotrofio is represented as an opportunity to start building his life. For this participant, the squat may be seen as part of the material, physical aspect of what is a complex process of integration and foregrounds political and social aspects of place attachment. Accounts of collective action, political practices, and strategies through which he could engage himself with the city position him as a skillful and active member of the community who is able to overcome institutional barriers. The process of becoming a member of the community is filtered by the appropriation of space and the claim of a life outside the refugee camp. This form of active place attachment is related to collective efforts to establish bottom-up ties with places on the basis of people–place bonds. Despite the fact that the Orfanotrofio squat was evacuated, the participant managed to maintain the relationships he had there with other people in other recreational and political spaces across the city. The participant's emplaced relationships constitute part of the process of “becoming local.”

**Neighborhoods as un/familiar places**

This repertoire refers to various constructions of the neighborhood as spaces not only familiar and homely but also unwelcoming and hostile. The following extract is by P3, an Iranian refugee who arrived in Greece in 2015. At the time of the interview, he had been working as an

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4The building was constructed in 1934 and served as an orphanage until 2000, when it was abandoned. It was occupied in 2005 and housed the residential public until 2011. In 2015, it was reoccupied to accommodate refugees and migrants until it was evacuated in 2016; it was later demolished.
interpreter for a local NGO. In Extract 5, P3 talks about people in his neighborhood and the sense of being at home.

**Extract 5**

*P3:* After so long, I felt that in Thessaloniki I was back in my homeland. And when I felt this, I said, “Yes, it's the right time to move to Thessaloniki.”

*I:* It's interesting that you said that. What elements would you say that the city where you lived in Iran has in common with Thessaloniki on a daily basis?

*P3:* Okay, the truth is that my city is bigger than Thessaloniki. Distances are longer, but I think people are just as warm. They try to communicate with you. For example, now I live in an apartment in a building where some old ladies also live. We have a very good contact, and we have fun. Sometimes I cook and I bring them food, and they bring me food too. Once they brought me galaktoboureko [a traditional Greek sweet]. It was the first time I tasted it. I do not feel like a foreigner over here because I think people, let's say, do not have very different behaviors in comparison. I think this is what I really like. P3, 32, Iran, Thessaloniki

Prior to this exchange, the participant referred to the problems (related to racist incidents and bureaucracy) he faced in Athens before moving to Thessaloniki, which shaped his decision to leave. In Extract 5, he starts out by grounding this decision on his “feeling at home” in the city of Thessaloniki. The interviewer invites the participant to further elaborate this feeling and to reflect on the commonalities between Thessaloniki and his homeland that affect his everyday life. The participant begins by referring to the larger size of Shiraz in Iran compared to Thessaloniki in Greece and immediately proceeds to discuss the cultural similarities between them that make him feel at home in Thessaloniki, referring in particular to the “warmth” of people in both places. He speaks affectionately about other residents in his apartment building, with whom he has developed intimate relationships through practices of mutual care (i.e., sharing food and cooking for each other). This creates a sense of local conviviality and peaceful coexistence, which create feelings of “becoming local” and an active place attachment with his neighborhood. Interestingly, by drawing connections between his home country and Greece, the participant not only puts human relationships in specific socio-spatial contexts (i.e., his apartment building) that foster a neighborhood-related place identity, but he also brings in the element of (discontinuous) time in his integration journey. In the process of strengthening his ties with locals in his Greek neighborhood, he is, at the same time, (re-)connecting with the past temporalities of his hometown.

However, conviviality in neighborhoods was not always unproblematic in our data. In the next extract, a participant from the Ivory Coast who lived in Kypseli, Athens, begins his account by referring to the initial hostile reactions of his neighbors when they realized that a man from Africa would be moving into an apartment next to them.

**Extract 6**

*I:* May I ask how many years you have lived in Kypseli?

*P8:* Well, three years.

*I:* And what is your relationship with your neighbors?
P8: I found the house through a friend of mine. When the landlady said, “A guy from Africa will come to stay in my apartment,” the neighbors replied, “We don’t want Africans in this building.” Yes, they said it clearly, but I wasn’t aware of it. My landlady didn’t tell me at first. But the situation has changed; they are like my parents now. The same neighbors, who are sitting next to me, called the landlady one day and said, “Who is this guy you brought us? He is a very good person.” When they put their garbage outside their door, I take it and throw it for them. Maybe one week will pass, and during this time, they won’t even know when I enter or leave the apartment. I always remain silent; I don’t even put on music. That is what they were telling my landlady: “He doesn’t even put on music; we realize that he is at home only when he opens the door.” And when I leave the apartment to go to work, I see they leave food at my door. Then the landlady told me that “you should know that when I told them that a guy will rent the apartment and he is black, they told me that they didn’t want Africans in the building.” P8, 27, Ivory Coast, Athens

P8 is invited to describe his relationships with his neighbors during the 3 years he has lived in Kypseli. During his interview, the participant noted that Kypseli is not a neighborhood where he spends time. It is only the place where he sleeps and rests; he prefers spending his time in downtown Athens. In Extract 6, he is juxtaposing his current relationship with his neighbors, who have become “like his own parents,” with their initial reactions. His account presents a narrative (with a sequence and consequence marked by the passage of time) whereby initially his neighbors openly racialized him as an “African” and expressed their discomfort with his moving into the same building. Eventually, however, they got to know him and changed their view, so much so that, now, they are close like family. In a way, the participant formulates a lay contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005) with a positive interpersonal outcome. Notably, the positive conclusion of this narrative is predicated on the participant’s being positioned as a “good and silent neighbor” who is capable of changing his neighbors’ initial negative attitudes. The reference to the neighbors’ negative reactions and racist comments situated in the past also serves to highlight the change of stance and to construct the facticity (Edwards & Potter, 1992) of their acceptance and positive attitude in the present. By emphatically stressing that at the beginning he was not aware of his neighbors’ initial views, P8 positions himself as a person who behaves in a “proper way” under any circumstances. These temporal aspects are important for the participant to be able to narrate the story of his relationship with his neighbors.

In contrast to Extract 4, the participant implicitly mobilizes a model of “good” migrant citizenship based on civility and proper manners, rather than on any kind of transgressive act such as the ones described by other participants (e.g., political mobilization through local squats in Extract 4). The participant presents himself as a model citizen adhering to norms of proper behavior and the high expectations placed especially on migrant “others,” who are assumed to be noisy and generally uncivil. The participant indeed appears to make a deliberate effort to go unnoticed and to fulfill the expectations of his neighbors in order to blend in and be accepted. His narrative illustrates how proximity and contact can foster positive intergroup relations, but, at the same time, it indicates that the conditions for these relations rest on emplaced power asymmetries between “locals” and “others” that a priori exclude unwanted racialized migrants unless they can live up to the expectations of the “good migrant,” meaning that they prove their civility and keep a low profile.

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5Kypseli is a neighborhood that has rapidly transformed in recent years into one of “the coolest neighborhoods in Athens” (“What to Do in Kypseli,” 2022).
CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine refugee integration in the Greek cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, using concepts and tools from critical social and political psychology and citizenship and migration studies. Theorizing integration as an urban and local strategy, rather than as a linear process of moving from the country of origin to a receiving country, the article explores the ways in which people–place bonds, everyday citizenship practices, and aspects of the urban environment constitute resources in the construction of integration and belonging.

Analysis indicated three repertoires that represented different uses of urban space and people–place dynamics, namely, “city squares and surrounding areas as minorities’ spatial nuclei,” “political spaces as urban enclaves of belonging,” and “neighborhoods as un/familiar places.” The aforementioned constructions of city spaces were related to different subject positions and presupposed different citizenship constructions and claims. Despite their often precarious positioning within urban spaces and in line with the findings of other social and political psychology studies on spatial relations (Di Masso, 2012; Dixon et al., 2006; Gray & Manning, 2014, 2022; Hopkins et al., 2006; Ropert & Di Masso, 2021), our findings show that through place attachment and place-making strategies, participants engaged in locational forms of citizenship and developed a sense of belongingness to city spaces (Gray & Manning, 2022). In particular, acts of urban citizenship were related to the right to be part of specific multiethnic communities and to deploy strategies that dismantle established spatial hierarchies, such as renaming areas or deploying everyday activities (Extracts 1 and 2). In addition, participants made citizenship claims through engagement in political places and housing or squatting projects by making relationships with local activists and opening the way for independent forms of life beyond refugee camp and asylum policies (Extracts 3 and 4). Different ways that participants engaged with their neighbors also revealed different patterns in the expression of citizenship (constructions of equal membership in Extract 5 or scripts of “a good citizen” with limited spatial connection with the neighborhood in Extract 6).

Analytic findings challenged the bipolar constructions of conventional/transgressive forms of citizenship (Isin, 2009) and showed that the boundaries between the two are blurred. Conventional citizenship, as Isin (2009) has discussed it, is connected to formal rights and obligations taken for granted, whereas the latter challenges scripts of proper citizenship behavior. This is configured particularly in Extract 3, which shows that the participant seems to be occupying both positions: that of the activist and that of the proper/conventional citizen. The participant seemed to be, on the one hand, engaged in the friends’ community of the squat but, on the other, reluctant to participate in “more political” activities of the squat out of fear for legal consequences. This form of “reluctant citizenship” (a part or an aspect of urban citizenship that is being discussed throughout this article) permits people to transgress the boundaries between legality/illegality and at the same time has the possibility to carefully (and strategically) occupy both positions throughout their daily activities.

Furthermore, our findings revealed that emplaced practices of citizenship are being constituted by wider political processes of spatial conflict and exclusion (Di Masso, 2012; Gray & Manning, 2022). The enclaves of refugee encounters and local activities were circumscribed by relations of power asymmetry. For example, the existence of separate multicultural enclaves in the city (Extracts 1 and 2), the fear of participation in certain political activities, or the social pressure to occupy the position of “the good citizen” (Extracts 3 and 6) constitute examples of the dialectics between integration and exclusion. Unequal treatment and everyday barriers gave rise to strategic participation in spaces (Extracts 3, 4, and 6) that in turn highlighted everyday emplaced power asymmetries but, at the same time, paved the way for particular local forms of coexistence.

Our findings can enhance the existing literature on integration and citizenship. For instance, integration is usually approached through the lens of acculturation models (e.g., Berry...
& Sam, 1997; Kunst et al., 2021) and the dichotomy between individual and societal dynamics. Alternatively, studies that have been interested in spatial relations have mainly drawn on the assumptions of the contact hypothesis (e.g., Ghosn et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). The current research showed that urban citizenship and the local strategies of refugees' place-making were in tension with structural barriers that marginalize refugees. These dynamics put refugees in a liminal position in the integration procedure, and it is occasionally suggested that maintaining a discreet and inconspicuous presence may be the most “successful” form of integration. Moreover, drawing on Isin’s performative citizenship, the study indicated that acts of urban citizenship are able to showcase various forms of place attachment and complex urban strategies and can go beyond the dipole of transgressive/traditional forms of claims.

The aforementioned concerns may have significant implications for policies related to migration and integration. Policy considerations have to take into account the different spaces and levels of integration (e.g., local, national, transnational), as well as the power dynamics and asymmetries of those specific places, shaped by the mobilities of people. Migrants’ localized/urban citizenship strategies can reveal the multileveled and ideologically loaded possibilities and limitations of integration. On the one hand, as the analysis showed, considerations of migrants’ processes of “making” and place attachment cast light on the ways in which migrants can exercise their own mobility against or beyond existing control-breaking traditional conceptions of citizenship, and migration itself. On the other hand, integration strategies are linked to people's necessity of encountering aggressive and neoliberal state policies, which often keep them on the margins and do not recognize them as equal citizens. This reminds us that mobility is always in conjunction with capital, international control, nationalism, and ethnicity.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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