

Chapter # 15

IDENTITY, RELIGION, AND THE POLITICS OF KHAWA-KHAWAⁱ: ALGERIAN CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF COEXISTENCE WITH REFUGEESⁱⁱ

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how Algerian children sharing spaces with refugee children imagine and negotiate questions of coexistence, belonging, and diversity in a national context marked by colonial memory, religious heritage, and contemporary migration. Drawing on an arts-based participatory study in three public schools in eastern Algeria, it examines how children frame coexistence through everyday practices and moral geographies. Guided by Sociocultural theory and Social-Cognitive Developmental Theory, the chapter considers how children develop understandings in response to their environments and shared narratives. Play emerged as a rich terrain for ethical negotiation, where inclusion was expressed through invitations to games and acts of sharing, and exclusion was marked by denying access to communal spaces. Younger children tended to frame inclusion through immediate, relational gestures, while older children engaged more critically with inherited discourses and structural inequalities. These varied responses invite a closer look at how children's reasoning is shaped not only by developmental factors but also by religious, historical, and national influences. Rather than provide a definitive account, the chapter introduces children's perspectives as complex and evolving, offering insights into how coexistence is imagined, contested, and sometimes resisted within the everyday moral worlds of childhood.

Keywords: children's voices, refugee inclusion, social attitudes, khawa-khawa, co-existence, arts-based-methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across regions affected by migration and displacement, scholarship on refugee-host relations has predominantly framed coexistence through institutional and policy lenses, linking it to processes of integration and inclusion focused on service access, social cohesion, and measurable outcomes (Ager & Strang, 2008; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Greatrick, 2021) Phillimore, D'Avino, Papoutsi, Strain-Fajth, & Ziss, 2022). Parallel strands of research in social psychology have drawn on contact theory to examine how intergroup interaction can reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954; Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2020; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), while sociological perspectives have often conceptualised social connectedness through notions of trust and civic participation (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). More recent work in migration and refugee studies has turned toward relational and affective approaches that consider how belonging is felt and enacted in everyday life (Hyndman & Giles, 2016; Wise & Noble, 2016; Mahmud, 2021). In some European contexts, studies of conviviality and everyday multiculturalism have similarly shown that encounters between refugees and host communities are mediated by affect, routine interaction, and moral ambivalence, where empathy coexists with exclusion (Cabot, 2023; Gilroy, 2004; Ticktin, 2011; Wise & Noble,

2016). Other studies conducted in Lebanon, and Jordan, similarly highlight how children and families navigate coexistence through informal encounters in schools, neighbourhoods, and care networks that both reproduce and challenge existing hierarchies (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Hart, 2008; Kamruzzaman, Al-Shanableh, & Albanna, 2025). Yet while much of this scholarship has focused on contexts in the Global North or humanitarian borderlands, far less is known about how coexistence unfolds in North African settings (Norman, 2021; Betts, Stierna, Omata, & Sterck, 2022).

Algeria offers a particularly revealing case, where children's encounters with refugee peers occur within a complex moral and political terrain shaped by colonial memory and state ambivalence. State practices fluctuate between symbolic fraternity and security-driven exclusion. The absence of a clear national asylum framework leaves refugee status determination, particularly for individuals from sub-Saharan Africa, under the mandate of the UNHCR, resulting in a protection regime that is largely informal and precarious (El-Naggar, 2020; Fargues, 2013). Norman (2020) characterises such contexts as embodying politics of "reluctant reception" (p. 341), where hospitality and control coexist uneasily. Access to education and healthcare remains inconsistent, with fear of arrest shaping refugees' mobility and service use (UNHCR, 2024a; 2024b). Civil-society action is similarly constrained by strict association laws, limiting sustained inclusion initiatives (El-Naggar, 2020; Knoll & Teevan, 2020). These ambivalences are inseparable from Algeria's postcolonial nation-building project, in which discourses of solidarity, rooted in the legacy of anti-colonial struggle, continue to inform public attitudes toward migration (Silverstein, 2004). Meanwhile, frequent waves of migration from sub-Saharan Africa and neighbouring countries have introduced new dimensions to the national conversation on identity, borders, and responsibility (Bernard, 2024; Norman, 2020).

Algerian children, growing up amid these layered narratives, often encounter refugee peers in informal and socially mediated ways, particularly within shared public spaces such as markets and neighbourhoods. Schools are rarely among these sites, as enrolment for refugee children remains administratively complex and often restricted. This chapter therefore explores how children and young people in parts of eastern Algeria make sense of these encounters. Rather than focusing on policy or formal integration, the emphasis is placed on how inclusion and exclusion are negotiated in everyday spaces. These moral negotiations, expressed through play, speech, and symbolic practices, offer a unique window into how children process wider social dynamics (Aboud, 2008; Hickey-Moody, Palmer, & Sayers, 2021). By centring children's voices, the chapter contributes to broader debates on refugee inclusion, intergroup relations, and the development of social reasoning in contexts of uncertainty and change.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives to understand how Algerian children make sense of their interactions with refugee peers: Sociocultural theory and Social-Cognitive Developmental Theory (SCDT). From a Sociocultural perspective, learning and moral development are seen as socially situated processes. Rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978), this approach emphasises the importance of guided interaction, language, and cultural tools in shaping children's understanding of the world. In the context of this study, public spaces and neighbourhoods serve as key environments where children are exposed to shared values and social norms regarding inclusion, fairness, and identity. These interactions often take place informally and are mediated through everyday practices

such as play, storytelling, and community engagement (Bernard, 2024; El-Naggar, 2020; Hickey-Moody et al., 2021).

In parallel, SCDT offers a developmental lens through which to examine how children's intergroup attitudes change with age and cognitive capacity. Initially formulated by Aboud (1988; 2008) and later expanded by Rutland and Killen (2015), SCDT suggests that younger children tend to rely on visible markers such as skin colour, dress, or language to categorise others. These early distinctions often inform simplistic judgements about fairness or difference. As children grow older, they are increasingly able to incorporate social, historical, and cultural information into their reasoning, allowing for more nuanced understandings of inclusion and exclusion. In contexts like Algeria, where narratives of colonial resistance and national sovereignty are prominent, these developmental trajectories are also informed by collective memory and political discourse (Silverstein, 2004).

The chapter also engages with Islamic ethics of hospitality, particularly Dawn Chatty's (2010) work on the concept of "karam" (generosity) in similar contexts, to contextualise how religious and cultural teachings infuse moral expectations and inform refugee-host relations. These frameworks help to capture the layered and evolving nature of children's attitudes toward refugee inclusion. They provide a means of interpreting how children navigate symbolic boundaries and express their views through culturally embedded practices, particularly in informal settings. By bridging developmental psychology with a sociocultural understanding of learning, the chapter situates children as active meaning-makers within the broader moral and political landscapes of contemporary Algeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative design grounded in participatory, arts-based inquiry to examine how Algerian children conceptualise coexistence with refugee peers. The exploratory design offers flexibility in contexts where empirical knowledge is limited, allowing meanings to emerge inductively from children's experiences rather than from predefined hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Stebbins, 2001). The arts-based approach provided expressive avenues beyond verbal communication. Drawing and collage invited children to communicate emotion, imagination, and social understanding which are forms of knowledge that are often inaccessible through interviews (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2020; Malchiodi, 2018). These creative processes were followed by focus group discussions, enabling participants to elaborate collectively on the meanings embedded in their artwork and reinforcing the participatory ethos of shared interpretation (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). Throughout the process, fieldnotes were maintained to document contextual detail, nonverbal interaction, and researcher reflexivity, forming an essential complement to verbal and visual data. Fieldnotes offer a crucial "scaffolding" of context that audio transcripts alone cannot capture (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 382).

Fieldwork was conducted in three public schools in eastern Algeria, each representing a distinct age cohort (5-7, 8-10, and 11 years and above). 60 children participated, with approximately 20 in each school. Data collection took the form of workshops lasting between 90 minutes and 2 hours. Each workshop followed a consistent structure comprising an introduction, drawing activity, collage-making, and a focus group discussion. The visual activities functioned primarily as prompts to stimulate discussion on coexistence and belonging. Open-ended questions, such as "How would you describe your community?" and "What does it mean to live together?", encouraged peer dialogue and collaborative reasoning during the focus group discussions. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Sampling was purposive and criterion-based (Patton, 2015), ensuring variation in age, gender, and exposure to refugee peers. Gender balance was prioritised in the two younger groups, while adolescent participants were predominantly female, reflecting regional patterns of early male withdrawal from schooling for military or vocational training (Laaredj-Campbell, 2023). The region's geographical and historical complexity, situated along the Tunisian border and Mediterranean migration routes to Europe, made it an especially dynamic site of contact between Algerian and refugee communities. The choice of this geographical focus was not intended to generalise attitudes toward refugees across Algeria but to foreground a context that remains underrepresented in existing scholarship, offering insight into children's perspectives within a region rarely examined in the literature.

Data analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Davey, & Jenkinson, 2023). Visual artefacts (drawings, collages) were not analysed directly; instead, analysis centred on the children's verbal interpretations of their images. This strategy aligns with participatory and arts-based principles that seek to avoid adult-imposed readings of children's representations and privilege participants' own accounts of meaning, affect, and intent (Clark & Moss, 2011; Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed and coded inductively to capture both explicit and underlying meanings related to coexistence, inclusion, exclusion and belonging. Codes and themes were refined across age groups to trace developmental and cultural patterns. Reflexive journaling ensured transparency in interpretive decisions and awareness of positionality. The SCDT and the sociocultural theory frameworks informed the data analysis and positioned children's visual and verbal accounts as situated forms of moral reasoning shaped by both developmental and sociocultural conditions.

Ethical protocols adhered to Swansea University's procedures and international standards for child-centred research (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; Harcourt & Sargeant, 2012). Written consent was obtained from parents and schools, and repeated oral assent from children. All activities took place within school grounds under teacher supervision, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw. The study upheld participatory ethics of respect and reciprocity, positioning children as co-constructors of meaning rather than subjects of inquiry (Christensen & James, 2017; Gallagher, 2008).

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Coexistence as Moral Simplicity and Acts of Playful Inclusion (5-7 Years Old)

Younger children predominantly framed coexistence through acts of inclusion anchored in Islamic teachings. Many of their drawings depicted mosques as welcoming spaces, often showing people gathered outside as symbols of togetherness. These visual representations prompted focus group discussions around the strong internalisation of religious messages about compassion and unity. The children who drew mosques were all boys, which may reflect gendered patterns of early religious socialisation, as boys are more likely to attend mosques with their fathers from a young age. The mosque, along with the concept of Muslim brotherhood or Unity, emerged in these drawings as a key representation of coexistence. For example, in Figure 1, Emyr drew two children standing beside an Algerian flag in front of a mosque. He wrote, "I went with my friend Leith to the mosque to perform Friday prayers". Leith is drawn with a different skin colour, signifying his status as a refugee according to Emyr's interpretation of his drawing.

Figure 1.
Mosques as shared spaces for co-existence (Emyr, age 6).



When confronted with questions about societal and religious diversity, younger children predominantly embraced it. They often shifted their imagery from mosques to football terrains as inclusive and neutral spaces where diversity could be comfortably accommodated through play. This was particularly evident in drawings explicitly inviting refugee children to join football games to prevent feelings of exclusion or sadness. Figure 2 below captures a dialogue among children considering inviting a *newcomer*. This interaction highlights children's active consideration of inclusion through everyday play.

Figure 2.
“Football gathers us” (Murad, age 7).



Murad captioned his drawing: “No to racism. Yes to humanity. Football gathers us”. The speech bubbles translate as follows:

Child on left: “I wish I could play with them”

Child in middle: “Shall we invite that kid to play with us?”

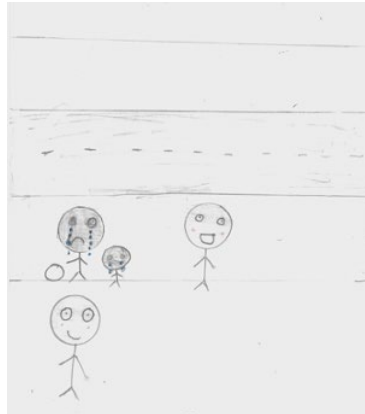
Child on right with the ball: “Yes, we will let him play with us so he does not feel sad”.

Similarly, in figures 3 and 4, Rami and Omar show a refugee child represented as sad and distinctively coloured, highlighting the children's sensitivity to emotional and visual markers of difference.

Figure 3.
"I wish you [all] a happy and fun life" (Rami, age 7).



Figure 4.
Sad and happy faces (Omar, age 5).



While football often featured in depictions of inclusion among boys, girls expressed similar values through different forms of play. Their drawings frequently illustrated rope-skipping and the traditional Algerian game *buff*ⁱⁱⁱ, highlighting a gentler mode of interaction where inclusion was communicated through cooperation and shared enjoyment. Sana's and Rula's drawings shown in figures 5 & 6, underscore the principles of kindness and solidarity through gendered play practices. In children's play invitations, boys tended to include male refugee peers, while girls extended invitations to female refugee peers,

reflecting both religious and cultural norms of gendered interaction and the social boundaries that shape children's everyday moral reasoning. Across these depictions, play emerged as a moral language through which empathy and fairness were enacted and understood.

Figure 5.
"...and suddenly a girl from Niger joined us..." (Sana, age 6).



Figure 6.
Rope-skipping with a girl from Mali. (Rula, age 6).



These expressions of play reinforced broader moral values, particularly around empathy and fairness. Alongside these affirmations of inclusion, children also used their drawings to address the obstacles to coexistence, most notably, bullying. Several illustrations reflected moral teachings learned from teachers and parents, often linking acts of exclusion to broader ethical concerns. For instance, in figure 7, Wafa drew three girls with different skin colours, accompanied by the caption: "We never bully one another because God created each person with the colour of their skin". This drawing along with the discussion around it, explicitly links anti-bullying messages to religious principles of equality and dignity.

Figure 7.
Anti-bullying message emphasising equality (Wafa, age 5).



This theme is developed further in Figure 8 below, which presents a dialogue explicitly addressing racial bullying and concluding with an ethical appeal to Islamic teachings:

Figure 8.
Scenario addressing racial bullying (Amna, age 7).



Amna added speech bubbles to her drawing, which translate as follows:

Girl on the left: "I want to play with you".

Girl in the middle: "No, no, she is black".

Girl on the right: "There is no need to mock. Yes, you are welcome with us. My religion taught me not to mock others, because there is no difference between white and black except in piety and good deeds".

Beyond challenging exclusion, many children also expressed proactive care and emotional solidarity with refugee peers. Acts of kindness and compassion were visibly articulated, highlighting empathy as a central value in their moral worlds. Figure 9, for instance, includes a heartfelt message shared by Yumna: "I wish you happiness and warmth in the winter". She explained that she offered oranges to the sad-looking refugee child to help them feel happy and warm during the cold season, describing this gesture as an act of coexistence and care.

Figure 9.
"I wish you happiness and warmth in the winter" (Yumna, age 7).



4.2. Emerging Social Awareness and Historical Reflection (8-10 Years Old):

Drawings by children in this group expressed a deepening sense of empathy, often infused with both religious values and emerging awareness of social dynamics such as exclusion, bullying, and disability. While Islamic values of compassion and hospitality remained a moral anchor for many, these were accompanied by growing concerns about identity, community safety, and belonging. Figure 10 below features a scene of refugee arrival. The caption reads: "Refuge is painful feeling. My picture represents the feeling or the state of refugees in a country and land that is not theirs, and at the same time it shows us the kindness of the Algerian people toward refugees". It blends acknowledgement of the emotional hardship of displacement with an appreciation of local hospitality.

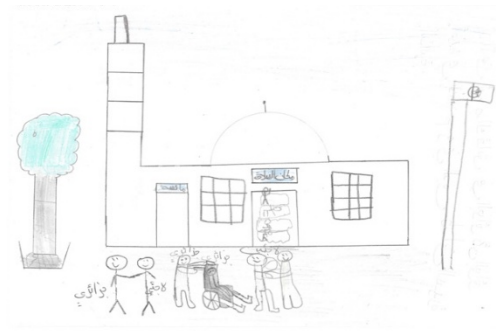
Figure 10.
"Refuge is painful" (Leena, age 8).



Building on this empathetic framing of refugee arrival, the following drawing in figure 11 shifts the focus from the emotional experience of displacement to the everyday visibility of diversity within shared communal spaces. It depicts a mosque with a group of figures standing outside, among them individuals who appear to have physical disabilities.

The characters are labelled, from left to right: *Algerian, refugee, Algerian, Algerian, two refugees*. This labelling suggests a more nuanced understanding of coexistence, where difference is not only defined by refugee status but also by physical ability. Notably, the refugee figure in this and other drawings from the same age group is not depicted with a different skin colour, potentially suggesting a shift away from racialised distinctions. By portraying the mosque as an inclusive space, Ahmed extends the principles of hospitality and belonging, previously tied to national and religious identity, toward a wider ethic of care. Here, coexistence becomes not just about accepting those from other places, but also about recognising and respecting the diverse needs and bodies that make up the community.

Figure 11.
Expanding the circle of acceptance (Ahmed, age 7).



As children's representations of coexistence became more socially attuned, some turned their attention to the barriers to inclusion found not only in physical spaces, but also in peer dynamics and digital environments. Several drawings in this group directly addressed bullying, reflecting a growing sensitivity to the ways in which difference, particularly in relation to race, body image, and visibility, is policed and stigmatised among children. Figure 12 below offers a clear ethical stance through the caption: "No to bullying, we were all created from the same clay", accompanied by diverse figures with different skin tones, body shapes, and facial expressions. This visual narrative presents a universalist message, rooted in shared humanity and moral equality.

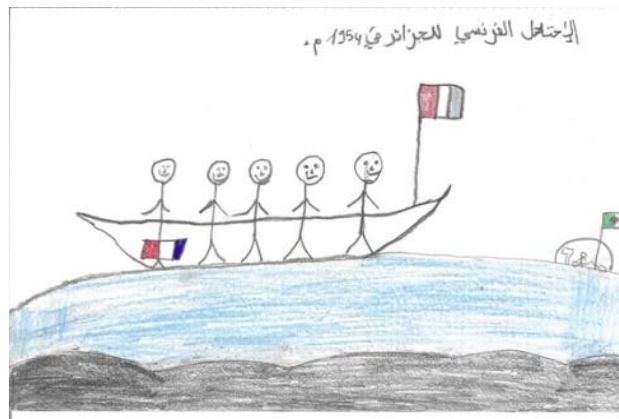
Figure 12.
"No to bullying, we were all created from the same clay" (Rami, age 9).



Alongside their growing interpersonal awareness, some children also drew on historical and nationalist narratives to make sense of refugee displacement. In this age group, references to Algeria's colonial past, particularly the Algerian war for independence (1954-1962), surfaced in several drawings and group discussions, revealing how collective memory informed their moral reasoning. During the focus groups, some children expressed fears that the arrival of refugees might bring conflict into Algeria, rendering the country vulnerable to instability or even recolonisation. These anxieties reflected a belief that war travels with displaced people, and that Algeria, having already endured the trauma of colonial rule, might once again become a target.

For others, the legacy of the War of Independence was interpreted as a moral benchmark: just as Algerian ancestors had stayed to resist foreign occupation, they believed refugees should remain in their own countries and fight for liberation. Several children explicitly discussed that refugees should “stay and fight”, linking their exclusion to Algerian ideals of self-determination and sacrifice. The drawing presented in Figure 13 offers a visual representation of French colonisation, depicted without detailed explanation but strongly resonant with the nationalist sentiment expressed in the discussions.

Figure 13.
The French colonisation (1954) (Ameen, age 9).



Children in this age group also displayed a more structured approach to social and political challenges. Their contributions often resembled mini-projects that identified problems, explained causes, and proposed solutions. Topics such as drug-use in schools and the ongoing Palestinian struggle for justice and freedom, were brought forward with striking conviction. In one instance, a child used the term “Djaza-estine”, a creative fusion of “*Djazair*” (Algeria) and “*Falastine*” (Palestine), to express a sense of shared struggle and solidarity. This conceptual innovation illustrates the group's capacity to synthesise complex ideas across national and cultural boundaries.

Figure 14.
Visual Case Studies of Conflict, Struggle, and Solidarity (Shams, age 9).

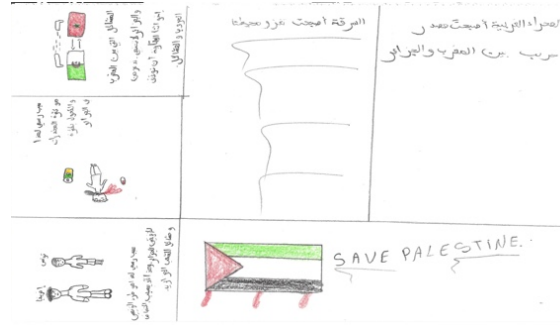
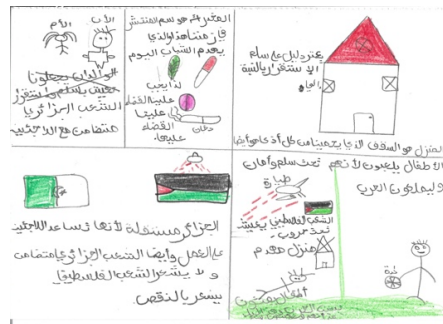


Figure 15.
Drawings of community, struggle, and hope (Walid, age 10).



4.3. Adolescents' Reflections on Co-existence (11+ Years Old):

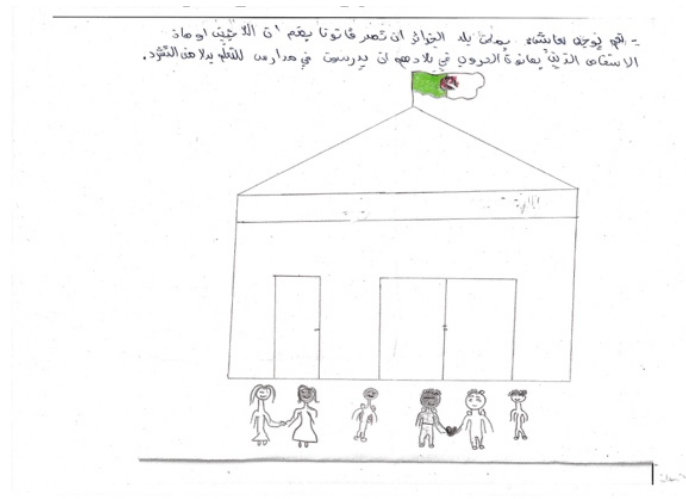
Adolescents participating in the study demonstrated a marked increase in critical consciousness, drawing upon complex moral, political, and religious ideas to articulate their understandings of co-existence. Their contributions, mostly verbal, were notably analytical and, at times, self-reflective or contradictory, engaging with local, national, and global contexts. Adolescents in this group expressed acute awareness of the moral dissonance between Islamic teachings and their lived realities. While earlier age groups often used religious principles to advocate for inclusion, adolescents questioned the consistency between such ideals and the treatment of refugees within Algerian society. They pointed to discrepancies between Islamic values of “*rahma*” (compassion), “*karam*” (generosity) and “*ukhuwwa*” (brotherhood) and the exclusionary practices observed by individuals in markets, neighbourhoods, and public institutions. Themes of structural inequality and denied access were particularly prominent among this group. Participants identified limited access to education, healthcare, and employment as critical obstacles preventing meaningful integration for refugees.

Figure 16 depicts a public library as a site of coexistence, where 2 figures referred to in the picture as *Black* and *White* stand together, referring to an explicit commitment to racial inclusion and cultural plurality. Figure 17 presents a public school, with a caption linking access to education to the prevention of homelessness for refugees.

Figure 16.
Institutions, Access, and the Boundaries of Belonging (Asia, age 15).



Figure 17.
Appeal for refugee children's right to education (Isa, age 16).



Young people in this group also began to interrogate the moral and cultural ideals that had shaped their earlier understandings of coexistence. One such ideal was the concept of khawa-khawa “brothers, brothers”, which, while celebrated by younger children as a symbol of religious brotherhood, was approached with greater scrutiny by older participants. Rather than accepting it as a given, adolescents questioned its practical application. Several

participants questioned whether this sense of brotherhood extended to all Muslims, only Arabs, or only Algerians, and whether it could truly be inclusive when institutional practices appeared to contradict it. In focus group discussions, khawa-khawa and Muslim brotherhood were described as ideals that are widely professed but rarely enacted, revealing adolescents' growing awareness of the dissonance between moral discourse and social reality.

Figure 18.
The politics of khawa-khawa (Ousama, age 16).



5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Play as a Moral Landscape

For younger children, play was the primary mode through which coexistence became visible and tangible. In this sense, play operated not merely as recreation but as a developmental and moral space, a dynamic process through which children construct meaning, rehearse social relationships, and explore moral possibilities, an understanding that underscores the need to attend to children's own perspectives on play as contextually situated and creatively expressive (Howard, 2020; Whitebread et al., 2017). Football and traditional playground activities served as inclusive spaces where the presence, or absence, of refugee peers was keenly felt. Their moral logic aligned with early stages of SCDT: perceptual cues like skin colour or sadness were noted but not necessarily interrogated. Instead, difference was met with concrete gestures, such as inviting others to play, what Aboud (1988) frames as affect-driven moral action rooted in fairness, empathy and generosity. These acts were not politically naive. As Hart (2008) and Doná & Veale (2022) note, children use everyday encounters to reconfigure social boundaries. Here, mosques and playgrounds operated as "moral laboratories", where Islamic teachings and peer norms intersected with embodied experiences of inclusion.

5.2. Gendered Dimensions of Moral and Spatial Inclusion

Children's expressions of inclusion were similar in intent but gendered in form. Boys depicted coexistence through football and mosque attendance, public, performance-oriented arenas, while girls centred cooperative games such as rope-skipping or *buff*, where inclusion was communicated through care and turn-taking. This mirrors playground ethnographies showing that children learn and police gender through spatially distinct game cultures (Corsaro, 2012; Thorne, 1993), with football fields operating as masculine moral territories of visibility and contest and skipping circles as relational spaces where fairness and coordination are rehearsed. Religious exposure reinforced these patterned moral geographies. Boys frequently referenced Friday prayers with fathers, aligning coexistence with public religiosity; girls did not mention mosques, locating moral practice mostly in domestic play. This aligns with jurisprudential and sociological accounts: men are strongly expected to attend prayers in congregation, whereas women's attendance is welcomed but not required, and in many settings practically less accessible (Megahed, 2022). In our data, that obligation produced a male-coded moral apprenticeship in mosque space, while girls' ethical imagination developed in relational domains.

5.3. Moral Development and Social Awareness

As older groups of children were engaged, their reasoning about coexistence shifted from relational immediacy to broader social awareness. Middle childhood brought with it a more deliberate engagement with ethical contradictions and group dynamics. While invitations to play continued, they were increasingly accompanied by questions around loyalty, safety, and belonging. This transition reflects the developmental coordination that SCDT highlights, wherein children learn to negotiate tensions between moral ideals and social conventions (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Rutland & Killen, 2015). Yet rather than representing a universal cognitive progression, the Algerian case shows how this coordination is profoundly shaped by cultural and historical context. The emergence of colonial history, religious duty, and national pride in the reasoning of older children shows how individual cognition becomes increasingly shaped by macro-level narratives. Comparable studies have observed similar culturally embedded moral coordination, where children's judgments draw simultaneously on moral, social, and group-identity domains (Abrams & Killen, 2014; Chatty, 2010; Nesdale, 2017).

The data revealed that Algerian national identity and colonial memory served as powerful moral frameworks through which older children interpreted the legitimacy of refugee presence. References to the War of Independence were frequent, with some echoing adult discourses that refugees should "stay and fight in their country like we did". Children were mobilising collective moral vocabularies rooted in postcolonial history, national pride and religious discourse. This extends Silverstein's (2004) argument about postcolonial nationalism shaping imaginaries of belonging into the realm of childhood, showing that these narratives are already embedded within pre-teens' moral reasoning. Consistent with sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), their judgments did not emerge in isolation but drew on local histories, political slogans and Islamic ethics of compassion and responsibility (Chatty, 2010). Together, these insights suggest that while SCDT helps explain the developmental structure through which children coordinate moral and social concerns, sociocultural theory illuminates the cultural content of that reasoning, demonstrating how Algerian children's moral awareness is shaped through the interplay of age, history and faith.

5.4. Identity and the Expansion of Moral Horizons

For the adolescent group, questions of coexistence were filtered through more complex identity work. Unlike younger children, who grounded inclusion in immediate relationships and shared play, adolescents drew on broader social, religious and political categories when making sense of refugee presence. Their discussions revealed an active interrogation of inherited identity labels. Questions such as Are we Arabs? Muslims? Africans? highlighted how continental, religious and national affiliations were mobilised differently to include or exclude. This mirrors Bernard's (2024) findings that young people in North Africa experience identity not as fixed, but as plural, layered and continually negotiated. Alongside these debates around identity, adolescents, also displayed a growing capacity for moral abstraction and transnational empathy. The use of terms like "Djaza-estine" exemplifies their ability to synthesise local and global struggles into shared narratives of injustice. This finding echoes research by Hickey-Moody et al. (2021), who argue that children are not only capable of moral learning but also of moral innovation. Through such expressions, young people demonstrated the potential to move from a framework of coexistence based on proximity or sameness to one rooted in solidarity, shared struggle, and ethical imagination. Together, these insights show how adolescence marked a shift from concrete moral practices to more abstract, politically attuned reasoning. The interplay of identity, history and global consciousness enabled young people to move beyond proximity-based inclusion towards more reflective forms of moral alignment.

5.5. Politically-charged Ethics of Brotherhood & Inclusion

One recurring theme across all age groups was the invocation, and problematisation, of khawa-khawa (brotherhood). Younger children adopted it as a moral slogan, often accompanying their drawings with captions like "A Muslim is a brother of a Muslim". In contrast, adolescents approached the concept with critical distance. Their interrogation of whether khawa-khawa truly applied to refugees reflected an emergent moral consciousness that both absorbed and challenged prevailing discourses. This echoes Mahmood's (2005) notion of ethical agency, where individuals negotiate the distance between moral ideals and social reality. Adolescents' remarks such as "It's a word we hear, not what we live" expose the performative nature of public ethics and reflect young people's growing awareness of hypocrisy in adult discourse. These debates around khawa-khawa did not unfold in isolation but were continually shaped and tested within the everyday spaces where inclusion and exclusion were enacted.

While policies and political discourses undoubtedly shape the broader context, this study confirms that co-existence is negotiated in ordinary spaces, mosques, streets, and especially playgrounds. These spaces were not neutral backdrops but active stages where social hierarchies were enacted, resisted, and sometimes reimaged. As the children's artwork and conversations revealed, play was both a method of moral expression and a site where inclusion could be felt, practiced, and withheld. In this regard, the findings strongly affirm Doná and Veale's (2011) assertion that children's social worlds are ordinary and politically charged. While younger children used play to construct belonging, older children used discussion and drawing to contest or complicate it.

5.6. Future Recommendations

Taken together, these findings suggest a number of directions for practice and research that could further cultivate inclusive moral reasoning and everyday coexistence.

- Future work could build on the findings of this study by examining how ordinary contexts such as playgrounds and other public spaces in host

communities might be more intentionally designed to cultivate ethical engagement and inclusive belonging.

- At a practical level, efforts to foster coexistence should adopt age-sensitive and contextually grounded approaches. Younger children in this study conveyed inclusion through immediate acts of empathy and invitation, whereas older participants mobilised moral vocabularies rooted in religion and national history. Interventions should therefore align with developmental capacities: for younger children, mixed play opportunities and rule-light cooperative activities can facilitate encounters between host and refugee peers; for adolescents, dialogue-based programmes linking cultural and religious values to everyday practices of fairness can help translate moral ideals into action.
- Inclusion initiatives must also ensure gender-responsive access to spaces and recognise that moral expression is shaped by gendered forms of agency. As Mahmood (2005) and Paechter (2007) note, both public forms of solidarity and relational practices of care constitute meaningful moral engagement. Future research could extend this inquiry by examining how gendered access to religious and recreational spaces informs children's moral and social reasoning in other postcolonial and Muslim-majority settings.
- Future research could extend this work through comparative studies across different Algerian regions, particularly those hosting refugees from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. Such comparisons would illuminate how local histories, linguistic environments, and religious traditions shape children's moral reasoning about coexistence. Examining how younger children interpret differences such as skin colour or faith, as both distinctions and possible points of connection, would deepen understanding of how inclusivity and belonging are imagined in varied sociocultural settings.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to explore how Algerian children imagine and negotiate coexistence with refugee peers who share their community spaces. Algeria, shaped by religious values, postcolonial legacies, and shifting demographics, offers a complex and important context for such inquiry. Rather than producing a singular or unified answer, the children's narratives reveal coexistence as a fluid and contested process, shaped by developmental stage, everyday interactions, and access to shared moral vocabularies. What emerges most clearly is that young children do not engage with refugee peers through abstract concepts such as "integration" or "diversity", but through lived, embodied encounters, through games, spaces, stories, and visual representations. These interactions often take place in informal settings such as playgrounds, where social boundaries are both made visible and open to negotiation. Children enter these spaces carrying inherited moral frameworks, but they also test, stretch, and at times subvert them, sometimes reinforcing group loyalties, and at other times imagining solidarities that adults have not yet realised. Rather than offering a prescriptive account of how children should behave, this chapter has foregrounded the ways in which children themselves make sense of difference. These perspectives are often contradictory, occasionally exclusionary, but just as often generous, surprising, and ethically imaginative. This complexity resists reductive narratives of either childhood innocence or mimicry of adult ideologies. Instead, it positions children as active participants in the moral and political life of their communities, capable not only of absorbing social discourses but also of interrogating and reworking them. This Algerian case study forms part of a wider

global initiative examining how children in different socio-political and cultural contexts conceptualise coexistence. Comparative data from additional sites, each marked by distinct intersections of migration, history, and identity, will further illuminate how children's experiences of coexistence are shaped not only by age, but by environment, context, and exposure to diverse social norms. Together, these studies aim to develop a richer, more situated understanding of how children worldwide navigate the ethical and emotional demands of living with difference.

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ⁱ "Khawa-khawa" (خاوة خاوة) is a colloquial Algerian expression meaning "brothers, brothers" or, more broadly, "we are all brothers". Rooted in values of solidarity, unity, and shared identity, it is commonly used in everyday speech to affirm collective belonging. In the context of this study, it signifies a culturally specific discourse of coexistence and moral obligation, particularly as it relates to inclusion, difference, and the ethics of living together.

ⁱⁱ This chapter is an extension of a paper first presented at InPACT 2025 and subsequently published in the conference proceedings (Boukhari & Howard, 2025). It expands the original analysis by offering a deeper examination of children's perspectives on coexistence with refugees in Algeria. In doing so, it builds on a growing recognition of the need to engage with children not merely as passive recipients of adult ideologies but as active social participants whose interpretations of inclusion, difference, and community carry meaningful social and ethical weight (James & Prout, 1997; Hart, 2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ Buff is a game played in Algeria, mostly by girls, involving a soft ball made from old fabric or socks tied together with plastic bands. Players take turns throwing the ball while others try to avoid being hit.

^{iv} In Islamic tradition, the Qur'an describes humans as being created from clay, symbolising shared origin and inherent equality. The child drew on this religious understanding to express that message of equality (Figure 12).