LIFE IN LIMBO:

REFUGEES AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE IN ATHENS, GREECE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores perspectives of refugee and asylum-seeking women and grassroots organizations on challenges that refugee populations face in Greece and how the local community responds to the emerging needs of the integration. Drawing from more than 11 weeks of research and 25 interviews with the women and grassroots organizations across Athens, in this thesis, I situate the experiences of refugee women and grassroots organizations' work within broader fields of research on migrant and refugee solidarity, deservingness and entitlement, and in the context of broader social and economic policies of Greece. I aim to showcase how refugee women mobilize themselves for change and what roles grassroots organizations and international volunteers play in promoting solidarity, integration and wellbeing.

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To all the women at Melissa Network who uplift each other through solidarity

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As I walk into the Melissa Network, the refugee and migrant women's hub in the center of Athens, I am greeted by the front desk administrator. I tell her my name and that I am here to see Ivy. "Yes, she will be here in a second, just wait," she tells me. As I wait in the hall, which is part of the bigger room with couches and two big tables, all I can see are groups of women laughing and talking with each other and moving around the house. No one has paid any attention to my arrival. Did I arrive at a house whose owners are about to have a big celebration? Women speaking various languages laugh and talk with each other, some eat food, some take care of their children. Soon I am greeted by Ivy who gives me a tour of the entire place and describes what my responsibilities will be as a volunteer for the next two months or so. She introduces me to the staff and then to women in the big room who greet me with a smile.

Little did I know that these women would soon become friends and key informants in my research. Hearing their stories of life in Athens and future aspirations, I learned what it meant to be an asylum seeker or a refugee in Greece. The process of asylum seeking in Greece came with many struggles as well as incredible perseverance that the women demonstrated while finding their place in the Greek community. While waiting for the asylum decisions, relocation, housing arrangements or employment, refugees faced structural challenges to access various services and integrate into the local community. On the other hand, as a response to the inadequate political will from the European Union (EU), Greece emerged as the center of solidarity as thousands of

grassroots organizations, international volunteers and locals responded to the needs of asylum seekers and redefined humanitarianism in Greece. Drawing from more than 11 weeks of research and 25 interviews with the women and grassroots organizations across Athens, in this thesis, I situate the experiences of refugee women and grassroots organizations within broader fields of research on migrant and refugee solidarity, deservingness and entitlement, and in the context of broader social and economic policies of Greece.

My research has two objectives. First, I explore the effects of the larger policies and culture of mistrust through a critical lens of embodied and lived experiences of refugee women in Athens and grassroots organizations who most closely work with refugees. I seek to illuminate the ways in which the broader culture of mistrust towards asylum seekers manifest in Greek context and how the provision of services or lack of them reflects exclusionary policies crafted at the EU headquarters. I argue that protracted uncertainty, indefinite waiting, and a lack of access to legal information are defining aspects of the experience being an asylum seeker and refugee in Greece and create liminal spaces. Second, I look into how grassroots organizations and volunteers working closely with refugees fight liminality and protracted uncertainty, promote the ideas of integration, embody solidarity and bring transformative change to refugees' everyday lives. Specifically, I seek to answer two research questions: in what ways do the asylum system and the larger policies affect lived and embodied experiences of refugee women in Athens? And how do grassroots organizations and international volunteers working with migrants promote ideas of integration and embody solidarity?

I argue that refugee women in Greece are dealing with uncertainty, waiting, and lack of access to needed information about the asylum process. Legal and institutional mechanisms situate asylum seekers and refugees in a highly ambiguous predicament. I use the term "limbo" to describe lived and embodied experiences of waiting for various decisions from the asylum office, the Greek government, EU institutions, and immigration courts. I specifically explore the lives of women who have been stranded in Athens after closure of borders and tell the stories from women's perspective and experiences. I seek to understand the ways in which the state of limbo impacts the everyday lives of refugee women and how refugee solidarity may mitigate or offset that uncertainty.

As a response to the inadequate political will from the EU, Greece has emerged as a center of solidarity and welcome. The country, hard-hit by the financial crisis of 2008 and neoliberal austerity measures, saw a rise of solidarity towards migrants and refugees among its citizens, grassroots organizations, and international volunteers. Involvement of solidarity groups was paramount, especially considering an inadequate, or sometimes absent political and administrative measures of the Greek and the European authorities (Tsoni, 2016). *Solidarians*, as many researchers refer to these volunteer humanitarians, became crucial in organizing the reception and rescue operations, providing food and water, offering cultural, social, and legal support, among other tasks (Rozakou, 2017).

Greece's historical and cultural context created and redefend solidarity and humanitarianism that exists today. However, the ways in which organizations embody solidarity differs between actors. I present how perspectives of refugees themselves, grassroots, international volunteers, NGOs, differ, and relate to each other. I argue that

these organizations play a vital role in working towards integration, demonstrating solidarity towards refugees, and alleviating liminality with their work. I argue that the country's transformation from a transit to a potential destination or resettlement state, calls for the shifts from the provision of basic needs to an integration approach. This shift reflects the principles of the *solidarians* and grassroots organizations that are supporting equality, egalitarianism, and horizontal governance. I present the ways in which one refugee women's center - Melissa Network - promotes integration and fights xenophobia through migrant women's care work. I contrast women's work against popular media discourse presenting refugee women as vulnerable victims of violence.

The goal of this manuscript is to contribute to the literature exploring the impacts of larger policies from migrants' perspectives through their narratives and embodied experiences in the Greek context. Most of the research on refugee and asylum-seeking women in Greece concentrated on their vulnerability and victimhood due to the lack of appropriate reception and provision of services. Moreover, to my knowledge, few scholars have explored the impacts of women's solidarity centers and intimate labor and its potential for transformative change. Thus, with this manuscript, I aim to contribute to this emerging literature on grassroots and volunteer humanitarianism, its potential and its pitfalls. Waiting and uncertainty in the lives of refugees and migrants is a theme of extant research. Scholars documented the impacts of broader social and economic policies in conjunction with stringent asylum policies on the lives of undocumented migrants or refugees. I refer to the work of various scholars herein who focus on the asylum-seeking and refugee determination process through their lived and embodied experiences.

To understand refugee and asylum-seeking women's experiences of resettlement, in this chapter I provide insights from the prominent scholars on underlying discourses of migrants that shape policies on access and entitlement. In Chapter II, I will dive into the specific context of Greece and its approaches to refugee reception. I will share my methods in Chapter III, while in Chapter IV I situate refugees' experiences in the larger political, social and economic context and connect these experiences to the structural vulnerabilities and lived experiences of women I met at Melissa Network. Chapter V explores embodied impacts of the life in limbo on everyday life; In Chapter VI I turn to the work of grassroots organizations and present how their actions contribute to refugee integration and call for the larger political action. Chapter VII explores motivations and learning outcomes of international volunteers in Greece and the ways in which they became one of the key actors promoting solidarity. In Chapter VIII I will conclude with recommendations on the ways in which the state can integrate refugees and asylum seekers into the Greek community.

Literature Review

Over the last decade hundreds of thousands of people fled wars, protracted conflicts, poverty, and economic destitution mostly from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia to countries in Europe. Greece along other Southern Mediterranean states, such as Spain and Italy became a crucial entry point and gateway to Europe. The Western media and politicians regularly used the words "flood," "crisis," and "influx" to describe the mass movement of people to Europe. Association of these words to the natural disasters exacerbated the feeling of urgency and a potential threat to Western societies.

Ethnocentric framing of the situation such as the "European crisis" and "refugee crisis" expressed Europe's fear of refugees engendering social order and norms (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018).

Asylum seekers are often framed as threats to the national welfare systems and cultural norms. The discourses of criminality and security threats legitimized the EU's measures to close the borders and contain "underserving" asylum seekers in camps including those in Greece. However, the perception of Europe being "flooded" by migrants are not based on facts. The number of refugees hosted in Germany and Sweden is a tiny percentage of the overall population (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018). Thus, the efforts to control arrivals are based on assumptions of refugees as an inferior, uncultured, and racialized Other that would invade local culture.

Europe has a history of framing migration as a security threat and using of various mechanisms to control the "influx" of migrants to its territories. In his book *Illegality, Inc,* Ruben Andersson thoroughly described Europe's various surveillance techniques to control the migration at the borders between Southern Spain and Northern Africa, and how these controls were justified on the assumptions of saving lives and framing migrants as risks to the society (2014). Border control and security agencies constructed the risk of migration into a profitable industry as they paid millions of dollars on expensive surveillance tools and machinery. To justify boat interceptions, Europe's border control agency Frontex and various security organizations constructed a humanitarian cause of saving lives, which allowed the European border control agencies to patrol African and international waters. Risk and securitization of migration provided the language to make migrant boats an abstract threat to the external borders.

Discursively constructing the image of a dangerous "illegal" migrant as threatening to local culture was often used to justify hostile treatments towards those arriving at Mediterranean shores. Use of force, detention, and ill-treatment were normalized to protect local citizens from this threat.

Framing asylum seekers as threats to society not only restricts their ability to cross borders but also deems them undeserving to seek better opportunities once they are in the country. Especially those asylum seekers have "exercised a choice" to migrate are deemed as less deserving of care and resettlement opportunities. The discussion over deserving and undeserving refugees in conjugation with the provision of services had been explored by social and medical anthropologists. In his article on the moral economy of care of refugees in Europe, Watters (2007) writes that asylum seekers who exercised the choice to migrate to European countries were viewed as economic migrants who "cynically manipulate the welfare systems" of the host country (p. 413). Within moral economy of care, migrants were constructed as security threats, which justified stricter border controls. Watters argues that the reason for the securitization of migration and closure of borders was justified by the threat that migrants possessed to the host countries by "invading" local culture, taking jobs, or being harmful. According to the author, the minimal provision of social services at camps and accommodation centers was indeed a representation of a "culture of disbelief" and mistrust towards refugee communities (p. 404).

The goal of the European Asylum system is to determine if asylum seekers are true refugees or "bogus" - underserving migrants who made a choice to leave their countries for better opportunities (Watters, 2007, p. 399). However, constructing

migrants as undeserving is flawed as the distinction between genuine refugees and migrants disregards the fact that migration is driven by combinations of conflicts, wars, political interests, and economic dynamics (Yarris & Castañeda, 2015). Migrants are pushed due to the structural violence and postcolonial economic exploitation which leaves them in destitution and poverty. For example, Yarris & Castañeda (2015) argued that in the US public and policy discourse, migrants were constructed as exercising choice and agency; their "choice" rendered them undeserving of care and protection from host countries.

In the moral economy of care legitimate asylum seekers are considered economic migrants where they are faced with various security and legal hurdles. Inadequate access to the information and limited services, which are one of the examples of the barriers created by the individual nation states and the EU, create uncertainty and feelings limbo among asylum seekers (Watters, 2007).

Prolonged waiting as a result of the "institutional ethos of suspicion" towards refugees is a way to discipline them because they are economic and undeserving migrants (Haas, 2018, p. 78). Legal and institutional mechanisms situate asylum seekers and refugees in a highly ambiguous predicament. I use the term "limbo" to describe lived and embodied experiences of waiting for various decisions from the asylum office, the Greek government, EU institutions, and immigration courts. Waiting is a part of structural violence that refugees and asylum seekers are forced to experience, as it imposes emotional and physical suffering in patterned ways often referred as "violent temporarily of waiting" (Bagelman, 2013, p. 50).

Limbo is often defined as an existential feeling of being stuck in one place and suffering in the uncertainty of the preset, often articulated with words such as "caught," "trapped," or "lingering" (Haas, 2017, p. 81). In exploring painful and lengthy process of asylum-seeking in the US, Haas situated prolonged waiting as a result of institutional ethos of suspicion and as a way to discipline asylum seekers. She argued that uncertainty about the legal status and the future that asylum seekers often found themselves in, provoke extreme anxiety and distress. Asylum seekers were deportable and occupy a "dual positionality as citizens-in-waiting/deportees-in-waiting" which created this very "existential limbo" in which both life and meaning-making were challenging (Haas, 2017, p. 76). Haas articulated two elements of existential limbo – feelings of being stuck and a sense of powerlessness in larger political systems. The temporal state of limbo was painful not only because of its existential insecurity but also because of asylum seekers' perceived lack of control over their lives. According to Haas, asylum seekers deportability in the US and waiting "connotes submission" and forced asylum seekers to live in alienated time, which was oriented by others. Refugees thus had "limited capacity to define the parameters of their positionality" (Haas, 2017, p. 83). In her earlier work Haas argued that asylum seekers in the US are, at one hand, made hypervisible as they are subject to surveillance and detention. On the other hand, they are made liminal subjects, which creates "a state of existential limbo" constituting the type of suffering (2012, p. 2). Liminal spaces and uncertainty impede people's ability to plan for the future and situate them in precarious situations governed by others. I deploy the framework of liminality and limbo to understand lived experiences of refugees I interviewed in Athens

as they are stranded in Greece waiting for their asylum decisions, employment opportunities or relocation.

Similarly to Haas, in exploring the UK-based Sanctuary movement and hospitality towards asylum seekers, Bagelman discovered that indefinite waiting was a facet of everyday life not only for asylum seekers, but refugees as well, who face structural impediments when looking for employment. “Integration often means integrating into destitution or chronic dependency on charity (p.53). The pattern of waiting becomes a way of life both for asylum seekers and refugees. Similar to Haas, Bagelman also argued that unpredictability of the future served as controlling and governing certain migrants.

In his seminal work *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu argued that waiting was one of the ways power was exercised over people (1997). Waiting implied submission, delaying the future without fully destroying hope. “Adjourning without totally disappointing is an integral part of the exercise of power,” he wrote (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 228). Those without power to determine their future were manipulated for their expectations and aspirations. Unpredictability served as a power that controlled people in the waiting game as long as they still clung onto hope: “absolute power is the power to make oneself unpredictable and deny other people any reasonable anticipation, to place them in total uncertainty by offering no scope to their capacity to predict” (p. 228). Therefore, according to Bourdieu, unpredictability serves to control people as long as they are committed to the waiting game.

In her work with refugees in Turkey, Biehl (2015) described how procedures for seeking asylum create uncertainties and anxieties for asylum seekers from the Middle

East. She introduced three terms: “waiting,” “narrating,” and “containing” to describe the nature of asylum-seeking in Turkey. Biehl argued that protracted uncertainty associated with indefinite waiting, lack of access to information, and volatility of legal status was a defining element of the experience of being an asylum seeker in Turkey. To describe different aspects of the asylum service in Turkey, similar to Haas, Biehl also claimed that uncertainty had a “powerful governing effect” to contain, demobilize and criminalize asylum seekers “through the production and normalization of uncertainty” (p. 59).

Biehl also introduced the term “narrating” to denote the very nature of the asylum interviews, which determine the fate of asylum seekers and produces many uncertainties and anxieties. Based on her research, asylum interviewers primarily depended on an applicant’s narrative accounts about why they fled their country of origin, which was checked for credibility in light of available objective evidence about the case. Recounting traumatic experiences over several hours in highly stressful environments was problematic especially because many asylum seekers had experienced violence from the officials in the countries of origin. Moreover, in analyzing narratives of the U.S. asylum applicants, Shuman and Bohmer (2004) stated that cultural differences between asylum seekers and interviewers and western understandings of trauma, persecution, remediation, or fault finding misrepresented or ignored complexities that structure the experiences of asylum seekers. Often applicants’ narratives were expected to have a consistent and linear chronology, a clear sense of agency, description of traumatic experiences and emotional representation. It is possible that some might be overly emotional or express limited emotions as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder. Stories of asylum seekers are embodied in local cultural styles of narrating trauma, which interviewers might not be

able to interpret correctly. In some cases, applicants might emphasize loyalty to their home countries instead of fear of return. Presenting oneself as the victim of persecution might be incompatible with recovering a sense of dignity and personal integrity following traumatic experiences. Any inconsistency with dates, details, facts, and situations of the country of origin causes suspicion in asylum officers who deem asylum seekers and their stories as not credible. Moreover, for some asylum seekers the very nature of the interview and questioning may feel more like a criminal investigation (Biehl, 2015). Many actors in the Turkish asylum system continually tested the eligibility and credibility of an asylum seeker if they had a "true refugee story" (p. 58). Asylum seekers in Turkey underwent series of questioning about their stories, vulnerabilities, where they relieved their trauma and convinced interviewers that they truly had the credible fear to go back.

Another characteristic of being an asylum seeker according to Biehl were procedures of containing people in specific locations, such as camps, residence buildings, cities, or countries. Biehl claimed that containing was the part of the state's securitization approach that aimed to create uncertainties among displaced populations (2015). Over the last two decades, migration has been viewed as a security threat to national welfare systems, cultural and national identities. The narrative of refugees "flooding" western countries and endangering western cultures serves to justify securitized border policing measures, restrictive immigration legislation and violence migrants and asylum seekers. National security concerns legitimized various deterrence mechanisms against asylum seekers, such as placing refugees in harsh, austere camps, deporting them to " 'safe' third countries" and police brutality towards "illegal" migrants (Biehl, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, securitization discourse leaves refugees in extremely dangerous and uncertain situations

making it impossible for them to lead normal lives. Securitization breeds a discourse of criminality, which justifies further security measures. Similar to Andersson, Biehl wrote that “positing migration as an external threat to “national security” served an important political function: it justified further state control and even gave the state the right to use any means necessary to protect “national security” (p. 13). Security measures have a huge impact on the everyday existence of refugees and asylum seekers. On one hand, it has profound psychological and health-related consequences, and, on the other hand, it leaves asylum seekers to undertake more dangerous ways of crossing national borders and relying on smugglers.

I apply this discourse of securitization of migration and migrants as threats to the society in the context of Greece. I aim to explore how the larger tendencies across the US and EU have manifested towards migration in the Greek context after the 2015 refugee reception and translated into exclusionary policies. The country that often is deemed as one of the main entry points to the "Fortress Europe" had been placed under the incredible pressure by the member states to "protect" the EU borders (Watters, 2007. P. 400). While appeasing the EU by containing migrants, Greece struggles to provide adequate care for its refugee and asylum-seeking populations.

In my writing, I use the socially and structurally constructed words “crisis,” “illegal” and “irregular” in quotes to avoid further promoting the Eurocentric and faulty understanding of migrants “invading” Western societies. I use the word *asylum-seeker* to talk about the people who are waiting for their asylum decisions, and *refugee* for those who have already received positive asylum decisions and a refugee status. I substitute the widely used “refugee crisis” frame with the more appropriate *refugee reception* to avoid

reemphasizing the crisis framing and to emphasize the economic and political instabilities in origin countries as well as the violence refugees experience during their migratory journeys.

I use the term asylum seeker for the people who are either registered and are waiting for the asylum decision and who have not had the chance to make a claim due to various reasons in fear of being detected and detained. However, I acknowledge that this might go against the technical definition of asylum seeker which only considers those who are registered within the system. To me those who undertook the dangerous journeys to Europe in fear of violence, destitution or better life opportunities are asylum seekers and legitimate migrants deserving of protection and care.

Below I explore how discourses of migrants as Other and threats to the local community translated into the measures to control the flow of asylum seekers, refuse to provide adequate assistance, and create uncertainty of the future.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXT

Greece as a Gateway to Europe

Greece is located at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe. Due to its location, the country had always been a crucial entry point for people seeking international protection fleeing economic instabilities and violent conflicts. During the 1990s and early 2000s Greece received a large number of migrants from its northern borders, mainly from Albania to work and settle in Greece (Afouxenidis et al., 2017). A lot of refugees also arrived during the mid-2000s mostly from Iraq, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and sub-Saharan Africa as a result of social, economic, and political upheavals in Asia and Africa. However, for the last five years country experienced the largest number of arrivals predominantly from the Middle East and North Africa. The civil war in Syria and protracted conflicts in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan pushed people to embark on dangerous journeys in search of safety and security in the Southern Mediterranean states majority of whom passed through Greece.

Around two million persons arrived on the Aegean islands of Greece since 2015. Most of these refugees undertook dangerous journeys on inflatable rubber dinghies from Turkish coasts (UNHCR, 2020). Refugees usually first arrive in the Turkish city of Izmir and then take buses to reach the Turkish coasts with the help of smugglers (Digidiki, 2016). The incredibly dangerous journey from Turkish to Greek coasts usually takes 2-3 hours. Dinghies are around 20 to 30 feet in length and cost up to $1,200-$2,800 per person. Despite the maximum capacity of 20 people, dinghies are packed with as many as 50 people, seriously endangering the lives of refugees. Fees change depending on the

weather. Those who cannot afford much are forced to wait for poorer weather and are faced with more complications during the journey.

Figure 2.1. Greek islands refugee destinations from Turkey (Parent, N., 2015)

The main points of entry to Greece and Europe are the Eastern Aegean islands of Lesvos, Samos, Kos, Chios, and Leros (See Figure 1.1). The number of arrivals gradually decreased since 2015. While in 2015 856,723 asylum seekers entered Greece, in 2019 the number of arrivals was 2019 45,137. Figure 1.2. shows number of arrivals since 2015. Majority of total arrivals in Greece traveled to other parts of Europe (UNHCR, 2016). The number dropped after the EU and Turkey signed on the agreement to restrict asylum seekers to travel from Turkey to Greece.

The composition of nationalities has also changed over time. While in 2015, a majority of refugees came from Syria (57%), Afghanistan (24%), Iraq (9%), Pakistan (3%), and Iran 3% (UNHCR, 2015); in 2019, Greece received 40% Afghanis, 23% Syrians, 7% Congolese from DRC, 5% Palestinians, 4% Somalians and 3% Iranians.

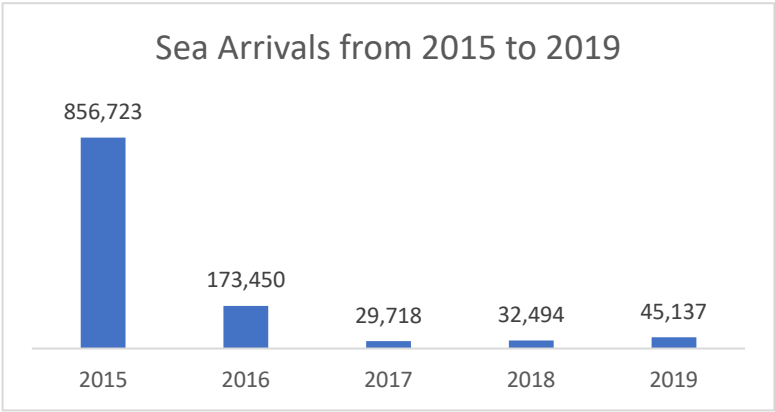

Figure 2.2. Sea arrivals to Greece, October 2019 (UNHCR, 2019)

National and International Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Refugee receiving countries are obliged by law to protect those fleeing dangerous situations in their home countries. The United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1950 is the centerpiece of international refugee protection today (UN, 1950). It is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which states that any person has a right to seek international protection in other countries. The Convention entered into force on 22 April 1954, and it has been amended once in the form of the 1967 Protocol, which removed the geographic and temporal limitations of the 1951 Convention (UN, Convention & Protocol). The 1951 Convention was a post-Second World war instrument and was originally applied to persons fleeing events before January 1951 and within Europe. The 1967 Protocol removed these limitations and, thus, gave the Convention universal coverage.

The 1951 Convention defines a refugee as someone who is "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UN, Convention & Protocol, 3). The Convention is constructed on fundamental

principles of non-discrimination, non-penalization, and *non-refoulement.* According to the principle of *non-refoulement,* no one shall expel or return *("refouler")* a refugee against his or her will to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom.

The terms *refugee* and *asylum seeker* are often used interchangeably in media or by the public. However, these two terms are different. UNHCR defines an asylum seeker as a person who is seeking international proception and "whose claim has not yet been finally decided by the country in which the claim is submitted" (UNCHR, Global Report, 2005). After the EU-Turkey agreement all arrivals are obliged to complete individual asylum claims and are evaluated individually in contrast to group belonging.

Greece ratified the 1951 Convention in 1960 and the 1967 Protocol in 1968, which makes the country obliged to follow the principles of the Convention and the Protocol (UN, Convention & Protocol, 3). According to the Convention, the signatory states should work with the UNHCR to make sure that the refugee rights are protected. Moreover, Greece as the part of the European Union is subject to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which was created in 1999 (Leivaditi et al., 2018). CEAS regulates refugee protection system across all EU members to process asylum applications more efficiently and systematically.

Until the 1990s, asylum policy in the European Union was administered on an ad-hoc basis (Afouxenidis et al., 2017). The collapse of the Soviet Union and communist regimes in Central and East Europe increased the number of asylum seekers to Western Europe, which led European Countries to develop what came to be called the Common European Asylum System. The abolishment of the internal border under the Schengen Agreement within the EU resulted in increased protection of the external borders and

tightening of migration policies. Schengen Agreement, which was signed in 1985, introduced freedom of movement for all nationals of the signatory EU states, other EU states and non-EU countries (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2000). Member states drastically reduced the percentage of asylum seekers recognized as refugees. For example, the proportion of recognized asylum seekers decreased from 50% in 1985 to 30% a decade later (Afouxenidis et al., 2017).

The CEAS's role is to provide series of directives and guidelines asylum determination procedure (Watters, 2007). It has number of regulations on protecting borders that members should follow. States are also required to have minimum standards in areas of health and social services especially for those who have been the victims of torture. However, some requirements are very vague which allow countries to reinterpret it differently and only fulfill the minimum standards.

One of the most important regulations of the CEAS was the Dublin Regulation, which stated that any asylum seeker needs to apply for protection in the country in which they first land (Arvaniti, 2018, p. 10). The goal of the Dublin Regulation was to avoid "asylum shopping," the term denoting the practice of asylum seekers to apply for asylum in multiple countries until they are successful (Afouxenidis et al., 2017, p. 8). Arvaniti argued that the Dublin regulation created an more burden on the southern states, such as Spain, Greece and Italy, which usually received the largest number of asylum seekers and, therefore, were responsible for providing an asylum (2018). The Dublin Regulation was soon replaced by the Dublin II Regulation in 2003, which provided clearer criteria on which states were responsible for processing asylum applications. This was accompanied by the creation of the electronic database of asylum seekers - that included their

fingerprints - to be shared across the member states. In 2008, the new Dublin III Regulation was created, which aimed to clarity asylum seekers' rights and the state's obligations, and thus improve the system's efficiency (Morgades-Gil, 2015, p. 435). The Dublin II and III regulations did not change the essential obligation of the Dublin I to claim asylum in state of arrival.

The intensification of border control was accompanied by creation of the institution responsible for physical control of migration. In 2004 the European Union established Frontex – border control agency – to improve border security enforcement and monitor "illegal" border crossings in the EU (Afouxenidis et al., 2017). In 2001 the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) was established to support member states in the implementation of CEAS.

Afouxenidis et al., (2017) argue that tightening of the asylum system was a result of the belief that asylum seekers were mostly economic migrants who were sought to exploit existing asylum framework. Asylum seekers and refugees were framed as security threats, and the EU's priorities started to focus more on "sealing its borders rather than its human rights obligations" (Amnesty International, 2014, p. 9). The EU policy had been characterized by the contradictions between members states' obligations to protect asylum seekers, and the need to restrict migrants to arrive on its borders. In the context of migration as a security threat, "the EU's approach to migrants became a policy of closed borders instead of one of concern for human rights" (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017, p. 17). As Huysmans argued, member states "integrated their migration policies into their security framework after removing internal border control with the Schengen Agreement" (2000, p. 770).

The belief of asylum seekers threatening and not genuine led to not only sealing borders but also tightening procedures for processing asylum claims (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017). In the European Union asylum seekers are entitled to the minimum rights and benefits and have trouble accessing work and social services and are placed in the reception centers far away from the urban areas. While the EU countries officially proclaim a commitment to the right of asylum and seek refugees, in reality, they have adopted restrictive policies that curtail access to the asylum process and place asylum seekers in extremely precarious conditions.

Greece as the member state of the had been influenced by the EU asylum policy priorities. In the 1990s, Greece witnessed the transformation from emigration to a destination country, which was accompanied by the adoption of strict immigration laws, deportation practices, and negative coverage of migration by the media and politicians (Leivaditi et al., 2018). Throughout the 1990s, Greece mainly tried to combat "irregular" migration with border controls and by giving migrant populations temporary resident and employment permits (Petracous et al., 2018). In the 2000s, however, asylum policies became very restrictive, which included acts of detention, bureaucratic procedures, and low rates of recognition.

In August 2010, Greece adopted a "National Action Plan for Migration Management" by the Ministry of Citizen Protection, which is the department of the government responsible for public security. The Ministry introduced the strategy of migration management to address the arrival of a large number of asylum seekers and migrants (UNHCR, Greece, 2010). This development further indicated that Greece viewed migration as a security concern (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017). The plan led to the

establishment of screening, registering, and managing “irregular” migrants, as well as the creation of the Asylum Service and accommodation facilities for vulnerable groups. Soon reception centers transformed into detention centers with poor living conditions. Detention was used to facilitate deportation of asylum seekers but also as a penalty of entering the Greek territory “illegally.” The practice was used as a deterrent for those who were thinking about coming to Europe. Following these measures, the country was criticized for disregarding the human rights of people seeking protection (UNHCR, Greece, 2010). Many international organizations documented how Greece did not respect the principles of non-refoulement and equality; did not provide access to services, proper assessment of asylum claims, adequate facilities; and did not try to combat xenophobia, ill-treatment by law enforcement or promote local integration efforts.

From 2012 onwards. the Ministry of Citizen Protection focused on the reinforcement of the Greek-Turkish land border and identification and removal of all “illegally” residing migrants in Greece (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017). The Ministry achieved this by erecting the fence in the land border of Evros between Turkey and Greece, although the European Commission refused to support the project. Greece also started Operation “Shield” to deter “illegal” migrants from Turkey to Greece, deploying 2,500 police officers as well as providing equipment for surveillance and patrolling, such as police vehicles, coastal patrol vessels, helicopters, night-vision goggles, and thermal cameras, which had been funded by the EU External Borders Fund (Amnesty International, 2014). As a result, the number of arrivals decreased, and the operation was further extended.

The Hellenic Police and Coast Guard closely cooperated with the European border control agency Frontex, which had a strong presence at the Turkish-Greek border (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017). Border control experts even assisted Greece in screening applications. Frontex also opened its first office in the country and started the regional joint operation "Poseidon" covering Greek and Bulgarian land and sea borders. These developments were in line with those in Spain and Italy -- the countries that closely cooperated with the Frontex and undertook various joint operations to monitor African waters and intercept migrant boats (Andersson, 2014).

In addition to these measures, in 2012 the Ministry of Citizen Protection started the police Operation "Xenios Zeus" funded by the EU External Borders Fund (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017). The goal of the operation was to arrest "irregular" migrants in Athens. Police would stop persons looking like migrants, check their documents, and detained if they did not possess documentation. This operation was heavily criticized by several human rights organizations.

In 2016, the Greek Parliament established the new Ministry of Migration Policy under the Law 4375/2016 to manage migration and integration as well as supervise Asylum Service (Leivaditi et al., 2020). The Ministry was abolished after the election of the right-wing political party New Democracy in the summer of 2019. The Ministry transformed into a General Secretariat for Immigration Policy, Reception, and Asylum under the Ministry of Citizen Protection. Moreover, a wide range of conservative measures on migration were implemented, such as sweep operations in refugee squats in the center of Athens and the transfer of refugees to camps located in remote areas. Greek policy's actions to close squats and transferring asylum seekers and refugees to the

remote camps were justified under the basis of fighting drug and human trafficking. The government announced stricter securitization of the Greek borders and conversation of the camps to "closed centers," from which asylum seekers are not allowed to leave (Leivaditi et al., 2020, 12). However, in January 2020, the government re-established the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. It was announced that the four goals of the ministry were to guard the borders, speed asylum procedures, increase returns, and closed pre-departure centers (The National Herald, 2020). The reestablishment of the ministry was made amid a constant increase of refugee arrivals, which asylum application system could not keep up with.

The operations by the Frontex and Asylum Service in Greece reflect the discourses of migrants invading local cultures, engendering local norms and rules, and taking advantage of the welfare systems. In this discourse, migrants are not genuine but rather "bogus" refugees who are seeking better life opportunities in Greece and the EU countries. Greece's approach to securitization was intensified by its efforts to please the EU amidst a recent economic crisis that left the country in debt to Europe. The lack of solidarity and political will from the EU member states was mentioned by interviewees as one of the reasons for the current "refugee crisis" and inhumane treatment to refugees and asylum seekers.

The women at Melissa Network shared me their stories of detention and how in their words they were treated like "criminals" often manifested in maltreatment by some police officers, or even services providers in the camp. None of the refugees were allowed to leave the camp setting. If they did their asylum seekers would be rebuked.

The discourse of a deserving or undeserving asylum seeker is embedded in the EU's new policy initiative – the vulnerability criteria. These criteria are applied to determine if the asylum seeker is vulnerable enough as a result of the trauma or life-threatening situation. Those asylum seekers who are not vulnerable enough experience much longer asylum determination procedure. They are usually contained on the Aegean camps for years. As I explain in the coming chapters, the vulnerability criteria are instruments to distinguish deserving asylum seeker from an undeserving, not vulnerable and agentic asylum seeker.

The EU-Turkey Agreement

In the beginning of the refugee arrival, asylum seekers were able to travel from Turkey to Greece and other EU countries through the West Balkan route. This pathway allowed asylum seekers to travel from Greece through Macedonia and Serbia to Croatia and Hungary to reach Germany or other preferred countries of destination. However soon member states decided to close the borders and contain migrants in countries such as Greece and Turkey. During 2015, it was made clear that not every European country shared the same ideas about migration management. Germany and Chancellor Merkel allowed Syrian refugees to seek asylum in that country, while, on the other hand, Hungary closed its border with Serbia and Croatia. Slovenia, Austria, and Macedonia followed the same restrictive measures. Therefore, the West Balkan route, the main pathway for refugees, was closed. After the closure of the West Balkan route, thousands of refugees were stranded in Greece, unable to move forward.

While the border between Turkey and Greece had remained open and allowed asylum seekers to enter Greece, on March 18, 2016, the EU and Turkey made a deal to control the "flow" of refugees and return those not deserving an asylum back to Turkey if they were not applying for or were not eligible for asylum based on individual protection needs (Colett, 2016).

Figure: 2.3. Refugee and migrants' movement along the West Balkan route (Afouxenidis, et. al., 2017)

According to the EU-Turkey agreement, for every refugee deported from Greece, one Syrian refugee in Turkey would receive asylum from European countries, the EU member states would speed up visa liberalization for Turkish nationals and increase existing financial support for refugee populations in Turkey. Turkey also received an aid

package worth 6 billion Euros, which was directed not only to the education, health care, and direct cash support of refugee populations but also to the expenses of detentions and removal centers (Ingleby, 2019).

To assist the implementation of the containment policy, European Commission (EC) created a Fast Track border procedure, also called the "hotspot" approach, was applied to asylum seekers arriving on the main port of entry - Eastern Aegean islands - after 20 March 2016. The goal of the hotspot approach was to assist border states, such as Greece and Italy, in processing asylum seeker registration faster (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Hellenic Parliament adopted the law, which introduced several changes in legal frameworks in terms of the reception and asylum procedures and the management of refugee flows. This led to greater involvement of EASO and Frontex in Greece (Petracous et al., 2018). EASO's roles were expanded from assessing vulnerabilities of asylum seekers to conducting interviews and drafting opinions about border procedures. Once arrived, refugees were first received by the Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), placed in the camps on the islands, and then transferred to the mainland or other countries through family reunification (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Petracous et al., argue that the introduction of the Fast-Track border procedure was "the blanket detention of migrants in closed Reception and Identification Centers (RICs)" (Petracous et al., 2018, p. 16).

Worrying about its border security, EU leaders reassured their critics that Turkey was a "safe third country" or "first country of asylum" that respected refugee rights and was committed to the principle of non-refoulement (Gil Bazo, 2015). The "safe third country" concept is contained in the Dublin III regulation. Under the "safe third asylum"

principle, Greece can reject an individual's asylum application if the individual had the chance to seek asylum in the first country they arrived, which is Turkey in this case. However, despite the claims of the EU policymakers, Turkey is not a safe third country. Asylum seekers cannot safely stay and seek protection in Turkey. Even though Turkey ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it maintained geographic limitation that excludes non-Europeans from full refugee status (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Syrian asylum seekers can access a temporary protection in Turkey, which allows them to reside in the country. However, they face many obstacles with registration, access to education, healthcare, and employment. Asylum seekers from countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan do not have access to even temporary protection. Moreover, Turkey is also fraught with conflicts between security forces and minority groups in the country causing social and political unrest (Roman, et al., 2016). Turkey itself violated the principle of non-refoulement and closed the borders of thousands of Syrian refugees. Today Turkey hosts around 3.6 million registered refugees – nearly four times as many as all EU states combined (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Designating Turkey as "safe" was argued to be another example of tightening of the asylum and protecting the "Fortress Europe" (Afouxenidis et al., 2017; Watters, 2007, p. 400). Sending refugees back to Turkey and refusing asylum was an example of the EU's efforts to outsource migration to its neighbors by provision of generous funding and political support (Andersson, 2014).

The hotspot approach was supposed to "end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU", however, it transformed registration hotspots to closed detention centers (European Council, 2016). While the EU had committed to relocating a large number of asylum seekers to other European countries, the process of identification and relocation

has been very slow and bureaucratic, partly caused by the lack of political will and partly by lack of staff handling the asylum process. As a result, thousands of people were confined either on island camps, unable to move to the mainland, or to other countries in Europe, or stranded in Athens waiting for their asylum decisions for years (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Refugees were subject to geographic restriction and not allowed to leave their primary reception area, otherwise, their asylum cases could be rebuked, and they lose access to food and health assistance, which was already highly problematic. The island camps, especially the biggest camp, Moria, is still severely overcrowded. Initially considered to house about 3,000 people, Moria camp is now home to more than 13,000 (Donadio, 2019). Asylum seekers are in dire living conditions, without proper access to shelter, hygiene, healthcare, and information (Refugee Rights Europe, 2019). They lack access to basic services, such as proper shelter and food, as well as to legal support. The camps are characterized by increased violence between different ethnic groups as well as sexual- and gender-based violence. People who are identified as vulnerable might be transferred to the mainland, however, the practice of assessing vulnerability among asylum seekers is faulted due to the lack of staff and expertise. Vulnerabilities are often missed, and many times asylum seekers go through an asylum application without having their vulnerability assessed. I will discuss the process of vulnerability assessment in more detail below.

Many international organizations condemned the process of identification and relocation, which had been characterized as violating multiple human rights and reenacting trauma for refugees who have already been the victims of many dangers during their perilous journeys. Dunja Mijatovic, the human rights commissioner of the

Council of Europe, denounced the "political deadlock" by the 28 member states of the European Union that resulted in no action towards refugees (Kitsantonis, 2019).

For those on the mainland, access to asylum services is highly problematic as well. While the usual procedure should take up to 6 months, in practice, average processing time between pre-registration and issuance of first-instance decision takes two years and varies depending on a person's nationality. For example, the waiting time for Turkish asylum seekers is around six years. Many interviews have been scheduled in two, three- and four-year's time (Asylum Information Database, 2019)

The EU-Turkey deal combined with other security measures was a way for EU to curb irregular migration across its borders. This agreement created a years-long humanitarian crisis on the Greek islands and "turned refugees into a bargaining chip wielded by Turkish President Erdogan to extract support and policy concession from the EU" (Reidy, 2020). According to the UNHCR, all states have a right to control their borders, but at the same time, states should avoid using disproportionate force and maintain a system for asylum application processing (UNHCR, 2020, March 2). Persons entering Greece "irregularly" should not be punished and should be given the opportunity to seek asylum in a dignified manner. Greece cannot suspend the internationally recognized right to seek asylum and the principle of *non-refoulement.*

While containment policy reduced number of arrivals to the Greek shores, asylum seekers still arrive to the Greek shores with the help of smugglers. As figure 2.2 shows, an estimated 280,000 asylum seekers arrived between 2017-2019.

Vulnerability Assessment

Asylum seekers' access to protection depends on being classified as vulnerable. Vulnerability assessment determines which of the asylum procedures an applicant has to undergo: Fast Track border procedure or regular asylum procedure (Asylum Information Database, 2018). Under Greek law, nine categories of people including: children, victims of torture, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and people with disabilities are considered vulnerable. Vulnerable groups are entitled to special protection, including exemption from a Fast Track border process under the EU-Turkey deal. People determined as vulnerable undergo regular asylum procedures and are given a priority in the regular Greek asylum system. They also are transferred to the mainland to access services easier. The most vulnerable might have geographical limitations lifted and some transferred to the apartments in the mainland. Since May 2017, Syrian applicants determined as vulnerable have their vulnerability lifted immediately, while non-Syrians after the personal interview (Asylum Information Database, 2018, p. 121). In this sense, vulnerability constitutes one's deservingness to better care.

Vulnerability assessments have been conducted by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (known by its Greek acronym KEELPNO) and medical international organizations such as doctors of the World (MDM). However, KEELPNO is another understaffed service with a severe shortage of interpreters and doctors (Leivaditi et al., 2018). Therefore, it is still unable to respond to the increased needs in the field. This results in a lack of access to medical assistance and significant delays with vulnerability assessments, which sometimes take place after the asylum interview. Refugees are not informed about the existence of the vulnerability assessment and the importance of the KEELPNO diagnosis. Those who are lucky are informed through their social networks.

Access to interpreters during vulnerability assessments has been problematic as well. Based on the research conducted among asylum seekers on Lesvos, Levaditi et al. (2018) discovered that asylum seekers' vulnerability assessments were not assisted by interpreters, and doctors refused to talk to them in English, even it was clear that they spoke that language.

Apart from the poor quality of the vulnerability assessments, Human Rights Watch documented that in May 2017, Greece received indirect political pressure from the European Union to reduce the number of "vulnerable" asylum seekers including those with disabilities, victims of torture, and survivors of sexual violence (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The EU urged for a more conservative definition of vulnerability. According to the MSF (Medecins Sans Frontières) and MDM representative, identification of vulnerable cases had already been problematic for the pressure to identify these cases in 2-3 days after the arrival. Representatives of this organizations argued that it is impossible to identify victims of torture or sexual or gender-based violence survivors, people with mental health challenges or intellectual disabilities in such a short time. Most people are traumatized by the journey and are not provided the space to build trust and disclose traumatic stories (Human Rights Watch, 2017).As the lawyer at Melissa Network told me: "you might not be vulnerable enough by EU standards when you come to Moria [the biggest camp in Greece], but you become vulnerable after you live there. So, everybody is vulnerable." This quote illustrates the problematics of the vulnerability assessment in the Greek and EU asylum system. Not only the criteria exclude people deserving of protection, but the inhuman treatment in the camps further exacerbates feelings of vulnerability and victimhood.

CHAPTER III
METHODS & SETTING

Primary Data Collection

This thesis is based on the fieldwork I conducted in Athens in summer 2019, from the middle of June to the end of August. To answer my research questions, I interviewed asylum seeker and refugee women, volunteers, representatives of grassroots and international nonprofits. The research is qualitative in nature based on unstructured and narrative interviewing and extensive observations. In total I conducted 25 interviews.

I volunteered and researched with the local grassroots organization Melissa Network, which promotes migrant and refugee women's empowerment, communication, and active citizenship (Melissa Network, 2019). A group of women, many of them being migrants themselves, founded the organization in 2015. Melissa provides a wide array of services, such as psycho-social support, language classes, art and creativity sessions, information and referrals, skills and capacity building, media and advocacy, self-care, and community engagement. Around one hundred participants benefitted from Melissa's services at each cycle. A Majority of refugee women I met in Melissa have been part of the organization since the beginning of 2016. Melissa had around 500 participants on the waitlist who they could not accommodate due to the lack of capacity. Every day, one or two potential participants would arrive and register themselves on the waitlist.

The organization was located in Victoria Square of downtown Athens, which has been historically known as a place of anti-immigration rhetoric. Co-founder Nadina Christopoulou said in the conversation with me that Melissa's goal was to promote communication between the groups that might have radically different opinions about

migration. The place itself was in the two-story building. The first floor was dedicated to classrooms and daycare. The second-floor housed reception, conference room, a small kitchen, two offices, and a big community. Women spent most of their days in this community area. They relaxed on the couches and chatted while having some coffee and tea. The center takes its name from the Greek word for honeybee due to the buzzing hive it has created. As honeybees, women come from various parts of the world to share skills and resources and empower each other.

Figure 3.1. Melissa Network

I volunteered at Melissa every day. My tasks ranged from assisting refugee women navigating in Athens, registering new arrivals to watching kids in the daycare. The work was very flexible and informal, which allowed me to chat with the staff and women during volunteering. The feeling of respect, egalitarianism, positivity filled Melissa's walls every day.

With the help of Melissa, I was able to meet refugee and asylum-seeking women from many different countries. Most of them came from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and Sudan. Some also were from DRC, Kenya. It seemed like in the beginning Melissa hosted more Syrian refugees, however, as of today, a majority of participants were from Afghanistan as they had harder times getting asylum and were stranded in Greece. All women I talked to, arrived on Lesvos island first and then either have been relocated to Athens by officials or escaped with the help of smugglers. All of them arrived after the EU-Turkey deal, therefore, they first lived in island camps before coming to Athens. Some had been transferred to Athens due to the qualifying as one of the vulnerable groups.

I spent my first months getting to know women and them learning about me. I constantly participated in group activities, such as crafting, poem writing, and drawing, during which I shared a lot of stories with women. They were very interested in learning about my home country Georgia and what brought me to Greece. Georgia in Farsi is called Gurjistan, which spiked curiosity of women especially from Afghanistan and Iran who heard about history and culture of Georgia due to its relatively closer proximity to Iran and Afghanistan. Some women spoke good English, and with some, I was able to talk with the help of other women who translated for me.

My next biggest source of information was extensive observations. During the first month, I relied on observations as I did not feel comfortable interviewing women right away. Observations gave me a good understanding of the organization's culture, communication styles, and expectations from me. Through my observations, participation in everyday activities, and informal conversations, I was able to establish trust with women. Based on my observations I also gained more nuanced understanding of refugee women's lives and adjusted my interview questions to reflect the reality of the situation on the ground.

After a month, I realized that women trusted me and were open to talking to me more formally through unstructured interviews. Support of Melissa Network's staff played a tremendous role in developing a trust. In the beginning, I felt conflicted to approach women and ask questions about their lives in Athens. I knew that I was not the first interviewer they encountered. Many journalists and researchers expressed an interest in their stories before me. Women seemed disappointed that journalists would take photos, listen to their stories, but then they would never hear back from them. Therefore, I tried to be honest in my intentions and clear that they could back out from the interviews or refuse to be interviewed at any time.

I realized my positionality as a graduate researcher from a western university and the distance this created between us. I had a passport that allowed me to go back to my home country and feel safe or go back to the US to finish my education. I tried to shorten this distance by showing women that I was their ally and supporter in the struggle they have been unjustly put in. Therefore, I tried to be as genuine as possible and clear about my motivations in doing the research. I told them that it would be great if they could help

me understand their situation, but it was completely fine if they did not want to. The fact that I was from Georgia, closer country to Afghanistan and Iran (where most of my interviews were from) created cultural familiarity between us. They have heard about Georgia (Gurjistan in Farsi) and ask me questions how similar and different our countries were.

I conducted eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews with refugee women. I obtained oral consent from them. I have obtained approval from the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research in compliance with the ethical requirements and EU regulations. None of the interviews were audio recorded. Based on my observations I decided this would be the best course of action. Women usually were uncomfortable being recorded as their asylum cases were still pending and they were afraid that anything negative that they might say that could be tracked would go against them. I would make written notes during the interview and write out the full interview narrative right after the interview was over in a coffee shop or at home. The interviews on average 2 hours long. Some interviews lasted for an hour and some more than 3 hours. I was also able to conduct multiple interviews with four out of the eight women. I visited their homes, met for a coffee, or we went for a walk. Apart from this, I was able to conduct three shorter (15 mins long) interviews with three other refugee women. My interview questions were explorative in nature and I used the grounded theory approach to inform my interviewees. Almost all the interviews were life histories. I was also able to accompany women to different social service organizations. Even though I did not speak Greek, I acted as an intermediary, and supported women in dealing with Greek bureaucracy. For example, I went to the landlord to rent a house,

wrote together a business plan for the possible café, navigated through different problems that would arise, and helped by teaching English individually. Six of my interviewees were from Afghanistan, three were from Iran, one from Sudan and Nepal. Most of the women I talked to were married, three of them had kids and four were single. All of them arrived in Greece with the help of smugglers after March 20, 2016, following the EU-Turkey deal.

All women that I interviewed spoke good English. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview non-English speaking women, which is one of the limitations of my research. The organization did have a translator, who was a refugee woman from Afghanistan. She was not able to help me with translation since she was busy and had very little time during the day. Having a non-affiliated translator did not work out as well since women would not be prone to reveal their stories candidly in the presence of an external translator.

While I sought to make the interview a private conversation, sometimes it was hard especially if kids were around. Although I did not directly observe children, mothers' relationships with them and references about their children were also part of my data.

I also interviewed the social worker, lawyer and a caretaker (responsible for cooking and cleaning) at Melissa Network. Working directly with asylum seekers within the bureaucratic procedures of institutions, they knew best about the challenges of women. I was assisting the social worker during her day at Melissa and had an opportunity to observe some of her work and ask clarifying questions in the process.

Interested in the Greek solidarity and grassroots mobilizations, I talked to six grassroots and solidarity group representatives. Kim Voogt[1] from Hestia Hellas was one of the interviewees representing grassroots organizations. Hestia Hellas provides mainly literacy (language learning), psychological support, and vocational skills classes for beneficiaries. I volunteered with the organization for a week during the time that Melissa was closed for the summer holidays. I was interested in knowing how Hestia Hellas approach to integration and organizational culture differed from Melissa's. Founded by American development practitioners, the organization mostly comprised of international staff and few locals. The organization heavily depended on the work of volunteers. Unlike Melissa Network, who only had few volunteers, Hestia Hellas had developed an online platform to recruit volunteers. Around 30 volunteers were active at one at the time with a minimum of 2 weeks service requirement. The organization aims to help refugees and Greeks to prosper and achieve a more dignified life by providing critical support and self-sustaining skills, which includes psychosocial support, vocational training and life skills, workshops, and community advocacy (Athens Coordination Center, n.d.).

One of my interviewees was Manuela Vlahaki Cepeda, a project coordinator at Za'atar NGO - Project Layali. The organization was founded by young Greek residents who were either first- or second-generation migrants themselves. The organization's mission was to provide safe space for refugees to rest, learn and feel empowered and grow (Za'atar NGO, n.d.). "We believe in empowerment, not pity," says their website. The services are concentrated on integration, which they believe is a two-way process, where both hosts and refugees change their view each other. Their services concentrate

[1] A real name is used per interviewer's permission

on language and computer skills, life skills (e.g. cooking), and providing space where refugees can socialize, as well as managing shelter for women. The organization works towards refugee integration and building self-sufficiency even for those refugees who end up relocating to other countries. The interview lasted for three hours and it has been very informative in terms of gaining deeper understanding on the integration challenges in Greece.

I also interviewed Joanna Theo from the Campfire Innovation who supports organizations working with refugees to develop efficient, collaborative, and dignified grassroots initiatives. Being a volunteer from the first day of refugee reception, Joanna shared a unique perspective on the evolution of grassroots, solidarity, and volunteerism in Greece.

These three interviews allowed me to understand grassroots perspectives of most pressing challenges on refugees and asylum seekers and perspectives on integration and volunteerism. Some of my key informants, such as representatives of the grassroots organizations, NGOs and volunteers gave the permission to identify their names in my thesis.

My next two interviews were with advocacy groups whose work concentrated more on providing advocacy and legal support instead of immediate services. They promoted migrants' visibility within society and battling stereotypes. Jackie Abhulimen represented a grassroots advocacy organization called Generation 2.0. The organization worked on advocating migrant and refugee rights. In an interview with her was able to explore discourses on deserving and undeserving refugee, prevailing migrant stereotypes in the Greek society, and explore more invisible challenges for asylum seekers. I also

interviewed Yonous Muhammadi - one of the leading defenders of refugee rights in Greece (Human Rights Watch, 2016). He was the founder of the Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR). GFR's goal is to defend the rights of refugees and migrants and increase awareness about refugee rights. A refugee from Afghanistan, Yonous experienced a long process of asylum-seeking himself and was very well aware of the struggles of the process.

My interviews with larger international and national NGOs were very informative as I explored their stance on integration and life in limbo in Greece. Specifically, I Interviewed Antigone Lyberaki - the general manager of one of the biggest refugee service provider organizations in Greece, SolidarityNow who shared her ideas from the perspective of a bigger organization. I also interviewed Stella Nonou from the UNHCR. The biggest intragovernmental organization in Greece receives most of the funds from the European Union, providing basic services for refugees, such as housing and cash assistance. In addition, I also interviewed three volunteers from Melissa Network after returning back to the US.

I also spent a lot of time with the founder of Melissa Network, Nadina Christopolou, and asked questions about her work. While interviews were not formal and took place as informal conversations at Melissa, they were very informative. I also attended various conferences and talks with her, where she was invited to speak.

Towards the end of my stay, I volunteered at Skramangas camp in Athens for two days with the Dutch organization, called the Drop in the Ocean. I observed the life in a refugee camp and the structure of the camp and the nature of services provided. I also was part of the Athens Coordination Group –the biggest volunteer coordination space in

Athens. The group members updated each other about the most urgent needs of refugees and exchanged valuable information. I also attended a few public talks, events, and celebrations dedicated to issues of migration and resettlement.

I also interviewed three volunteers from Melissa Network after I returned back to Oregon through email and social media. I sent out the same questionnaires to the volunteers and they replied back in writing. In total I have conducted twenty-five interviews.

I had different sets of questions developed for refugee women, lawyers, social workers, grassroots organizations, and volunteers. At the beginning of my interviews, the questions to refugee women were more explorative, which allowed me to gain a breadth of information. Conversations with Melissa Network's social worker and lawyer were other great sources of information to narrow down my questions. I avoided asking questions related to women's journeys that would require them to narrate or re-narrate their trauma. I made this decision because for two reasons: I did not further traumatize women by remembering traumatic experiences and retelling journeys of migration was not my research objective. I always had a list of questions printed for my interviews, however, almost always women would end up telling me more than I anticipated. Therefore, my interviews were unstructured and often ended up being narrative stories of women's lives in Greece.

Secondary Data Collection

For my secondary research, I referred to the work of prominent scholars in migration and resettlement as well as to international organizations and the grey literature

of policy reports and data available on publicly accessible websites. I engage with social scientists of migration in the EU, the US, and the Middle East, particularly anthropologists interested in embodied experiences. I also referred to news sources and opinions from respected media, such as: BBC, The Atlantic, The Guardian, Routers, and other sources with updated information about Greek Refugee Reception. The reports of international organizations such as the Human Rights Watch, UNHCR, Amnesty International, and Transparency International also play an important role. Secondary sources, especially ethnographies and anthropological research formed the foundation of my research in the field. I was influenced by the scholars introduced in chapter I and IV, V to explore the embodied impacts on migration and local and situated perspectives of the global policies. I attempt to present conceptual and theoretical insights based on my fieldwork and to contribute to the existing literature in the field by depicting embodied experiences of migration.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCURAL VIOLENCE AND VULNERABILITIES OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN GREECE

The realities of women I met at Melissa Network were constructed by diverse sociocultural, political, gendered, and economic conditions. While women had different refugee status, nationality, ethnicity, and socioeconomic conditions, they all had something in common: they were placed in uncertainty and constant waiting with a lack of information about their asylum cases, access to employment, housing, healthcare and language, which were manifestations of the structural and indirect violence. While most women I interviewed were waiting for the asylum or relocation decision, few had acquired refugee status. Some were undocumented (without "papers" as they often referred to themselves), and some had their asylum claims denied. Waiting and uncertainty have become inseparable aspects of being asylum seekers or refugees in Greece. The women I interviewed assumed that once they reached Europe, they could live in a safe environment. However, the dream of living in Europe seemed further away as they struggled to make sense of bureaucratic procedures of the asylum process. They lived in Athens between 1-4 years at the time of my interview either in mainland camps or the UNHCR-provided temporary housing. While those women who had their claims for asylum registered were eligible to public education, healthcare and employment opportunities, the access to such services was problematic. Women disclosed with me their experiences of uncooperative and disrespectful doctors who would refuse to talk with them in English even though doctors clearly were able to. Some women complained about negligence from the healthcare providers and treating migrants as not "worthy" of treatment, for example, by refusing to provide comprehensive and humane care. Access

to job was mentioned as the most important for their integration into the community. Most of the employed women I interviewed worked either at Melissa Network as interpreters or as caregivers at unaccompanied minor shelters administered by the Network. A Majority of women could not find opportunities to work either in formal or informal sectors. My interviewees with grassroots organizations confirmed the absence of the integration policy, which included cohesive plan of integrating asylum seekers and refugees into the social and economic sphere. Therefore, without the actual commitment to integration, thousands were left in precarious conditions. Hearing women's stories I wondered how their individual experiences reflected larger social, economic and political context and embedded stereotypes towards refugees in the society.

In this chapter I examine the gap between the policies shaping refugee and asylum seekers' access to employment, health, housing, and education and the actual uptake of these social programs and opportunities by migrants. With weak access and utilization, these programs illustrate the structural violence that migrants face in Greece. I argue that this is partly caused by the financial crisis and economic instability that left thousands of Greeks vulnerable since 2008. Austerity measures to cut down public spending had a tremendous impact on the economy with people under the poverty line. The poor economic condition and unavailability of job opportunities are one of the reasons why Greece found it hard to incorporate asylum seekers into their system. Other issues such as the EU's and the state's failure to incorporate migrants into the society, their initial response to migration as a security threat, and the patchwork approach to refugee relocation led to the lack of coherent policies and tangible outcomes of the integration. Overall, I argue that the failure to enroll and utilize these available public benefits

illustrates the Greek state's failure to incorporate migrants into society. Curtailing access to services is a form of the structural violence that is manifested in the exclusion of certain groups of people from social services based on the group's characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, national origin, and so on. I explore the psychosocial effects of structural violence and vulnerability on refugees and how it manifests in the everyday lives of women. I aim to contribute to the emerging literature on structural factors that explain migrant vulnerabilities in health outcomes instead of the previously considered individual-level cultural explanations. By framing women's experiences as part of the structural violence, I emphasize on the systemic nature of exclusion and discrimination, which cannot be mitigated by individual projects and disjointed initiatives. Addressing structural causes of the violence needs a cohesive plan and commitment at all levels of society but firstly it requires a shift of the discourse on migration, discriminatory policies, and priorities that are in place and embedded in larger structures of governance.

The exclusion of migrants and refugees from the services is circumscribed by the political and legal contexts and the provision of such services is defined as what Watters refers a "moral economy of care," which I refer once again (2017, p. 395). Researching the treatment of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants at Europe's southern borders, Belgium, and the UK, Watters stated that the economy was moral as it reflected societies' wider institutions and values about legitimate and illegitimate. The legitimate refugees deserved the protection and care, while illegitimate refugees did not. These characterizations are influenced by the "culture of mistrust" towards refugees who are crossing borders "illegally" with no real fear of persecution, but simply for gaining economic benefits (Watters, 2017, p. 396). In the Greek context, as discussed in Chapter

II, one gains deservingness as a result of being vulnerable after the physical and mental illness. According to Watters, the moral economy shapes "socio-legal space" for refugees where care is either limited or non-existent (2017, p. 397). As Watters says, the provision of inadequate access to the information and legal support, exacerbated by formidable logistical hurdles reflected this moral economy of care. For example, asylum seekers in Greece were required to claim their asylum in their primary reception area (camps) and if they left their camp, they were automatically disqualified from applying for asylum. This and other logistical hurdles, lack of access to services reflect the culture of mistrust that exists towards asylum seekers as "bogus," not genuine and illegitimate people (Watters, 2007, p. 400). "Moral economy of care which routinely misrecognized potentially legitimate asylum seekers as economic migrants places those who should be protected outside the parameters of care" (Watters, 2007, p. 415).

To my knowledge, most of the research in Greece on asylum seekers looked into the characteristics of the "crisis" and inhumane living conditions in camps. Few have explored the connection between the lived experiences and reasons behind the policies that unfold. Schneider et al. (2017) were one of the few researchers who analyzed the impacts of broader social and economic structures on the lives of Syrian refugees in Greece and concluded that they were forms of indirect violence. They claimed that broader social and economic policies left thousands of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Greece extremely vulnerable. Policies affected by austerity measures of financial crisis curtailed access to healthcare and employment opportunities for asylum seekers and local citizens as well. Access to healthcare varied considerably for refugees based on whether they lived on the mainland or on islands (Schneider et al., 2017). While

theoretically asylum seekers with documentation had access to public healthcare, the wait time was usually long and the quality of services poor. Those without documentation could only access healthcare through the NGOs who did not ask for papers or social security cards. The treatment was even more difficult for Afghani nations, which constituted the majority of my interviews. Afghanistan was not regarded as dangerous as Syria and, therefore, had a low asylum recognition rate. The asylum applications for Afghans usually lagged for years compared to Syrian nationals (The Conversation, 2017).

According to Schneider et al., indirect violence is "insidious, chronic manifestations of violence woven into the day-to-day lives of many refugees" that causes refugee suffering in ways that are not always recognized as forms of violence (2017, p. 67). Indirect violence can take many forms, such as restricting access to employment, healthcare, education, housing, nutrition, clean air, and self-agency, or self-identity (religion, sexuality, gender, marriage, or citizenship) that are present in the Greek asylum system. The Authors differentiated between structural violence and structural deficiency within the indirect violence framework. Structural violence handicapped particular groups of the population while deficiency impacted a broader range of the population. Cultural stereotypes that contribute to the creation of discriminatory laws and enforcement were often referred to as cultural violence, which was a form of structural violence as well. Galtung, who developed the term structural violence, defined it as "indirect violence built into repressive social orders creating enormous differences between potential and actual human self-realization" (Galtung, 1975, p. 173). Therefore, through structural violence migrants are not able to realize their potential and live a dignified life. Structural violence affects migrants through different pathways, ranging

from curtailing access to healthcare and employment to everyday discrimination and exclusion. Media broadcasts often depict examples of what Galtung would consider direct violence towards refugees in Greece, such as dire living conditions, lack of access to food, and accommodation in camps. On the other hand, the impacts of indirect violence on the mainland are not explored with much depth by the scholarly work and the media.

Schneider et al., (2017) argued that refugees and frontline workers reported experiences with indirect violence throughout the resettlement journey as a rule and not an exception. The authors explored how inadequate nutrition, access to accommodation, security, healthcare, work opportunities, and education are forms of structural violence in Greece. Legal restrictions on the right to work for asylum seekers and the inability for recognized refugees to secure a job are indirect manifestations of broad economic conditions in Greece as well as cultural violence, including anti-refugee rhetoric that restricted access to certain services (for instance, discriminatory views by landlords).

The framework of structural violence and the impacts of broader social and economic policies on embodied experiences of migrant and refugee populations had been investigated by medical anthropologists. According to Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois (2011), structural vulnerability is defined as "a positionality that imposes physical/emotional suffering on specific population groups and individuals in patterned ways," which is "a product of class-based economic exploitation and cultural, gender/sexual and racialized discrimination" (p. 339). Authors studied structural vulnerabilities of Latino migrants in the US as a result of structural violence, such as political exclusion, increased enforcement of migration laws, labor market discrimination

and residential segregation. Latino migrant laborers were especially vulnerable to structural violence because of economic inequalities, xenophobia, ethnic discrimination, and scapegoating. Structural vulnerability captured migrants' embodied inequality and violence when insecurity was normalized and understood as deserved.

Marcia Inhorn, who studied Arab refugees' access to reproductive health in the US, argued that structural vulnerability encompassed the notions of worthiness and whether medical staff and care providers considered people as deserving of such care (Inhorn, 2018). Financial resources, legal status, access to healthcare, education, language skills, discrimination were part of the broader social and economic policies affecting America's Arab refugees. Inhorn argued that these structural vulnerabilities negatively affected Arab Americans' wellbeing as those who were structurally vulnerable might internalize discrimination. Structural vulnerability and depreciated subjectivities were part of the refugee experience in the US. For example, Iraqi refugee resettlement processes in the US were characterized by poor planning and coordination, limited support for employment, funding for community organizations, and inadequate English learning. Some resettlement policies had further exacerbated structural vulnerabilities of refugees, such as employment agencies pushing Iraqi refugees towards low-paying jobs. This resulted in highly qualified professionals working in low-paying jobs and not having an opportunity to practice their actual professions. Similar to this, many refugees that I have interviewed in Greece were either unemployed due to their status or pushed to low-paying jobs for which they were overqualified.

Psychosocial Impacts of Structural Vulnerability

Farhat et al., (2018) documented Syrian refugees' challenges accessing healthcare, information on legal assistance, and asylum procedures in Athens and the island of Samos. Study participants mentioned the lack of guidance and information on asylum procedures increased their feelings of uncertainty about the future, which negatively impacted their mental and psychosocial wellbeing. They often mentioned words such as "hopelessness" and "losing hope" when describing their situation in Greece. Additionally, a constant fear of being deported exponentially exacerbated feelings of stress. The study connected to a lack of access to information, legal assistance, healthcare, past traumas, and resettlement challenges to a high prevalence of anxiety and depression. Farhat et al., concluded that high levels of anxiety and depression may be attributed to current living conditions and uncertainty about the future more than past traumatic experiences. The authors situated refugees' challenges to broader social and economic policies led by the overloaded and disorganized administration due to the recent and drastic austerity measures, resulting in cuts in public employees.

Virruel Fuentes et al., (2012) write that structural racism which they defined as ideologies and institutions that limit access to power and opportunities based on racial and ethnic assumptions, influences health from multiple pathways as they are embedded in "societal-level institutions, policies and practices" (p. 2012). The authors argued that immigration policies historically represented a type of structural racism as they often sought to emphasize national belonging along ethnic lines and racializing migrants as undesirable. Various exclusionary policies, such as residential segregation were often deployed in othering migrants, reproduced health disparities. Similarly, camps set in

remote areas of Greece, far from the residential areas is a manifestation of residential segregation that aims to exclude asylum seekers.

Access to Asylum Services

As of October 2019, Greece hosted 103,500 refugees, of whom 68,100 were on the mainland and 35,400 on the islands (UNHCR, October 2019). As of December, the number of refugees on the islands has increased to 38,800 (UNHCR, December 2019). Interestingly, while the number of applications to the EU dropped by 10% in 2018 compared to 2017, the number of applications with the Greek Asylum Service rose by 14%, which was caused by the closure of borders between Greece and the EU. Turned back by the EU, a lot of asylum seekers decided to apply for asylum in their first country of residence – Greece. The country received 11% of the total applications submitted in the EU, which puts Greece as the third Member State with the largest number of applications, after Germany (28%) and France (19%). By the end of 2018, Greece had received 66,969 asylum applications. However, decisions were made only on 30,748, with 58,793 applications still pending. The total recognition rate over all applications submitted in Greece is 18.8% (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Out of all decisions made 41.1% (12,611) were granted the refugee status. This illustrates that many asylum seekers are still waiting for their refugee status decision, and more than half of those who applied were rejected their claim for international protection.

Access to the asylum procedure remains a structural and endemic problem in Greece. At the end of 2018, the Asylum service operated in 23 locations in Greece. The average period between pre-registration and full registration was 42 days in 2018, while

the average processing time was 8.5 months. However, all asylum-seeking women I met at Melissa were waiting for two or three years. Out of the total applications pending in 2018 (58,793), 80.5% had not yet had their interviews. Identification of vulnerability on the islands also remains problematic due to a significant lack of qualified staff. Many vulnerabilities are missed and not properly identified, with many vulnerable people detained. There were eight active pre-removal detentions centers in Greece at the end of 2018. Police stations also continued to be used for prolonged immigration detention.

Those in the mainland usually register their asylum cases with Greek Asylum Service (GAS) using Skype, which had been proven to be problematic as there are limited slots. Only two staff members of the Asylum Service together with an interpreter are handling Skype appointments. Limited capacity and availability of interpretation and barriers to applicants' access to the internet hinder the access of persons willing to apply for asylum (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Asylum seekers have to try multiple times, often over several months, before they manage to get through the Skype line and schedule an appointment. Skype registration is just the first step which only allows refugees to pre-register and schedule a full registration. Meanwhile, their police notes might expire (that states their entry date), they might lose access to humanitarian assistance and face the risk of detention. After the Skype registration, asylum seekers have to wait for their interview, which might happen from six months to more than two years after the registration. Meanwhile, asylum seekers get a pre-registration number and card, which allows them to legally reside in Greece until the Asylum Service decides on the asylum claim, move freely, have their children go to school, stay in camp or other

types of accommodation, access cash program and healthcare (Asylum Information Database, 2019).

According to the Asylum Information Database, the assessment of asylum claims, and decisions delivered raise multiple concerns. There were cases when interviewers did not consider the mental and psychological situation of an applicant (2019). For example, an applicant from DRC received a negative decision as he was not considered descriptive enough when narrating the ways he was tortured. The outcome of the personal interview depends on the asylum seeker's nationality, culture, trust with the interviewer, access to interpreters, and lawyers.

A lack of information about their asylum cases was a prevalent theme with women I interviewed. Those who were received negative decisions were not provided with thorough explanations. Those without documentation had very little information about the procedure to apply for the asylum. The overall atmosphere was characterized by ambiguity, waiting and uncertainty. No state-funded free legal aid was provided as well (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Several NGOs and grassroots organizations offered free legal assistance and counseling to asylum seekers. The scope of these services remained limited, taking into account the number of applications in Greece. Melissa Network's lawyer and lawyers from other pro-bono organizations were the only people who could provide some clarity. However, pro-bono organizations usually were understaffed. Over 10,000 asylum seekers received some sort of legal service by NGOs under UNHCR funding in 2018 (Asylum Information Database, 2019). In 2017, Greece introduced a state-run legal aid scheme in appeals procedures with 21 lawyers participating. However, the availability of lawyers under this scheme was limited. NGOs

still fill the gap by providing legal advice and assistance. In total, 176 pro bono lawyers and NGOs were providing legal assistance throughout the country (Asylum Information Database, 2019). According to Melissa Network's lawyer – Sophia who assisted hundreds of refugee women - legal assistance was necessary to help asylum seekers identify what was expected from them during the interview. As Sophia said in an interview with me, "the main problem is that women don't know their rights, second, there is violence, third, they don't understand the procedure and, fourth, there is the uncertainty of the situation. All these causes distress and depression." Her reflection emphasized the importance of legal assistance and preparation before the interviews, which under the culture of mistrust sought to prove the illegitimacy of an asylum seeker.

Employment

All refugee women I interviewed were made structurally vulnerable by the lack of social and economic protection from the Greek state and the European Union. According to Greek law, refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to employment as long as asylum seekers possess an asylum seeker's card (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Asylum seekers receive the card after they complete the full registration and lodged their application. Those who are pre-registered do not have access to the labor market. The average time between pre-registration and full registration was 42.3 days in 2018. Despite the fact that asylum seekers and refugees are entitled to employment, access to the labor market is severely hampered by the economic situation in Greece, high unemployment rate, and the inability of most asylum seekers and refugees to speak fluent Greek, as well as bureaucratic procedures of obtaining necessary documentation (Council of Europe,

2018). The UNHCR led participatory assessment study, which interviewed 1,436 asylum seekers and refugees concluded that study participants had a hard time accessing the labor market (UNHRC, 2018b). A lack of information and required documentation (e.g. residence permits, passport), high unemployment rates, language insufficiency and remoteness of some jobs, lack of job advice, and placement support were motioned as employment obstacles in Greece. Participants also found existing employment support programs to be very few and unstructured in nature. Even if asylum seekers do find jobs, they often face further obstacles opening bank accounts which is a precondition to receiving payment in the private sector (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Four major banks in Greece refused to open accounts even though the employer had submitted a certification of recruitment. The UNHCRH study concluded that while by law asylum seekers were qualified for vocational training, the access was often hampered as enrollment was based on the provision of documentation that asylum seekers many times did not possess.

The UNCHR provided cash transfers to refugees and asylum seekers so that they could purchase goods based on their preferences and become more self-sustained. In a report documenting impacts of cash transfers on refugees' livelihoods, the UNHCR found out that cash transfers did not have any effect on people's abilities to work. Moreover, despite the availability of English and Greek English classes, few actually attended such classes. According to the report, "social and cultural norms that limit the movement of women and girls outside the home and the desire of persons of concern to leave Greece and live in other countries in northern Europe were among the key reasons." (UNHCR, 2018b, p. 4). The report argued that asylum seekers had little motivation to learn the

Greek language thinking of Western and Northern European countries as their final destinations. A similar thought was expressed in an interview with the General Director of the SolidarityNow – Antigone Lyberaki and Younous Mohammadi from the Greek Forum of Refugees (local advocacy group). Mohammadi said that the lack of motivation from the asylum seekers might explain why integration was challenging in line with the lack of integration policy from the state. While it was true that at the beginning of refugee arrival, most of the refugees intended to leave for Western Europe, all asylum seekers I met at Melissa Network were very eager to learn the language and integrate into the local culture. The fact that the Melissa Network had more than 500 people on the waitlist and every day we would turn many women back because of the lack of capacity, proved that the language learning was very important to a lot even though they might think of moving to other countries of Europe. Many interviewees shared with me their concern to know the language and how much it would help with connecting with locals and finding employment.

A lack of employment opportunities was the most important reason why some women wanted to move to other EU countries. Almost all of the women I worked with dreamed about going to Germany, Belgium or other Western European countries where they could find employment. For example, Yasmina, a single mother from Afghanistan, shared with me her worries about her future in Greece. As a recognized refugee, she was given two months to leave the UNHCR - provided apartment under the program ESTIA. [2] However, she could not afford the rent with her salary as a part-time caretaker at an

[2] Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme (ESTIA), provides urban accommodation and cash assistance to vulnerable groups in Greece. The program is funded by the European Commission's European Union Civil Protection & Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) and implemented by UNHCR and partner organizations (UNHCR, 2018).

unaccompanied minors' shelter. Yasmina was concerned about what her future would look like without having access to education and employment. Her desire was to live in a country that provided access to such services. Unfortunately, in summer 2019, the shelter was changing the owner, and Yasmina was worried that she will no longer be employed.

Amaya received a master's degree from an international school in Athens after her arrival from Afghanistan. Despite her advanced education and fluent English language skills, she was not successful in securing a job that she desired (in her degree area, Marketing). Amaya felt discouraged and, in her words, "depressed," which she said was exacerbated by her family members' health condition. According to Amaya, most organizations only would hire her as a translator. Both Yasmina and Amaya had a refugee status, which allowed them to seek employment legally. However, in reality, they were not provided any assistance with connecting to the labor market, where to seek employment, and so on. They were left at the mercy of local volunteers and grassroots organizations like Melissa Network, where opportunities were generally limited.

A similar concern was expressed by Marzia who also had been officially recognized as a refugee. She mentioned that she enjoyed living in Greece because the people were nice, and the weather was good. "The only problem is that there is no work, I want to go to some other country for work but live in Greece," said Marzia. Along with other interviewees, Marzia disclosed with me that stereotypes about refugees made the process of securing employment challenging. Without intermediary between the refugee and the employer, refugees found it hard to connect with already limited job opportunities. Marzia also had to leave her UNHCR-provided accommodation. However, she did not have any money to rent an apartment but even if she did, she could not rent

the house because as she said, “Greeks would not accept, because we are refugees and they think we cannot pay the rent.” Her words reflected the deeply embodied stereotypes about refugees as disrespecting and not suited for the European social norms. Marzia’s words came in contrast to what the international organizations, such as UNHCR and SolidarityNow stated in my interviews. Soon after her interview, I learned firsthand about what housing discrimination meant.

Housing

Greece had been criticized by various international and human rights organizations for failing to provide adequate accommodation to asylum seekers. Currently, asylum seekers and refugees live in one of the three types of accommodations: camps on islands, camps on mainland, or apartments. Living conditions in camps also known as temporary accommodation facilities (administered by the UNHCR) had been described as inhumane and not suitable for living. On the mainland, more than 16,000 asylum seekers lived in 28 camps at the end of 2018. In 2017 UNHCR started to implement an accommodation scheme called (Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme (ESTIA), funded by the European Commission’s European Union Civil Protection & Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) to provide urban accommodation and cash assistance to the most vulnerable asylum seekers. ESTIA is implemented by UNHCR and a number of partners who provide cash assistance and housing for refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2018). ESTIA only covers a small percentage of asylum seekers and refugees. By the end of December 2019, UNHCR rented 4,523 apartments and 14 buildings in 14 cities and 7 islands across Greece (UNHCR, 2019b). This

provided accommodation for 21,620 people (6,822 refugees and 14,798 asylum seekers) out of a total of 103,500. 38% of all residents are children. The vast majority of these accommodations were families, with an average family size of five people. More than one in four residents had at least one of the vulnerabilities that made them eligible for the accommodation. More than 89% are either from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and DRC. According to the UNHCR, ESTIA and urban accommodation helped refugees restore their dignity and access to better education and health.

However, it was announced that the ESTIA program was going to be defunded in 2019 and asylums seekers had to leave the apartments. As of March 31, 2019, recognized refugees that received their status before July 31, 2017, are obliged to leave their ESTIA-supported accommodation (Campfire Innovation, 2019). Refugees were responsible to figure out their housing situation on their own, which was extremely difficult for those with limited Greek skills and xenophobic attitudes towards refugees. Since this announcement, refugees, INGOs, and grassroots organizations expressed their fear that many refugees will end up being homeless. As of December 2018, 287 cases were submitted to be excluded from the removal due to this vulnerability. 165 cases were granted extensions on the basis of being too vulnerable to be removed, with the rest asked to leave the accommodation. Part of the challenge with removals lay with refugees' inabilities to pay for rent without having employment and not having been integrated into the community. Despite the fact that a new "integration" and housing provision policy, *HELIOS,* was supposed to take care of those who were kicked out from the apartments in June, no support was provided between April and June. Moreover, during my fieldwork in 2019, the refugees who were asked to leave their houses were not

contacted about future accommodation opportunities. According to the grassroots organization Campfire Innovation, those who received refugee status before 2018 would not be eligible for the HELIOS program, which represents a large number of people on the verge of homelessness (2019).

In my interview with the UNHCR representative Stella Nanou, she described the benefits of the ESTIA program which provided housing and $150 cash assistance to vulnerable asylum seekers. However, the program was going to end soon and be replaced with more a comprehensive integration - focused HELIOS program. Nanou argued that the goal of ending the ESTIA program was to promote more independence, personal responsibility and agency of refugees. According to Nanou Athens had a lot of apartments available that refugees could rent out and live a dignified life instead of being "aid-receivers."

However, renting an apartment in Greece was not easy. To rent an apartment, recognized refugees had to secure AFM (Tax Identification Number) and AMKA (Social Security Number) to demonstrate that they had a financial capacity (around 1000 Euros a month) to pay a rent (Campfire Innovation, 2019). Without these numbers, they could rent an apartment, access healthcare, and open a bank account. There have been countless reports of people waiting for months for these cards to be issued. Even if refugees had cards, securing a job with limited Greek language and hostile suspicious towards refugees in already crisis-hit Athens, is highly problematic. Additional challenges were posed by attitudes of some members of Greek society, such as landlords refusing to rent apartments to migrants and refugees because of their volatile status. Moreover, Athens also saw an

increase in rental prices, especially in the city center, mostly due to the meteoric price rise of Airbnb.

One day, Fahima asked me to accompany her to meet with the landlord for a possible housing arrangement. As we walked to the house, the landlord met us at the entrance and ushered us to the elevator while he took the stairs. Fahima liked the apartment and wanted to proceed with the procedure of signing contracts. The Landlord narrated the contract terms and talked about rent, electricity, and house bills in a very humiliating way to Fahima. For example, by sounding derogatory and suspicious in his talk, raising his voice and nervously motioning in the air with his hands while frowning at Fahima. He asked her to show the proof of salary. However, soon his anger intensified and his face dissatisfied when he saw that Fahima lacked few Euros to have exactly 1000 Euros worth of salary in a month. When I told him that Fahima had a full time job (as a caretaker at shelter), was able to pay the rent, and was a good person, he turned to me and said angrily: "everyone says they are a good person, no one says that they are a bad person." I was terrified by his distrust and hostility towards Fahima. She had been a refugee celebrity for her work of feeding homeless Greeks and other refugees, acted in theaters promoting dialogue between people, served as a face of refugees for many international organizations. The Landlord continued talking to Fahima in an angry tone: Below, I excerpt their interaction:

> Landlord: "You know, there is a house fee here, every month you pay 10 Euros, okay?"
> Fahima: "Yes, yes, I know,"
> Landlord: "You have to pay it, everybody is paying, and this is a very good neighborhood, they are very good people, and you have to pay it, crying and all that won't help you. When the bill comes, you have to pay it. You have to pay the first month deposit and rent of 1050 Euros, do you understand? You cannot live here if you can't pay. If you don't pay the rent, you will be kicked out."

Fahima: Yes, yes, I know it."

I could hear Fahima's voice start to shake. She was about to cry. The landlord continued his explanations and went to warn Fahima on electricity, water bills and the rent the same way as with house fee. He looked at Fahima's employment papers, AMKA, FMA and seemed dissatisfied that her salary was few Euros short than required. Fahima had to show more to be eligible. "You should show me the updated salary slip because this is not enough, show me and then we can talk," he said and pointed us to the door. He went downstairs with us and watched before we disappeared from the corner of the street.

This was just one of many examples challenges refugees experienced as result of discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes that resulted in various aspects of their lives. Due to the stereotypes or what Inhorn calls "controlling images," refugees had challenges with securing housing or employment in Athens (2018, p. 104). They all had to do convince their landlords that they were indeed responsible people and endure humiliation and hostility. Discouraged and belittled by this treatment, many feared to encounter locals on issues of housing and employment. The example shows broader structural and social inequalities experienced by refugees: at one hand existing policies in housing market (such as having requirement of having certain amount of income and social security number) does not allow those who have less than required salary to rent the house legally. On the other hand, if they do have more than $1,000, they are still subject to discriminatory attitudes and distrust. Refugees are not supported when searching for housing by the State or the EU. For example, there are no mediators who could bridge the gap between the landlords and refugees and alleviate some of the tension and cultural

misunderstandings. This example of lived experience also contradicted how overly positive description of housing arrangement was by the UNHCR representative. Her presentation missed all the important dimensions of housing insecurity and did not consider various aspects and power dynamics existing between a refugee and a landlord originated from xenophobia, stereotypes, racism. I could see how Fahima was internalizing this traumatic experience, which made her more discouraged and disoriented. “I am a good person, I feed homeless, I never do bad, I love people, I help them. Why don’t they treat me like this? I am a human too,” she said when we were walking back from the landlord’s house.

Walking back to Melissa from the traumatic encounter, Fahima also remembered a day when she went to another landlord, an old lady to see the house. When the lady saw her and realized she was a refugee, she screamed in Greek: *όχι, όχι* (no, no) and motioning with hands to leave. Fahima explained that placing palms in front of the person’s face is considered as a biggest insult in Greece. She did not seem surprised by the women’s reaction.

As the General Director of a large national nonprofit, SolidarityNow, Antigone Lyberaki, told me in an interview, refugees in Athens should be happy as they have much better housing than what they had at home in Syria or Afghanistan, and what some Greeks have. Her organization worked with the UNHRC to determine vulnerability of asylum seekers and designate apartments. She also shared concerns with me that not all asylum seekers who got the apartments were ready as they did not appropriately treat neighbors. “Maybe they were not ready for apartments,” she said. To the contrary, she also stated that refugees’ hostile representations in the media were not based on facts and

were problematic. “If you show to locals that refugees are similar to them, are like them, they will understand and participate [in helping refugees].” While her last point seemed logical, I wondered why she still considered some refugees as not suitable for living in apartments. She seemed to attribute the differences to refugees’ cultural characteristics as not used to living in a new environment of European soils.

This simplistic perception of lives and needs of refugees did not encompass challenges posed by structural and deeply embodied vulnerabilities often manifested from everyday interactions with locals to refusing to rent the apartment or employee. This illustrated a deeper view of refugees as threatening, invading local culture and unworthy of social support. Dignified life and integration into the community is much more than having a choice of renting an apartment and receiving cash assistance. It requires years of meaningful and long-term solutions to resettlement and inclusion. Although the legal status is important, it is albeit insufficient in Greece. Although those without the refugee status are still able to rent a house, in practice they cannot, because they do not have a proof of employment, which is required by the landlords. The refugee status only makes a difference when the person has a job which pays more than minimal wage in Greece, which is hard to secure. As long as deeply embodied stereotypes are still in place, a person even with the legal status of residence will have a hard time securing housing.

Even though Fahima had a job and a refugee status, she nevertheless experienced discrimination in the rental marketplace. Circulating stereotypes images of refugees as individuals not paying rent, being disrespectful to the neighborhoods and not being deserving to live alongside Greeks are widespread. “Controlling images” are created by assumptions of refugees, which are defined as “stereotypical portrayals of people who are

oppressed and objectified" (Inhorn, 2018, p. 104). Reinforcement of such images over and over again, as Inhorn argues, results in refugees internalizing discrimination and failing to realize their aspirations.

The idea that refugees are not acculturated to Greek and European or Western society came across during my observations and informal conversations with volunteer helpers. For example, while volunteering at Skaramangas camp, one of the volunteers described to me how refugee women did not know how to change diapers for their kids or be hygienic "because they have never done it, they don't know it." The tendency of blaming refugees for failing to adopt to western cultural norms disregards various sociocultural and structural policy failures as they shift the responsibility to refugees. Indeed, conceptual frameworks that link health disparities to cultural behaviors essentialize and homogenize immigrant groups and perpetuate ethical stereotypes, which promotes victim-blaming explanations (Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012, 2001). The stereotypical attitudes deeply embedded in the society influenced by the media portrayals of refugees as threats and undeserving taking advantage of already diminishing resources in Greece created extremely precarious conditions for those already made vulnerable by the draconian policies. Those attitudes are part of the structural and indirect violence.

Healthcare

Asylum seekers and refugees in Greece face various challenges accessing healthcare. According to the national legislation, specifically Greek Law 4368/2016 (Article 33), "vulnerable social groups," including asylum seekers and refugees and their families are entitled to access health, pharmaceutical and hospital care, including

psychiatric care (Amnesty International, 2020). Individuals falling under Article 33 must have a Social Security Number, also known as National Insurance Number, ("AMKA") to access free public healthcare. Challenges with accessing healthcare is partially caused by the significant shortage of resources and limited capacity of international and local actors as a result of the austerity policies in Greece, which is further exacerbated by the lack of adequate cultural sensitivity from healthcare providers (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Refugees have difficulties communicating with doctors without interpreters. While organizations, such as MSF, are doing their best to continue providing healthcare and make up for the State's failure, they are not equipped to meet the scale of existing needs and serious cases. As noted by the UNHCR, "across the islands and on some camps in the mainland, the low number of staff under the Ministry of Health, in particular doctors and cultural mediators, is not sufficient to help refugees with medical and psychosocial needs" (UNHCR, 2019a).

Based on their research with migrants and refugees and healthcare professionals working with this group, Gionakis and Ntetsika (2019) found that miscommunication and cultural incompetence was the main issue affecting poor outcomes. The article suggested trainings to improve collaboration between interpreters and professionals to build cultural competence, along with creation of migrant-friendly hospitals. Migrants' access to health services was "hindered by the lack of the language skills and intercultural competences of providers" (Gionakis and Ntetsika, 2019, p. 40). Migrants stressed on the importance of raising awareness about their situation and sensitizing the local community of their struggles to address racism. Yasmina mentioned to me in an interview that she had a hard time communicating with the doctor who refused to talk with her in English, even though

according to Yasmina, the doctor could understand and speak English. This example demonstrated the hurdles accessing healthcare for refugee population in Greece.

Education

Based on Article 13L 4340/2018, in Greek national law, asylum-seeking children have access to the same education as Greek nationals as long as there is no removal order against them or their parents (Asylum Information Database, 2019). A program of afternoon preparatory classes is available for kids aged 4 to 15. Children attend this program in public schools neighboring to camps or other places of residence. Children aged 6 to 15 years who live in urban areas (such as UNHCR accommodation, squats, apartments, hotels, reception centers of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors), can enroll at designated public schools and attend morning classes alongside Greek students. The UNICEF estimated that at the end of 2019 there were around 27,000 children in Greece out of which 11,700 were enrolled in schools and 66% resided in apartments with their parents or in shelters for unaccompanied minors (UNICEF, 2019). Children on Eastern Aegean islands did not have access to formal education because except afternoon preparatory classes. Those on islands were confined in camp settings and could not leave their primary reception area. There were no preparatory classes available for them until the end of 2018 (Asylum Information Database, 2019). Despite legal provisions that allowed children of asylum seekers and refugees to access free public education, indirect costs such as clothes, lunch money were mentioned as barriers to getting successful education and integration into schools (UNHCR, 2018b). Entitlement to services did not automatically translate to access (Watters, 2010).

Based on a UNHCR participatory research study, many asylum seekers perceived a lack of language skills as a hinderance to their integration. All women I talked to wished there were more opportunities to learn the language. Every day at Melissa Network we would turn away women who wanted to register for the Center's language classes. Zeynab from Iran attributed her lack of friends and employment opportunities to her inability to speak the language. She said, "if I spoke Greek, I could have Greek friends who could help me. Because I don't know Greek, I cannot start working. I had a great job back in Iran – I had everything, but I here cannot find job." Yasmina wished she could know Greek so that she could have better communication with doctors. Language provision therefore was part of the structural problem that impacted all aspects of the integration.

In this chapter, I showed how the lack of commitment from the EU and the Greek state amplified by the economic crisis manifested in indirect violence towards refugees. Discrimination and bureaucratic procedures or simply lack of access to housing, employment, healthcare, and language provision left asylum seekers and refugees in precarious conditions. While several grassroots organizations addressed various issues through their operations, a lack of coordinated integration was mentioned as the main challenge, which prompted a lot of asylum seekers to look for dangerous ways to migrate to other EU countries. Grassroots organizations played an important role in providing language classes and building trust between the communities. However, they were unable to respond to the scope of the challenges and integrate refugees in the social and economic spheres. What is more, since the indirect violence was not as visible as the direct violence against refugees in inhumane camps, less attention was given to refugees

and asylum seekers on the mainland and allowed the government to overlook some of the problems.

CHAPTER V

EMBODIED IMPACTS OF LIVING IN LIMBO

In this chapter I discuss the embodied impact of living in an uncertainty and limbo, which had become defining factors of being a refugee or asylum seeker in Greece. I argue that limbo was part of the structural violence towards refugees and asylum seekers, which defined their everyday life. Embodied experiences and wellbeing of refugees should be contextualized in larger structural processes and violence in which violence is sometimes legitimized and regarded as deserved. While in Chapter I presented the emerging research on asylum seeker's life in limbo, here I explore how limbo manifested in everyday life of women at Melissa Network. By presenting the lives in limbo, I aim to showcase women's lived experiences and narratives within the larger systems of structural violence.

Making sense of life and planning for the future is made almost impossible in a state of limbo. A Disjuncture between expectations and realities have a profound impact on people's lives. In his study of West African migrants in Italy, Lucht (2012) looked at the migrants' struggle as a result of failed attempts to connect their aspirations and expectations to the outside world and the reality. He introduced the term existential reciprocity which he defined as responsiveness from the economic and social powers that support the fabric of everyday life and a secure sense of being. Economic and social inequalities caused migrants suffering as a lack of responsiveness to one's wants and needs yielded a sense of desperation. Having a sense of the outside world as a permanent, reliable, and substantial whole was essential for one's existence. Lucht argued that West

African migrants' experiences did not entail a sense of responsiveness from the world and, thus, they needed to reinvent their worlds to obtain a sense of control.

According to Hage (2005) there is a close connection between the viability of life and sense of "existential mobility" (p. 470). When migrants feel that they are existentially going slowly, going nowhere or stuck in one place, they develop no sense of moving forward for a better life, which is a vital component of life.

Becker introduced metaphor "disrupted lives" to describe the period of limbo, life reorganization that people experience, and impact on their wellbeing. This "disrupted lives" framework can be used to understand the suffering of refugees in Greece. As Becker (1999) wrote:

> In all societies, the course of life is structured by expectations about each phase of life, and meaning is assigned to specific life events and the roles that accompany them. When expectations are not met, people experience inner chaos and disruption. Such disruptions represent loss of the future. Restoring order to life necessitates reworking understandings of the self and the world, redefining the disruption and life itself' (p. 4).

Many researchers have explored what impacts the sense of going nowhere and disrupted lives have on the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers. For example, Haas detailed the struggles of asylum seekers in the US to meaningfully engage in the social world (2017). Insecure present and uncertain future impacted activities that asylum seekers participated in as they often considered various activities as a waste of their time. Haas documented the impacts of the limbo on asylum seekers' psychological distress often expressed in terms such as "worry," discomfort," "trauma" and "madness" (2017, p. 88). Many asylum seekers were interpreting waiting as a form of violence.

In exploring impacts of the uncertain future temporality, uncertainty and wellbeing among Iraqi refugees in Egypt, El-Shaarawi (2015) argued that displacement

was often characterized by limbo, or "living in transit," where people are caught between places and different categories, has a destructive effect on refugee's wellbeing (p. 38). She wrote that uncertain future was the cause of refugees' ill health, lack of wellbeing and suffering. El-Shaarawi drew her work on scholastic on "outsideness" by exploring places of exception, such as refugee camps, which framed refugees as liminal actors (p. 40). Relocation of asylum seekers in remote camps of Athens was a manifestation of framing them as liminal actors. "The frame of liminality echoes the formation of refugee situations as problematic and "other," a predominantly negative view of refugee populations that is often echoed in policy and news media accounts" (p. 40). This argument illustrates how liminality, discourses of refugees as threats to the society and Others are intertwined with each other. In El-Shaarawi's work, living in transit disrupted Iraqi refugees' expected and imagined life trajectories. The author referred to the term social suffering, which refugees experienced as a result of bureaucratic processes, inabilities to exercise basic human rights, experience insecurity, and financial difficulties. In this sense social suffering was located in political, economic and social contexts and is a result of the structural violence. As she wrote, when a refugees in Egypt lost control over their conditions as a result of social and political suffering, they may find their expression in a narration of illness. Uncertainty disrupted refugees' imagine life trajectories and made it difficult to conceptualize the future. This led to worry, tiredness, sadness and other psychosocial problems.

Coker expanded on this topic and introduced the term "illness talk," or "body talk," which refugees often deploy to make sense and express their concerns about the situation of limbo and experiences with trauma (2004). In her research with Southern

Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Coker concluded that bodily ills and refugee-related trauma were interconnected. Body and illness played a metaphorical role in the stories that Sudanese refugees told to make sense of suffering, loss, and disruption in social, economic, physical, and psychological domains. According to Coker, "when the self is broken apart, it hurts, and pain is the ultimate embodied metaphor. It is everywhere, and nowhere at the same time. It is found in the heart, in the stomach, the head, the legs." (p. 18). Most of the refugees she interviewed complained about stomach aches, digestive issues, chest pain, general body main, head pain, painful legs, insomnia/poor sleep, stiff body, or muscle aches. "Thinking too much" was another common complaint point out that refugees argued fueled their illnesses in one way or another. For many financial situations and lack of job opportunities made them to think a lot. Too much thinking, loneliness or separation from relatives were seen as integral aspects of illness. "Thinking too much was a direct result of current financial, social, and political insecurity, and an integral part of a larger process of loss and movement" (p. 24). Research participants also had psychological symptoms such as worry and anxiety for the future which was regarded as the cause of physical symptoms. "loneliness and lack of social support were commonly mentioned as contributing factors to illness" (p.25). Coker argued that illness metaphors also served to establish order out of chaos and bridged the gap between the idealized past and the disrupted present. It gave a teller a space to express otherwise inexpressible suffering. Metaphoric language was creative and created a possibility of change, she argues.

In her book *Care Across Generations: Solidarity and Sacrifice in Transnational Families,* Yarris (2018) used the phrase *pensando mucho* (thinking too much) to illustrate

embodied distress and emotional traumas of grandmothers. Thinking too much was a way for grandmothers to make their caregiving roles visible and "inscribing their significance through specific sets of somatic symptoms" (p. 89). *Pensando mucho* was different from depression and anxiety as well as from worrying (preoccupation). *Pensando mucho* was a chronic distress experienced by grandmothers who did not have agency to alter migration patterns that created tensions in their transnational families. While, on the other hand, preoccupation was related to the everyday activities, such as what to cook for dinner - problems that had solutions and grandmothers had power to solve. Thinking too much was related to of complexities of migration. *"Pensando mucho* is persistent worrying about social and even transnational problems without simple solution" (107). Thinking too much was further exacerbated by uncertainties of migration.

In exploring perilous journeys of Central American migrants from their home countries to Mexico and the US, Vogt wrote that embodied experiences of suffering and injury should be contextualized in larger social, structural, political and symbolic processes and forms of violence, in which "such violence is rendered natural, expected and even to be regarded as deserved" (2018, 109). Migrants in her study often exhibited injuries and external wounds as a result of dangerous freight trains but also alluded on psychological distress, trouble sleeping, feeling nervous and scared.

For women I met at Melissa, uncertainty was normalized. Frustrated by the absence or attention from the state or large organizations, they experienced limbo with varying degrees: some were especially vulnerable due to their undocumented status and were waiting for the court decision to allow them to register for the asylum claim. Others were experiencing uncertainty of waiting for their asylum decisions. In the section below

I aim to explore narratives of refugee and asylum seeker women and how politics of limbo, special and temporal uncertainties, containment, securitization are manifesting in their everyday lives in Greece.

Aida

Aida was one of the refugee women I interviewed. [3] She was a 24-year old Sudanese woman who came to Greece with her husband in 2016. Like a majority of asylum seekers in Greece, she first arrived on Lesvos island with her husband on a boat from Turkey. Aida described to me unbearable living conditions in Moria camp and neglect from the camp officials in responding to the needs of refugees. Upon arrival, she was placed in a small tent, which was not suitable for cold weather. "During rain, our tent floor seemed like a boat on the water, I tried to sew the tent, but it did not help. During the freeze, the ice was hanging on the tent," described Aida to me. She recalled that people were sleeping with all their clothes on in a sleeping bag to warm themselves. Three men died from the cold weather. "We have been waiting in very long food lines. Sometimes I would look from my place and I could not see the first person in line, it was so long." She did not have the choice to decide what she could eat, and generally, camp food tasted bad.

Apart from dire living conditions, Aida also witnessed violence in camps which made the situation very dangerous. She also described the horror of one day when her neighboring tent was caught on fire, which left her without shelter for a few days. These experiences including her journey from Sudan to Greece left a traumatic mark on her and

[3] All participant names are pseudonyms

ignited distrust in the Greek Asylum system. As she spent more time in Greece, her hopes for a better life in Europe started to weather.

Aida experienced negligence and mistreatment from the camp officials. For example, even though her living conditions were dire in camp, officials dismissed her requests for relocation to another housing facility. Strangely enough, months later, Aida was able to move out of the camp with the help of the camp cleaner, a Greek man who decided to complain and raise the issue to the camp officials. “The man was very nice,” Aida said, “he brought us warm socks.”

It took humanity and advocacy of an ordinary man to have Aida’s living conditions change so drastically, which tells much about the disconnect between refugee populations and the camp officials. The Greek man complained with camp officials which resulted in Aida’s transfer to a slightly better facility where she spent a few months. Then she relocated to a nicer camp in Thessaloniki, which is the second-largest city in Greece, and later she transferred to an apartment provided by UNHCR in Athens. After she arrived in Athens, she joined Melissa Network to learn English and Greek while socializing with women.

When fleeing to Europe, Aida was searching for safety and a better life. She thought Europe was a haven for her. However, three years have passed, and she saw no hope. Aida has been denied asylum statues twice despite life-threatening conditions in Sudan. The Sudanese government and militia have a history of undertaking numerous attacks on civilians which caused the destruction of livelihoods over the years and made Aida and her spouse flee from the country. At the time of our interview in August 2019, the situation in Sudan remained unpredictable and life-threatening.

In conversations with me, she was frustrated and baffled by why she was given hope and then refused the refugee status after having spent years in oblivion in Greece. She spent three years figuring out her asylum claim while enduring injustice and negligence from camp officials, healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, and asylum staff. The asylum rejection letter in 2019 left her powerless. While pro-bono lawyers and social workers advised her to start the asylum process all over again, Aida refused to engage in the process of uncertainty. Instead, she decided to go back to Sudan in June 2019, a few months after the asylum office released a negative decision on her claim.

Aida experienced what researchers call existential immobility (Hage, 2005). She felt she was not going anywhere existentially, which is a necessary component of life. Her life was disrupted as a result of waiting in vain. Living in transit disrupted Aida's expected and imagined life trajectories which negatively affected her wellbeing (El-Shaarawi, 2015). She used the words "depressed," "disappointed," "unhappy" to describe her and her husband's current mental state and embodied experiences of limbo and negligence from the larger institutions and policies. For example, her husband was "depressed and sad" after he got hit by a car and broke his knee. Because of the injured leg, he could not work and even had a hard time walking. Aida told me that after the accident, doctors did not take good care of him and instead of treating him with immediate surgery, they applied a cast. This resulted in the damage of the entire lower leg, which needed urgent treatment and surgery. He found this out after visiting Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) doctor in Athens following serious pain. [4] MSF scheduled the

[4] Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders is largest NGO providing medical and mental health care to refugees on the Greek islands and in Athens

surgery in January 2019. However, eight months had passed, and had not heard anything about the surgery.

Aida and her husband have become tired fighting while constantly being reminded that they were not worthy and deserving of receiving care, asylum status, or state support. Having her dreams shattered and seeing no future in Greece or other EU countries, they decided that returning home is the best option, where their family can take care of them. Uncertainty about their future and living in "existential limbo" provoked depression and distress for her and her husband. Aida did not want to continue living in this limbo and feel powerless anymore. Uncertainties were produced by indefinite waiting, lack of information about her future, and distrust in the Greek asylum system.

Conceptions about ruptured and uncertain future and disrupted life trajectories caused by the larger political and social inequalities, left Aida and her spouse feeling hopeless and depressed. Aida mentioned to me that her husband was generally very optimistic and positive person. However, his mood changed drastically over the last couple of months.

Whether or not asylum seekers get refugee status depends on their well-founded "fear of persecution," the way they tell the story and nationality. The asylum process leaves some refugees as illegitimate, not deserving and others as deserving refugees, much of which depends on the way stories are narrated during the asylum interview (Biehl, 2015). Several asylum decisions that omitted critical information (e.g. ill-treatment, torture) have been documented by the Asylum Information Database (2019). For example, an asylum seeker from DRC was not considered credible describing his

torture allegations. According to the decision made, he was not narrative enough in the ways he described his torture.

According to the Greek state and EU asylum policies, Asylum status in Greece are granted to people with the fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or because they are in danger of suffering serious harm in their country of origin or the previous residence (Asylum Information Database, 2019). To ascertain whether newcomers after March 2016 suffered significant harm, the Greek state and EU use so-called vulnerability criteria, which allows certain groups to seek asylum from the mainland instead of the island. These groups are unaccompanied minors, persons with disability or those suffering serious illness, pregnant women, single parents with minors, victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, a post-traumatic disorder (particularly survivors and relatives of shipwrecks, victims of human trafficking). Meeting any of these criteria does not guarantee asylum status. The decision is based on whether or not asylum-seekers come from a certain country or sound convincing enough.

Tunaboylu (2019) who studied liminality among refugees on two island camps in Greece, argues that the criteria of vulnerability within the EU-Turkey deal was directly related to deservingness of asylum seekers as those who were vulnerable were allowed to go to the mainland and live in UNHCR housing. The vulnerability assessments carried out on the arrival in the island hotspots were inadequate due to the shortage of the medical staff, interpreters, translators, and layers providing legal assistance. Moreover, in an asylum system, which prioritized vulnerability over protection, asylum seekers were forced to circumvent the existing law and negotiate their vulnerability. For example, there

were instances when couples decided decide to have a baby to speed up their transfer to the mainland and ultimately be granted the status. Moreover, as Cantat (2018) argued vulnerability assessments linked the access to rights not to political subjectivities but one's position as a victim and suppressed one's agency. According to Cantat, migrants had to demonstrate extreme forms of suffering and illnesses to qualify for care, which was deeply problematic and further reflected EU's controlling mechanisms towards migrants.

In a new reality, some asylum seekers could recount their stories in a way that wins the hearts and minds of asylum officers. Others, on the other hand, were put in unfair conditions as they were not able to circumvent the law and negotiate their vulnerability or deservingness. Aida was one of these latter cases. In the asylum framework, vulnerability was equated to deservedness. Exercising agency and choice are presumed as undeserving of protection. Aida mentioned to me misunderstandings between her and the social worker and the lawyer that were in charge of her case which farther indicates a lack of cultural competence from officials' side. Specifically, when she was called to discuss next steps for her asylum case, Aida had a question which was ignored by the social worker and the lawyer, which left Aida very frustrated: "after that, I did not want to talk to them, and I just stayed silent the whole time, I did not say a word," she remembers. Cultural differences and the culture of mistrust from the interviewer's side might have influenced the way Aida's story was interpreted. "They don't listen," she said. Lack of understanding between asylum officer and Aida might have influenced the way her story was perceived and therefore interpreted as undeserving or genuine enough.

As Biehl argues the very nature of asylum interviews produces additional uncertainties and anxieties and contributes to the liminal condition of asylum seekers (2015).

Aida refused to continue to live in a state of uncertainty. She decided to return to Sudan with the help of IOM that coordinates voluntary returns to countries of origin. She told me: “I don’t want to apply again. I waited for three years and they said no, I cannot wait three more years.” Demobilized and disempowered by the prolonged uncertainty and liminlity, she decided to return to Sudan despite the danger. Returning to her family would allow her to regain some control over her life. “I don’t believe in anything anymore,” Aida said to me. Life went to waste in front of her eyes. At the beginning of arrival, she was hopeful but now as time passes, she had no hope left. Aida represented an “undeserving” asylum seeker for the European Union as she was not vulnerable enough (Watters, 2007).

Aida’s inclination to travel back home was spurred by her desire to restore her “disrupted life” and liminality (Becker, 1999, p.4). Liminality manifested in feelings of not progressing and stalled. When refugees have no sense of going anywhere, they become liminal subjects over who the power is exercised. It has a debilitating effect. On top of a constant state of uncertainty, she experienced multiple tragedies including a dangerous journey, life in Moria, her spouse’s unfortunate accident, and a loss of her father. Life went by and she felt she was not taking part in it. However, at the time of our interview, she was denied going back as Sudan was considered dangerous enough. On the other hand, she had to leave UNHCR funded housing as she was no more eligible. Thus, Aida was in real limbo – could not go back home and stay in Athens. “I am very stressed, every day,” she told me a week before I left Athens. “I don’t know what to do.” The state

of limbo she lived in with not having control over her life caused distress and anxiety. Her life in Greece did not coincide with what she dreamed of, which left her family in suffering.

As Lucht argues having a sense of the outside world as a permanent and reliable whole for existence is a vital component of life (2012). Aida's life was going nowhere and was stuck in one place, which contradicts what consists of the viability of life. For her, the outside world was not reliable or permanent but constantly changing, precarious, and untrustworthy. In El-Shaarawi's words, living in transit disrupted Aida's expected and imagined live trajectories (2015). Aida's suffering was a result of the broader political, economic, and social contexts in Greece and the EU. Her narration of illness ("sad," "depressed") was a reflection of the larger structural violence and social injustice.

Haas presents the idea that undeserving asylum seekers prolonged waiting is a technique to discipline asylum seekers (2015). This notion has also been voiced by Melissa's social worker. According to her the EU and Greece deliberately prolong the process of resettlement. They don't grant asylum, but at the same time don't expel refugees. "They benefit from having refugees stranded in Greece," she said. A General Manager of one of the largest national NGO of SolidarityNow, Antigone Lyberaki also expressed similar sentiments: "stranding people in those camps was a political decision to signal other refugees that they should not come."

Other asylum-seeking and refugee women I talked to also assumed that once in Europe, they would be able to live safely. For instance, Afghani women would no longer be afraid of the Taliban or Syrian women of violent groups in Syria. However, once they reached Greece, a getaway to Western Europe, they were faced with the never-ending

waiting period. “We were afraid of death in Afghanistan because of the Taliban. "Here we don’t die right away, but it’s a slow death," one of the asylum seekers disclosed in the conversation with. "Slow death" echoes the constant struggle between hope and disappointment. On one hand, asylum seekers were hopeful for a better life and agreed on enduring everyday oblivion. On the other hand, every negative decision or absence of decisions, lack of information, a feeling of insecurity and impunity made their hopes weathered. Many women mentioned with me how every day was the same and boring for them. "Every day, I get up, eat, take a bus, come to Melissa, attend classes, say goodbye, take a bus again, go to my camp, make food and go to sleep, and again next day" one of the asylum-seeking women- Leyla- mentioned to me.

Leyla

Leyla was another refugee woman who was affected by the uncertainty of waiting. An English teacher from Afghanistan in her mid-twenties, she arrived in Moria camp three years ago with her mother, three siblings, and their families, just little after the EU-Turkey deal. While two of her siblings were able to get the asylum in Germany, her mother, brother, and herself were stuck on Lesvos island. [5] All family members were able either to relocate to Germany (siblings with families) or Athens (her mother and a single brother). The latter was deemed vulnerable because of the psychological conditions and was granted asylum status in 2019. Given the circumstances, Leyla was the only one left in Moria camp - an extremely dangerous place, especially for a single

[5] Her siblings paid to smugglers to be transferred to Germany where they got the asylum cases since they had kids

woman. Leyla told me that she felt unsafe and was always afraid in the camp, especially during the night. One day she was able to smuggle herself on a boat with the help of her friends departing for Athens and reunite with her mother. At first excited to leave Moria, she did not realize the impacts of the voluntary departure and the harsh reality of life without documentation. Asylum seekers in Greece are confined to camps once they arrive and are restricted by the geographical confinement unless they qualify as vulnerable. If they violate the rule of geographical restriction, their cases get repealed unless they return to their primary reception and apply to the asylum all over again. One does not have the right to start the asylum claim in the mainland.

Since Leyla did have any documentation, she technically did not exist. She was invisible in Athens. Therefore, she could not go to the doctor nor access services that otherwise were available for other "registered" asylum seekers in Athens.

Leyla was left at the mercy of her mother and a few organizations that provided services requiring no paperwork. Thus, she found refuge in organizations like Melissa Network for socialization and classes and MSF for healthcare. She had been trying to get her asylum situation solved with the help of an outside lawyer that Melissa connected her with. Despite her attempts to appear at the court to justify the reasons for her escape (she had doctor's notes about her ill health) from the camp, the court postponed her hearing multiple times. She was still waiting throughout my stay in Athens. On top of this, she did not get a lot of support from lawyers and did not have complete information about her case.

When I asked her if she regretted escaping from Moria, she told me that situation was so dire, she would have died if she stayed. At least she was with her mother in

Athens and could come to Melissa. Every day looked similar for her: leaving the camp early morning with her mother, riding the bus for almost 1.5 hours to attend sessions at Melissa, and then going back to camp in the evening. I talked with her almost daily to check how she felt and if there was anything new. Nothing related to the court hearing changed for the duration of my stay in Athens. Leyla told me that she has been "stuck" for more than two years already and had no hope in judges: “I am afraid that they will send me back to Moria.”

Leyla’s experience with geographical restriction was an example of what Biehl calls “containing” policy of the state, which further contributes to the state of uncertainty (2015, 58). It’s been two years that Leyla left the camp without authorization. Since then she became an “illegal’ asylum seeker in Greece, undeserving of care. Leyla was afraid of being caught by the police who sometimes checks people’s IDs in public transportation to detain undocumented migrants. Geographical restriction and containment reflect the state’s securitization approach to control the physical movement of refugees. Greece’s asylum system with its border and mobility control normalizes security approaches. More extreme manifestations of the securitization approach were asylum seekers’ detention, police raids of squats (informal residential places for refugees). Containment and securitization are closely linked to uncertainty (Biehl, 2015). Securitization that was normalized under the laws of containment spread fear and further intensified feelings of insecurity.

The larger injustices and negligence manifested in illness talk with Leyla. Thinking about her future and being scared of going back to Moria, Leyla told me that she felt constant stress. She first started feeling anxious and stressed in the Moria camp.

She believed anxiety and stress led her to develop anemia and thyroid. Recently her stress manifested in stomachache (soon after diagnosed as gastritis). The organization that she was working with at Lesvos as a translator promised her to take to the doctor, but it took seven months to happen. I was in touch with her in October 2019 and she told me that she also had developed nose bleeds, that she ascribes to her stress. Insomnia was another symptom which she also thought was the result of her constant thinking about her future. "I always think about what will happen to me," she told me. Her embodied experiences of exile were responses to social and political suffering that she was placed into. Feeling "stressed," "anxious," having "stomachache" was her illness and body talks as Coker believes asylum seekers deploy to make sense of the situation of limbo, suffering, and experience of trauma. As I was observing, Leyla had a lack of interest in doing things. She was reluctant to participate in activities at Melissa. Once I asked her to go together to the organization that might potentially help her with part-time employment, but she was reluctant as she was already thinking that it will not work out. I did not want to raise her hopes but also offered my help in this process.

Zeynab and Amaya

Lives of people who were granted asylum status looked somewhat better as they knew that they at least had the right to stay; however, they were left without assistance to find a job, access to housing or social services. They face other types of the structural issues such as accessing housing and employment.

Loneliness and loss of social support often associated with exile is another contributing factor to refugees' illness (Coker, 2004). One of my other interviewees –

Zaynab – a woman in her late fifties from Iran, emphasized her feelings of loneliness and depression due to having a lack of social support and employment opportunities in Athens. She talked about having a headache because of thinking about this all the time:

> Women from Afghanistan and Iran feel lonely in Greece. They are used to depend on men back home but here it is a different culture. European women are used to be independent, but our women need someone to depend on. Also, women here feel very lonely. I feel very lonely in Greece. I don't have friends; I don't speak Greek and it is hard to make friends or find a job. I feel depressed and my head hurts. Even when I am talking about it now, my head hurts. I don't know what will happen to me, I don't know my future. I feel depressed all the time about this. But I realized what is the use of being depressed all the time, it will never change anything. I will be depressed every day. Nothing will change. Why should I be depressed? So, I told myself, I need to get up and do something. If I spoke Greek, I could have Greek friends who could help me. Because I don't know Greek, I cannot start working. I had a great job back in Iran – I had everything, but I here cannot find job.

Zaynab expressed her experiences of being stuck through her illness talk and specifically emphasizing on feelings of loneliness and lack of motivation. She was thinking too much (Yarris, 2017). She also told me how she had developed anemia and spent few two months a year in hospital. However, she did not allow her illness to take over her everyday life. When I asked about how she dealt with symptoms, she said:

> I can be sad and crying all the time, but I get up and drink coffee, take sugar, some food and start the day. I am feeling good. I am making myself feel good. I can be sad all the time – but I refuse to. My only wish now is to learn Greek and find a job. If I find a job, I know my character – I will be successful at work. I just wish I could find the job.

Unlike Aida and Layla, Zaynab had a refugee status. Originally from Iran, she got her asylum granted on the grounds of the fear of political prosecution. However, even though she had the right to work, her access to job opportunities was pretty much non-existent. Those who have been granted the refugee status discover that indefinite waiting is often a facet of everyday life as refugees (Bagelman, 2013). According to Bagelman,

many refugees still face structural impediments while looking for employment while waiting persists. Integration is manifested as chronic dependency on charity, which is true not only for women who are seeking asylum but those who have a refugee status granted and in theory have the right to work. The case of Zaynab illustrates that legal uncertainty is just one dimension of a life in limbo where racism and structural exclusion from economic opportunities are other dimensions.

One of the other women that I interviewed was Amaya from Iran who already was recognized as a refugee and who was also able to complete her master's degree in Athens two years ago under the fellowship. However, she was not able to find a job after graduation. She spoke very good English. "Everybody calls me for the translation, I want to do more than that, I want to work in marketing, that's what my master's degree was about," she said during our interview. Amaya felt depressed all the time because she had been applying to a lot of jobs without success. She did not get any guidance and support from her the state through employment trainings and neither from her school. Her and Zaynab's case demonstrate that limbo and uncertainty also serve as disruption of employment and education to those who have acquired a legal presence.

Leyla's was always accompanied by her mother with whom she lived in Skaramangas camp. While I was never able to talk with Leyla's mother, I knew from Leyla that she experienced psychological issues for which she had been hospitalized. She also had been mistreated by camp officials and taken to the police for being uncooperative after she expressed her worries to be transferred to another tent due to the disturbing neighbors. She would come to Melissa every day with Leyla. She was the least involved in activities and mostly would sit quietly. Sometimes she would say few words

to other women. Part of her family was in Afghanistan, Germany, and Greece. Waiting for the reunification, her face expressed sadness and emptiness.

Perspectives from Organizations

One of the goals of my interviews with civil society representatives was to understand their perspective on existential immobility in Greece and how they responded to challenges of uncertainty. In an interview with me Kim Vogt who represented a grassroots organization, Hestia Hellas described the destructive impact of waiting on asylum seekers' mental health. According to her, waiting had become an inseparable aspect of asylum seekers' everyday life: waiting for food, housing, and refugee status. While being stuck without work and purpose, people felt bored and lonely, which created a feeling of powerlessness and anxiety:

> People are very bored. When our psychologist talks to them, they say most of the time that they are bored and lonely. Loneliness was mentioned many times – there are families in other parts of Europe, families in home countries might pressure them to send some money back. Refugees don't understand the situation here what Greece wants, waiting and not knowing what will happen is the greater source of the stress.

Kim's position was similar to what I heard from other grassroots and refugee women. I was curious to learn about a larger organization's positions over these issues. Since these organizations played such an important role in Greece, I decided to get in touch with a couple of them. I interviewed the General Manager of SolidarityNow, Antigone Lyberaki, who is the former professor of migration, and now manages one of the biggest migrant and refugee focused organizations in Greece. I was interested in learning her organization's position about life in limbo and integration challenges.

According to Antigone Lyberaki, part of the reason for refugees feeling depressed and sad lay in their preferences to treat Greece as a transit, rather than a destination, country. She believed asylum seekers had entered into the charity dependency mode and become disempowered. Knowing that Greece would not be their destination country, they had less motivation to work towards integration. While asylum seekers were more active and agentive in searching for opportunities, they became more passive as they spent more time in Greece:

> What we found was that when refugees first arrived, they were more forceful and active to take an initiative, but as time passed by, they became less active to take on an initiative. They have entered the mode of the benefit-recipient and somehow, they became less active. Now the integration has become difficult for people who arrived two years ago compared to the ones who arrived maybe few months ago. People don't try to find an employment because they receive the money, they have become dependent, now that they know that they receive money from the organizations.

Regarding asylum seekers as tired because they became comfortable in a giver-receiving environment of aid does not align with the narratives I heard from refugee women. Those who wanted to leave Greece cited its economic condition and lack of jobs as the primary reason. Those who received refugee status were trying to search for jobs and they either were unsuccessful or ended up having jobs as caretakers or occasional translators, which did not provide a stable income. Many revealed to me that they would prefer to stay in Greece if the country provided proper social services, such as education for their children and employment for themselves. The women emphasized Greece having pleasant weather and cultural proximity compared to Western European communities which made it a great place to leave and settle. However, smoother asylum procedures and employment opportunities in countries such as Germany and Belgium sounded more promising and drew them away from Greece.

The disparities between refugee women's stories of limbo, uncertainty, and structural exclusion and the organizational voice and perspective of refugees as dependents on state services on state services are striking. This narrative ignores the larger political, economic, and social policies that refugees are experiencing and internalizing. The larger responsibility is placed on refugees as they need to try hard to fit into the culture and actively seek employment, while in reality access to such services is problematic.

Agency in Waiting

While the politics of spatial and temporal uncertainty was the defining aspects of being an asylum seeker in Greece, many refugees found their agency and voice in the mode of uncertainty. For example, Biehl writes that asylum seekers in Egypt show a form of agency and choice when seeking help with smugglers to reach other destinations to make asylum claims (2015). Although this strategy is fraught with many dangers, it represents a form of agency.

According to some scholars, refugees' narratives of their traumatic experiences associated with the asylum system or precarious journeys are also forms of agency (Rainbird, 2014). By recounting their stories, asylum seekers reassure themselves and make sense of liminality. Articulation of bad experiences allows refugees to assert their existence in new ways and make sense of traumatic experiences. By telling their stories from their perspective they co-write their experiences. Asylum seekers fight confusing and debilitating nature of liminality by understanding their position through narratives. While existential limbo serves to "de-humanize" asylum seekers and question their

existence, raising a voice and narrating stories serves to fight the ambiguity. Stories allow them to reassert themselves and connect to the world that they were denied. Having stories shared and listened to promoted feelings of legitimization and acceptance.

Many women I met at Melissa Network told me stories of their journeys and challenges in Greece. I especially valued these moments as I felt I was trusted and somehow useful to women. Holding their hand and reassuring their feelings as legitimate responses made me an ally in this uncertainty. One of the aims of Melissa Network was to encourage a healing process through sharing and storytelling. Creative activities, such as portrait drawing and poem writing allowed experiences and trauma to translate into the art. While I describe Melissa's activities in the next chapter, here I share the artwork of one of the refugee women whose cry to be heard is expressed in this piece (Figure 5.1)

While the majority of women enjoyed telling their stories, some did not want to share their traumatic past. For example, Zeynab did not want to talk about her problems. Instead, she wanted to bring happiness to the center. She would often play traditional Iranian and Afghani music and make other women dance and sing.

Aida's decision to go back home to Sudan was also form of agency. While Aida lived in this alienated time for three years, she refused to submit her distorted positionality anymore and let others decide her future. Despite her struggles, Leyla never stopped talking to her friends about her story and kept looking for support from local organizations, like Melissa. Zeynab

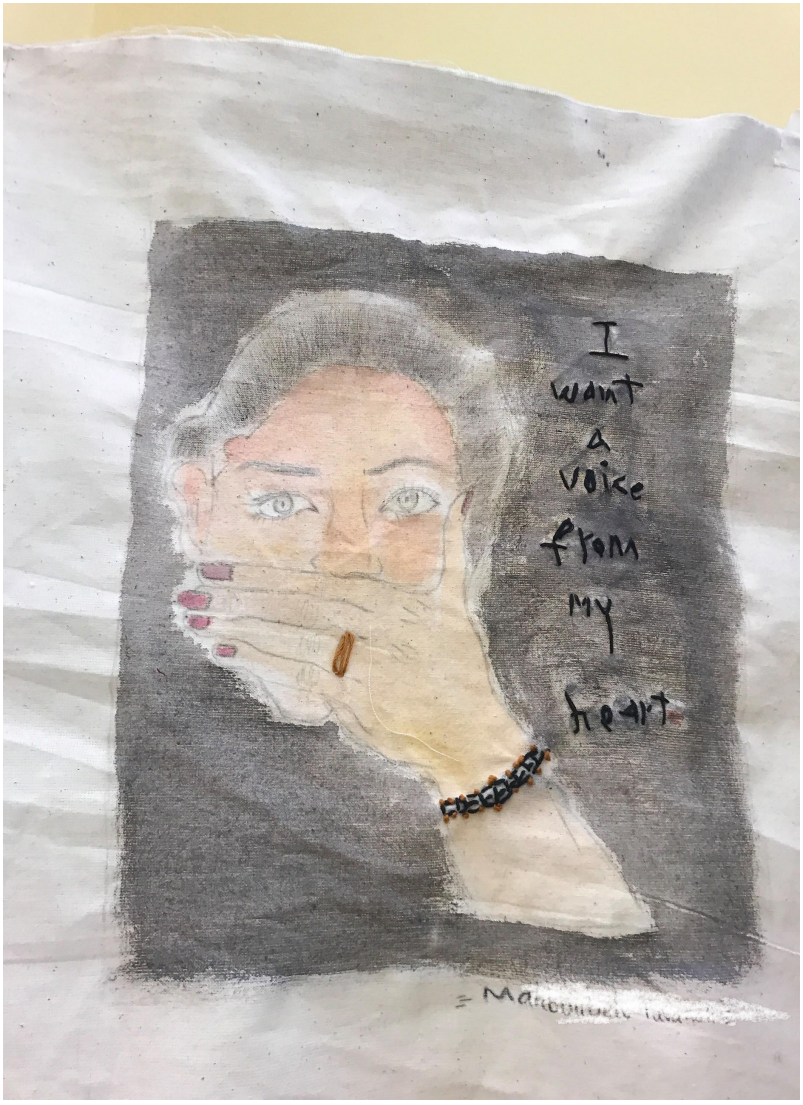

Figure 5.1. *I want a Voice from My Heart.* Artwork by refugee women from Melissa

would come to classes every day and try to improve her Greek while also entertaining women at Melissa by playing and singing various songs. To me, these represented examples of the healing process and resistance that was fostered by Melissa's facilitated workshops. Where according to Bourdieu (1997) waiting and unpredictability serves as to power to control people as long as they are hopeful, asylum-seeker and refugee women in

Greece tried to regain the control by either going back home or narrating their stories in safe spaces like Melissa Network.

CHAPTER VI

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS AS *SOLIDARIANS* IN GREECE

In the era where refugees are placed in limbo and uncertainty and their victimhood and vulnerability are equated to deservingness, grassroots organizations and volunteers provide services that aim to reinstate refugees' dignity and promote discourses different than vulnerabilities. The missions of such organizations reflect a shift from the provision of basic needs to the integration approach, and the long-term commitment of the Greek state and society to integrate refugees. The grassroots organizations refer to themselves as *solidarians* who perform solidarity by empathizing with vulnerable populations, providing much-needed assistance, and fighting against racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

Despite the emergence of various organizations to support asylum seekers and migrants in the country, research on them has been scarce and limited (Kalogeraki, 2019). According to the Papadopoulos et al., even though civil society organizations are intermediaries between the state and refugees and represent interests of migrants, they still are under-researched considering "the impact on the prospects for the migrants and the opportunities of the latter for integration in the host countries (2013, p. 344). While there has been some research on how solidarity practices evolved in the context of the recent "refugee crisis" (Rozakou 2016; Afouxenidis et al 2017; Siapera 2019), "little is known whether formal and informal migrant organizations frame their solidarity initiative similarly or in different ways" (Kalogeraki, 2019, p. 3). Inspired by the ideas of the solidarity rooted in the specific context of Greece, in this chapter, I present the ways in which grassroots organizations in Greece support refugees to alleviate challenges of

limbo, support integration and perform solidarity, I situate their work in Greece's historical and cultural context, which created and redefend solidarity and humanitarianism that exists today. Through in-depth interviews with representatives of the grassroots organizations, I show how their activities reflect solidarity to migrants. I especially illustrate the ways in which migrant women's organization Melissa Network promotes ideas of integration and fight the limbo through the gendered care relationships. I argue that the country's transformation from the transit to potential destination/resettlement state, calls for the shifts from the provision of basic needs to the integration approach to alleviate limbo and uncertainty among refugee populations. This shift reflects the principles of the *solidarians* and grassroots organizations that work most closely with asylum seekers and support equality, egalitarianism, and horizontal governance. I argue that these organizations are the product of the Greek solidarity initiatives that originated since the 2008 financial crisis and are influenced by the history of migrants' challenges in Greece. Grassroots organizations play a vital role in working towards integration, demonstrating allyship towards refugees, and alleviating kinds of liminality I described in Chapter V.

I present how perspectives of refugees themselves, grassroots, and larger NGOs, differ, and relate to each other in areas of service provision and integration. While international individual volunteers are solidarians themselves and participate in redefining the humanitarian landscape in Greece, I discuss their contributions in Chapter VII. Volunteers are intertwined with grassroots organizations as the majority of volunteers work with those organizations. They are solidarians; however, they occupy different roles. Grassroots organizations usually have professional organization structure, with

paid staff and external funding (Kalogeraki, 2019). They have a history of working with refugees in a systemized and structural manner and offer various resources related to human rights, education/training, dissemination of information, psychosocial service, legal assistance which primarily aim to strengthen migrant's self-efficacy and integration into the host society. Some organizations I interviewed were founded either by the Greeks and migrants themselves or international development professionals, volunteers, or a combination of any of these groups. Volunteers usually occupy temporal positions in various organizations and help with either administration, daycare, translation, medical support, or other relevant tasks. Volunteers are unpaid, while the staff of the grassroots organizations receives remuneration for the service.

Evolution of Solidarity in Refugee Reception

Greece became known as the center of solidarity following the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe. The Aegean islands, with limited economic resources as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and austerity measures, were faced with enormous pressure to handle a large number of arrivals. Austerity measures hamstrung the Greek state's capacity to even meet the basic needs of its citizens. A lack of support from the EU and the state provoked mass solidarity from all around the world, which mobilized millions of financial and in-kind donations (Gkionakis, 2016). During the first days of refugee arrival, management of the reception almost exclusively fell on the shoulders of grassroots organizations, individual volunteers, and local communities, which despite the chaotic and improvised nature of the situation, made a great impact. Their involvement

was paramount, especially considering an inadequate, or sometimes absent political and administrative measures of the Greek and the European authorities (Tsoni, 2016)

Soon after more than one hundred NGOs (Nongovernmental Organizations) and INGOs (International Nongovernmental Organizations) launched humanitarian operations in Greece. The Greek government delegated the management of the refugees to those organizations, while the coordination of the organizations was in the hands of the UNHCR (Papataxiarchis, 2016). INGOs such as MSF, IRC, Doctors of the World, Catholic Relief Services, and Mercy Corps -- as well as national nonprofits in Greece employing international volunteers -- such as Diotima and SolidarityNow -- were one of the key actors alongside the UNHCR. Rozakou argues the collaborative work of various organizations redefined traditional humanitarianism and created "vernacular humanitarianism" which emerged from the Greek historical and cultural context (2017, p. 103). Intergovernmental, international and national humanitarian organizations, local grassroots groups, Greek citizens, independent volunteers, and *solidarians* worked together, formed unexpected coalitions, collaborated and often competed with one another: "Lesvos became the focal point of reconfiguration of humanitarianism and the emergence of vernacular humanitarianism" (p. 103). Vernacular humanitarianism -- also referred to as "solidarity humanitarianism" transformed the established nature of humanitarian action usually dominated and managed by large-scale, traditional humanitarian actors such as international organizations (p.103). While some principles of the larger organizations are different from that of grassroots and *solidarians,* all actors worked together to meet the gap between refugee needs and services available.

Solidarity humanitarianism questions traditional humanitarianism which my interviewees often characterized as institutions with bureaucratic and vertical forms of governance. The word solidarian (*allileggyos* In Greek) has a specific genealogy in the Greek context. Solidarity humanitarianism emerged in the austerity ridden Greece during 2011 as a response against the structural adjustment and debt management programs that left many vulnerable populations in an incredibly precarious situation (Rakapoulos, 2016). Thousands of Greeks started setting up social clinics, pharmacies, soup kitchens to support people affected by the crisis. Solidarity participants draw on ideas of forming a *horio* (village), and *allilovoithia* (mutual aid), which has been central for the Greek village world with the principles of equality and egalitarianism.

Solidarians are also often associated with radical and anarchist groups in Greece. In the 1980s and 1990s, the term had a political meaning ascribed to the anarchist and anti-authoritarian initiatives in post-dictatorship Greece. Anarchists occupied schools in Athens, marched against the government which often resulted in clashes with police forces (Rozakou, 2018). Despite initial connotation to the anarchist movement, the term solidarians also acquired new meanings and became broadly used to denote groups supporting migrants, refugees, and poor Greek citizens in the 2000s. For example, after the "EU-Turkey deal" was announced, the groups of anarchists occupied an eight-floor-abandoned hotel -- called the City Plaza in the center of Athens to offer housing to hundreds of migrants and refugees (Mezzadra, 2020). The City Plaza with other squats became alternatives to the state and UNHC-run camps, which were squalid, dangerous and degrading (Crabapple, 2017). The goal of the squats was also to bring refugees from the remote areas to the city center. The City Plaza was one of the examples of many

networks of squats, festivals, social centers, solidarity kitchens, cafes that formed multi-ethnic, politically radical fabric of several Athens neighborhoods. The City Plaza was managed by its founders and migrants where everybody participated in the management, shared everyday life and resolved disputes together. It became a place of solidarity, where its members shared the ideas of living and struggling together and self-organizing to make a change. The City Plaza emphasized the autonomy and subjectivity of migrants and refugees that were not "reduced to the combination of charity and technocratic management that characterizes the paradigms of NGOization and produces specific victimizing and managerial effects" (Mezzadra, 2020, p. 5). By offering place of participatory governance, the City Plaza differed from large humanitarian organizations, that delivered services to the most vulnerable and are often characterized with bureaucratic processes.

Solidarity is different from hospitality and bureaucratic frameworks of assistance to refugees and asylum seekers (Rozakou, 2018). *Solidarians* occupy conceptually different space than larger nonprofits and play a vital role in vernacular humanitarianism. Solidarity emphasizes lateral and anti-hierarchical relations, where solidarians engage in an egalitarian and beyond gift-giving relationship with refugees (Rozakou, 2017). *Solidarians* refuse to call refugees "beneficiaries," and go against the official humanitarian world of aid giving, its bureaucratic principles and frameworks of assistance.

Solidarity work is different from the humanitarian assistance provided by the larger institutions with the support of bilateral or multilateral donors. In her study of solidarity and citizenship in Greece, Cabot argued that humanitarian work was not the

same as solidarity initiatives, however, sometimes they might be providing similar services (2019). Solidarity initiatives usually distanced themselves from more vertical based governance of an NGO, often described as an institutionalized and well-funded entity with the professional staff. There is "a gap between the one who offers care and the one who receives it" (p.761). However, as Cabot wrote with increased EU funding available to Greece, solidarity initiatives started working alongside and in collaboration with humanitarian institutions. This is in line with Rozakou's argument, who concluded that while Solidarians were different from traditional humanitarians, they were still interwoven with each other in the specific context of Greece. They all share feelings of solidarity, however, with various degrees of radicalization.

Since 2015, the work of the grassroots organization evolved as a response to the constantly changing nature of refugee reception in EU policies. As shared my interviewees with grassroots organizations' representatives, the closure of Balkan Route and the EU-Turkey agreement stranded thousands of refugees in Greece, which prompted grassroots organizations to adapt their operations to the emerging needs of the refugee population and help those stranded in limbo. In 2016, a significant part of the EU financial assistance was channeled to non-state actors which prompted some *solidarians* to cooperate with large international organizations and receive funding from them. This meant that a lot of self-organized groups decided to form more formal structures of governance. This represented a shift into the institutionalization, officially registering as a nonprofit organization, and deploying international volunteers. Some *solidarians* decided not to make this move as they were afraid of the "NGO-ification of solidarity" (Rozakou, 2017, 103). NGOs usually are characterized by vertical

governance and bureaucracy and focus on securing funding at the expense of the first-hand contact with affected populations.

Some scholars argue that solidarity initiatives and activities of grassroots organizations changed in accordance of the different stages of the refugee reception. According to Oikonomakis (2018), during the first stage of the "refugee crisis" the gaps left by the unprepared Greek state were filled by these organizations and volunteers. However, the closure of the Balkan route and the EU-Turkey agreement initiated the second phase where solidarity initiatives were allowed only to registered organizations and receive the EU funding. Therefore, refugee solidarity initiatives changed their activities and concentrated on a more rights-based and integration approach, which corresponded to the challenges of those on the mainland.

The nature of the solidarity is largely influenced by the Greek context alongside with the scale of the "refugee crisis." Vandevoordt (2019) researched the importance of local context, political, and social environment in the evolution of volunteering and civil society movements. In comparing two refugee response civil society initiatives in different regions of Belgium, the history of past solidarity and resistance movements greatly defined how the two regions responded. The diverse composition of Brussels and its constant reemergence as a site of crisis with already existing multilevel opportunity structures allowed larger citizen mobilization in supporting refugees. This was not the case in Flanders, which did not have as much history of mobilization. Therefore, local circumstances predispose the intensity and magnitude of solidarity responses.

Based on my interviews with grassroots organizations' representatives, NGOs, and my observations, I present the ways in which these organizations embodied

principles of solidarity, assisted refugees and asylum-seekers, and alleviated challenges of the limbo. Grassroots organizations work closely with refugees and have a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences. Having first-hand experience, they challenge the ways in which the integration is administered and propose alternative and exemplary ways of the integration. Their actions are rooted in specific Greek contexts – the country with a long history of solidarity towards the vulnerable populations.

Below I discuss the work of the women-centered organization, Melissa Network, and present how their activities constitute political action through women's empowerment and active participation. Jointly with other grassroots, I show how Melissa Network's activities encapsulate integration and long-term positive change. I present the views of three grassroots organizations and two advocacy groups that are working closely with migrants. I also discuss the work of larger organizations - the UNHCR and SolidarityNow to illustrate how their mandate is different or similar to those of grassroots.

Transnational Care, Intimacy and Activism

During two months of volunteering at Melissa Network, I was able to observe their work and how the organization responded to the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking women. Melissa was founded in 2014 by a group of migrant women to provide a platform for networking, capacity building, and advocacy for refugee and migrant women. While at the beginning of the refugee reception, the Network provided emergency aid to refugee women, the founders soon realized that women needed more comprehensive and fundamental support. Therefore, their mission and operations

transformed to promote migrant and refugee women's empowerment, communication, and active citizenship through the provision of innovative integration programs, which included psychological support, language classes, arts and crafts, and awareness raising trainigns for refugee women (Melissa Network, 2020). The founders of Melissa Network were active leaders in their respective migrant communities. Having experienced migration to Greece 20-30 years ago with limited state social support, they were most acutely aware of the challenges that migrant women experience in Greece. Through migrant centers, these women formed collaborations, shared resources and information about their rights.

What made Melissa Network such a unique and welcoming place? The small space that network occupied barely held 100 individuals one at a time, but more than 500 women were on the waitlist. One of my interviews called Melissa Network a "mother's home." A home where you can feel like yourself, where you don't have to pretend that you are someone else, where you always have someone to talk to. Being slightly intimidated when I first arrived, I recall women greeted me and were interested in learning about me. I felt that they were my hosts in their own homes. The women invited me to attend their intimate conversations and engage in daily activities. Along with psychological support through group drama and individual therapies, the Network also had various crafts activities such as painting, embroidery, poetry, theater, which allowed women to embrace identities that were different from what they have been ascribed to, such as refugees and victims. In the environment where vulnerability and victimhood were normalized as the basis of deservingness, Melissa Network allowed women to explore and express themselves as artists, actors, or cooks.

The majority of the literature within intersections of refugee and women's studies focus on vulnerability and victimhood of refugee women, rather than their collective and individual organizing abilities (Christopoulou & Leontsini, 2017). Various reports on the "refugee crisis" emphasized on women being the victims of sexual- and gender-based violence in Greece. While many women encounter violence throughout the journey that calls for discussion, the propensity to merely reduce women's experiences to victimhood further reinforces the legitimacy of the vulnerability criteria deployed in the European Asylum system described in preceding chapters.

Mahler and Pessar argue that migration scholarship lacks a deep analysis of women's multifaceted experiences of forced migration because the figure of the migrant was assumed to be male, and women migrants were excluded from the research (2006). As Kofman et al., note, the reason of invisibility of women in migration research is that dominant models of studying migration have been in terms of labor migration where a migrant worker was assumed to be a man and women were perceived to be economically inactive, thus, not worthy of examining (2000). When analyzing female migration, the women were considered to migrate to accompany or reunite with their husbands and family. The term "women and children" which has been broadly used in mainstream development and migration scholarship depicts the invisibility of women's unique experiences and their perceptions as a group in need of protection. Giles argues that refugee women were often seen as dependents or "helpless" by humanitarian workers, and the voice has been given to men in deciding what resources migrant communities might need (2003). Moreover, as Malkki states, forced migration academics and practitioners largely identify, portray, and respond to "refugee women" as apolitical and

non-agentic victims (1992). While they recognized that women's experiences of displacement differed from men's, these accounts often reduced gendered experiences to women's vulnerability to sexual violence, rather than acknowledging that displaced women could simultaneously be victims but remain active agents deserving of respect instead of pity (Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Similarly, various reports about the "European refugee crisis" highlighted the vulnerability of women in camps with a lack of adequate housing and healthcare provision in Greece. While this was a common theme on the ground, the lack of more balanced coverage of women's diverse backgrounds, responsibilities, and skills might have contributed to already mainstream discourses on vulnerability. The instances of sexual and gender-based violence attracted a lot of attention while less emphasis was placed on other types of gendered impacts of the crisis, such as uneven care work and women's lack of participation in public spheres. Therefore, not much had been done to support women in the redistribution of care work or creation of public spaces for participation (Oxfam, 2016) The attention solely to SBC, without addressing political and economic participation partly contributed to an environment which failed to adequately prevent SGBV (Oxfam, 2016). In this context, organizations like Melissa Network emerged to fight the mainstream and reductionist understanding of women's experiences. While the Network addressed the psychological challenges of women through individual and group therapy sessions, at the same time, it urged to explore and fight against more subtle forms of gender inequalities. The Network strived to empower women to become positive changes in their communities, instilled the ideas that women had the potential to mobilize resources, make a change for the disadvantaged and combat the discourses of xenophobia and racism.

Gender and feminist analysis of migration studies first emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s with a conception of gender as a static category at birth and usage of binaries of male versus female to measure gender differences. However, it was still an improvement over research that only studied men and generalized those findings to all migrants. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000) refers to this stage as fixing exclusion of women from research by "adding and stirring" them into the existing framework. This state is also referred to as "women and development" or "women and migration." Migrant women were added as a variable, inserted and measured with regard to education, fertility, and other quantitative categories.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000) argues that the research of this period was only concentrated on women and did not take into account how gender as a social construct impacted the migration process for all migrants. This promoted attachment to the sex role theory, which argues that women and men have different sex roles, which are static. One of the examples of this analysis of concentration on how domestic roles anchor women's migration and how involvement in public-sphere activities facilitates men's migration. Assumption of women being too traditional and culture-bound was also present in the sex-role theory which ignored issues of power relations and social change. The gender analysis conducted by Oxfam in Greece, concluded that despite the abundance of research and formal commitments by international institutions and national governments, the responses to the refugee reception in Greece failed to include women's voices and facilitate women's equal access to interventions (2016). The humanitarian institutions many times "actively reinforce power imbalances by relying on a "male breadwinner" assumption," consultations with local communities are often limited to male heads of

household, and self-appointed community leaders and decision-makers who are commonly men, therefore ignoring priorities and needs of women (7). The report argued that women were absent from public spheres and from accessing information. This was compounded by women's care responsibilities which disabled women to participate in information sharing sessions. The women especially had hard times to organize collectively to inform and influence decisions. The report also stated that migrant women relied their choices on humanitarian actors, which left them disempowered and passive. For example, women were not able to choose the clothes for themselves, but rather different pieces of clothing were distributed to them that did not match their needs, cultural preferences and weather conditions.

In the mid- and late 1980s, feminist migration scholars shifted from studying women to studying gender as a system of relations challenged by migration. This has promoted complex understandings of how gendered institutions and gender relations are reconstituted and changed through migration. Migration scholarship started to conceptualize gender as "a structure that shapes power relations in families, communities, and whole societies (Nawyn, 2010). Sotelo (2000) calls this moving from "women and migration" to "gender and migration." The Universal category "women" was disrupted, and intersectionality of race and class was taken into account. The research started to focus on how migration changed the dynamics of gendered systems and roles considering the fluidity of gender relations. For example, in her study Sotelo (2010) found that after migrating to the United States, migrated families from Mexico have had more egalitarian divisions of labor and decision-making in households. Pessar (2003), on the other hand, argues that some of the assumptions of women's liberation were rooted in simplistic

terms that ignored intersections of race and class. One of the weaknesses of this second wave of research was treating a household as the subject of analysis, which assumed that gender happened at home and not in the public sphere (Nawyn, 2010). Much of the literature during the second wave concentrated on gender dynamics within the household. While I have not explored the gendered impacts of the migration in detail, some women mentioned to me that they felt more freedom in Greece, while some had more opportunities to seek education in their origin countries. The difference in experiences should be attributed to sociocultural statuses of women. Marzia told me that she enjoyed walking alone in the streets, which was not very safe for women in Afghanistan. However, some women mentioned that that there had been instanced of increased intimate violence.

The most recent feminist scholarship in migration research, often called the third wave, looked at gender as a constitutive and determining element of the migration experience. For example, Nawyn mentioned the work of Jones-Correa (1998) who documented that immigrant Latino men lose their status after migrating to New York City and try to ensure speedier return back home, while women are more likely to expand their stays and partake in community organization activities. On the other hand, Nawyn also mentions Goldring's (1998) work who studied the community development projects of Mexican migrants in Mexico. Goldring found that men decided resource allocation in those projects, which allowed them to reinstate their social status denied in NYC. Men had a chance to enhance their gender status, while women's participation in community projects was limited to helping men and did not demonstrate active leadership. These findings are in line with the research of Franz, who analyzed Bosnian refugee women in

Austria (2003). Franz found that women found jobs much easier than Bosnian men, who were reluctant to be employed in low-paying jobs and missed their social status back in home countries. Men were more committed to and involved in maintaining transnational ties both to facilitate a speedier return and to situate themselves in areas of male privilege and reinstate their social status. From my observations and interviews with grassroots organizations, I found that women were more committed to learning the language and found jobs easier than men in areas of caretaking. As the representative of the grassroots organization Hestia Hellas mentioned with me, men tended to be easily discouraged. They looked for quick solutions to earn money which is exacerbated by expectations from the society towards men to provide for the family.

Melissa Network offered the space to socialize and enjoy delicious food provided free of charge to participants. Refugee and asylum-seeking women, staff members, and the director constantly showed and engaged in what Vogt calls "gendered care relationships" (2010, 188). In her book *Lives in Transit*, Vogt explored the embodied violence of Central American migrants in Mexico. Describing female shelter workers, Vogt conceptualized migrant care, intimacy, and activism in shelters in a wider process associated with transnational migration. She linked everyday intimate labors of local women assisting migrants in transit to a more formal and public movement of Central American women and as an expression of the political activism in the broader environment of violence and impunity.

Central American migrant women were not just the victims of violence, as they were often rendered. Rather, through care work, women participated in their personal and public struggles for human rights and justice. Their activities, such as cleaning and

cooking, while might seem associated with domesticity, were "forces of resistance" (p. 189). Thus, the intimate labor of women assisting migrants was a formal and public political stance from Central American women. In shelters of Mexico, migrant women were offered a safe space to express themselves emotionally and grapple with the trauma and suffering they have experienced along the migration journey. Care work was often seen as less valuable than men's labor within the gendered hierarchies. However, through this everyday intimate labor, women moved the labor outside of their households and challenged the larger system of social inequality and discrimination.

In her book *Care Across Generations,* Kristin Yarris connected globalization, gender roles, social and economic inequalities in Nicaragua by placing grandmothers and their intergenerational care in the center of transnational migration (2018). Through solidarity and sacrifice, grandmothers participated in transnational care and upheld their cultural and familial values and gender expectations. While caregiving equated to sacrificing their time and energy, it was also a way to heal and assert a sense of agency for Nicaraguan grandmothers who felt the void left by their daughters' migration. Yarris pointed out the double standard that grandmothers and women played in transnational care and compared their work to men's caregiving (e.g. migrant sons' remittance were not as constant and generous as daughters'). This gendered double standard increased pressure on mothers. Yarris's positioning of women in the transnational chain of care that sustained generations in the context of structural vulnerabilities and deeply embodied gender norms, highlighted women's agency and power.

Christopoulou and Leontsini (2017) who studied migrant women's networks argued that women's networks played a crucial role in fostering social change in the city

of Athens. Due to the gendered stereotypes, migrant women were often regarded as invisible actors in the community and their households. Entrenched gender norms often confined women to domesticity. To the contrary to this mainstream assumption, authors argued that women's work in migrants' networks were examples of how women challenged statuesque and served as transformative agents of change in society through their intimate labor.

Christopoulou & Leontsini (2017) argued that securing access to information was one of the most critical motivations of creating women's networks. Restricting information about asylum claims, relocation, and resettlement was a constitutive element of limbo in a current migration context. According to the authors, limbo and uncertainty impeded the refugee women's agency and narratives. Moreover, they found that a lack of information was a major obstacle in integration. Thus, having access to information allowed migrant women to connect to the city, make themselves visible, and fight the limbo. Women's active involvement and success in networks enhanced the status that they had before the migration and allowed them to de-stigmatize the constructed image of a weak or a dangerous refugee. An active participation fought the public discourses that framed migration as a security threat or refugees as vulnerable. As authors write "getting organized is seen as a way of claiming civil rights and promoting integration" (p.521). Similar to Vogt's argument, Christopoulou & Leontsini see the migrants' social networks as places of collaboration. Care work is a political act, through which women make themselves visible and deserving without deemed vulnerable.

I argue that everyday intimate care by Melissa Network founders and migrant women themselves is a form of resistance, solidarity, and part of vernacular

humanitarianism. In Vogt's words, the women who provided care and support at the Center were "contemporary expressions of transnational constellations of care and social justice" (2019, p.189). They too, most of them being older generation migrants paved the way to the newcomers to Greece and guided through empowerment, advocacy, and experience sharing. Everyday care did not only include getting a warm meal and socializing with each other but also seeking emotional support from staff members through informal care. People providing direct support such as cleaning and cooking were migrants as well. For example, one of the caregivers – Daria - who migrated from Ukraine years ago told me that her past involvement with charitable organizations (e.g. orphanages) in Ukraine motivated her to get involved with Melissa. When she came to Greece, she wanted to feel useful and help others. At Melissa she enjoyed helping women: "I cannot give them money, but I can support them emotionally, give them a hug, talk to women." Daria had also founded her own organization - *Ukrainian women in Greece.* The organization aimed to connect migrant women with each other and share resources. "Ukrainian women, as well as others, for example, Georgians are not safe in Greece. They don't have information about insurance, health care, and many more," Daria shared with me. Although at Melissa she was working in the kitchen, Daria spent a lot of time socializing and making crafts with women. Even though they all came from different backgrounds carrying various migration histories, a sense of solidarity and resistance was unifying all. The fact that the organization was run by migrant women for migrant women made them especially in tune with the specific challenges that women faced.

The Network challenged traditional gender roles by situating women's care work in the centerpiece of their operations. Therefore, it challenged the widespread masculine culture often dominated in bureaucratic organizations, which usually tend to accommodate men's lives who have few competing demands in the private sphere. Instead, the founders illustrated that social care and reproduction and childbearing did not strip women away from their collective and community mobilizing roles. While bureaucratic organizations are often based on men's bodies and masculinity, Melissa Network foregrounded stereotypically feminine emotions of care as the centerpiece of their work. In this sense Network, itself was gendered and promoted women's strength through care and solidarity as opposed to the culture where the care and emotions are associated with weakness and incompetence. Therefore, the network was gendered, uniting women's social and private spheres and agency in once place.

The women at Melissa, most of whom lost extended family ties due to the migration, found "home" and connection within the organization. Through psychological care and integration activities, women were able to learn about their rights and challenge some of the gendered dynamics in their homes. Yasmina - one of the refugee women I talked to walked me through her journey of separation from her husband and how it would have been impossible to separate in her home country. She felt support and understanding in Greece and if not limited employment opportunities she would not want to leave the country. As Jamila said, psychological sessions helped her overcome trauma: "what makes Melissa different is that you can see a result here." This indicated how much Jamila not only improved her life but trusted the organization. I observed the ways in which the Center directors stirred away from rigorous rules (such as requiring women

to attend certain sessions) and instilled trust and confidence within women by giving them decision-making power. This approach was especially remedying as a lot of women had experienced mistrust and hostility from the asylum service.

Most of the women I interviewed also came from families where men were usually considered as the household head and the access to information was limited for women. By providing information about their rights, psychological support, and language education, Melissa Network challenged patriarchal gender dynamics and promoted agency and power of women. While I have not explored much the change within the gender dynamics, in the informal conversations with me, women expressed the freedoms they enjoyed Melissa Network, through forming relationships, exchanging valuable information, and engaging in community activities.

The very location of the center near the area of the right-wing and xenophobic political party proved the network's commitment to dissolve anti-migration sentiments and create a space for the dialogue. The center served as a sanctuary for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant women who found themselves in the midst of limbo and xenophobia. According to co-founder Nadina Christopoulou, she did not want Melissa to be self-contained and enclosed in a location far from the center. Her goal was to promote integration, which had been failed by Greek governments (Bohn & Karas, 2016) The location allowed women to dismantle notions of the Other, engage in neighborhood activities, and create a space for communication between locals and migrants. Since 2015 Victoria square had been makeshift tent city for refugees arriving in Athens. In attempts to help those asylum seekers and refugees, Melissa reached out to its neighbors and shops to help to put together meals and supply bags for stranded people. Miraculously, once

suspicious residents started to help out and open up. For example, the lady in the bakery across the street and local grocery stores showed initiative. “It’s important to give the message to the Greek society that migrants aren’t part of the problem, but part of the solution,” says Christopolou in an interview with Amnesty International (Christensen, 2017). Battling controlling images of migrants as threats to the local culture was an integral part of integration and acceptance, which Melissa decided to spearhead in the community.

Women at Melissa Network, both participants, founders, and staff members, became crucial for the migrants’ lived experience, invoking the sense of belongingness and association fostering with home cultures. Jamila, 24-year-old refugee women from Afghanistan, mother of two, shared with me how Melissa Network helped her overcome depression. With the help of drama therapy that the center provided twice a week, she was able to concentrate on other things such as learning Greek and English:

> At Melissa women are very supported, and women have choices. What makes Melissa different is that you can see a result here. For example, after I attended the drama therapy I felt psychologically very well. Then Melissa employed me at the shelter where I am a caregiver. Melissa for me is like a mother’s home. Through Melissa I feel I belong to the community.

Jamila also compared her experience with Melissa with the bigger nonprofits which according to her, “just want to have the work done and don’t worry about people.” She was particularly disappointed with a representative one of the larger NGO in Greece for culturally misunderstanding and accusing her of putting her children in danger when she left them alone at home as she had to run errands. Shocked by the accusations she said that: “I carried my child in the womb when I crossed the Aegean Sea on a boat, and they told me that I was putting them in danger? They told me that I did it for myself!” It

seemed that cultural sensitivity of founding migrant women and experiences with exclusion created a welcoming environment for refugee and asylum-seeking women. Refugee women did not have to prove their eligibility or vulnerability in order to be the part of the center. A trust and solidarity invoked feelings of belongingness and care between newcomers and host migrant women.

Jamila called Melissa Network a "mother's home," which illustrated the ways in which the Center built trust and relatedness. Creating a mother's home is especially important during the kinds of liminality that was described in earlier chapters. Refugees as liminal subjects lose hope as they are governed by the structural violence under the culture of mistrust. A mother's home creates a sense of belongingness and a sense of "going somewhere," which fights against the protracted waiting and uncertainty that dominate women's lives. Through its interpersonal ties, trust and unconditional support, Melissa Network reinstated trust in humanity and life that many refugees have lost along the way.

Melissa Network considered psychological stability as vital in the integration pathways of refugee women most of whom experienced trauma during and after the migration. An integrative model was trauma-informed and culturally aware. Psychological support that included drama and movement group therapy, psychodrama group counseling, parenting group counseling, and individual psychotherapy emphasized on the agency and centrality of each person, aiming to provide women with sufficient tools to engage actively in the healing process and to become in turn healing agents for those around them (Integra-Train Manual, Melissa Network, n.d.)

The women who have spent few years at Melissa Network engaged in various community mobilizing activities. One of the examples of women becoming active citizens of their communities is Fahima with whom I spent a lot of time navigating social services in Greece. While dealing with various challenges as a refugee and figuring out bureaucratic hurdles, she decided to give back to the community by cooking for Greek homeless people with the help of donations. Being homeless herself when she first arrived in Athens, a team of volunteers from a local church would bring food to her and other asylum seekers sleeping in Victoria park. Now that she received a refugee status on political grounds, Fahima decided to give back to the community and be in solidarity with locals. Providing help was part of the healing process for Fahima as she told me in an interview. In her words, her heart was happy. Through her work, she felt that she was creating something meaningful and impactful, something that instilled feelings of belongingness to the community.

Camila, a woman from Afghanistan, had felt depressed for six months after her arrival in Greece. Her main sources of worry were unemployment and responsibilities associated with being a single mother. She said that she went to every organization she knew to ask for a job, such as PRAKSIS and UNHCR. They promised but never got back to her. One day, she said a voice came to her saying “wake up”, and, according to Camila, “I started to start caring for my life. In Greece everything is disorganized. I went from one place to another.” Finally, she managed to get a job at MSF and then at Melissa as a translator. Camila not only interpreted all sessions and informal conversations but also served as a liaison and mediator between refugee women and Greeks. The moment she realized she had to take care of her life became a pivotal turning point. Rather than

living in the shadow of a victim and having her dreams shattered, she found a purpose in her life. Camila always brought laughter to everybody. Many women asked her for advice about services or questions about the asylum process. Her dual positionality as an Afghani refugee who had faced similar struggles to other women and her familiarity with Greek asylum and nonprofit structures put her in a perfect position to bridge the gap and alleviate anxieties associated with limbo and uncertainty. With the help of Melissa Network, Camila was able to serve as leader to her local community and empower fellow migrants and herself.

Transnational and intergenerational intimate care in a safe space reinstated women's belongingness to the community. The voices of laughter and heated discussions echoed from Melissa Network every day. While larger organizations I talked to mentioned refugees' diminished motivation to engage in integrative activities and passivity, women's involvement and presence in Melissa demonstrated otherwise. However, Melissa represented only a small portion of all refugee women. Everyday women traveled hours from their camps just to attend sessions and talk to their friends. By creating a space of expression, refugee women suddenly were listened to, their stories were appreciated and validated. Through psychological support, creative activities, and intimate care, and even a hug as Daria said, Melissa Network built women's self-sustainability and hope for the future. The center brought a little bit of clarity to everyday uncertainty that permeated the journey of the refugee and asylum seeker women.

Melissa Network thrived to showcase women's multifaced experiences that Mahler and Pessar explore (2006) and promote the visibility of women in media, research and popular discourses. The organization not only promoted empowerment internally

among women, but also tried to fight the xenophobia and entrenched ideologies through the help of various projects, media coverage and research. Every day various journalists and researchers would visit the Network to learn more about the women's extraordinary stories of empowerment and achievement. Melissa Network challenged the mainstream notions of women as vulnerable or as victims. The Network's approach was in line with what second waive feminists argue about the need to look into the intersectionality of women and gender dynamics. The center unified women from various ethnicities and countries with different socio-economic statuses. The organization questioned the notions of the women as "dependents," "helpless," which was often perpetuated by the media narratives of the refugee "crisis." Tying back to the evolution of research on gender and migration, Melissa Network recognized intersectionality of refugee women coming from various countries of origins, ethnicity, race and power relations.

The approach of Melissa proved to be successful due to the number of reasons. The fact that the organization was founded and managed by migrant women for migrant women who had developed valuable expertise in navigating the life of a migrant in Athens, uniquely situated Melissa to understand lived experiences. The center was gendered itself, based on non-hierarchical governance which created trusting and understanding environment. Melissa unified various groups of women from different countries – it was vital to build the understanding between them to avoid further conflict. Many women at Melissa had experienced physical or emotional violence sometimes from their partners that was disclosed during my interviews. Psychological sessions intended to alleviate traumatic experiences of not only migration journey but also tense family relationships that often times where put into. Melissa offered a safe space where women

could socialize without worrying about their traumatic experiences and express themselves. Various reports have documented instances of the violence in camps and household often exacerbated by the challenges of migration. While it's not the focus of my research, few women disclosed that they felt safer in all women environment.

Grassroots Organizations as *Solidarians* within the Discourses of Integration

Similar to Melissa Network, other grassroots organizations I interviewed shared a sentiment on the importance of integrating refugees into the local society. After the "EU-Turkey deal" and the closure of the Balkan Route, a lot of refugees ended up resettling in Greece, while some waiting for the relocation to other EU countries. The representatives of the UNHCR and SolidarityNow (largest national NGO) shared in interviews with me that most of the refugees would either stay in Greece or leave for other EU countries. While being in Greece either temporarily or permanently, it was vital that asylum seekers and refugees were integrated into the society by accessing employment, decent housing, and acquiring language and other transferable skills necessary to live in a new country. In the article on strategies of temporary integration in Athens, Galgano (2017) argued that while many refugees were in Greece temporarily, integration policies were necessary to alleviate the negative effects associated with refugee reception while empowering people to thrive either in Greece or in their final host country. On average, asylum seekers spent between 1-4 years in Greece before they were relocated to other EU countries. Adequate social and economic integration was necessary for more than 100,000 people in Greece, out of which almost 70% lived on the mainland.

With the Greek state's incapacity to implement integration policy, many asylum seekers had been left in precarious conditions. Working closely with asylum seekers and

observing shifts in the political and social spheres, grassroots organizations called for the deliberate action from the state to commit to integration and redress structural inequalities. Grassroots organizations criticized the state's response and argued that provision of only basic needs and operating in the crisis mode was not necessary.

Drawing from my interviews, shifting from "crisis" mode to resettlement demanded different approaches and adaptability of organizations supporting refugees. For instance, the provision of basic needs was no longer enough. Instead, refugees required long-term intentional services, such as psychological support, language classes, educational and employment opportunities. Grassroots organizations who were more attuned with the needs of the communities, were quick to respond to the needs and shift their operations. However, their scale was not enough to accommodate thousands of asylum seekers and refugees. On the other hand, traditional NGOs were not as flexible. Activities of the grassroots organizations expressed the ideas of solidarity by promoting active participation of migrants into the community and gaining transferrable skills.

All my interviews with grassroots organizations emphasized the importance of the state's commitment to the integration of refugees. For example, Manuela Vlahaki Cepeda - the coordinator of grassroots organization Za'atar - shared this sentiment with me. Za'atar empowered refugees and migrants to build self-sufficient lifestyles by providing constructive spaces for education, employment training, and cultural integration (Za'atar NGO, 2019). Za'atar's mission was to "provide a safe space for refugee to rest, learn, feel empowered and grow" (Za'atar NGO, Mission, 2019). According to their website the organization believed in empowerment, not pity: "refugee cook, clean, and teach and attend classes to prepare for their future – whether that future is living independently in

Greece or in another country." In this sense, Za'atar strived to teach refugees skills that were transferable, which they could use no matter where they go.

Manuela emphasized that the shift of the refugee reception from the crisis to the integration mode urged the organization to concentrate on integration rather than the provision of basic care such as housing and meals, which she believed was disempowering and problematic. The organization provided services such as cooking classes, language learning. According to the Za'atar: integration worked in both ways: not only refugees and migrants integrated into European life, but Europeans also had to change the way they viewed migrants and refugees coming to Greece. In this sense, the organization aimed to de-stigmatize the image of the "threatening" asylum seeker. The organization strived to involve local citizens and business in their daily operations. For example, Za'atar invited hairdressers' school for free haircut for refugees, local shops donated bread, milk or any unsold items, Greek musicians volunteered their time to play for refugees and so on. The provision of the services that were beyond distributing food and clothes, aimed to reinstate normalcy in refugees' lives. Services such as haircuts, cooking classes distracted them from everyday limbo and liminality.

Manuela argued that while many adapted to the new reality, some organizations had to abandon their operations as their services had become irrelevant. However, some with generous funding continued operations despite the irrelevance of their activities. Za'atar believed that refugees were human beings deserving to exercise the choice and should not be criminalized for their choice. Manuela argued that her organization aimed to fight against the uncertainty by giving meaning to refugees' lives and promoting a more dignified life.

When asked what made her organization so unique, Manuela said that a diverse composition and migratory background of the leadership made them more sensitive to challenges experienced by migrants in Greek society. The founders were migrants themselves - either first-generation Greeks or with a multi-cultural background, who understood what it meant of not having a choice. “I had the privilege as a migrant to make a choice, but I have seen people not having that luxury, for example, my mother, who was not able to leave Greece for 20 years. We all in our team have seen the meaning of choice and what impact it has on a person's life and the fact that all human beings should have the choice,” expressed Manuela.

Despite the effects of the economic crisis, she regarded Greece was a perfect place for refugee resettlement due to the similarity between Greek and Middle Eastern cultures. She also argued that Greece was characterized by less militarization of migration compared to other places, such as Belgium. Manuela also said that refugees would help Greece economically considering the country's aging population and the need for the labor force.

Her organization received funding from the range of donors, including INGOs. She mentioned her struggles of complying with the strict rules of funding agencies that often did not consider a local context and dictated the distribution of resources according to already set objectives, which often were controversial to be implemented in the local community. As being the first to know about the needs of refugees and migrants, she believed grassroots organizations were powerful tools for many in need.

Kim Vogt, from Hestia Hellas, other grassroots organizations expressed similar rhetoric on migration. The organization provided psychological, vocational, and

educational services to refugees. As Kim said, Hestia Hellas was founded to fill the gap between the need for psychological support and integration and the state's response. Similarly, to the Za'atar, Hestia Hellas saw that a lot of organizations were concentrating on meeting basic needs, but very few were doing something related to long-term solutions, such as psychosocial support and integration. Kim talked about different approaches undertaken by grassroots and contrasted them with bigger organizations:

> We need the community to decide what they need. There is a contrast in big organizations, such as UNHCR and the actual needs of the community. They are the ones that provide most of the funding and they want to fund things like food, immediate assistance because it's catchier and shows up more while providing psychological service does not.

Kim's understanding of the integration that coincided with those of Melissa Network and Za'atar, differed from what UNHCR representative shared with me, who believed that cash assistance and housing provision was the first main steps of the integration. While Kim acknowledged that those things were important, the lack of the long-term solutions impacted community's ability to have a viable life. It seemed to me that local organizations were most close with refugees and understand complex problems that they had that could not be remedied with temporary housing and cash assistance. While these services were very important, they did not provide conditions for viable life.

Unlike Melissa Network and Za'atar, Hestia Hellas was founded by the international development professionals who had an experience working in humanitarian emergencies. The organization employed the Greek staff and international volunteers mostly from the Western Europe and the US. The organization had around 20 volunteers during the summer, each spending 2-4 weeks on average and helping the organization either with English classes, administration or with a daycare.

One of my other interviewees was Joanna Theo represented the grassroots organization Campfire Innovation that she founded to coordinate the delivery of valuable services for those on the islands. Joanna served as a volunteer from a day one in Lesvos to help refugees at the Greek shores, which inspired her to create her own organization.

Joanna reemphasized that grassroots organizations played a paramount role in responding to large arrivals of refugees which among the confusion within NGOs and the state. However, as she disclosed these small organizations were not prepared to handle this kind of emergency due to their small structure and lacked coordination between each other to share resources. For example, as Joanna described one organization had just one nurse and was not able to accommodate refugees, which was a clear sign that they were not prepared to handle the "crisis." After Joanna came back to Athens, she could not stop thinking about her experience in Lesvos. "I had to do something," she said. Witnessing a huge need as well as resources, she decided to create an organization of remote coordination, which is now called Campsite Innovation.

Through the help of social media and technology, the organization connected international volunteers, donations (both financial and in-kind) from all over the world to people who worked on front lines in Lesvos. Additionally, Joanna and her team facilitated the coordination between warehouse managers where all donations were stored and the front-line workers. They connected the actors on the ground to warehouses with the help of international volunteers whose responsibilities also included driving in-kind donations from warehouses to the Greek shores. "So basically, what we did was a barrier between organizations and warehouses. Those working at the front did not have stock

rooms, so they needed to communicate with warehouses. For communication, we used WhatsApp – everyone was using it, “she said.

Joanna used the words “empathy” and “solidarity” to describe her work and the work of other grassroots organizations. Her organization helped other small nonprofits deliver “smart aid”, which she defined as aid that promotes dignity, efficiency, and less bureaucracy. According to her people working at grassroots organizations tended to have a lot of empathy and solidarity as they were directly working with refugees and had experience in social work. “Faith gets restored in grassroots,” she said. Joanna believed that larger organizations often come with bureaucratic procedures that restrict them from what they can do because donors do not have an accurate understanding of the community's needs. Sometimes the need did not correspond to funding priorities, therefore, less resources were devoted to what is actually has to be addressed.

While in Athens I became part of the Athens coordination group which connected grassroots organizations and volunteers in Greece and shared resources. WhatsApp served as the communication platform for the group. The members responded to the instant needs of the refugee population in Greece such as providing assistance with housing, ad hoc legal issues, or medical emergencies. The group members sometimes asked for specific items for refugee families, such as food, clothes, or baskets. On average, the group received a hundred messages a day. The members also posted updates on the ground, and how changes in policies were affecting local populations and refugees. The kind of updates that they were posting clearly showed the big gap between the services provided and the actual needs of the refugee population. I am still a part of the WhatsApp group and get updates on a daily basis. A lot of times the members shared

new policies and government actions (such as raids) to warn people of possible dangers. During the summer of 2019 I also attended the team's meetings where we discussed those updates in more depth considering their impact on refugee and local communities.

These organizations, although small in size, showed solidarity and humanity to refugees. They tried to alleviate challenges related to the dehumanizing refugee reception, where benefits were based on refugees' ability to present victimhood and vulnerability. For example, Hope Café, which operated in Greece and distributed clothes and food items to refugees and locals as well, allowed refugees to choose clothes that they found culturally appropriate and food that they might be missing, such as various spices labeled in different languages. Many small organizations set up their operations in Greece and offered various services, such as psychological support, language classes, computer skills, crafts workshops, and so on.

Almost all of the organization representatives that I talked to were active in the Coordination group.

Apart from organizations mentioned above, which worked on the ground to long-term services to refugees and asylum seekers, I also interviewed representatives of two migrant advocacy organizations: Generation 2.0 and Greek Forum of Refugees.

Jackie Abhulimen - one of the founders of Generation 2.0 shared with me that various integration activities from the grassroots and NGOs were not enough for the integration process to be coherent and successful. She reaffirmed that the state needed to take an active role in implementing the integration policy that was drafted but never came to fruition. Jackie mentioned xenophobia and lack of acceptance from the Greek society as major obstacles for the integration. According to her, xenophobic attitudes were more

acute towards those asylum seekers who either received their refugee status or are without papers - predominantly migrants who exercised their choice to be in Greece. “People blame migrants for having a choice. Because the idea under migrants is that they are exercising a choice, and not dying or are the victims of violence.” Her description of the reality on the ground coincided with the research I have introduced earlier chapters on “illegitimate” migrants. As Watters (2007) and Yarris and Castañeda (2015) argue, those asylum seekers who exercise the choice to migrate to seek better living conditions are considered as not deserving and not genuine refugees. According to Jackie, the society was more accepting of those who have suffered violent conflicts, wars and were severely vulnerable. However, this neglects the fact that those deemed as economic migrants were displaced by the combination of political and economic factors.

Founded by second-generation migrants, Generation 2.0 concentrated its efforts around advocacy. “We create solutions from lobbying in the top,” Jackie said. She believed change could be made by influencing politicians and lawmakers. For example, as a result of their advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns against a law that only allowed migrants to work a year after receiving the resident cards, it was amended in favor of migrants, who now were able to immediately start employment after securing a residence. "We look for the gaps in bureaucratic rule and laws," Jackie said.

The organization helped to ensure equal access and participation through combatting discrimination and racism. One of the examples was lobbying from the top by providing diversity trainings in the workplace for the employers so they would become more open. “We created a diversity charter. We try to work on both sides of the coin,” Jackie said. Having similar experiences with migration and accompanying migration,

Jackie and other founders regarded migrants as legitimate to seek social and economic protection who were entitled to as many rights as local citizens without the reproach.

I also interviewed Yonous Mohammadi – initially a refugee from Afghanistan who had founded and coordinated migrant advocacy organization - Greek Forum of Refugees. He pointed out two issues with the state's response to migration: faulted reception and asylum procedures and inadequate integration. According to him, asylum policies stranded thousands of people in Greece and placed them in complete uncertainty about their futures. Secondly, the government failed to introduce a strategic plan for integration, which was written on the paper but not implemented in practice. Yonous argued that refugees represented the most vulnerable population among Greeks due to the lack of attention to their needs. Some were confined on island camps for years, while those on the mainland who were not property incorporated into the society. Many were without documentations, whom he referred to as *invisible people*. According to Yonous, people without papers many times become the victims of smugglers who smugglers abandon refugees in the midway of the route. For example, two of my interviewees, Fahima and Leyla were promised to arrive in Germany, while in reality, once they arrived in Greece, the smugglers disappeared with all their money. Similar to Jackie, Yonous also stated that the integration was a two-way process, which involved both refugees and Greeks. According to him, the places with few refugee inhabitants tended to me most xenophobic. On the other hand, the areas with significant refugee populations tended to be more understanding and peaceful as refugees "build common ground with local communities: the problem is that the places that are without refugees are most hateful, hate crime occurs in these places, it does not happen in the places where a lot of refugees

live." This reminded me of the choice made by Melissa Network to start operation in one of the most xenophobic areas of the town to build an understanding between locals and refugees.

Yonous mentioned that the humanitarian work was characterized by the top-down approach and less involvement of refugees, which posed another hurdle for integration. "The goal should be to have refugees doing things themselves and being empowered," he argued. The Greek Forum of Refugees worked towards building the common ground by battling fake news, changing narratives, and training refugees to become participatory leaders. Yonous emphasized that the decision-making roles are unevenly distributed to refugee men who usually were the leaders in the community, while women did not participate in decision-making. "It's common in the communities to have one leader and others watching. The integration should happen based on participatory leadership and promoting participatory ideas." He also emphasized the inclusion of the members of the LGTQI+ community and generally broader gender issues.

Perspectives from NGOs

While in the previous section I described the work of grassroots organizations, here I compare their activities to those of larger nonprofit organizations that played a vital role in refugee reception. Various international and national nonprofit organizations operated in Greece to provide first-aid assistance, shelter, and food for new arrivals on the Eastern Aegean islands. The provision of various services was divided between larger national or international NGOs. For example, MSF was responsible for health, while PRAKSIS for shelter. All organizations were under the coordination of the UNHCR.

Soon after asylum seekers were transferred to Athens, many of them also set up their offices in the capital of Greece to respond to many similar needs. For example, SolidarityNow was employed social workers to assess vulnerabilities of refugees and resettle them to UNCHR-funded housing, while MSF provided healthcare assistance.

Those nonprofits usually are characterized by a high degree of professionalization, larger funding, bureaucracy, and vertical forms of governance. They do not interact with affected populations as intensively as grassroots organizations do. A lot of refugee women that I talked to at Melissa either were confused about the role of NGOs and INGOs or were not aware of the existence of these organizations. Representatives of grassroots organizations had mentioned in the interviews with me that large organizations were not very well attuned with the needs of the local communities for integration and they further promoted the discourses of vulnerability as only vulnerable and those in volatile situations were deemed of receiving their care. Having played such an important role in what Rozakou called vernacular humanitarianism (2017), in this part I present the views of larger organizations on issues of integration and analyze how their approach differs from those of grassroots organizations, particularly, in relation to integration, refugee deservingness, and reception.

International organizations have a history of working in Greece prior to the refugee reception to respond to the challenges of the Greek economic crisis. In analyzing access to different services for structurally vulnerable Greeks and refugees in Greece, Cabot (2019) argues that the austerity measures by the Greek state left poor citizens and migrants without basic needs where humanitarian organizations started filling the gap. The rights and services for refugees and many citizens alike in Greece have become

dependent not so much on (shrinking) state agencies but on formal and informal humanitarian interventions" (752). The EU trends towards neoliberalization and retractions of social programs and austerity led the Greek government to introduce humanitarian discourse and framing the economic crisis as a humanitarian crisis to alleviate the dire living conditions of its citizens and residents.

Cabot (2019) argues that this approach further emphasized a humanitarian logic of the intervention where refugees must present themselves as worthy, deserving, vulnerable, and in need to get the protection that was supposed to be guaranteed. Therefore, influenced by the history of humanitarian interventions in Greece, Cabot claims that during the 2015 "refugee crisis" asylum-seekers were automatically treated as humanitarian subjects. This is in contrast with rights-based logic, where a refugee is entitled to assistance and protection as a human being whose life is under threat. However, in the discourse of the humanitarian logic, asylum seekers and refugees acquired rights if they presented themselves eligible and sufficiently vulnerable, which is in line with the priorities of the EU as well. As Cabot argues, "increasing neoliberalization and precarity in Greece in the age of austerity has further enabled the encroachment of humanitarian logics onto the terrain of rights" (p. 752). For example, the Syriza government [the former government] has a history of cooperating with the humanitarian organization Médecins du Monde (active in Greece since 1989) to disseminate the discourses of a humanitarian crisis.

The legacy of "humanitarian citizenship" paved the way for larger involvement of humanitarian organizations in refugee reception and the absence of the state during the "refugee crisis" (Cabot, 2019, 747). This might explain why Greece was flooded with

hundreds of humanitarian organizations and constituted what Rozakou calls "uncomfortable symbiosis" of various actors (2017, p. 103).

The approach towards refugees as humanitarian subjects might explain the conflict between grassroots organizations and larger NGOs (Nonprofit Organizations). Cantat (2018) writes that the difference between the nature of services of grassroots and that of NGOs is in line with the struggle between victimhood, vulnerability, and dignity (Cantat, 2018). Traditional humanitarianism that provided temporary support tended to have a de-politicizing effect. Refugees were expected to perform vulnerability to leave the island of Lesvos or receive assistance, which was often administered by the UNHCR and other large INGOs or NGOs, which were influenced by the directives of the EU and the Greek state. As Cantat writes, “humanitarian modalities place people in liminal places where demonstrating victimhood constitutes the criteria upon which the decision of extending aid is based (2018, p.9). This part of the research validates what I found in my research as well, where grassroots organizations aimed to challenge the status quo, while larger organizations provided the services within the existing system. In the new reality of integration, larger organizations are still mostly concentrated on providing humanitarian assistance in forms of services (e.g. housing, cash assistance, healthcare) and determining the vulnerability of certain groups.

Cabot argues that humanitarian work is not the same as solidarity initiatives, however, sometimes they might be providing similar services (2019). Solidarity initiatives usually distance themselves from more vertical based governance of NGOs, often described as an institutionalized and well-funded entity with the professional staff. There is “a gap between the one who offers care and the one who receives it” (p.761).

However, Cabot contends that with increased EU funding available to Greece, solidarity initiatives started working alongside and in collaboration with humanitarian institutions. Thus, they too by providing material forms of relief and cooperating with large nonprofits, embodied the notions of deserving or needy refugees.

While NGO representatives argued that they were fully committed to the ideas of integration, their bureaucratic procedures and accountability towards donors did not allow much flexibility. Some of the conflicts might lay in the very design of the program and funding priorities. For example, several grassroots organizations disclosed in the conversation with me that NGO obsession with data reporting in the forms of basic service provision, such as a number of kits delivered, tents set up and so on instead of the number of psychological sessions or indicators of long-term impact, which did not sound as appealing and "loud."

Kalogeraki conducted research to differentiate between informal (self-organized groups) and formal organizations (NGOs) in Greece that support migrants (2019). She found out that formal organizations were more likely to involved in the provision of economy-related activities (such as the provision of food, urgent needs, information dissemination), while informal organizations conducted more cultural-related activities (such as art, festivals and concerts) to support migrants' identification with the host country. Informal organizations were more active in fighting hate crime, combatting discrimination, promoting equality of participation, social change, self-determination, mutual understanding, collective identities, dissemination of information, community responsibility/empowerment, and increasing tolerance. The study concluded that informal organizations strived for promoting political change (50):

Informal migrant organizations are significantly more like to underscore ultimate aims associated with promoting social and political changes, collective protest actions and social movement identities as well as visualizing a more equal, just, and tolerant society unveiling their role as social movement actors.

As Kalogeraki argues, informal migrant entities were more likely to resemble radical social movements. The creation of the Plaza Hotel was one of the examples of radical social movements led by the self-organized groups from radical and extra-parliamentarian Left and anarchist spaces already active in the country. The goal of these informal organizations extended providing immediate assistance to migrants towards the transformation and reconstruction of the society as a whole. For example, actions targeted at integration and building trust, increasing tolerance and mutual understanding, combating discrimination, and promoting equality of participation is significantly more prevalent among informal migrant entities.

After around a month being in Greece and having heard about the work on NGOs, I decided to talk with representatives of larger organizations. I was able to connect with the UNHCR Greece communications representative Stella Nanou through personal contact and set up an interview with her. UNHCR's role in Greece was as the main assisting actor to the Greek state in responding to the "crisis" by providing basic needs such as setting up tents, cash assistance, and temporary housing. UNHCR spearheaded the housing and cash assistance program ESTIA, which was discontinued in summer of 2019 and replaced by the HELIOS program that provided more comprehensive integration activities including language classes, employment support and sensitization of

the local community by connecting refugees to hosts (European Web Site on Integration, 2019). However, at the time of my interview, the program was still underway.

Similar to grassroots organizations, Nanou expressed UNHCR's commitment to refugees' dignity and integration. She believed the Greek state had failed to introduce and implement the integration strategy, which was a vital step towards providing dignified life for refugees. I observed the differences in the ways both Stella and grassroots organizations viewed integration. For example, Stella framed housing and cash assistance as main drivers to the integration. Cash assistance promoted independence and dignified life. This rhetoric was questioned by the grassroots organizations that regarded psychological support and building trust between the host community and refugees as vital for integration. While UNHCR emphasized the importance of building trust between the communities and fully promoting ideas of refugees as deserving to live in the EU, the representative did not discuss the specific challenges experienced by refugees on the mainland. Talking with Stella, I got a sense of an overly optimistic view of the situation in Greece that did not correspond to the feelings of refugee women. It seemed like the UNHCR was not aware of all the various complicated barriers that an individual refugee was experiencing and was more concentrated on overall program impact. In a sense, it seemed like the UNHCR representative was performing the work of an organization and the impact it made rather than looking into the challenges. The representative talked about how their efforts strived to return dignity and independence to refugees and to allow refugees to make choices by cash assistance programs. The urgency of the crisis on the island camps and the UNHCR's concentration on emergency might have left less funding and commitment to meet the needs of those in Athens whose living conditions

were not as dire as those on the island, which I have witnessed by interacting with refugees on daily basis. Stella was an extremely delightful person to talk to and I left her office optimistic but confused. I grabbed some Frappé (a cold Greek coffee) and headed back to the Melissa Network. The moment I entered the center, I realized the words "dignity" and "independence" were not enough to depict the diversity of women's experiences in front of me. Even though these programs meant to promote dignity and independence, the realities of women were not in line with these aspirations. I felt a big gap between the security guarded UNHCR office and always open and buzzing Melissa. The very design of the UNHCR, highly bureaucratic institution with large overhead costs, and less interaction with affected populations might explain why they considered refugees as homogenous groups.

The meeting reminded me of the World Refugee Day Celebration on June 20th in Athens that I attended with Melissa Network. One of the refugee women who owned a restaurant back home in Syria cooked a lot of food that we took to the event to distribute among attendees which were mostly refugee families with kids. The event was filled with representatives of large NGOs such as UNHCR, PRAKSIS, and the Danish Refugee Council. Videos of refugee stories were broadcast on a large screen. Once we started distributing food, hundreds of children and their parents rushed to our table and we could not hand the food to everybody in a timely manner. Surrounded by kids from every corner who would get angry if I took longer to hand them food or accidentally gave them less than other kids, I realized that they were in much need. Our table was a sharp contrast from the rest of the tables where the staff of large NGOs dressed in overly expensive outfits was handling brochures to interested people, mostly students and

researchers, and describing their activities in Greece. A lot about larger organizations presented was about demonstrating their impact on the populations, the impact, and accountability to their funders through rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Asylum seekers were not interested in reading brochures of the impact of the organizations that usually displayed their photos on the front page.

I have not explored in-depth the impact of larger organizations; however, from my work with grassroots organizations, it seemed that asylum seekers considered larger NGOs as less approachable and formal in providing services. As the lawyer of the Melissa Network mentioned in an interview with me, other organizations did not engage with women and vulnerable populations as Melissa Network and grassroots organizations did: "they [refugees] are part of our community. They are not beneficiaries but rather equal parts," she said. Originally from France, Sophia mentioned to me that before coming to Melissa, she got the job in France for the position related to advocacy but she could not stay there longer because in her words "could not work in top-down and beneficiary-type of organization. According to her, other organizations in Greece too, such as UNHCR in her words "use refugee women for their own benefits." One of the participants of Melissa Network – Fahima, was constantly invited by dozens of organizations for publicity. In Sophia's words:

> She [Fahima] is all over the place, she is the one they take for cooking, to show on TV, but you saw she needs a lot of help. If, she cannot get the house as you saw, how can other refugees get houses and other services? They [INGOs and NGOs] use her for their reputation and face, to look nice, that they help refugees but in fact with basic services to they don't give them much help

The contradiction between NGOs and grassroots organizations was reflected in Sophia's words - *beneficiary, reputation*, which seemed very important for larger NGOs especially for accountability towards the donors.

Apart from UNHCR, I also interviewed Antigone Lyberaki - the general manager of SolidarityNOW - the biggest national NGO providing services to refugees such as housing, psychosocial support, and nonformal education in camps and the mainland. She argued that the state and international organizations received a lot of funding to streamline the process of integration, and in fact, it was the Greek state's, local municipalities and civil society's responsibility to spearhead integration activities. Her idea of integration placed more responsibility for refugees to integrate into society. She argued that refugees themselves became passive recipients of aid which rendered them less active to integrate as they considered Greece as not a final destination but rather a transit country. Antigone also raised problems with some refugees not being ready to occupy apartments as they did not treat neighbors and buildings appropriately. She also emphasized that these apartments were better than what they had back home. While listening to her, I remember my conversation with one of the refugee women Camila about stereotypes of refugees not being able to adjust to the Greek society. Frustrated by what she observed, Camila said:

> How can they tell me what type of person I am? Why are they thinking this way about me when they have not experienced my behavior? We say this back home in Afghanistan: you don't know if my yogurt is sour until you taste it. You don't know what type of person I am until you taste my yogurt - until you get to know me.

Despite the existing stereotypes about refugees and contradictions above and contrasting their work to that of grassroots organizations, NGOs and INGOs were vital in

providing such services as housing and cash assistance that are still relevant in Greece. However, the provision of basic assistance was not enough for the integration, and as Antigone mentioned it might transform refugees into passive aid recipients. The refugee reception landscape in Greece represented vernacular humanitarianism, which was "an uncomfortable symbiosis of diverse and antagonistic actors" (Rozakou, 2017, p.103). Antagonism was manifested in the nature of their services and commitments on integration and various degrees of solidarity towards refugees. As Yonous mentioned from the Greek Council of Refugees, a lack of cooperation between grassroots organizations, NGOs and the government resulted in duplication of efforts and responsibilities, better coordination could make a more sustainable impact. Sharing resources, such as funding from the NGOs and local knowledge of the grassroots organizations, would have a much lasting impact.

CHAPTER VII

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS AS *SOLIDARIANS*

Thousands of international volunteers are believed to fill the gap between the needs of refugees and services provided by the Greek state and the European Union (Amnesty International, 2015). While locals offered valuable assistance, volunteers from all over the world were at the forefront of receiving and caring for refugees on the Greek shores. Volunteers showed solidarity and welcome to those who underwent dangerous journeys and were confined in limbo and uncertainty. Volunteering specifically for refugees and asylum seekers have not been explored much in the literature, especially related to the refugee reception in Greece. Most of the literature in the Greek context is quantitative in nature exploring demographics and motivations of volunteers on the Aegean islands. In this section, I show the ways in which international volunteers mobilized themselves, what motivated them, and how their actions reflected ideas of solidarity and integration in Greece. While their work had been invaluable, it also came with many challenges often associated with the power imbalances between volunteers and refugees.

Since summer 2015, Greeks and international volunteers offered their help to refugees arriving on Greek shores. Local people were among the first respondents. Island inhabitants would rush to rescue migrants, including fishermen who were "doing what had to be done" - the "duty" of "the men of the sea" who could not afford to leave people in danger" (Papataxiarchis, 2016, p. 9). Some volunteers assisted refugees with disembarking boats, while others organized clothing collections and gathered first aid kits (Digidiki, 2016). Millions of monetary and in-kind donations have been contributed to

aid asylum seekers fleeing violent conflicts and wars. The images of refugees undertaking dangerous journeys crossing the Aegean including the photo of the three-year-old Aylan Kurdi lying dead face down on the Turkish beach stirred emotions of people across the globe and brought donations to charitable organizations and attracted volunteers from all around the world (Cole, 2017). Social media became the source of information and means of crowdfunding that enabled independent volunteers, predominantly from across the EU, to reach Greece (Rozakou, 2017).

Solidarians as many researchers refer to these volunteer humanitarians, became central in organizing the reception of refugees, in rescue operations, providing first-aid, food and water, among other tasks. This was an unprecedented phenomenon for an EU country (Rozakou, 2017)

Volunteers in Greece offered a wide range of solidarity activities, such as food supplies, collecting and sorting food, medical aid, legal support, cooking, and so on (Kalogeraki, 2018). They stepped in to meet the gap left by the Greek state and EU to support refugees. In the analysis of various stakeholders in responding to the "refugee crisis," Papataxiarchis identified volunteers as one of the main actors among professional humanitarians, *solidarians*, and local populations (2016). Volunteers are motivated to come to Greece both out of curiosity and compassion. By traveling internationally and staying in solidarity with asylum seekers volunteers achieve "transnational citizenship" through working at the front lines (p. 8).

Kalogeraki (2018), studied the profiles of 2061 individuals volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers in Greece based on their demographic attributes, (gender, age, education) human (income, employment status, and occupation), social (trust and

informal social interactions) and cultural (religiosity) capital and political motivations. Based on her findings, most volunteers were primarily women, young, highly educated, involved in unconventional political acts (e.g. rallying, joining a strike, signing petitions, sit-ins), and with higher level of social capital. According to findings, human and cultural capital were not associated with volunteering.

Trihas and Tsilimpokos (2018) explored the motivations of volunteers on the Aegean islands. By surveying 107 volunteers, they identified that most of international volunteers came to Greece to help people, do something meaningful, and work with the organizations whose missions aligned with their values. When choosing the country of destination, they considered the level of need and the safety. Moreover, many combined their holidays with their work. This type of volunteering is often referred to as volunteer tourism or (voluntourism). According to the Wearing's definition, voluntourism refers to the tourists who "volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (2001, p.1). Voluntourists are different than typical tourists as they seek authentic and meaningful travel experiences, which often manifests in volunteering is social sectors.

The nature of volunteering in Greece has evolved since 2015. In the beginning of the refugee reception, most volunteers helped on an ad hoc basis. Kitching et al., (2016) studied ad hoc organizing of grassroots actors and volunteers on Lesvos island before the EU-Turkey agreement. Based on interviews with 41 ad hoc grassroots organizations (AHGOs), the researchers identified that those organizations heavily depended on volunteer contribution. Between 2260-4240 volunteers worked in Lesvos from November

2014 to February 2016. Those who had medical and first aid qualifications provided medical assistance. The rest distributed clothes, supplies, and food. Due to the urgent nature of the "crisis," volunteers usually arrived on islands with no prior training. However, as the country slowly moved out of the crisis mode, more formal structures of volunteer work were established. For example, in my research with grassroots organizations, which hosted various volunteers, I found that these organizations had a procedure of vetting volunteers, usually through written questionnaires and then interviews. Some also conducted trainings before the services.

According to Kitching et al., (2016) the majority of volunteers took care of their own housing and living expenses in Greece. The ability to provide volunteers with accommodation and food varied by each organization. Some were completely responsible for their accommodation and food, or organizations provided meal services. The majority of volunteers in Greece were connected with grassroots organizations operating on islands. Later on, as grassroots organizations moved to the mainland, volunteers also appeared in cities such as Athens and Thessaloniki.

Volunteer solidarity is not a new phenomenon; however, it has been increasingly impactful in Europe since the refugee arrival. Without volunteers' support, it would have been nearly impossible to accommodate refugees arriving in Europe in the last few years (Innocenti, 2016). Despite the importance and urgency of the refugee reception, most grassroots organizations did not receive generous financial aid. They mostly depended on in-kind and private donations; therefore, work of volunteers gained a vital importance for those organizations. Innocenti argues that many volunteers decided to take action because they were frustrated by the state's response to refugees' needs. Volunteers not only

helped by providing services, but also by humanely treating refugees and, thus, showing them solidarity and welcome. “They do not regard their work as charity, but as solidarity with the main purpose of “re-humanizing a dehumaning situation” (Innocenti, 2016, p. 24). For example, volunteers in Katsikas refugee camp of Greece were concerned that camp inhabitants were provided with the food that lacked taste and nutritional qualities. They took a role to set up a kitchen and provide warmer, healthier and tasteful food that respected people’s dignity. Volunteers also provided language classes, crafts, and various workshops to fight the boredom and make refugees’ days in camps more bearable.

A few days before my departure from Athens I met up with Aida to say goodbye. I asked her if she ever regretted coming to Greece. She spent three years enduring many hardships in Greece, unable to fulfill her dream life in Europe. "No," she said. "I like Greece, people are nice, only government is good. And I met so many friends. I met Anna. She was a volunteer from Spain with whom I became friends. I will never forget her." Aida showed me Anna’s photo and described all the things they did together. I realized that Anna's solidarity and support fought against the dehumanizing aspects of limbo and uncertainty. Volunteers fought alongside the refugees.

Volunteer work brings invaluable impact; however, it is also not free from bias and power imbalance. In his research exploring compassion and privilege of Swedish volunteers in Malmo, Mårs looked into the motivations and power dynamics of volunteers working with refugees (2016). Similar to transnational citizenship, he argues that through their work, volunteers expressed compassion and “global citizenship” (p.1). As citizens of the world, they felt the responsibility to help fellow human beings. They were motivated to alleviate refugee suffering and provide help in an unjust world.

However, volunteers' compassion towards refugees positioned them not only as allies but as privileged Swedish citizens. While volunteers showed resistance towards the current anti-refugee attitude of the Western world, they also were part of it and benefit from a privileged position. Volunteers exercised their choice and always have an opportunity to escape from the situation, therefore, their citizenship gave them the power. "They were politically aware and engaged in various issues of injustice but were also living privileged lives" (p. 34).

During my stay in Athens, I met many volunteers, most of whom were associated with grassroots organizations on the mainland. The nature of their work and duration depended on the organizations they chose to work for and the duration of their stay. Those working with established organizations and stayed for a long time, engaged with refugee populations on a more personal and deeper level. While those staying for a short period of time mostly helped with basic needs provision.

When I visited Hestia Hellas, I met four volunteers who helped the organization with the coordination of services, language classes, and daycare. The majority of them stayed around a month while a few stayed for several months. They came from all over the world but mostly Western Europe and the US. The organization had paid staff, but they also heavily depended on the work of volunteers. Volunteering at Melissa Network gave me an opportunity to observe and build trust with the women and participate in everyday life of Melissa Network.

On the other hand, the Drop in the Ocean, a Dutch organization that worked at the Skaramangas camp in Athens was almost entirely volunteer-based except for the founder and few coordinators. The organization provided language services and activities for

refugee kids and their parents. They also had a sewing space where refugees could use sewing machines to create their own clothes. They believed that by providing sewing supplies (once a month), refugees were able to exercise their choice and feel dignified. All of their volunteers came from Western European or North American countries, such as Sweden, Spain, the US, Netherlands. The majority of them volunteered for two weeks after which they often went on a vacation in Greece (voluntourism). Two of the Swedish volunteers, who were in their late 40 took a vacation off from their regular jobs to help refugees in whatever they could. It seemed they felt very good about themselves and were proud that they spent 10 days in camp. Another volunteer from the US was an active nurse who also combined her work with the vacation. The work of these volunteers mostly consisted of the provision of basic services, such as cleaning the common area, distributing milk to mothers for the babies, and similar tasks. It seemed that they were not very connected with the camp inhabitants and were mostly hanging out among themselves when having free time.

Joanna Theo who founded the organization Campsite Innovation was initially a volunteer on Lesvos island. She volunteered from a day one in Lesvos to help refugees at the Greek shores. Her decision to travel to Lesvos was influenced by her personal feelings of empathy and solidarity. Originally from Greece, she lived and studied internationally before coming back to Athens. Living in different cultures, she developed empathy and understanding to the Other. She believed that volunteers made a huge difference in filling the gap between the needs and services provided by the organizations to first respond to the “refugee crisis” on Lesvos island and then integration challenges.

On the other hand, Joanna also shared challenges with volunteers related to power dynamics and lack of knowledge. Joanna emphasized that many volunteers needed trainings about power imbalance and what she refers to "white savior complex." “The volunteers have the passport, they always get to fly back home and there is a power imbalance," said Joanna. She also emphasized how some volunteers had put people at risk by encouraging them to cross borders or smuggle.

My conversations with Melissa's social worker confirmed that some volunteers were not very well aware of bureaucratic procedures in Greece. The social worker said that while volunteers meant well and wanted to help refugees, sometimes, their actions put refugees into more precarious conditions. For instance, one day, I was working with a social worker at Melissa's front desk when a pregnant woman with her husband and two young volunteers came in. They had an understanding that Melissa Network, being a women's support center, provided shelter for vulnerable women. However, this was not the case. Melissa was only providing shelter for unaccompanied minors. The woman left her primary reception area from another city. According to the containment policies, this might have resulted in the annulation of her case. It seemed like two volunteers had helped the woman and her husband with transportation so that they could come to Melissa. The social worker tried to help her, but as she explained, it would take a few days for her to get into the accommodation. Moreover, her case could have been rebuked. The woman was very disappointed and volunteers angry at the social worker. I wonder if the volunteers encouraged the woman to leave the primary reception area. They certainly helped her and gave some hope to arrive in Melissa. It was obvious that they did not

have complete information about how housing and healthcare services operated in Greece.

However, despite the challenges that were unavoidable considering the scale and need in Greece, volunteers made a huge difference in refugee's lives and supported the organizations working on the ground.

Melissa Network only had four volunteers (including me). Volunteers usually stayed longer and developed closer relationships with participants compared to other organizations I discussed above. Most of us stayed for around 1-3 months as often preferred by the organization instead of the short stay of less than a month. Two of the volunteers returned from last year and, therefore, were very familiar with the organization and its participants. Melissa preferred their volunteers to stay longer. The organization also tended to favor repeat volunteers. I interviewed three other volunteers about their motivations to join Melissa and how they thought their work contributed to the overall solidarity movements.

One of the volunteers, Tamara, decided to join Melissa due to personal reasons. As a granddaughter of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, she felt especially connected with refugee issues. "Melissa's tight-knit community and unique holistic approach made me want to come back repetitively," she said. She first heard about the organization from her professor while studying psychology at New York University in Abu Dhabi. Tamara volunteered with Melissa three times, for 2 months each time. She described the close connection that she had developed with participants after some time who would ask for her support outside Melissa. Initially, Tamara served as an Arabic translator and assisted during group psychosocial support sessions. According to her, volunteers played a huge

role as a middle person, helping refugees and asylum seekers adjust and connect with the host society:

> I believe that volunteers, especially those who take the time to connect with refugees on a more personal level (although I understand that isn't always possible), make them feel supported, understood, and less alone. It's important, as volunteers, to make refugees feel like their voices are heard and that they should continue holding on to hope," Tamara said.

I have observed how Tamara developed close relationships with women and their kids. Her actions were examples of solidarity as she listened and helped women every day. Cultural similarity with some women made this process easier for Tamara. By trying to support refugees and make them feel less alone, she was participating in the struggle for recognition and acceptance alongside refugees. Tamara in a sense was participating in alleviating liminality and uncertainty by giving refugees a sense of home and reinstated their trust in humanity. Providing validation and support to refugees served the double purpose. First, it provided an outsider's approval for the injustices happening regarding the asylum process and deservingness of refugees to be in Greece, and second, it provided a sense of hope that the future would look better than the present.

Emma was another volunteer from the United States. She had done research on sexual violence during the Syrian Civil War as part of her undergraduate degree and was interested in learning more about this subject. Emma attended the migration-related conference in Athens, where she was introduced to the idea of volunteering. Greek by heritage, Emma felt a personal connection to the country, where she had traveled a few times previously. Because she knew the country fairly well, Emma felt comfortable and safe to volunteer in Greece. She volunteered for three months in the summer of 2019 with a childcare center along with three other teachers. Initially, she was brought to teach

English, but the organization needed help with various tasks, and she ended up mostly helping with kids.

Emma described the positionality of western volunteers in relation to refugees and how it led to unpleasant and sometimes dangerous consequences. She mentioned some examples, such as volunteers providing housing to refugees and then being unable to pay, or even getting fake passports and smuggling people across the borders. She believed that volunteers meant well but sometimes they didn't realize that their actions could have adverse, or even illegal, impacts. Emma described her positionality as she was sometimes perceived as wealthy by kids because of where she was from.

Emma also addressed her struggles with setting expectations with children and how her departure might have affected them as they witnessed a lot of people coming in and out of their lives constantly. Emma tried harder to be consistent and provide emotional support. For example, she described how she helped a girl who was constantly getting bullied. "After that, she was really open with me and hugged me every time she came into the center," said Emma about the girl. Emma's attempt to engage with children beyond just fulfilling her volunteer responsibilities and supporting them emotionally showcases the importance of her work and deep engagement with the cause.

Emma regarded volunteering at Melissa Network as one of the best decisions she had ever made:

> Volunteering with Melissa Network is likely one of the best decisions I have made. I must admit that I probably got more out of it than I could ever give to the refugee population – as is such with voluntourism. I learned so many lessons and had a lot of challenges. I grew both personally and professionally.

This excerpt further indicates her meaningful engagement in the process. When asked about what she learned from the experience, she mentioned flexibility and patience:

> I had to think on my feet, as I had no teaching experience and was suddenly asked to teach English to kids. I learned that you have to go with the flow and don't take things personally. If the kids didn't think my lesson was fun, or did not want to participate, I had to work around that. I definitely am more relaxed now and don't catastrophize as much as I used to. They [kids] needed some time to just have fun and forget about all the problems they may be facing, and I wanted to be someone they could count on to have a smile on my face and be welcoming. The children really taught me how to relax, have fun, and take it one step at a time.

This excerpt shows how volunteering changed Emma and how she adjusted her behavior to make children's lives more enjoyable. This type of flexibility is especially important as many children have experienced multiple instances of trauma. Emma showed incredible sensitivity when approaching children:

> Learning to deal with trauma the children experienced was challenging. I could not ask questions about their hometown, family, etc. because I did not want to bring up any negative memories for them. So, I really had to be careful what I said and be mindful as to why children might be acting out – these are not your typical children, they have seen some terrible things. It was also challenging to understand the confines of NGOs in Greece, or NGOs in general.

Similar to other volunteers in Melissa, Emma was very sensitive when working with children and tried to provide consistency in their lives through keeping promises. In this sense, she was showing solidarity and performing solidarity through the emotions of empathy and understanding. This example shows that volunteers did not only come to Greece to learn about the cause and gain knowledge, but also make their humanity and solidary serve a meaningful purpose. Emma engaged with the children on personal levels and tried to alleviate some of the trauma and inconsistency the children were used to in their lives. In this sense, Emma tried to create a different reality for the children and

instill a sense of hope for a better future. Emma also discussed that she felt part of a greater movement of solidarity and volunteer community across the entire city. Her and Tamara's approach challenged traditional ways of charity because they closely interacted with refugees, beyond aid giver-recipient dichotomy.

Francesca, another volunteer, first arrived at Melissa to complete her thesis research in summer 2016 and then 1-year long research as part of the Fulbright Fellowship in 2017-2018. During her time in Athens, she decided to volunteer at Melissa and came back again in the summer of 2019 solely to volunteer. As a graduate student in the US, she had time during the summer:

> I decided to volunteer with the Melissa Network because I had a very positive experience with them first when I interviewed Nadina [the director of Melissa Network] for my thesis research and she was so generous with her time and Melissa Network has such an amazing atmosphere and I knew for sure that I wanted to go back.

According to Francesca, the culture of solidarity and volunteering in Greece was pretty different from the culture of volunteering she experienced in the US. "It's much more about community building and being part of the same community than it is about reaching down," she said. She saw solidarity as allyship rather than as charity, that has been interesting for her. Francesca also believed that demographics and degree of solidarity to refugees among Greeks changed and probably decreased as local solidarians became exhausted, impatient, and disappointed with the lack of government's involvement. Her observations of solidarity being different from charities resonated with the research on solidarity networks in Greece, who went against the principles of aid-giving and charity, but rather supported egalitarian and horizontal governance. Based on my interactions and interviews with volunteers at Melissa and grassroots organizations,

solidarity required some degree of personal change and openness to change on the part of volunteers, whereas charity focused only on the aid distribution. In line with other grassroots organizations I presented, volunteers viewed their work demonstrations of solidarity and participation in struggle for recognition, rather than charity. By being in solidarity, these volunteers shared the common cause with refugees to be recognized as worthy and deserving. The volunteers' solidarity was expressed by "togetherness" and loyalty to the group and demanded recognition of refugees that refugees deserved to live and integrate into the Greek society, exercise equal rights as citizens and strive. Thus, the international volunteers with their engagement internationally and internalizing the ideas of solidarity demonstrated global citizenship and promoted ideas of transnational justice.

Apart from long-term volunteers, Melissa Network also hosted professionals who used their unique skills to provide meaningful workshops. They too were volunteers. One of these examples was poetry workshops by the MacArthur Award-winning American poet Alicia E. Stallings. During her workshops, she experimented with various methods to facilitate creative writing and expression among migrant and refugee women; promoted women's voices as they told their stories in their own words. Later women had an opportunity to present their work at various venues.

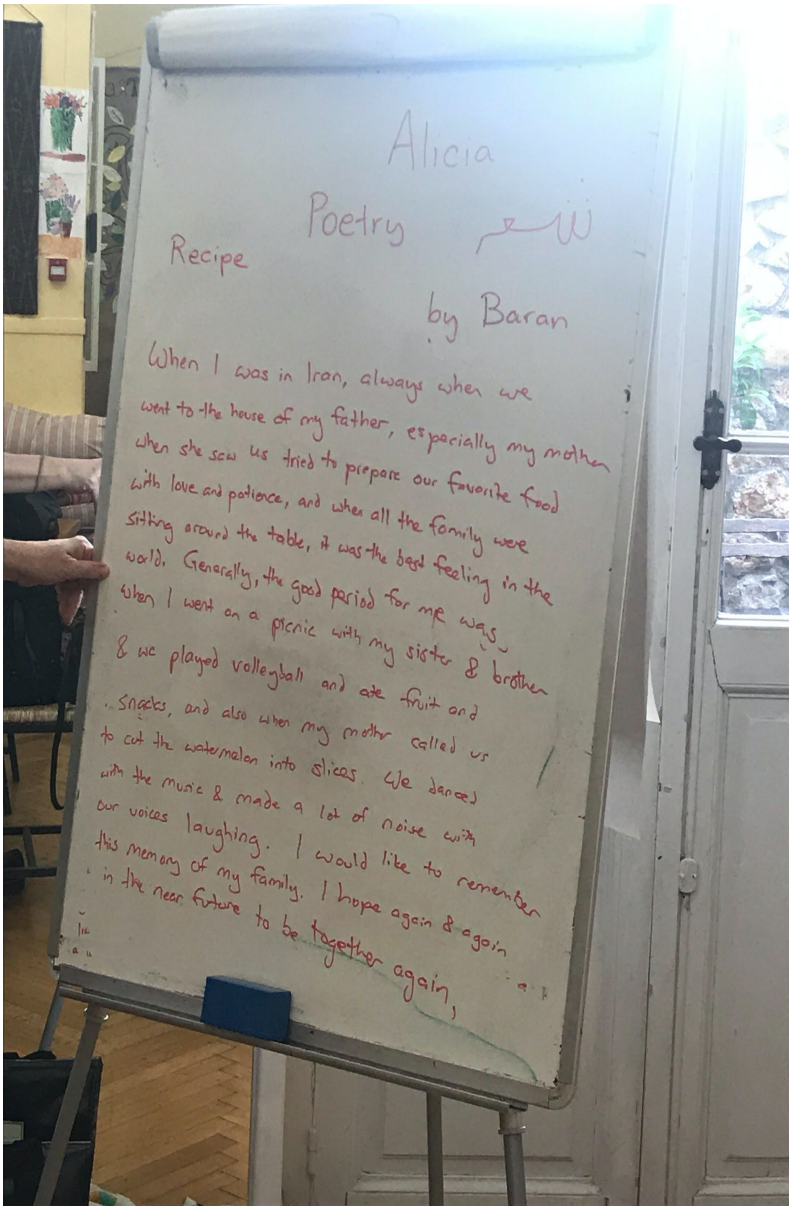

Figure 7.1. Poetry Workshop by Alicia E. Stallings

Another workshop that I was part of was portrait drawing. Run by a volunteer artist, the goal of the workshop was to celebrate the strength of women and develop self-awareness about bodily and spiritual selves by playing with colors and shapes. The workshop intended to explore identity through visual means; create personal experiences and life's journeys expressed in arts.

Crafts workshops such as origami, card-making, jewelry-making, knitting, and crochet were also part of the weekly activities at Melissa. They too were run by volunteers. These artists and community members were also part of the volunteer groups whose goal was to revitalize refugees' dignity and give them their agency. Engaging into these activities allowed women to move beyond the victimhood and explore their capabilities. None of the other organizations I was part of incorporated arts and crafts activities, and in this sense, Melissa was unique. While of course activities such as arts and crafts fall short to address broader structural and legal vulnerabilities, a therapeutic setting they have a positive outcome on wellbeing of migrants, which can determine successful integration. Psychological wellbeing is as important as larger policies of integration. Arts and Crafts could be another venue for the locals and migrants to engage, build trust between each other and challenge negative representations of refugees.

Figure 7.2. Portrait Workshop at Melissa Network

Volunteer responsibilities in Greece evolved over time and varied by location. While many were still on island camps, some lived in Athens and worked with grassroots organizations, which provided longer-term and integration-focused support. Therefore, volunteers were not only supporting basic needs and providing medical assistance but found creative ways to engage with refugee populations. It is quite rare for larger organizations, such as UNHCR to conduct such creative workshops. I see the work of such volunteers as part of the broader solidarity movement. I observed how women at Melissa engaged in hours of socializing while writing poetry, making crafts, and drawing portraits. For some, this process was emotional where they expressed their vulnerabilities but also found healing. I witnessed how Melissa Network's living room turned into a safe place of social support. While volunteers came with their positionality, they also contributed to larger solidarity movement, humanization, and acceptance of refugees as people deserving of dignity.

CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

I acknowledge that my research is not free from limitations. I based my work to explore the lives, or refugee and asylum-seeking women and therefore did not account for the experiences of men. Therefore, I only explore the impacts of the limbo on women and their coping strategies. While the interviews with other grassroots organizations mentioned struggles of men and as well, it is still not the central point of my research. Therefore, my findings are generalizable to women's experiences most of the time. In my analysis, I have not considered the vulnerabilities and mobilizing the power of men and others on the gender spectrum.

Moreover, I only interviewed women who spoke good English. Therefore, I have not incorporated the views of the most vulnerable who did not have opportunities to learn the language. While I interacted with women who did not speak good English and exchanged information, I still was not able to incorporate their narratives. My interviews were conducted through convenience sampling - I only talked with women at Melissa Network. Therefore, I did not account for the experiences of all other women in various locations. While women at Melissa Network came from various backgrounds and living conditions, I did not reach the ones who were not connected to the organizations. In addition to this, the relatively small sample size of the population impedes the generalizability of my research, therefore, reducing the external validity of it. I conducted some interviews at Melissa Network in the presence of other people and respondent's children. While we would sit outside on the balcony, sometimes we were interrupted by

kids or the noise from inside. This might have affected the way the interview was administered and impacted some of the answers.

However, despite the limitations, I have demonstrated that limbo and uncertainty were defining elements of being an asylum seeker or refugee in Greece as a result of the larger policies and culture of mistrust within the EU. Uncertainty and waiting had become normalized in the everyday life of women I interviewed. Worrying about their futures and deportability resulted in women's embodied experiences of stress, worrying, and depression.

I have shown how larger policies or absence of them created refugees as liminal subjects stranded in uncertainty with a sense of existentially going nowhere. Studying liminality foregrounds refugees' lived experiences often not represented in policy debates and decision-making. Liminality demonstrates the human cost of the draconian policies justified under "protecting" local communities from "invading" refugees. With my research, I challenged the popular discourses and showed that usage of words such as "illegal," "irregular", and "European crisis" is an inadequate representation of migration, which is based on discriminatory sentiments towards refugees as inferior and racialized Other. Uncertainty disrupts refugees' lives where the power is exercised upon them while they are made insecure through securing national borders. By underlining the lived consequences of structural violence, I have demonstrated how policies of mistrust create and normalize the inhumane treatment under the justifications of protecting local communities from migrants who, according to the popular discourse, seek to exploit national welfare systems. The discourse of liminality and structural challenges illustrates the governing and controlling power of larger policies on asylum seekers' bodies and

emotions. Through illness talk, I have shown the power that unjust policies have on people's bodies upon which the state control is exercised. The body becomes the object that absorbs the injustices of the recurring structural violence.

The study of liminality and structural violence itself challenges the mainstream literature, which stresses on the importance migrant communities' acculturation into the host societies. The acculturation framework or individual explanations of integration disregards the kinds of structural violence I described in earlier chapters. Asylum seekers are often constructed as "problems" and subjects who need to adjust to the western cultural norms to fully integrate into society. This discourse conceals the structural violence that the states are committing against asylum seekers and refugees. By foregrounding liminality and insecurity of refugees' lives I sought to shift the responsibility of integration from the asylum seekers to the state. This approach illuminates the ways in which the state is failing to meet the minimum requirements of integration and to combat xenophobic attitudes. Therefore, I call for the state's meaningful commitment to integration that is not based on the reproaching of asylum seekers.

I have shown how asylum seekers and refugees were made structurally vulnerable as a result of a desire to protect the EU borders also referred to as "the Fortress Europe" from newcomers, which was intensified by the economic challenges of Greece. While asylum seekers are in more precarious condition due to the volatility of their statues, refugees are in no less dangerous situations when it comes to the integration into the local communities. I have illustrated how the women with legal status still faced various structural impediments accessing employment, healthcare, and housing while

encountering stereotypical attitudes that impeded their integration into the local community. While acquiring refugee status equates to overcoming one major hurdle, the fight for the dignified life does not end at that point. Refugees are tasked to open the doors that are closed, build the bridges that are burnt, and engage in spaces where they are not welcome. Painful experiences of interacting into local communities that remind them of their unworthiness and deservingness of being in the place further close the ties between locals and newcomers that cannot be solved by the relatively small-scale initiatives from solidarity spaces. The asylum and refugee issue in the Greeks society requires structural interventions.

The powerful governing effect of the structural violence showed that integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the labor market and various other aspects of social and economic spheres lie in the powers of the government and receiving society. The women I spoke were expected to integrate into the local community by themselves. However, no matter how hard they tried, the lack of employment, systematic language courses, housing options, and reintegration activities made it impossible for them to fully enjoy their lives in Athens. Many believed that the reason that asylum seekers found it hard to integrate both socially and culturally into the country lied within the asylum seekers when in reality the hurdles caused by the structural policies made it impossible for refugees to access employment, language, and housing opportunities. Therefore, this manuscript calls for the examination of the structural challenges posed against refugees and asylum seekers who constantly find themselves in informational and legal limbo.

While invisible by the state and the EU, the women found refuge in organizations such as Melissa Network where they participated in gendered-care relationships that built

trust and understanding. I have shown how the organization sought to reorganize women's lives and instill sense of purpose and "going somewhere." Melissa Network and other grassroots organizations engaged in transnational solidarity by information and resource sharing to those who planned either to stay in Greece or continue their journeys to the Western European countries. Through intimate labor migrants, staff, and international volunteers engaged in the struggle against the limbo and liminality. While uncertainty impeded women's expression of agency and integration into the community, the collective organizing networks shared information and resources to streamline the pathway to the integration and alleviate liminality. International volunteers also played an important role in alleviated liminality by being in solidarity with refugees.

The Melissa Network's commitment to holistic integration, which focused on overcoming trauma through psychosocial support and creative activities, and promotion of active participation in the community had political and collective mobilizing goals. This type of involvement de-stigmatized the constructed image of weak or dangerous refugees and fought against the regimes of vulnerability that had dominated Western migration management policies. The efforts of other grassroots organizations were political undertakings as they questioned the entire discourse on the criminalization of migration that had become the centerpiece of the policymaking. An inclusive environment to fight xenophobia went against the popular stereotypes about migrants as threats to society and as vulnerable subjects. Therefore, efforts of the grassroots organizations challenged the wider exclusionary policies from the local engagement to global. These organizations placed a migrant's choice as a centerpiece for their

operations and supported the emerging literature on deservingness and legitimacy. The right to integrate and dignified life went against the criminalization of migration.

While media often paid more attention to the inhumane conditions of camps, life in limbo and structural violence on the mainland was often neglected. By voicing integration challenges, grassroots organizations draw attention to the violence of limbo and structural inequalities that had been normalized as it did not attract as much media coverage as instances of direct violence on the islands. Solidarity initiatives demonstrate the ideas of we *live together, we fight together,* that have the potential to imagine new citizenships of the asylum seekers and refugees through participatory governance, collective action, and self-mobilization. Collective organizing enables sharing the information which was regarded as one of the major obstacles in integration. Melissa Network alongside other grassroots organizations and volunteers stayed in solidarity with refugees to alleviate some of the impacts of uncertainty and oblivion. Together these organizations contributed to the emergence of a new type of humanitarianism with the horizontal nature of governance rooted in the country's recent history of solidarity.

I have also demonstrated places that international and grassroots organizations occupy in addressing the needs of refugees. INGOs usually have more leverage and connection with the government while grassroots organizations work closely with the communities. The small migrant organizations contradict the larger discourses on migrants as victims without agency and choice. There is a potential to create a space for collaboration of different organizations to share resources and design policy priorities. Throughout my research, I have found that larger organizations often partnered with grassroots organizations to address the needs of the refugees. The evolvement and

professionalization of the grassroots organizations create a premise for future collaborations between these groups and the potential to scale the impact. Moreover, the existing relationships that exist between larger organizations committed to the betterment of refugees' lives and the government could be capitalized to influence policymaking. Larger organizations, though bureaucratic in nature, occupy an important role in providing much-needed services to asylum seekers and refugees.

The intimidation and isolation created by the culture of mistrust and the lack of social services further isolate refugees from the host societies and widens the gap that already exists. Those in power, such as the host government and society must incorporate migrants by providing necessary services and combatting stereotypes that have a destructive impact not only on the first but also second-generation migrants and refugees.

Deep structural inequalities within migrant communities can only be addressed with the commitment of the Greek government to eradicate aspects of structural vulnerabilities and full commitment to integration by engaging in dialogue with refugees and organizations representing them. It was confirmed Below I present recommendations on how integration policy can bring about the change by engaging with affected populations and grassroots organizations.

Throughout my interviews, a lack of employment and Greek language learning opportunities were mentioned as paramount for a viable life in Greece. As the unemployment rate is the highest in the EU, the country struggles to create jobs for its residents. In 2019, the unemployment rate in Greece was 18.08% - the lowest since 2011 (Statista, 2019). The representatives of the grassroots organizations argued that the refugee reception created hundreds of jobs for Greeks in asylum offices but mostly in

civil society. While most of the asylum seekers are occupied into the low-skilled jobs (for example, caretaking, construction), employing refugees in high skilled jobs corresponding to their professions from origin countries could be an important policy change. For example, Galgano (2017) argues that employing bilingual refugees in asylum offices will actually speed up the process of asylum determination where a lack of bilingual interpreters and translators causes the backlog. Refugees will better understand and interpret the asylum interviews based on their cultural competence and language skills. Refugees could also be employed in places, such as language centers and as cultural mediators between newcomers and service providers. At the same time, I recommend consultation with local migrant organizations to ensure fair and well-informed employment and a holistic approach to labor rights. Migrant communities face specific challenges, some of which had been mitigated by the advocacy efforts of the local migrant organizations. For instance, after the Filipino Migrant association advocated for a change in the insurance policy for caretakers and house cleaners, employers were obliged to ensure the migrants (OECD, 2018). Migrant organizations are most acutely aware of invisible challenges for entering the labor force.

A lack of language skills was a major barrier for all refugees I interviewed. Melissa Network provided language classes every day. However, the majority of the refugees and asylum seekers do not possess Greek language skills. The lack of language skills was a barrier for Fahima when interacting with a homeowner, for Zeynab to secure a job. Lack of language skills made of appointments with the doctors difficult for Yasmina. The state with the collaboration of local language centers and bilingual

mediators should offer opportunities to learn the language. This will, in turn, create more jobs for local citizens.

Another broader challenge mentioned in my interviews was the lack of housing opportunities for migrants. Greece has one of the highest rates of homeownership in Europe (72%) and the city of Athens has a significant number of empty houses and uninhibited apartments (OECD, 2018). More than 600,000 apartments are not occupied in the region of Attica (greater Athens), whose owners moved away from the city center. These apartments could be rented to the migrants who could enjoy dignified life in the city center away from the contained camp settings and residential segregation. This idea was also mentioned by the representative of Za'atar NGO.

Based on the 2017 Athens Observatory for Refugees and Migrants survey of public attitudes in Athens on refugees, 44% of Athenians think that refugees constitute a threat for Greek society, while 55% regard that refugees probably cannot integrate into the society (OECD, 2018). Building trust between communities is essential for integration along with broader social and economic policies. While employment and housing integration are vital, the lack of cultural integration will further stigmatize refugees and drive them further away. Organizations such as Melissa Network, Za'atar NGO, and Generation 2.0 provide invaluable resources for bringing communities together and mobilizing collective action for a change. Collaborating with these organizations to scale up their operations will go a long way. Based on the same survey, 58% of Athenians think that the presence of migrants in the country increases unemployment and 64.4% think that the presence of migrants in the country increases criminality. This illustrates the extent of the discourses of criminalization in society, that

should be addressed through a holistic approach. Without battling these stereotypes and controlling images, it's impossible to make progress in other aspects of integration, such as employment and housing. Grassroots organizations have a history and expertise on building trust and tolerance between the neighborhoods, and their active involvement will further promote ideas of solidarity and welcome.

The inclusion of refugees will not possible without more open and culturally sensitive service providers. The asylum officers and representatives of healthcare providers, such as doctors should be trained on cultural sensitivity. The Greek state and municipalities should. hire cultural mediators to enable communication between refugees and service providers and mitigate misunderstandings. Appointing cultural mediators and/or interpreters will ensure not only communication but also accountability and transparency of the process. Those from the grassroots groups and migrants themselves will be best suited for these positions or to provide cultural trainings.

An extensively long and bureaucratic asylum process was one of the defining aspects of liminality. Speeding up the process by employing more staff and interpreters is vital for refugees in limbo. Information services and communication should also be provided in the language that is understandable for refugees. Timely and accurate information should be provided to those waiting for asylum decisions for years. However, this requires greater solidarity from the European Union to take responsibility for resettling migrants. Bilateral collaborations between Greece and other member states could alleviate some of the challenges of the country. For example, a few years ago made a deal with Greece to resettle 1,000 asylum seekers, that demonstrated their commitment to solidarity.

Through my research with refugee women and grassroots organizations, I showed how exclusionary policies manifested into lived experiences and local responses in Athens. I emphasized on the systemic nature of exclusion and discrimination, which cannot be mitigated by individual projects and disjointed initiatives. Addressing structural causes of violence needs a cohesive plan and commitment at all levels of society to battle stereotypes and shift exclusionary policies that are in place and embedded in larger structures of governance and everyday relationships.

With the research on structural vulnerabilities and life in limbo, I aimed to contribute to already existing research exploring integration through structural inequalities standpoint rather than cultural and individual explanations of resettlement. Since much of this research had not been conducted in the Greek context, this manuscript will contribute to the emerging literature in Greece about refugee reception and integration.

I showed the transformative power of grassroots organizations that are challenging policies and adhering to ideas of solidarity. Researching further migrant organizations, their main features and challenges will be useful not only for understanding for migrants and society but serve as a guide for policy responses. Most of the research on migrant solidarity organizations are quantitative in nature. Therefore, more research transformative power of grassroots organizations deserves more attention.

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