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Farakouki, Lida

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Ethnographic research

by Lida Farakouki

Name: Lida Farakouki
Supervisor: Ass. Professor Erik Baehre
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Abstract

This ethnographic research takes an in-depth look at the identities of refugees (and other border-crossers), refugee communities and politics of belonging. Through the ethnographic method of narrative approach, it explores the perceptions of refugees on their identity, communities and work and shows how these affect and are affected by politics of belonging.
Using ethnographic methods of participant observation and informal interviews in the geographic area of Athens and Piraeus, Greece, I explore contested refugee narratives about refugee identity, refugee communities and work. I use “refugee communities” and “work”, as the main lens through which to discuss what protects, supports or helps them outside and aside of the humanitarian and the asylum system. I discuss the terms of “refugee” and “refugee community”, showing the complex ways people and theory make sense of them. The main argument of my analysis is that, dealing with the so called “refugee crisis”, also means examining our perceptions on the contested narratives around refugee identities and making the choice to “stay close” to people, who already make up part of our societies.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Α.Δ.Ε.Τ.	Residence Permit, Άδεια Διαμονής Ενιαίου Τύπου
AEK	Athletic Union of Constantinople, Αθλητική Ένωση Κωνσταντινουπόλεως
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
Δ.Υ.Ε.Π.	Reception School Facilities for Refugee Education, Δομές Υποστήριξης Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων
ECHR	European Court for Human Rights
EU	European Union
EURODAC	European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database
HCG	Hellenic Coast Guard
MoMA	Ministry of Migration and Asylum
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RCO	Refugee Community-led Organization
R.I.C.	Reception and Identification Center
RLO	Refugee-led Organization
TDV	Travel Document, Titre de Voyage

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Introduction

The social issue

It is the 1st of April 2023. The Greek Government has announced that it is going to sign a contract for the construction of the extension of the fence at the border in Evros. Evros is the river that defines the north-eastern land borders, between Greece and Turkey. I am at home in Athens. I connect with an online news channel through my laptop and I see that there is a live broadcast from the area. Government officials have gone to the Greek border, next to the metal fence, to give speeches on the subject[1]. The video begins with a panoramic view of the area. A drone flies over the border along the river showing the existing construction. It stops at the area where the officials have gathered. Three people from the Hellenic Police take the floor and then the former Minister of Migration Policy (2020-2023), Notis Mitarakis says the following:

"We have implemented a strict but fair immigration policy. We have set two targets with, currently, measurable results. Firstly, we substantially reduced flows and secondly, we drastically reduced the impact of the crisis on local communities. We have effectively guarded the borders and I would like to express my very great thanks to the men and women of the Armed Forces and the security forces for their superhuman efforts over the past years. We have guarded the borders, but we have also dealt effectively with asylum seekers within the territory, by rapidly separating refugees from economic migrants, as we had committed to do, by operating the "Closed Controlled Structures", by deporting those not entitled to international protection."

(Notis Mitarakis, Minister of Migration Policy)

After the Minster on Migration, the Ministry of Civil Protection takes the floor and says:

"Today, we sign from here [i.e. Evros] the extension of the technical barrier of the fence by 35 kilometers. We are doing what the overwhelming majority of the Greek people demands. We are doing what is necessary to make Greece's borders with Turkey impassable. Similarly for Europe's borders with Turkey… against all forms of aggression, against the instrumentalisation of people who have been exploited by the illegal immigration circuits and their transformation into an asymmetrical threat to Greece and the whole of Europe. Our goal according, to the decision of "KYSEA"[2] is the full coverage of the entire length of the Evros River, all of the 140 km with an artificial barrier…"

(Takis Theodorikakos, Minister of Civil Protection)

The contract for the fence was signed. It might be interesting to mention that this project was undertaken in a pre-election period.

On 19th of May 2023, the New York Times issue an article with the title: "Greece says that it doesn't ditch migrants into the sea. It was caught in act". The article is based on field investigation of an aid worker, which was then confirmed by the news agency. The video-investigation follows the route of 12 people that border Police intercepted. The camera follows them when they were already on Lesbos island (Greek territory) and then back to Turkish territory, where they testify about what happened to them. Their "push-back" took place after they had already reached the Greek territory. The video shows that people were transferred by a van to another part of the island, then via a first

[1] The speech was broadcasted live that day and has remained uploaded in video and text format (in Greek) on Governmental website, which can be accessed here: https://www.primeminister.gr/2023/03/31/31540?fbclid=IwAR1NwP8ZmOJr9tdpPASc2BybiIypOBLpSHaSN9pqy57anlFeWRhMdhAzGyQ [accessed on 11 August 2023]

[2] KYSEA is an acronym for the "Governmental Council of Foreign Affairs and Defence".

boat to a second Hellenic Coast Guard boat, that then took them to the sea border with Turkey and abandoned them on a raft in the middle of the sea.

After this event, the Prime Minster, in an effort to defend his policies, stated on CNN that this is *"an absolutely unacceptable practice. I have numerous times made the distinction between this unacceptable practice and our obligation of intercepting people at sea on our sea border with Turkey"*[3]. Not only the Prime Minister, but also the Greek society takes a stance but not only in words but with actions. Following the allegations on the "push-back", 28 civil society local organizations reacted by jointly signing a letter asking the Public Prosecutor to intervene and conduct investigation[4].

The next month, on June 14, 2023, another news story on refugees stirred up the public opinion and political discussion. A boat named "Adriana" capsized on calm waters, which was carrying up to approximately 700 people. Approximately 79 died, 104 were rescued and probably more than 500 went missing. The shipwreck took place in international waters outside Pylos, under the watchful eye of the Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG), which has the responsibility to perform "search and rescue operations" in the area. There have been suspicions on the role of the HCG, allegations on the reasons why HCG threw and tied a rope to the boat (allegedly one of the possible reasons for capsizing), and on the reasons why HCG did not immediately intervene to save lives[5].

Following the shipwreck in Pylos, the local society mobilized, taking the side of refugees and migrants. After two days people protested in the streets of Athens ("Mass demonstration in the center of Athens for the deadly shipwreck in Pylos", 2023; Stamatoukou 2023). Additionally, the Athens Bar Association issued a press release announcing that a group of lawyers created an initiative aiming to legally represent the victims of the shipwreck ("A group of lawyers and jurists is formed for the criminal Pylos shipwreck after a meeting of DSA" 2023). Leftish political parties (SYRIZA, Mera25) visited the barracks in Kalamata, where survivors were put by the authorities, and made statements in support of the victims while requesting a fair judicial investigation.

Based on the above it has become clear so far, that the presence of refugees, border-crossers, migrants, or economic migrants (sic.), however named, in Greek and European soil, is a debated political and social issue. There are contested narratives about their identity. They are seen as an "asymmetrical threat", "instrumentalized" victims, victims of harsh anti-immigrant policies, economic migrants, etc. European Union and its bodies have already been in the process of forming a "New Migration and Asylum Pact" during the last years implying that the current "Common European Asylum System" (CEAS) is not working for them. Civil society organizations and Human rights organization have criticized this Pact, claiming that the legal pathways for refugees and migrants to come to Europe will be even more perilous.

These policies on migration and asylum are about "protection". The question is though, about *whose* protection? The government and people, identifying with right wing politics, talk about protection of

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[3] The interview of the Prime Minister K. Mitsotakis at CNN on May 23, 2023 can be accessed here: https://edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2023/05/23/amanpour-greek-prime-minister-kyriakos-mitsotakis.cnn , [accessed on 11 August 2023]

[4] The press release of the organizations can be found here: https://www.gcr.gr/en/news/press-releases-announcements/item/2169-intervention-of-28-organisations-to-competent-prosecutors-on-the-pushback-incident-published-by-the-new-york-times [accessed on 11 August 2023]

[5] BBC revealed through investigation contradictions between HCG testimonies and the actual digital stigma of the boats at sea, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65942426 [accessed on 11 August 2023]
Additionally, "Forensis" performed investigations aiming to digitally reconstruct the story with the help of the survivors. The video with the testimonies and the forensic analysis can be found here: https://counter-investigations.org/investigation/the-pylos-shipwreck [accessed on 11 August 2023]

the local communities and securing the border. They see the migrants as an asymmetrical *threat* and the traffickers as the only reason of illegal movements. On the other hand the leftists talk about the protection of refugees and migrants, condemn the strict policies on migration and asylum and the non-existent social policies for their integration. For them, the threats are the military protection of borders, the practices of push-backs and the unsafe passages for migrants to Europe. This political and social tension goes even deeper, to a secondary level, where human rights supporters, often known as "alilleggyi" ("αλληλέγγυοι"), or solidarians, whether they are locals or international supporters or refugees themselves, are criminalized, because they provide humanitarian assistance or rescue people at sea. Such cases, are often taken to the court by the state, and are often dropped before they reach trial. This mechanism works as a method of intimidation of solidarians and as a deterrence for future attempts [6].

As seen above, in this so called "refugee crisis", refugees become the subjects of the socio-poltical tension, and, as this system of international protection has been rendered weak, through the pushing and pulling of the political powers, it is often difficult for refugees to reveive any protection.

The questions

In this tension about, should they be protected or not, the questions arise, who are they, **what exactly is the refugee identity** (on a legal, social and individual level) and is thus worthy of protection?

With the 1951 Geneva Convention, the humanitarian system and the state have developed a very concrete protection system. They render refugees as beneficiaries of international protection and therefore dependent, vulnerable who need to be saved. This asymmetry doesn't let us think about what kind of protection people really need, but instead, let's us see protection only through the eyes of the state and the humanitarian system. Examining protection then, on the the so called "beneficiaries'" (refugees') side, might have an added value. Instead of letting the "international protection system" decide what protection is for them, why don't we ask the refugees themselves? Examining **refugees perceptions on what protection means for them at the individual and social level**, might answer the question of how protection should be provided.

Moreover, exploring what people do to protect themselves in their everyday life, might help us understand what protection is for them and what protection mechanisms are already in place, outside or aside the humanitarian and asylum system. **Are there any protection mechanisms in the communities of refugees**? Do they receive protection, support or help within their communities? At the individual level what are their actions for protecting, supporting or helping themselves, if they don't solely rely on the humaniratian system?

As seen above, a big part of the implied discussion is the division between "us" Greek society, and "them" the refugees. The tension in the Greek society is wether refugees belong or not. The question then, is how do **politics of belonging affect and how are they affected by the identity of refugees and by communities of refugees**?

[6] See for example the famous case about Sara Mardini, who is herself a refugee, who was charged for espionage, because she saved people from drowning at sea: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64268707 [accessed on 11 August 2023]

Theoretical overview

This discussion on the "identity" of refugees, their "protection" and the "politics of belonging" mostly falls under the topics of political and legal anthropology. It also includes sociological and governance studies, refugee and forced migration studies.

Firstly, the main anthropologist who helps me think about the anthropological approach on the identity of refugees, is Malkki (1995). She talks about the essentialization of refugees as a normal or natural condition, even though it is a socially constructed identity. She also talks about the construction of this identity as imagined or ideal other, an identity that seems unchanging across time (Malkki: 1996). This social construct of the refugee identity, is an outcome of international law that produces knowledge (Merry 2006: 108). Documents, rules, organizations and practices create and reproduce this knowledge around the world (ibid). Bureaucracy is also a part of this system of knowledge reproduction. The webs of bureaucracy through documents, rules, organizations and practices reproduce this knowledge (Hull 2012, Rozakou 2017: 38-39), through their materiality (Cabot 2012). Fassin, suggests that the bureaucratic asylum process- applying for asylum and requesting to be recognized as a refugee- produces a "truth", which is constructed (Fassin: 2013). Fassin, also discusses how refugees are seen as the "suffering" others, a product of nation states, and driven by an ethical imperative of "humanitarian reason", refugees must be saved (Fassin & Gomme 2012). He names this process "humanitarian government" (ibid). Building on Fassin (2005), who talks about the "moral economies" produced by the asylum process in France, Papada (2022) describes the "moral economies" of vulnerability in the asylum system in Greece. Bragg (2022) adds on this, that we neglect to see refugees as agents, rather than vulnerable subjects and discusses how the Ethics Board of her University blocked him from doing ethnographic research with them.

The main difference of the above studies with this study, is that it starts from a point thinking about refugees as agents and discusses their identity, including their perceptions on it. It puts refugees in the center of it, it doesn't assume that they are victims, vulnerable subjects of a superstructure, that confines them. It contributes to the discussion on the perceived identity of "refugee" by putting forward their own voice. Additionally, this research takes the identity of refugees outside the confined limits of humanitarian processes and the state, in relation to which, it mostly has been examined. It contributes by discussing refugee identity within refugees' own sociality: the refugee communities and the society in general.

In what follows, on the subject of communities and in particular on communities of refugees, the main relevant academic work concerns two researches. The first one is sociological research, using ethnographic methods and focused on the "Nigerian community of Greece". Fouskas (2014) describes the ways in which the "low-status jobs" of "Nigerian immigrants" affect and are affected by their participation in the community. This research (2010-2014) focuses on the subject of their employment and to what extent the Nigerian community facilitates Nigerian immigrants finding a job. Fouskas provides an extensive focus through "life-stories" pointing out the role of the community in empowering (migrant) Nigerians to claim their labor rights. He finds out that the role of the community is not what it is expected to be, because the community appears rather unappealing to its members- as a system- as they don't feel represented. The second study is an anthropological PhD dissertation, that employs the ethnographic method of participant observation to discuss the ways in which the members of the (refugee) community of Armenians in Greece express their Armenian identity (Antoniou 1995). Thinking about ethnic identity and boundaries, the work of Barth (1969: 11) is very useful in that direction. Barth (1969: 11) discusses "the ethnic groups as culture bearing units" which to some extent applies to the ethnic communities formed by refugees in Greece.

On the subject of protection, help, support within communities of refugees, academics from Governance, Refugee and Forced migration studies, who studied with refugees, suggested, that more research is needed at community-level, as well as studying their social networks in the context of self-reliance (Field et al. 2017; Pincock and Easton Calabria 2018; Pincock et al 2020, 2021; Skran and Easton Calabria 2020). Such organizations or communities, formed by refugees in host countries, are often named in literature as Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) or Refugee Community-led Organizations (RCOs) (Griffiths et al. 2005, Zeynep 2021, Tippens 2020, Pincock et al 2021).

This research, on the subject of communities, contributes by not examining one community of one ethnic identity -as in Antoniou (1995) and Fouskas (2014), but the identity of refugees across diverse communities. This way it focuses on how ethnic identity is perceived by refugees and locals. It also examines politics of belonging and refugee identity within and in relation to the community, which was not examined by the other two studies in Greece. This study aims to add on the discussion of different refugee and migrant communities in Athens. It adds the perspective of people's inclusion or exclusion, depending on their identity as refugees. In addition to the above, studying about how community works in term of protection of its members, contributes to the discussion of the subject of RLOs and RCOs.

Finally in terms of theoretical background for exploring the "politics of belonging", I based my research on Yuval-Davis (2016) article. Yuval-Davis explained that there is a difference between "belonging" and the "politics of belonging". The "politics of belonging" is about how "political projects (…) such as racism and nationalism" affect the level of belonging of an individual or a group (ibid: 197). Within political processes people are attributed certain characteristics (and divided in categories) based on their ethnicity, religion and other. Pels (2022: 80), talking about the nature of classifications, highlights that these humanly-created categories "do" something to people. In other words, classifications- how we name and categorize people- have a social effect on people's lives, because of the meaning we assign to them. Simon (2012) adds on this discussion by expressing that statistics and censuses play an important role in this categorization process, as they create perceived national identities within states. All the above studies are part of the discussion on how identity is socially constructed and how social difference is produced.

This research employs the above mentioned anthropological and theoretical arguments and applies them to an empirical research that focuses on the identity of refugees in the geographic area of Athens, Greece. Refugees, as a socially and politically constructed identity, are part of this discussion on politics of belonging. This research adds to this discussion by providing both "identity and collective narratives" on politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2016: 202).

For readability purposes in this research, in several parts of the text I will use the all-encompassing term of "refugees" for including under it, also, other legal categories, such as asylum-seekers (who are in the process of application for asylum) and undocumented people (border-crossers who are willing to apply for asylum). From a legal perspective this is not correct, as refugees are legally considered only the ones who have been through the asylum procedure and have been recognized as such. The main reason for doing this, is for brevity and secondarily it implies the fact, that this is already a socially constructed identity (Cabot 2013; Fassin 2013).

"The field" and the methods

The process of "constructing" the field was one of the most difficult parts of the research in the field. I imagined that it would have been relatively easy to find people for my research because I had been working with refugees as a humanitarian worker. Therefore, I knew the context of how refugees organize themselves and I was familiar with some names. I knew that there were "refugee communities", and that there was a Greek umbrella organization for all these different ethnic communities of refugees.

Constructing the field started through emails, calls, messenger messages to people I knew and didn't know. I first contacted an ethnic community in Greece and after some days they replied to me. Then, I contacted an ex-colleague who worked as an interpreter with refugees via text message. This colleague sent me a telephone number of another refugee community in Athens. Then slowly I started to have some meetings, but for the first month one person would send me to another, without any tangible effect. There was no demarcated group of people or geographic area, where I could access refugees, unless I would be reaching out to NGOs. My intention though was to meet people outside the humanitarian assistance system. I walked several afternoons and evenings in various neighborhoods of Athens. I entered shops of people with refugee and migrant background. After some weeks, some of my interlocutors invited me to an event and slowly I started to meet people. Apart from meeting people at community events, since I didn't want to limit myself in the views of community leaders, I tried meeting individuals, either through the leaders or by attending specific events where refugees and asylum-seekers might go. This led me in spreading my research to art spaces, religious spaces, shops, sport fields (by participating in a soccer team of refugees) and to a solidarity School, that gave lessons to adult migrants, refugees, asylum seekers. This spreading out of contacts and communications in turn did not give me the depth, I had imagined. However, with regards to the people I met as individuals, I met them occasionally (one to five times) within a period of three and a half months and managed to get some depth this way.

What I learned from the process of "constructing the field" is that the process takes you somewhere, and it is almost impossible to keep control of "your field". What I mean with that is that I was able to select my main interlocutors for my research, but I could not control the environments in which I would meet them, or have access to spaces, where refugees would meet, because my identity, of being a Greek white woman made it more difficult, since the majority of my interlocutors were men from Africa. What made it difficult though, was not these differences, but the fact that such identities of foreign men are marginalized by legal and social processes, where women are less present.

I used mainly three basic ethnographic methods. Those were, participant observation, interviews and the traditional note-taking. Complementary to these methods, I used digital social media (voice and video calls, messages) for maintaining contact with the research participants and navigating through social media pages of communities. I used photos for capturing surroundings for my own reference and as a method for discussing perceptions on refugees (see chapter 1). Finally, I occasionally used audio-recording.

Participant observation let me have access in occasions that usually a researcher wouldn't have. This means that mostly in the soccer club, where I joined the training but also in the Solidarity school, as a prospective member, I witnessed not only what people presented to me, when having an interview with them, but also how they interact within their community, which was the main focus of my research. I also witnessed the unpleasant moments, such as clashes between people and arguments, uncomfortable moments, something that people tend to leave out, in interviews, as people in general – all of us- tend to present the good side of things. The most important contribution of the participant observation is that it provided me with the context. This means that from the many different views I

heard through informal talks and participation in events, I was able to understand, issues that were not discussed or check if things that were discussed, were actually happening or not. For example, the important role of leadership in communities, is an observation I made by being around members of the communities. Participant observation meant also walking around the neighborhood of Kypseli, Platia Amerikis and Platia Viktorias, where many refugees and migrants live. It also meant playing soccer in the team, where refugees played.

Doing participant observation, I often felt like an undercover observer, who was barely participating. I say barely, because even though my body was there, my mind was thinking about the themes of my research questions. Therefore, to what extent was I participating? Another example of my level of participation was for example, in the Solidarity School, where I was not actively volunteering as a language teacher or fully participating in all activities, as other members would. Being a participant meant that I would join the conversations, I would participate in the language classes as an assistant volunteer, I might selectively share my views in discussions with teachers and students or I would help by driving someone home. However, my limitations in participations were the fact that, I was not teaching Greek as a volunteer teacher in the Solidarity School or as a conscious believer in religious spaces. My intention was, though, to expose myself to some extent through participation, and through this process making the participants feel more comfortable exchanging more contextual information, sharing their views and knowledge and revealing themselves as much as possible.

The problem I faced with participant observation was in relation to my choice not to do audio recording. This limited the data I could collect at the present time. My practice was to make a mental note and then at a later stage take note at my notebook. The problem with this is that I wouldn't always remember details, and that I couldn't catch phrases of my interlocutors. I chose not to use audio-recording during participant observation, because I thought of this practice very intrusive and I felt that my interlocutors were already giving a lot of their space to me. As a result, note-taking consisted of a process of recalling events and discussions, which is a different process than recording at the present time. However, occasionally, when my role was more of an observer, when I was attending religious ceremonies for example, I could take notes directly on my phone.

Participant observation, means that my presence in the field has an impact. For example, being an Orthodox woman in a Mosque or in a Catholic Church, created suspicion towards my presence. This is something that I realized through the way people looked at me, or the way they talked to me. On the other hand, through my presence, as a Greek (white?) woman, it was relatively easy to initiate a discussion with refugee men, when for example I attended an art workshop. In this case, my perceived identity as a Greek (white?) woman by my interlocutors, when doing participant observation, brought out some information and at the same time concealed other. Participant observation as a process also creates feelings of sympathy or dislike, which can lead us to choose some people as main interlocutors over others. All the above, were issues that affected my choices and data in the field.

In terms of interviews as a method, I used unstructured informal interviews. Unstructured and informal, means that I had a list of topics that I wanted to cover through the discussion, but I didn't have a certain order through which I would introduce the topics. I often left my interlocutors lead the discussion, when I felt that the discussion was stuck or that they had something important to share. Through this method, the issue of the importance of religion in their lives came out. I tried to be aware of the subjects that were important to my interlocutors, in addition to the topics that I thought were important. Although I had subjects of discussion that I thought were interesting to my interlocutors, in some interviews some subjects were less interesting to them and others more interesting. This method, let me go with the flow and follow what each person had most of all to contribute to my research questions. During the unstructured informal interviews, I had the freedom

to show genuine interest to what my interlocutor was saying and the same freedom to change the subject, when I wanted to stir the conversation to another subject. This method of interviewing, felt more like a conversation and not so much like an interview. This made the interview less of an interrogation, which I think was generally positive. In addition to the above, one of the most important contributions that this type of interview had, was, that they helped me seeing my interlocutors as people and letting go of the refugee and migrant stereotypes I had in my mind.

The limitations that this method of unstructured informal interviews had was that, I did not have answers to the exact same questions and I cannot always compare my findings among my research participants. Since I do not even have recordings of my interviews, I faced the problem, that I cannot recall the phrasing of my question, as this plays a role in how people answered.

The final major method I used, note-taking, one could say it is not a method, but I find that this is one of the major methods that I used to "collect" my data as it formed the way that I made sense of the field. Taking notes is an intellectual process of how I understand what has happened and how I remember the most important things that people told me. It is an *impression* of impressions! I did note-taking by hand in my notebook when I was at my own place or somewhere away from the field, except on the occasions of some interviews, where I would often take notes in front of my interlocutors. I did this because I felt that this was the friendliest way that my researcher identity could be present. I believe that collecting data through notes while letting myself be "me" within the field during observation, played an important role on how I "read the data" around me. I was not actually trying to *find* data or collect data, but mostly live the situation and then reflect on it. However, this intellectual process changed over the course of my fieldwork. In the beginning I was more focused on reading the data around me all the time, while, as the research progressed and I knew who were the important research participants for the collection of my data, I could both enjoy the process of being present and collect data at the same time.

This is a process that I was not really familiar with, because it was the first time, that I was representing myself in the field and not some organization. Even though, I was *myself* during my research, I was also *a researcher*, which means that I did have *a role*. My goal during the first two months of my field research was to let go of the too many methods, that I had initially in my mind, and try to feel how the researcher's role is and how I could interact with this identity (myself+ research role) with the people around me.

One of the major drawbacks of note-taking is that I often kept data of what stroke me, or what I thought was important in that moment, as one cannot capture everything, but has to make choices and eliminate some information. This means that the limitations of this method is, that I cannot go back in that moment and see what else could have been interesting after having a second look or a second hearing, something that could be done if video, sound-recording or photos would have been some of my main methods for collecting data.

For collecting my ethnographic data, I participated in events and activities, during which I observed and after which I took handwritten notes. I participated in three events where refugee-community leaders met for different reasons each time. I attended five Sunday Holy Masses at a Catholic Church and one Friday prayer at a Mosque. I participated in four soccer trainings and for six days in total I attended Greek language classes addressed to migrants and refugees at the Solidarity School. I also joined one art workshop organized by an organization providing shelter to refugees and asylum-seekers and three social gatherings; a party for kids playing at the soccer club, one dinner for the Solidarity School members and an Easter celebration with some of the Solidarity School members.

For presenting the ethnographic data I used the narrative approach. I used narrative approach providing both contextual information abound the people who tell their story, and tried to incorporate stories as they were told. Sarah (2013: 65-66) refers to this method saying that "the narrative mode creates meaning by situating individual events or observations within a temporal and social context."

Through my field research I held many informal talks with at least 30 people, during the events I joined. I interviewed 17 different people, 14 of whom are men and 3 are women. All of the research participants are adults and have some relevance with refugee and migrant experience in Greece. In terms of the legal status in Greece, 2 people at the time of the research did not have any legal status in the country, but intended to apply for asylum, though not having managed to lodge their application since 2019. 2 people were asylum-seekers, which means that their asylum application was registered and they were waiting for their case to be examined. 7 people were recognized refugees in Greece, which means that their case had been examined and they were granted residence permit, which is usually for two years and can be renewed. 3 people had another kind of residence permit in Greece, not connected with the refugee status, but had been through this process some years ago. 1 person was a Greek citizen but of migrant background. Lastly, 2 people are Greek citizens who worked and volunteered for the rights and inclusion of refugees and migrants.

The structure of this thesis dissertation is organized in the introduction, the three main chapters and the conclusion. In chapter 1, I will discuss my own positionality towards refugee identity how my own perceptions about "refugees" changed. I will also present narratives of the refugees themselves on this identity and finally narratives that appear on the streets of Athens. In chapter 2, I will try to give an understanding of the social life of regugees, who are the "refugee communities" and how people ask, receive or value "help" in them. In this chapter I will look at the role "refugee communities" in peoples lives and politics of belonging. Lastly, in chapter 3, I will look at how people survive at individual level, how they become independent. There, I will discuss work as a way of being independent, of coping and surviving, through narrations of refugees, who also talk about the exploitation in work. Finally, in the conclusion, I will talk about the different contested narratives on refugees and how these affect and are affected by politics of belonging.

1. What does the term of “refugee” do to me, to you, to people?

You hear the term “refugee” and you probably think of people in boats trying to cross the sea. I hear the term refugee and I think of “sphere standards”, the camps or the closed reception and identification centres. I think of blankets, tents and sleeping bags, the queues outside the Asylum Service on *Katechaki* street in Athens for the renewal of their card or for the registration of their asylum claim. I think of *Viktoria square* and *Platia Amerikis* (Amerikis square), where people slept rough for days. I also think of the news reports, which used to show images from the Greek islands of North Aegean, where the so called “hotspots” were built, whose official name by the Government is “Reception and Identification Centres” (R.I.C.s) the extensions of these “camps” with thousands of tents among trees. When I hear the term refugee I think of the source of the term, the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees, I think of the Nansen passport, the asylum-seeker’s card and the plastic residence permit for the recognized refugees and the blue passports.

In this chapter I talk about my own experience of how my gaze towards refugees changed over the time and through engaging with them or the subject in different ways.

Refugees in books and pictures

I studied International law as my major in my Bachelor’s and this was the first time I really heard about refugees. In my Faculty of “International, European and Regional Studies” there were some courses dedicated to migration, humanitarian law and human rights law, which I followed. Through studying books, I learned, that refugees are the products of wars and conflicts, who flee their country because they are victims of such conflicts. For this reason, the International Refugee Law protects people after they flee their country.

Reading the legal history of the genesis of the term refugee from books, it is as follows. The first efforts for the determination of the refugee status dates back in 1921 after World War I, where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the League of Red Cross Societies decided that a High Commissioner is needed, that will define the status of refugees (Jaeger, G. 2001: 728). After many efforts the following years and already thousands of displaced people living in camps between the two world wars, in 1951 after World War II, the political elites of the nation states decided to create a legal and practical system for the protection and inclusion of people in their new place of residence, outside of their country of origin or country of previous residence, as a result of persecution they faced or due to generalized violence as a result of war. The displaced people after World War II were approximately 30 to 40 million (Fassin 2005: 373) within the geographical area of Europe. The extent and persistence of the “problem” over many years -after the creation of the nation state- in addition to the undiminishing numbers of displaced people, were the main reasons why such an intervention was needed. Displaced people needed to be protected by the state, as they were unregistered, without access to rights, such as health, education, ability to have legal capacity for marriage, birth, death, and access to other services needed for a dignified life.

International refugee law and this initial definition of refugee, is adopted and reproduced in hundreds of legal texts through European Directives, national law, jurisprudence of European and national courts, ministerial decisions and so on, all of which determine, the fine details of how this protection system should work for this particular social group. Such for example are, the European directive and a national law, describing the procedure for registering asylum applications and the granting of refugee status by the competent authorities[7] or the Ministerial Decision for asylum seekers receiving

[7] Greek law determining asylum procedures is L. 4939/2022, which is an adoption of the European Directive 2013/32/EU at national level.

a temporary social insurance number (called "PAAYPA"[8]). In addition, there is the jurisprudence of the ECHR, such as the milestone case of M.S.S. Vs. Belgium and Greece, which created an exception for asylum-seekers who until then could not seek asylum in EU countries other than the first country of EU that they entered[9]. Then, there is jurisprudence of national courts mostly on issues of detention of asylum-seekers, which usually exceeds the provisioned time set by the law. Additionally, every year ministerial decisions are issued about the creation of the reception classes for refugee children[10]. Furthermore, there are recommendations of the Greek Ombudsman[11], ministerial decisions for the exceptional and temporary protection of certain nationalities of refugees, such as for example the temporary protection status for Ukrainian nationals[12]. All the above, is an indicative thematic overview of the legal texts produced at different levels, regional and national, by various institutions. There are many more legal texts produced for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, all of which "make it clear", that refugees are a distinct social category and a "problem" (Malkki, 1995: 497-499). Looking at the legal determination of the refugee and all the relevant legal texts, however helpful they might be for saving lives and providing basic human rights to people, it often becomes the only or the major lens to look at people. As Merry (2006: 108-9) puts it, the "knowledge practices of law" affect our perceptions of our social world, the way we perceive ourselves and others.

Studying refugee law in combination with images of refugees creates an "otherness" and the image of an "ideal refugee". There is this idea that people are "different", come from very far away, from other regions or from other times. This is how refugees are and have been depicted, mainly by major humanitarian organizations in photographs, posters and campaigns. For the most part, they have been portrayed as poor people living in the "undeveloped world", in a desert, in a camp, and the pictures imply that they just need some water, some food and the donations of the developed world to survive. Malkki (1996: 386-388) calls this "anonymous corporeality" of refugees linked to their projected "helplessness" and "speachlessness". Such images also create in the viewer the idea that this image does not change over time (ibid, 389). This is roughly how the Greek refugees from Turkey (early 1920s) have been depicted in black and white photographs of the time. As a result, this is how the idea and image of the "other", "the refugee", was constructed in my mind. I linked this image of the refugee to the legal framework for refugees of a certain appearance, an expected social and educational background, and so on. However, this image of the refugee is not exactly true. It is a fragmented way of seeing people and categorizing them as others.

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[8] The "P.A.A.Y.P.A" is a temporary insurance number other than that of the Greek citizens, which was introduced with the national law Gazette ΦΕΚ Β/717/31.1.2020 and was heavily criticized because there were delays and bureaucratic confusion resulting in no access to health system or problems with issuing Asylum Seeker's card, for the asylum seekers.

[9] The case at the European Court of Human Rights of M.S.S. Vs Belgium and Greece, set a precedent for some years, where asylum applicants could not be returned to the first country of asylum because Greece was found to have reception conditions below standard. The case can be found here: https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-103050%22]} [accessed on 9 July 2023].

[10] The most recent Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Education on the Reception School Facilities for Refugee Education (in Greek Δομές Υποδοχής και Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων – Δ.Υ.Ε.Π.) that determines the relevant reception classes for refugees in afternoon hours is Φ1/90023/ΑΔ/Δ (Government Gazette 4032/ Τ.Β/29-07-2022).

[11] Such as for example the findings of the Greek Ombudsman on the "Inclusion in education of refugee children living in Reception and Identification Centres (R.I.C.s) and other accommodation structures", March 2021, which can be accessed here in Greek: https://old.synigoros.gr/?i=childrens-rights.el.epanapatrismos.787548 [accessed 9 July 2023].

[12] Ministerial Decision (υπουργική απόφαση 131035/04.03.2022) of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum on the Ukrainians' temporary protection in Greece. The law provides an immediate title of temporary residence/ protection to the people who left Ukraine from the February 24th 2022 or later. A summary of the rights that the law provides to this group of people can be found here: https://help.unhcr.org/greece/displaced-people-from-ukraine/ , [accessed on 9 July 2023]. This law follows the decision made at European level. More can be found about the EU level temporary protection of Ukrainians can be found here: https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-your-rights-eu_en [accessed on 9 July 2023]

Refugees within humanitarian aid, policies and documentation

When I started working as a volunteer in my first year at an NGO providing legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in October 2013, I had to deal with a lot of paperwork and bureaucracy about how the relevant law translated into rights through the documents that people had or did not have. Such were the "Υπηρεσιακό Σημείωμα" (pronounced as "ipiresiako simioma" which is translated as "Police Note"), issued by the Police for the irregular entry of foreign nationals. Other documents and bureaucratic processes include the asylum-seeker's card (the old one which was issued until 2013 and the new one which was issued from that year on), the identity card which functions as a residence permit (locally known as "Α.Δ.Ε.Τ." or "adia paramonis"), as well as travel documents for refugees known as "T.D.V." or "passport". These are the main identity documents issued by the Hellenic Police and the Asylum Service for people who are going through the process of crossing borders and applying for asylum.

The "Police Note" is probably the first identification paper a border-crosser will receive, when entering Greek territory without official travel documents. This A4 dimension piece of paper informs the person in Greek language, that according to law, they should leave the country within 30 days due to illegal entry. The Police Note is also known by refugees and migrants as "harti" (or "hartia", in Greek which means "paper(s)"). It contains the personal details of the border-crosser as declared by the person themselves- many times with mistakes on date of birth or misspellings- a photo and the signature of the relevant regional Police department. This paper means that the person has been registered and fingerprinted by the Hellenic Police and that the European system (EURODAC, the database of digital identification) has been informed of their entry. It does not secure the holder from deportation, but still people pay hundreds of euros for obtaining "hartia" in the black market, as it is not always easy to register. Many try to avoid registration because it is a lengthy procedure with unknown outcome (Rozakou 2017: 43). Then, if and when someone manages to lodge their asylum application, they are issued with a light beige paper trifold card, which is called the "asylum-seeker's card". Asylum-seeker's card provides with its holder a legal temporary presence until the expiration date of the card (usually six months from the date of issue), or until the issue of decision on their asylum application for asylum.

The above it is just an indication of the documentation that refugee, status in Greece have to deal with. Having a document like this provides some agency to its holder but at the same time it signifies a legal and social barrier imposed through the documents against "locals" and citizens of the host country. Bureaucracy and its products, create classifications (Rozakou 2017: 38-39; Cabot 2012: 16; Yanow 2013). Citizens, refugees, migrants or other statuses are "legal concepts fixed into documents" (Merry 2006: 108). The mere existence of documents that make the person "legal" or "illegal", creates a certain reality – agency or limitations- for border-crossers. The material (plastic or paper card) itself of the identity document, is a human product, but "in turn it affects human agency" (McGuire 2020: 178). Additionally, the classification of people as a result of documents, introduces a social border between the border-crosser and the citizen. Citizens can be equal to each other, but refugees cannot be equal to citizens and this is signified by the identity documents.

As a humanitarian worker, which I was, dealing with refugee documentation on a daily basis, this reality of documentation, made me feel that the people fleeing or migrating, are different from me or from the people I know in my life. Hull (2012: 253) precisely argues that knowledge is reified through documents. Subconsciously I felt that refugees have something different (Malkki 1995: 513). I saw them as "beneficiaries", as "applicants", as "vulnerable", categories created for the purposes of humanitarian aid projects (Green 2011: 45).

Having a legal educational background and in combination with my professional experience, I created a preset understanding and I learned to have a certain look towards refugee identity. It was with sympathy and care that I considered "refugees" as an identity other than mine. Refugees, as I learned to look at them, need extra protection, while citizens don't. Malkki (1996: 378) suggests that the label of refugees reduces the person to their vulnerable situation and at the same time to a universal abstract refugee man, woman or child. Creating the imaginary other who is in need of care is an intellectual, psychological and social process. Tronto talks about this process as being part of politics (Tronto 2013). Care is supposed to be addressed to the "other", the needy and the weak, and not the self-reliant "autonomous liberal citizen" (White and Tronto 2004: 433, 446). Often, those who are in need are considered as "less equal to other citizens" (Tronto 2013: 425). This is the case with refugees, whose citizenship is revoked or seek for the protection of another state, in need of some kind of citizenship.

This aid, care or assistance for the other comes as a response to the unbearable suffering of others. "Humanitarian government" comes to alleviate suffering, save lives and "save" something of our idea about the world and humanity (Fassin 2012: 252). Suffering is an imperative that requires urgent action as they are not in their normal state (Calhoun 2012: 36). In an effort to manage the emergency, the latter becomes the new normal by creating "exclusionary norms on gender, nation and capital", which are actually nothing but ordinary (Athanasiou 2018: 19). There are several meanings that are assigned to emergency, depending on how we define who is in danger and who needs rescue. Emergency humanitarian response in the European Union is often seen as a threat to internal security (Andersson 2016: 1060,1061). "Rescues of people at sea are seen as the opposite to the border security", while external borders are seen as vulnerable and border-crossers as a threat (ibid).

This social, political and legal process of exclusion of categories of people in need of "aid" or protection, is reflected on different types of documents which classify their holders in levels of deservingness or "worthiness". Citizens are the most deserving, as they hold an indefinite identity card which never expires, refugees hold a two year residence permit, asylum applicants are considerable less deserving with a temporary asylum card valid only for a few months, while the people without any legal status are the least deserving, with no right to live on the same land. How is it possible, then, that the refugee regime, whose aim is to protect refugees, can reify such an exclusionary reality for its subjects?

I came to the above realizations and aporias steadily and over time during my professional and academic life. The process started with my need of being useful, or saving others, then continued with my realization of my need to saving myself or my "need to helping" (as Malkki 2015 suggests in her book) and finally, I arrived at this ethnographic study with a dialectical intention towards the term "refugees".

Shifting my gaze

Embarking on this research, my initial goal was, what can we learn from refugees and other border-crossers, about "protection". What are their perceptions on protection and how does protection work in communities of refugees. The research though took its own way. My first realization was about my own gaze on the identity of "refugees". I thought I had no gaze. I was seeing refugees as people who had something of a refugee within them. I actually don't even know what is the "refugee material" that I had in mind. It was mostly a shadow that my mind created. During the first month of my research in Athens, what happened was, that light was shed onto this shadow.

I enrolled in an anthropological winter course on migration in Athens, where I undertook some small field research with a fellow colleague, on the subject of art and refugees. I had some interviews with refugees and migrants who were also artists, or artists who worked with refugees through art. Then I had to make a presentation to my classmates on my research findings. After my presentation one of my classmates asked me a question: "You kept on saying about refugee art, but my question is, did refugees themselves talk about refugee art, or did you come up with this term?". I was very ashamed because I was standing in front of my colleagues, doing what is the most inappropriate thing in anthropology: othering (Ramsay 2019: 404). Whatever had happened though, I was forced to see my own glass wall, which I had to tear down, if I wanted to continue to do research on the subject. Therefore, with all the courage that I could find, I answered to my colleague: "Yes you are right. People did not talk about "refugee art". It is a term that I came up with." After this event, I felt like I had hit strongly my head on the glass wall. I felt dizzy and ashamed. I spent the following days in my room trying to accept what had happened and how come I had fallen in this "trap" into this "mistake".

Refugees talking about "refugee identity"

Hence, due to the realization of my own prejudice and glass wall, during research it became important to understand people's perspectives about their own identity and how they deal with the label of the refugee. Through my research I met several people who directly or indirectly accepted or rejected the label of refugee. The point is, that everyone understands the term differently (Malkki 1996: 380). Here I share the stories of Maya, Alicia, Hasan and Farid using the method of narrative approach. The stories talk to each other or complement each other. Each person gives different meaning on what the identity of refugee means to them. In some of my discussions with my interlocutors I explicitly asked them what does the term "refugee" mean to them, but this happened after we had touched the topic. My intention is that through these stories- some of which talk more explicitly, while others implicitly- is to show the meaning which people give to their identity (or to the identity of refugee) (Sarah 2013: 73). For me the most important thing was to be open to the way people address their own identity and the way they think about the word "refugee".

Meeting Maya was by chance, as with most of my interlocutors. This means that, even if I had some idea of who my interlocutors would be -I had a specific plan of meeting specific ethnic refugee communities- I ended up having my most valuable interlocutors in an unexpected way. Additionally, I often met my interlocutors in several places or several times and at some point I asked them for a meeting to talk about my research, ask them if they want to take part in it and their permission. With Maya this happened very easily because she made herself immediately available, since our first encounter when we introduced to each other.

Maya, is a young woman who almost in all occasions will make her opinion and experiences heard. Maya has the ability to talk about her own experiences in a very detailed manner. She has a soft voice and soft eyes and she often smiles out of kindness. She has been living in Greece for several years. She has been legally recognized as a refugee and she wishes to go to University to continue with her studies, so that her ideas have more impact in the world, to become a writer and to continue being an independent woman.

In my mind I had the prejudice to exclude from my research, people with whom I was not speaking their mother tongue. I didn't expect that I could do ethnographic research with people who spoke other languages, as foreign, because I thought that they didn't speak any. This was my prejudice. Had I not been open to her contribution, this research would have been less valuable without her. The fact though, that I excluded possibilities by not reaching out to several nationalities just because of my prejudice, still makes my research "compromised" in that sense.

Maya in our discussions often addressed herself as a refugee. So I asked her more on the issue. She told me that she "doesn't have a problem with the term *refugee*". Maya was born in a country, which was not the country of origin of her parents. She said, "I was born as a refugee and I will die as a refugee". She is an activist on refugee and women's rights and she works in an NGO. When I asked her what does she think and how does she feel about the word "refugee", she said "I don't like the word in a political way." "In the mind of some people they have another translation [than mine], that of weakness and of someone not being able to get out from the situation. I am not proud to call myself refugee, but it is a reality. It is our job to have a good interpretation of the word". I asked her what this interpretation is. She replied that, "the interpretation I have for the word is, that [this experience] is making me stronger, because it made me understand the world better. It helped me understand the bias I had about other nationalities. It helped me see other people as equal with equal rights." Maya as the writer and journalist, that she is, writes stories about her own life. In one of her articles she writes about how she obtained new personality traits from her experience as a refugee. Those were selflessness, humility and endurance.

Maya, has participated in various research projects with her capacity as an interpreter, researcher and refugee. In those projects, she sometimes had an unfair treatment because she is a refugee. "The problem with research projects is, that we are always the beneficiaries." She told me that when she started participating in research projects, she could never imagine, that for projects she was a beneficiary. She said, "I don't like that. I thought I was in the same level with other people." However, she has had some colleagues who tried to show that refugees are more than beneficiaries. In some of the projects, she along with her colleagues, fought for refugees participating as researchers, to get paid for their time and work. She said, "we cannot ask their free time (i.e. of refugees) while not giving back". One time she said that a University Professor from one of the project partners, didn't like the fact that refugees were part of it as staff. He believed that refugees couldn't write well reports for the project. At some point, she and some of her colleagues wrote a report and the partners couldn't believe that refugees could write so well. Maya added, "what is the reason for this project, if we cannot say how we experience it?"

Stereotyping refugees as inherently vulnerable or unable to provide their consent, without agency- is a common practice in state policies, humanitarian aid and University research (Bragg 2022, Papada 2022). Maya defies this narrative. To be a vulnerable "refugee" in Greece you have to fit in one of the ten vulnerability categories as per the law. These categories focus on characteristics such as age, gender, pregnancy, mental health and marital status (Papada 2022: 328). As Papada (ibid) explains, there is a standardized vulnerability assessment interview within the asylum procedure. Politics and its bureaucratic apparatus, in an effort to manage the situation, take for granted that refugees need vulnerability assessment. Even though, such processes can work in favor of people in need, through everyday policies in practice, practitioners and others, automatically attach "vulnerability" to certain categories of people, while stripping them of their personal characteristics and agency.

Alicia is a dynamic lady. The person that is full of stories. I did not need to ask her many questions to tell me about her life. She is also the type of person that is born a manager. She has everything under control and she has a very sharp mind. She studied Communication and Public Relations and she worked for the Army in her country of origin. She currently works in high-class restaurants as a cleaner. However, she plans to make some money and open her own restaurant in Greece. Apart from her managerial skills, Alicia is also a very good cook. When she came to Greece, as she said, she was not able to find an office job, because she is black and because her certificates are not recognized in the country. She told me, that in her country she would never have to work as a cleaner, because she has been at University. In Greece, she cannot do other jobs as an employee, than just being a

cleaner. She said that many people she meets are impressed with her English because she doesn't just have the average, as she said, level of English knowledge.

To my understanding Alicia is ripped off of her identity, just because she happened to cross the borders and live in Greece. She is forced to leave the old self back in the country of her origin and become a new person for the Greek society. Alicia for the Greek society and the asylum system, has become the archetype of the refugee (Malkki 1996: 378). Just another person like the rest of refugees, whose particular skills and knowledge are irrelevant. Alicia has to abandon her old self, and become the new one that Greek society demands, a cleaner. In Greece, it is common for African women to work as cleaners and as domestic workers "live-in" (Rozakou 2012). Solnit describes this process as "a violent metamorphosis" through which "you cease to be who you were" (Solnit 2006: 50- 51).

With Hasan we met at his shop, where he sells African style clothes. Hasan has been living in Greece for 11 years and has been through the process of asylum application for seven years. I met Hasan in a community event the first time and then a second one in another event. The time though, that we really had a talk, was when I passed by his shop of African clothes. I just saw the shop in a not so typical neighborhood for ethnic shops. It caught my eye and I stopped. I was surprised to see Hasan inside, whom I had already briefly met at the community events. He was sitting behind the counter and we greeted each other initially without realizing that we know each other. He was sitting behind his laptop, as he usually does when he is in his shop. He usually follows some meetings or trainings in English, Greek or French. Hasan is a man with an intense smile that takes over his face completely, as soon as you address him. He has a very individual "clean" dressing style, a very neat haircut. He is thin, but not extremely tall and, when you talk to him, he takes his time to reply and always in a calm smooth way. You get the idea that he is never in a hurry, even though you realize, when you get to know him better, that he goes from one meeting and one call to another. As the President of an ethnic refugee community, he takes calls from members of the community, who need his guidance. At the same time, he receives e-mails from European networks for migrants' rights while he is a businessman, having his own shop, selling clothes of African style and other accessories.

At some point, our discussion, reached the subject of the asylum system in Greece. So, I asked his opinion, what does he think about it. He said that "[this] is the system of colonialism. The system shows always that we are inferior from the white person. When [people] ask for asylum they don't say the truth. At the interview people show the marks on their bodies for the white person to feel sorry. They put you in a process of two to three years and you cannot do anything. You become sick with psychological problems. The asylum system is a system of discrimination. It is systemic racism. (…) We always need money to give for refugees and people [i.e. refugees] need to make other people (authorities) feel pity, thus they can get asylum. This system is for the white person. It was created after World War II. (…) They don't put white people in detention. A person from Canada told me that Ukrainians don't go to jail because they are "displaced people" [he implied the rest of refugees who come to Europe are not seen as displaced, but as "refugees"].(…) Europeans think, that they don't want to mix with other people. That is why they put the system, to block people. [For us] it should be like with Ukrainians. You come, they give you rights, a card, a residence permit. No more discrimination. We are all equal."

I also asked Hasan if he thinks that other people who have been in the position of refugee, all realize what he said to me. He said that "other people don't realize, even if they are in the position of refugee. Many people were born in the system."

Hasan with his ethnic community participates in an online (internet) radio show, where some refugee and migrant communities have digital space on a collective cultural platform to hold discussions, play

the music they like and express themselves. Hasan has been using this platform to talk about issues that concern members of his community. In one of the discussions, himself with another member of the same community, talk about people without legal status.

> Hasan: "So, Mr. Paul, what do you think when you hear the word "regularization" of the "sans papiers" (the people without legal permit documents)?"
>
> Mr. Paul: "I believe that it is a word that shouldn't exist. Because as human beings (…) this should happen in an automatic way. It is like when they give you a birth certificate. It is absolutely normal that a human being can have an identity. Therefore, the first thing no matter where you are, the most important thing, is having a document, that proves your identity. And this is something that should happen in an automatic way. We cannot live in a place hidden. And because of not having documents, we live while hiding and wait until they give us a document. No, this should happen automatically, when you arrive at a place. I believe this is the most important thing for the rights of human."

To my understanding from the above, Hasan talks about racialization of migration and of the asylum process, about the asylum system as a product of colonization and, about xenophobia and racism of Europeans. This reality has been created through stories that we tell to each other about "cultural difference"; that one culture is different from another (Kirtsoglou, Tsimouris 2018: 1877). In these stories Europe is often seen as superior (ibid), in which other cultures and people are supposed to "integrate" (ibid: 1877, 1879). This story, as Hasan argues, starts from colonial Europe. Anghie (1996) argues that there is a strong relationship between colonialism and international law. He shows that Francisco de Vitoria (16th c.) created "universally applicable norms" to which nation states should conform, based on European standards (1996: 332). Such norms are among others, human rights, including the right to asylum[13] . As Zigon states human rights "[have] become the dominant political and moral language in the world today" (2013: 717). I would add to this conversation of who is a refugee, that this moral universal language of human rights, probably needs re-examination, because it reproduces oppressive and racist practices within its own system.

Mr. Paul talks about the normalization of the legal construct of the "sans papier". The "undocumented" become a new and "real" social category created by law (Coutin 2000: 47). As Coutin says "law defines that which is illegal" (ibid: 11). To my understanding, Mr. Paul, also suggests, that documents create different levels of human deservingness, between the ones who have them and the ones who don't. The ones who don't, are in a state of "nonexistence" (Coutin 2000) and for this reason they "should" remain hiding, they "should" disappear.

Talking with Farid I understood that for him the document and the status, that he has, does not provide the suggested freedom. I met Farid at the School community. He lives in Greece for 8 years approximately and he is married. Farid is very tall and he seemed to me like a volleyball player. In fact, he plays volleyball for leisure. He has studied Information Technology, but in Greece he works for an NGO that supports refugees. He told me about the difficulties that documents bring to his life. When we met, he told me, he had plans to travel with his wife, but the problem is, that even though he has a residence permit ("Α.Δ.Ε.Τ.") for three years, he cannot travel because he is waiting for the renewed card. The residence permit is valid for 3 years and he has been waiting for 12 months for his new ID card. He said that if he travels with the (refugee) passport only, he risks being arrested or held at the airport, even though he has the right to travel. Farid was given a paper called "veveosi" ("βεβαίωση", which means certificate) by the relevant authority, where it states that he has applied for renewal. However, "veveosi" is not enough for travelling according to the law. He has to have both his ID card and passport with him. Additionally, the validity period for the expected new ID card has started

[13] The right to asylum is safeguarded in article 14 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948

counting from the date of application. This means that, if he receives his card within the current month, the actual remaining time to practice his right to travel will be only the two remaining years.

As Cabot says, the documents have a "brutal materiality" and the person "depends on the material presence or absence of the paper" (2012: 23). These documents become "fetish objects" which do "not free" their holders but rather "imprison them" (2012: 19, 23). These stories showed to me how people assign meaning to the refugee identity. For them, as I understood it, being a refugee means having or not having this object: the paper, the ID, the passport.

The city… talks

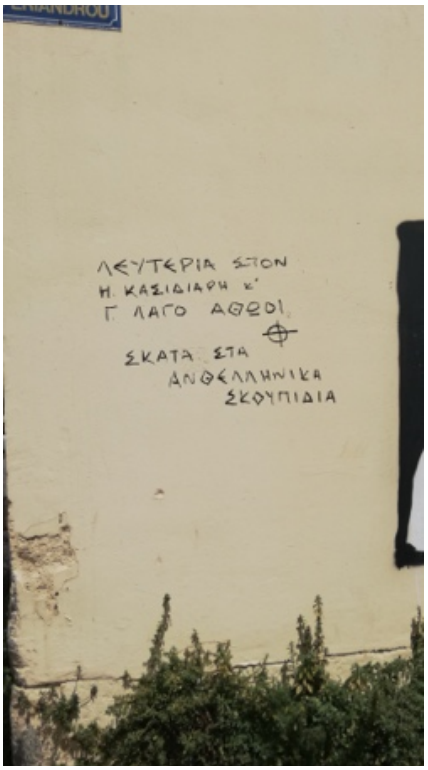
Moving around the city of Athens, wearing the hat of the ethnographer, I started noticing details, that I might not have noticed as a local, as a resident. At some point, being on the street, I thought I would take photos in Kypseli another region, where many refugees and migrants mostly live (Bourlessas & Balabanidis 2019: 16, see map 2). Taking photos helped me reflect on what I saw by looking at the photo, when I went home. I took photos of buildings, squares, people hanging out in public spaces and walls with graffiti, and flyers on the street, talking somehow about the issue of refugees. The landscape gave me some input about what people, who live in this city, believe about refugees and migrants. As Miklavcic (2008: 446) says "the walls of the city constitute a multilayered site in which language-race micropolitics are played out".

In Greece the subject of migration and refugees is tightly connected to political views. Right wing and nationalists are against the presence of migrants and refugees, while the left wing and anarchists believe that migrants and refugees are and should be part of the local society. Bampilis (2018) talks about the anti-migrant rhetoric of the members of the Golden Dawn ("Hrisi Avgi" in Greek) political party and their clashes with leftists, communists in the street. The far-right groups "essentialize cultural difference", believing that the different phenotypes mean also biological differences (ibid: 60). Nationalists ("ethnikistes", "εθνικιστές"), who identify themselves with ancient Greek archetypes and Christian Orthodox religion, believe that the people who seem different (non-white and with different religion) are a threat and that their presence is degenerative to the pure Greeks who identify with the Greek nation (ibid: 67). Thus, migrants and refugees who "do not look like Greeks" are the main victims of such groups, and secondary victims are the pro-migrant "Greeks" who politically identify as leftists, communists and anarchists.

My gaze focused more on the pro-refugee and migrant city discourses. The photos displayed in the below section are only indicative of some, and the aim is to provide to the reader a sense of how much information can be found in the streets and walls on the subject. The photo display that follows is by no way an exhaustive or proportional representation of what people in Athens believe on the subject, but just indicative.

Picture 1 "Kolonos means nationalism. Down with the anarchy and the communism", at Kolonos neighnorhood, Athens

Picture 2 "Flats for refugees and locals, not for AirBnB", at Pagrati neighborhood, Athens



Picture 3 "Freedom to Kassidiaris and Lagos. Innocents. Shit on the anti-Greek rubbish", at Plaka neighborhood, Athens

(Kassidiaris and Lagos are two far-right ex-politicians convicted at court and currently in prison for participating in a criminal organization, the political party of Golden Dawn. The organization committed crimes with racist motive.)

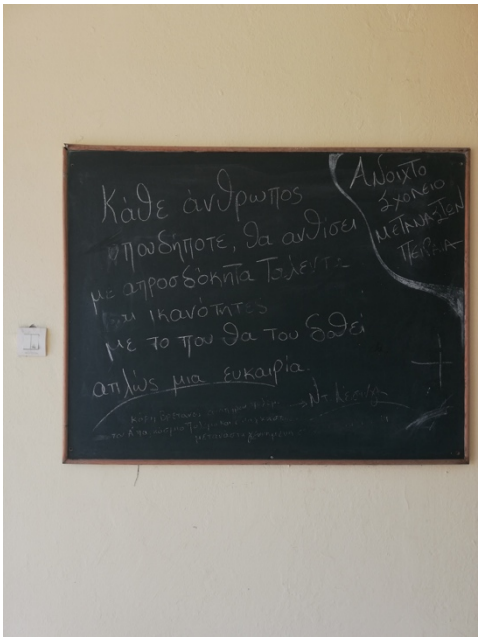
Picture 4 Response the following days "To die with Kassidiaris and Lagos… We will tear you apart wherever we find you nazi gargbage, scams of the earth, mules, nowhere guys, ANTIFA", at Plaka neighborhood, Athens

(ANTIFA is an antifascist leftist organization. It erased the first graffiti while replying to the nationalists)

Picture 5 "Pylos is filled with migrant bodies. Greeks are also murderers of peoples", at Pangrati neighborhood, Athens

(Pylos refers to the shipwreck of 14/06/2023 where more than 500 people drowned)

Picture 6 "Burn the borders. We are all relatives.", at Kypseli neighborhood, Athens



Picture 7 "Every human wherever they are, they will blossom with unexpected talents and skills by the time they will be given a chance. Open School for Migrants", at the Public School where the Open Schoo for Migrants operates, Kaminia neighborhood, Piraeus

Picture 8 "What I love in Kypseli... it's narrow streets…its tribes… its music scenes… its stray dogs.. its cinema halls…its multiculturalism…its many colors…", in Kypseli neighborhood, Athens

Picture 9 "Pushback to Notis Mitarakis", in Kypseli, Athens

(Notis Mitarakis was the Minster of Migration and Asylum during 2020-2023)

Picture 10 "Migrants welcome, tourists go home", at Stadiou street, central Athens

The first picture is the only one that does not imply or say anything against migrants in its text. However, in Greece, by stating that the neighborhood belongs to the nationalists, it is implied that migrants and refugees are not welcome. The second picture implies the clash between neoliberal politics and policies, which welcome foreigners when they are tourists, and social welfare policies, which are not enough to accomodate locals and refugees. Athens is considered a tourist city, where in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in online short-term rental platforms. This means that the local owners of a house will either rent it out to tourists at very high prices or rent it out to locals, but still at very high prices. For refugees and other border-crossers it is difficult to find accommodation because the Greek (right wing) Government ceased the accommodation program for asylum-seekers, forcing them to go back to the camps, outside the cities. Therefore, refugees and locals have common struggles on finding affordable flats.

Pictures three and four are a sequel. In the third picture, the nationalists demand that their nationalist leaders be released from prison, where they were incarcerated for racially motivated crimes (including murders). In the next picture, organized antifascist group "ANTIFA" replies that they will tear them apart "tha sas lianisoume" ("θα σας λιανίσουμε"), meaning that they will use physical violence against them.

Picture five says "Gemise i Pylos kormia metanaston, ine ke i Ellines foniades ton laon", which means that "Greeks" are also culpable for migrants' deaths. Greece is not a friendly host for them, as it was between 2015-2016, when it showed immense solidarity with refugees and migrants. Greeks are not anymore passive receivers of migrants, but are actually responsible for the deaths of hundreds of them. This slogan ending with "foniades ton laon" (murderers of the peoples") refers to the slogans often used by the Communist Party of Greece , commonly known as "KKE" (pronounced as "kou-kou-e") and other leftist groups that are against neoliberal politics and capitalism.
Picture six says "kapste ta sinora, imaste oli siggenis", which means "burn the borders, we are all relatives". It is a very anthropological slogan, I would argue, because through solidarity and the prosonym "adelfe, adelfia", ("brother, brothers") in Greece we call people with whom we share the same ideology and the same political views. It also connotes to the brotherhood of workers and unions. "Adelfe", though, can be used by both leftists and right-wingers in the Greek context to show our sympathy towards a person with whom we share something in common. This slogan emphasizes that we are all in the same position -dynamically migrants, while the borders signify the forces that have put up fences between people. People who are all migrants, could unite against the implied oppressor by burning down the borders, which probably signifies the state and all the forces that support it.

Picture seven is a writing on a board at a public school where the Solidarity School is hosted. This wall is in public view for the children who go to school on a daily basis and the volunteers and refugee and migrant adult students, who learn Greek on Sundays. This slogan points out that people are not tightened to a place and that each person has talents and skills, which will show, when there is "space". The Solidarity School provides exactly this social space, by providing Greek language lessons to all people despite of their ethnicity, religion, legal status, previous education and other characteristics which are usually prerequisites for people to enrol in formal education. Picture eight speaks of another social and geographical open space; that of the neighborhood of Kypseli in Athens. This wall is a collectively written one, with locals and passers-by writing what they love about the neighborhood. Some of its characteristics are the many colors -metaphorically and literally- its many tribes and its multiculturalism.

Picture nine refers to the "push-backs" of the Greek authorities at the Greek sea and land borders. For some years now, the Greek Government (right wing) has denied these narratives as conspiracies, that undermine the sovereignty and borders of the Greek state. From 2023, the same Government, following criticism from the media and human rights institutions and the disclosure of evidence, partially accepts the narrative and undertakes an investigation into the illegal actions. Push-backs are an informal practice of authorities to *push* "an alien" who enters the state's land or sea, back into the territory of the neighboring country. Such practices include abduction, detention, intimidation and violence, such as physical violence, humiliation, stealing of their belongings and other. The previous Minister of Migration and Asylum (2020-2023) has firmly denied the existence of such practices by the Greek authorities. Therefore the slogan implies that he is the one to be "pushed-back". Picture ten, emphasizes on the "foreign" identity of both migrants (refugees are often called migrants and vice versa) and tourists. However, it is implied that for the city migrants are more welcomed than tourists. One of the probable reasons could be the fact that migrants are locals, who live, commute, work, shop daily in the city, while tourists are temporary visitors. Another reason why tourists are less welcome than migrants, is that a lot of infrastructure has been built for tourists (such as big tourist buses and hotels) which disrupts the city rhythm, against the migrants who have adapted to the city scenery.

2. I heard there are *"refugee communities"*

In Athens someone can find the so called "refugee communities" and "migrant communities" in forms of associations. There is actually a guide developed which lists a great number of them (Harokopio University 2009). The associations are both legally established and informal communities. There is almost always some representative and a telephone number, that you can call. These communities have mostly come together because of their ethnic, linguistic, religious, labor and other similarities.

The problem with talking about "refugee communities", as Malkki says is that they become "an essentialized am anthropological 'tribe'"(1995: 511). Refugees then are not similar because of their legal status, "they become 'a culture', 'an identity', 'a social world, or 'a community' (ibid). "as if refugees shared a common condition or nature" (ibid). By using this term, apart from assigning to the socially constructed category of refugees certain characteristics, we automatically make a distinction between the "refugee communities" and the rest of the society. As if the "rest" of the society is uniform. Using this term presupposes that we think that the rest of the society does not have any refugee experience or background, it is "Greek", local and autochthonous. But, to what extent the Greek society is Greek or to what extent Athens is comprised of Greek Athenians? Who is considered more or less Greek or Athenian and, are there statistical data for all the above? Statistics play an important role in constructing impressions within us about how society is (Simon 2012). As Simon writes "population statistics play a key role in nation building and the (re)production of national identity" (2012: 1368). He also argues that European states do not collect anymore data on the categorizations of race and ethnicity, because such data would undermine the ethnic homogeneity of societies (ibid: 1376). Therefore, the impressions we have about the "Greekness" of the Greek society, of who is foreigner, the idea about the concept of the "host community" which are locals, against the concept of the "refugee communities", which are hosted, are also constructed. We perceive the refugee communities, as islands of different or diverse identity, among homogenous local identities. Such perceptions are also built based on our own identity; is it multiethnic, is it Greek, what are our personal and family stories on migration and refugeeness. Based on these, we make sense of who is familiar and who is strange, who is local and who is a visitor, which are the host communities and which are the refugee communities.

Trying to locate refugee communities and to decide whether they are a refugee community versus a migrant community took me some time to understand. These communities are not comprised of homogenous identities, neither is society. This is useful to think about because neither the "local communities" are homogenous, as I was expecting them to be. The issue of temporality is an important factor regarding the identity of "refugees". Someone is not necessarily a refugee all their lives. It is often a temporal situation. Ramsay (2019) argues that we create "the other" and we assign to them the characteristic of the permanent other. She also argues that the label of the refugee condemns them in a present because of a certain past they have, while denies them a possible future (Ramsay 2019: 404).

The elusiveness of common identity among community members became more evident, as I went closer. Our language and its binaries, has created a mutual exclusive taxonomy: the local ("ntopios", "ντόπιος") and the foreigner ("xenos", "ξένος"). Therefore, we often cannot perceive that a "foreigner" can be at the same time "local". This is the reality that I found within the so called "refugee communities", ideas of foreignness and locality embedded to each other; people who might have been refugees and currently are recognized Greek citizens, people who might have come to Greece as migrants, but recently have become refugees, people who were born and live in Greece for several decades, but their parents originate from another country and cannot be legally recognized as Greek. This mesh of different identities coexist within refugee communities.

Therefore, these are classifications on citizenship, such as refugee, migrant, Greek, Greek with migrant origin, migrants or refugees who feel Greek but the state doesn't recognize them as such. Classifications on citizenship are mutual exclusive classifications, meaning that these they cannot coexist on one person at the same time. This is true, but some these identities can be temporal (Ramsay 2019), as someone for some time can be a certain one and change to another. Additionally, within refugee communities, one would expect to find only "refugees", but can find migrants, Greeks, refugees, people without legal status. The community keeps the characterization as "refugee community" and people who are not anymore refugees, might still identify with them (or the opposite).

Entering my field, it was difficult to draw a distinct border between the host and the refugee communities as explained above. So, I kept wondering whether I was "in my field". Being an Athenian myself in Athens, I was not trying to reach a far-away place, but I was actually embarking on a journey of different identities. During this process while looking for "different identities", I actually realized more about my own identity, as well as my own stereotypes and constructs (Panourgia 2015: 12). I tried to meet interlocutors that were refugees, but many questions arose, about, how can I know the identity of my interlocutor when I meet them? How do I consider someone a refugee, based on the 1951 Geneva Convention, based on what people say? Should I ask about whether they are refugees? Should I only focus on the more recently arrived refugees? If yes, what does "recently arrived" mean for me, up to five years or more? For several weeks, people, whom I met within refugee communities, were sending me from one person to another, as I was trying to meet people who were "refugees". Within the first days of my research, I met a man that was part of a refugee community. However, during our meeting, it came out that he was Greek and had a migrant background. Some people, that I met within the first weeks of my field work, have been living many years in Greece, spoke Greek and had recently acquired Greek citizenship. Should I consider them locals or refugees since they are part of the refugee communities?

At the same time, another difficulty I faced was, that I was continuously stuck on my own identity. I was seen as Greek. And even though I am, I actually do not *feel* "Greek". My interlocutors, though, see me as Greek. This made it more difficult for me to gain the trust of people who do not feel comfortable with my "Greekness". Is it me who doesn't feel comfortable or them? However, I think that I was seen with mistrust by some community members and leaders, because I was approaching people, with whom I was not sharing common struggles about my identity. I could not do anything to change my identity, as there was no way I could think to disguise or hide it. In one of my first discussions within a meeting of refugee communities, one young woman commented on my research subject that "this is a subject that should be researched by refugees and migrants themselves". However, even though I faced mistrust and had many doubts about how to approach the subject of the refugee communities, I decided to embark on this journey, and try to find out, not only based on my observations of others and what others would say to me, but also through my own identity, through which I was seeing my interlocutors.

Based on the above, I realized that I cannot think of refugee communities as "islands of different people" within the sea of a homogenous society. Taking a historical example, in Greece there have been "refugee communities" and "migrant communities" that have been excluded and discriminated. However, over time they became part of the Greek society. These are the migrant community of Albanians who mostly came to Greece in the early 1990s and the refugee community of Greek refugees who came to Greece in 1922. These were Greek speaking people, mostly from Istanbul and Smyrni, who fled from Turkey in the early 1920s and came to Greece[14]. The Greek refugees who

[14] These were people identifying as Greek speaking and Christian Orthodox living in Turkey, who were forced to flee in 1922-23, which was the major flee, but also in 1955 and until 1974. These people spoke both Greek and Turkish, were Turkish

came from Istanbul are also known as “Polites, known also as “Poli”, which means city. Greek refugees in Greece were for many decades socially excluded as a community. They were often called by the locals with intimidating names, which have remained in the Greek language up until today, such as “tourkospori” (“τουρκόσποροι”, which literally means “seeds of the Turkish”) or for women, “pastrikies” (“παστρικιές”, which literally means “very clean”). For a woman to be extremely clean was synonymous to being a whore, based on the assumption that whores have to be clean for their clients and very well dressed. Being a whore in Greece was considered unethical for a woman based on Christian orthodox religion. However currently they have integrated and over time are socially recognized as “ntopii” (locals) and not as “xeni” (foreigners).

Thus, the Greek refugees from Turkey, who spoke the Greek language and had the same religion, were still seen by the “established community”, as “others”. Elias and Scotson in their sociological research, similarly described the stigmatization of a community in Winston Parva in Britain, even though it had similar characteristics of “ethnicity, nationality, ‘race’ or social class” with the established community (1994 [1965]: xviii). The only difference was that the established were residing for longer period at the area than the outsiders. The reason for the stigmatization, Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) argue, was because of the power imbalance between the two communities. The established community possesses resources that the outsider community does not. Petintseva (2015: 7) applies the Elias lens on the study of migration and argues that “migrants”, if seen as outsiders, lack the “social capital” as described by Bourdieu which is “networking”, “sociability”, “reciprocity” and “bonding”, which needs time investment in order to bring economic value.

What I want to argue in this chapter is that refugee communities help us seeing the subject of being a refugee differently and closer, than seeing an abstract scheme of “us” and “them”. My findings show that the refugee communities are made by refugees *and* “locals”, but also that refugees *are* locals. This shows that, a refugee community is not an island of different identity floating in the sea of a homogenous host society. It mostly depends on how (with what intention) we look at “others”, and to what extent, we ourselves, are others. Secondly, I discuss the “politics of belonging”, where the persons share only some part of their identity with that social group, the community. I show the diversity in experiencing connection and belonging t the “refugee community”, as the identity of my interlocutors is “constructed along multiple axes of difference” (Yuval-Davis 2016: 200). Finally, I discuss the aspect of support or “help” that people get (or not) from the community and how this is different from the “help” or assistance that someone gets from the humanitarian/ asylum system, NGOs and state services for refugees.

Other relevant ethnographic researches situated in Greece related to migrants, refugees within the context of communities, are the sociological work of Fouskas (2014) and the anthropological work of Antoniou (1995). Fouskas in his book examines through quantitative (statistical data) and qualitative methods (interviews and “life-stories), how the “low-status jobs” of “Nigerian immigrants” affects and is affected by their participation at the Nigerian Community of Greece and their smaller tribe communities (2014: 58). Fouskas in this book discusses thoroughly the theoretical concept of “community” and emphasizes mostly on the disassociation that Nigerians feel with their communities. Antoniou (1995) by using the ethnographic method of participant observation discusses the meaning that the Armenians -as part (or not) of the Armenian community in Athens- give to their ethnic identity of “Armenianness” outside their country (as refugees). She does that by exploring different parts of their social life through her participation in those, and also, by collecting official data from local authorities and historical documents of the Armenian community.

citizens, but were considered as part of Greek and Christian minority. Nationalistic ideas that prevailed that time in qddition to the Greek army attack in Turkey the previous years, led to their persecution by the Turkish authorities.

Ethnic communities

I approach ethnic communities through a constructivist approach, showing how the ethnic "refugee communities" are indeed a social construct. Barth (1969: 11) talks about ethnic groups as an "organizational type", that someone identifies with, based on their "presumpti[ve] (…) origin and background". He also adds that some similarities and differences might be ignored by their members while others exaggerated (Barth 1969). These ascriptions might change over time but as Barth says the boundaries of the group persist (ibid). The same applies to the ethnic communities discussed in this chapter.

Talking with members of three different refugee communities, I understood that they might be unified and fractioned, conservative and progressive, protective and exploitative, exclusive and inclusive (in terms of gender and ethnic identity), comprised of locals and foreigners at the same time.

Ethically, I decided not to reveal the ethnic origin of the communities, that I came to know, and to anonymize the people I talked to. Exposing their identity could be harmful for them, as for some, the communities are not only a safe space, while for others it is. I decided, that some things, about how communities work in different directions, are important to be said, but to name communities and people might harm them or their relationships among each other.

"Z" community:

After two weeks of trying to arrange my first meeting with the community "Z", I managed to meet its Chairman. We met at his office, which is actually the backroom of an office for money transfers, with the relevant logo outside. It seemed to me that the community doesn't have an office. Among other issues, that we discussed, including that of "integration"- as he said- of the people of his community into the Greek society, he told me that he was elected Chairman less than a year ago. His phone was ringing often during our meeting, interrupting us. One of the persons who called him was from the Embassy, to wish him well for the new year. It was clear that the community is very well established in Greece, network-wise. Even though the community is a legal entity, to my understanding, there is no office for the community, other than the shop of the Chairman. The Chairman, as it came up from our discussion, aimed at strengthening the integration process of the members, as he thought that this is the major problem of the community. He didn't mention any frictions in the community. He was friendly towards me and he suggested that he will facilitate my access to other people from the community.

Pastor John, whom I had met some days ago, a member of the "Z" community told me that the community is currently fractioned because there is a disagreement on the results of the elections, basically about who is the Chairman. He also told me that within the "Z" community there is another community that is about based on the diaspora. In this organization only people who have a legal status are allowed to join. Pastor John was the first person, whom I met the first days of January, and he was the first to communicate to me, that the community is fractioned. The Chairman did not mention this in our meeting. If I had only met the Chairman, I would have gotten a different impression about "Z" community. It is interesting how I found out more about this later.

Four days after the meeting with the Chairman, I tried to meet Samuel, the other person claiming to be the Chairman of the "Z" community, as Pastor John had told me. I went to the cultural center, that Samuel is managing in the city center of Athens, which normally holds cultural seminars, trainings and workshops. Samuel was not there, but I found his phone number on the website of the cultural center. I called him on his phone, introduced myself, told him my role as a researcher and asked to meet him. I told him that I have been following his activist work in the past and that I had already

contacted community "Z". He asked me, whom I had met from the community. I told him that it was the Chairman, whom I had met. He said that there is a misunderstanding here, and that, normally, he is the chairman, but that we are going to discuss this issue in person. So, we booked an appointment and agreed, that I would send him a message in a few days, thus he could let me know, which day would suit him for a meeting. I did as agreed, but long story short, the meeting never took place.

Nevertheless, and since Athens is a "small world", I had the luck to meet Samuel in person by chance at a social event, where communities held an open discussion two months after our first talk on the phone. I introduced myself to him again and we had a quick chat after the open discussion. He was friendly- he told me that he thinks he knows me from somewhere- but I could also feel his scepticism towards me. Even though, in the communities' open discussion, all communities presented themselves as unifying organizations for their members, in our private discussion, we talked about the tensions within the community "Z". Samuel told me about the conservative force within "his" community. He said that the current Chairman belongs to the group of the "old minds". People who do not really want to solve problems and let the community stagnate. He told me that he had tried steadily to introduce new subjects to the Board, such as gender equality, as he himself was a member of the Board. Initially, he was encouraged by the other members of the community to be a candidate for Chairman, even though this was not his intention when he joined. His goal was to bring positive change and to unify the second generation[15] with the members of the "Z" community. Samuel himself is part of the second generation, which means that he was born in Greece, but he faced difficulties with maintaining his residence permit in the country.

From this experience, I realized that the communities are not a unified entity (Antoniou 1995: 24, Fouskas 2014: 138). There are political tensions within them and of course it is comprised of people of different "identities": Greeks of migrant decent like Pastor John, migrants with decades of residence in the country like the Chairman, second generation migrants who were born in Greece like Samuel and refugees like Joseph. Meeting Joseph, revealed to me more about the "Z" community.

I met Joseph through Pastor John. Pastor John introduced me to Joseph as a person without a legal status in Greece, at a meeting we had at a local restaurant close to "Platia Amerikis" (Amerikis square). Since then, I kept in contact with Joseph through whatsapp and we had a meeting at "Platia Agiou Georgiou" (Agios Georgios square) in Kypseli. When I asked Joseph about the role of the community in his life, he told me that there are various sub-ethnic-group communities under the "Z" community, depending on someone's tribe. He himself approached the community of his own ethnic group for help, when he came to Greece. He told me that he paid 400 € to one person to get an appointment[16], but nothing happened. Joseph, a 36 year old man, came to Greece in 2019 and is living and working in Greece for already four years, without having a legal status. Joseph also paid 100 € to someone from another community to get a paper, that will protect him from being arrested. He said that in the beginning "we are new people, frustrated and we don't know better". For this reason, he said that he doesn't have any connections with the community because he doesn't trust them. He also told me that in order for someone to maintain his membership, it is necessary, to pay a monthly fee, but without any support. Therefore, he has no friends from the community and no significant connection with it.

[15] Second generation are considered the children of first generation migrants, who are born and/or live in Greece since young children. So far, the Greek state does not give citizenship to second generation migrant children by birth. It even deprives the rights of a residence permit, in case the parents do not have certain types of residence permit in Greece. More information here (in English): https://g2red.org/ellinika-i-kyvernisi-odigei-xana-se-apokleismo-ti-deyteri-genia/

[16] Joseph wished to have an appointment with Asylum Service for applying for asylum. He had been calling the 'skype' application, since 2019, which for some years was the only access to apply, for people who have been living in the mainland (not in the islands).

This made me realize that "refugee communities" are not necessarily protective for refugees, but can be exploitative. Some of the members are progressive and others conservative, with different legal statuses (no legal status, migrants, Greek citizens or refugees) or ethnic group belongingness. However, the "Z" community wouldn't accept people without legal status as members of the community. As Yuval-Davis (2016: 209) argues, "the social locations, identities, ethical and political values- can become the requisites of belonging". In the "Z" community" the more progressive stance of Samuel and the low social status of Joseph, as a person with no legal status, became reasons for their exclusion from the community. Thus, this affected their belonging.

"A" Community:

With Hasan[17] I met the first time at the office of a Refugee-Led organization in Athens. It is an umbrella organization for many different ethnic and other refugee communities in the country. Hasan is a Board member of this organization but also the President of the "A" ethnic community. In January there was an event called "kopi pitas" ("κοπή πίτας"), the cake that we traditionally cut in Greece within the first weeks of every new year with family and friends. In this cake, there is a lucky coin that falls onto the lucky person of the year. Such events take place in Greece, usually the first two months of the year, January and February, within families, organizations or offices, where people gather to share the cake and win the lucky coin. The people who attended this event at the office of the umbrella organization were Presidents and Chairmen (very rarely woman leaders), representatives of friendly NGOs to the Forum and of a political party, activists, including a representative from UNHCR, who gathered at the office. During this event, we were having informal talks with each other and at some point, after one hour, the cut of the cake took place. People took their cake, took photos and that was it.

From the beginning I introduced myself as a researcher to Hasan and when we met in person, I offered to help him, with anything where I could be useful. He asked me about my knowledge background. I told him that I used to work for organizations who supported refugees, thus I have experience in writing funding proposals. He liked this idea, as he had some pending plans, and we agreed to work on this together after the interview. Hasan has a very clear style of communication, that doesn't leave you with second thoughts or an unclear position. He is direct without being rude, which made me feel comfortable to ask about many subjects.

Hasan told me that the "A" community, even though it is an ethnic community, has members from different nationalities with similar languages. The reason for this is because some people do not have their own ethnic communities in Greece or because they like and trust the "A" community. The "A" community has the reputation of helping people, refugees and migrants, who are not only from its nationality/ ethnic origin. For example, the community offers "correct information", as Hasan told me, in terms of asylum procedures or other legal and administrative papers. Moreover, it helps connecting people who are looking for a job through their network, or finding an accommodation for some people.

I found out that another person I met in an art-workshop, Mamadou, who does not have the same nationality as people of the "A" community, had been in touch with that community. He did in fact tell me that the President is a good person and that this community indeed helps people. I found out the same information, when I was talking to a staff member of the umbrella organization, Giannis.

Apart from the above, I realized that with me, Hasan was relatively more open, more sincere, than the President of the "Z" community. Hasan shared more information about the "A" community or the

[17] See another story of Hasan on p. 22- 23.

Forum in terms of what they do exactly to support refugees and their members. He didn't avoid answering my questions by making generalizations, as the Chairman of the "Z" community did. For example, he told me where his office was, that they have monthly meetings with their members, that they provide material and legal support to people reaching out to them when being detained, and other aspects of their practical contribution. Therefore, the "A" community, is not only open to other nationalities who are refugees, but also to my identity, someone that hasn't had the experience of being a refugee.

There could be two reasons why I felt that this community is more open and inclusive than the "Z" community. Firstly, with Hasan we found ourselves agreeing on several issues. For example, the issue of "help" by NGOs and the asylum system in Greece. He told me towards the end of our interview, that "we see things in a similar way, even though we come from a different background". With that I felt indeed that he was more open to me, as a person of different nationality. Secondly, Hasan's extrovert character, his communication skills, his ability to network with Greek and European activist refugee groups, created this openness, that I felt. So, the leadership of a community reflects to some extent the inclusivity.

With this example I want to show that, when we refer to ethnic refugee communities, it doesn't mean that they are comprised completely by one ethnicity. Based on Barth (1969) the boundaries of a social group might change based on what characteristic, its members give more importance to each time. Being a refugee in the "A" community, I assume, from what Hasan told me, puts you in a disadvantaged position, and is a more important characteristic than the ethnicity. Some members of the "A" community, according to Hasan, choose to be part of this community because they find support here, and/or because there is no community of their nationality, or because they do not receive help in their "own" community. As Castles & Davidson (2010: 182) put it, "[the] feeling of belonging that is at the source of civic virtue is understood as something consciously forged together rather than an inheritance that is inescapable". Because of their different understanding of belonging, such communities -like the "A" community-, are more open to merge or interact with "the local society". The "A" community develops its identity through "collective action" (Fouskas 2014: 8) towards the common goal of promoting the rights of refugees and other border-crossers with or without legal status. Considering the above, based on my experience with the "A" community, the main conclusion is that, we should not think of ethnic refugee communities as fixed entities either in terms of ethnicity or in terms of their level of inclusion.

"S" community:

Maya[18], was the only person that I met from the "S" community and thus, I didn't have the opportunity to observe or cross- check with other sources the events she recounted to me. I came to the decision to meet with her because I adapted my methods on how to approach possible interlocutors, looking for a bottom-up approach on stories about refugee-communities. This means that, due to the situation I was facing, with the limited access to refugee communities, I was led to look at the communities differently. Thus, not only looking through the eyes of people who have an active and organizational role within the communities, but also through the eyes of people, that ethnic communities supposedly represent, like members of refugee communities. This approach helped me to lower the expectations of what an important role a refugee community plays in the lives of refugees (Fouskas 2014: 128- 129).

With Maya, we briefly exchanged our first words at the terrace of a community center where we met for the purposes of a research project. The first things we talked about was the reason why I was

[18] See other story on Maya in pp. 20-21.

attending this reference group and the subject of my research that focused on refugee communities and the way people provide support to each other. She told me that she is not part of the ethnic refugee community of her own nationality. I was surprised to hear her stance expressed so clearly. But since we didn't have much time at that moment, we exchanged phone numbers and we agreed to meet another time. She seemed really eager to share her stories with me.

It was surprising to me how I kept meeting the same people in different environments. After that exchange, I met Maya at the Solidarity School. What defined our first intentional meeting, though, was that I texted her in *whatsapp* and we arranged an appointment for an interview. We met at a café at the city center in the more touristic part of Athens, Plaka. Maya came there directly after her work. She works as an interpreter for a program of an organization that supports refugees. The main questions I had in my mind were, how ethnic communities support their members and what could be the reason that Maya feels like she doesn't belong to the ethnic community of her own nationality, as she had told me one month before.

First of all, Maya, is of "S" origin but she was born in another country. In the second country, she was not allowed to become a national, even though she lived her whole life and went to school there. As her own country she considers her second country. However, in the second country, her nationality was and still is seen with suspicion by the nationals. People of her nationality are seen as criminals, thieves, people who steal the jobs from the locals… As a consequence, she never felt that she belongs to her second country, where she had actually spent all her life.

Maya told me that when she arrived in Greece in 2016, she lived in a camp outside Athens, where many people of the same nationality lived, due to the strategy of the Greek government, to group people of the same nationality together. Maya told me that "the first time I saw a community of "S" nationality, was in that camp", where she lived for one year and several months. She added that "in the camp women didn't have any rights". Despite that, as her father is an open minded person, she was able to join a youth newspaper for women migrants, where she started to write. In this, she wrote several articles. Among others she wrote about being a refugee and what men should know about being a woman of her nationality.

Since women traditionally are not considered writers, journalists or having any independent profession, Maya and her sister, were looked upon by men of her nationality. She told me that they were mocking at them saying, "Look at them! They think that they can become a journalist!". Men's advice to the young women were, "Be a good girl" and "Help your mum" instead. Maya told me that nationals of the "S" country are more conservative than the environment she grew up in in her second country.

The two sisters established contact with the Greek Army officials, who were the managers of the camp, in order to facilitate communication about food preferences of camp residents with nutrition problems, but also to start some Greek lessons for women and to raise awareness regarding nutrition. The lessons became popular with women in the camp, but the sisters experienced a strong critique by the men of the same nationality. As she told me, a man told her sister that, "we don't want our girls to be in a closed space with Greek Army men". This man tried to organize the men of the camp against the two sisters. Her father intervened and talked to this man. However, the result was that people in the camp stopped talking to her and her family for months. After all this, when the newspaper finally came out and was distributed to the camp, the same man that had created all these problems to her family which resulted in social exclusion, came to pay her respect about her articles she wrote.

However the end of this story might be, Maya shared this story with me, as an answer to my questions whether the members of ethnic communities of refugees provide support to each other. My understanding is, that not all people feel like they are belonging to one country or to the ethnic refugee communities of their countries for various reasons. The fact that Maya was born in another country than that of her nationality, in addition to the disassociation she felt due to the oppression of women's rights by men of her nationality, were the main reasons that made her feel separate and not as a part of the "S" community while living in that camp.

Maya told me other stories too. She told me that in Greece there are different refugee communities for "S" nationals which represent the different ethnic groups. Herself, she has characteristics of both main ethnic groups- of the one ethnic group because of her parents' race, and of the other group because of their religion, which is the major characteristic of the latter group. As a result of her mixed ethnic, racial and religious origin, she told me that both ethnic communities saw her with suspicion in Greece.

Apart from that, and because she is a very active person in women's rights, she intended to launch a yoga lesson for women within one of the "S" communities. As she told me, this happened by chance, as she went to attend a cultural event of the "S" community due to her role as a journalist for the youth newspaper. There she met with the different ethnic communities of her nationality and they were very friendly in the beginning. So, she thought that probably she made a mistake thinking that she doesn't belong. The leaders of the community, who some of them have been in Greece for twenty years, invited her to their meetings and she thought that they are more open minded, than the men of her nationality that she had met in the camp.

When she attended the meeting, she asked them, why women are not there. She realized that women do not have an active role in the community. For this reason, she decided to launch yoga lessons for women of her nationality and she asked the community leaders to give her a room in the office of the community, so that she can meet with other women for one hour per week. Men of this community were very nice to her and they even asked her if she wanted to take part in the elections of the community. She was not so much interested in the latter, but in the empowerment of women and her request for the room to hold the activity.

The Board members asked her to come the next week for several weeks, each time postponing to give her the room for the yoga lessons. She attended some meetings with them and it seemed that there was another woman who was interested in the candidacy for President of the community. Until then the Board had been comprised only by men. However, in one of the meetings, as Maya told me, an old man from the community insulted the woman candidate saying to her that she cannot be a candidate, "because she is fat and short". Maya, told me that everybody laughed in the room including the woman candidate. Maya didn't laugh and said that she wouldn't accept this insult, while the other men continued laughing. As Maya told me this is a way for men to be funny and to make this matter of the woman's candidacy seem less serious. Finally, the woman was not a candidate, the Board did not give her a room for the women's activity and she realized that their goal was to just take some pictures with women in their community meetings, in order to present themselves as inclusive and progressive community. Maya, ended her story saying to me that "I don't have any positive experiences to share with you about the community".

With this example I want to show that when we refer to "refugee communities", we should not think necessarily that they include all people of the same nationality. Not all nationals of that origin feel nationals to the same extent and not everybody feels safe and belonging to an ethnic refugee community (Fouskas 2014). In the case of Maya, gender roles and stereotypes about the lifestyle of an "S" national, are reasons for discrimination or exclusion from the community. As a result, Maya

identifies less with the community. However, probably not all women feel the same level of exclusion or discrimination, as Maya did, but this doesn't change the fact that some people do feel as if they don't belong. In conclusion the point I want to make is that, the ethnic refugee community is not a unified entity with clear and unchanging borders (Barth 1969), as we tend to think.

Refugees in other ethnic communities

With Mamadou we met at a comic workshop organized by an NGO. I asked for his phone number, saying that I am a researcher. With Mamadou we walked towards Omonia square together and there I explained to him what my research is about and what is Cultural Anthropology in general. With Mamadou, we kept in touch for some weeks through *whatsapp* and at some point I asked to meet him at a café to tell him more about my research and discuss with him if he wants to take part in it.

At one specific café in Platia Agiou Georgiou, I kept meeting many of my interlocutors, because Kypseli, is a neighborhood friendly to refugees and migrants[19]. Kypseli increased its population in the 1960s when the majority of its flats, houses were built by the upper-middle class, as we call it in Greece, *"astiki taksi"* (in Greek *"αστική τάξη"),* which literally means "urban class". The local residents of Kypseli in the 1990s started moving out from the neighborhood and this created space for the incoming migrants, who could find flats in affordable prices. The square where we met is actually a round place on which you can find tables and chairs from the adjacent restaurants and cafés. At one side of the round square, lays the Orthodox Church of Agios Georgios, whose bells you can often hear at dusk.

Picture 11 View of Agiou Georgiou Square, Kypseli, Athens

This is the place we sat with Mamadou the first time. Even though it was late January, it was almost twenty degrees of Celsius and sitting in the sun, although it's a little bit chilly, is always pleasant. The second time we met at the same café, some weeks later, we sat inside, because the weather had changed and it was rainy and cold.

Mamadou, is a not so tall man. He has a sweet face, in the sense that his smile goes along with his lightly slit eyes. He has a kind of soft and hoarse voice, that normally you wouldn't be able to hear if there was too much noise around. At our first meeting, I had decided that I am just going to hang out with him and not necessarily do an interview. The reason for this was because the first weeks of my ethnographic fieldwork in Athens, it had been very difficult to approach the communities as I intended to. Hence I changed my approach and decided to meet individuals of refugee and migrant background and see where the research would take me. Therefore, at our meetings with Mamadou, even though I told him that they are for the purpose of my research, we discussed issues other than my research, such as religion and family, both of us sharing with each other how we see the world and how we think. Even though our meetings with Mamadou were more relaxed and not so research focused, gradually I asked him all my questions and we discussed my research topics. I also directly

[19] About Kypseli's multiethnic character: Balampanidis, D., & Polyzos, I. (2016). Migrants' settlement in two central neighborhoods of Athens. City (London, England), 20(1), 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1096052

mentioned my intentions that I am going to write about some of the issues we discussed and I often brought on the table the issue of informed consent.

So, I asked Mamadou, if he has people from his country that he befriends in Athens. He said that he does have. Mamadou, when I posed questions, usually answered with very few words, focusing on what exactly was asked. I added to the previous question, if there are specific places, where he would meet them and he said that there are. He said that they do not have steady times and days when they meet and that this depends on the obligations and schedule of each person. Mamadou, added that he meets people from other countries too. He has an "X" country and "Y" country man and others that he befriends. He said that in general he meets people in order to learn something from them. He has some values, though, which means that he wouldn't befriend someone that does bad to other people or himself or someone that uses others in order to rise themselves up. From our discussion it came out that he wouldn't choose to befriend someone because of their ethnicity. He is more interested in meeting people for broadening his view and learning from them. After some meetings he would check with himself, if he is interested in meeting them again, based on the criterion, if he still has something to learn from them.

Mamadou showed me in his smartphone some videos and pictures from his country's independence day celebration, including pictures of two footballers from his country, who play in two of the most famous Greek football teams, *Olympiacos* and *AEK*. The celebration took place last year at a bar that the community used for this purpose. In the videos I saw some people wearing traditional clothing and dancing, but this was not prevalent in the rest of the pictures. From our discussions with Mamadou, I understood that he connects with his compatriots mostly during events in order to share customs and traditions, as well as to celebrate certain events of the year that are of significance to him. On the other hand, religion plays an even more important role in his life, than the ethnic community. He goes to the Mosque almost every Friday and during Ramadan, when he fasts, even more frequently. Therefore, he seeks to connect with the rhythm of the day, the week and the year that he is familiar with. Although he connects with people from his ethnic community from time to time, I understood that the ethnic community is not so central to his life. During the week, he is very much focused on his job, and the Greek and English classes he follows at an NGO.

These examples show that the communities are a way for socialization and a way to share some similarities with people in a social group, since socialization with the Greek host community is more difficult due to multiple exclusions (racism, discrimination because of being a refugee). These similarities are not necessarily the most defining of their identity. Neither the fact that they are (or not) "refugees" plays such an important role. Communities are mostly a "symbolic unity, which is composed of symbols and values that allow community members to construct meanings" (Fouskas 2014: 8). This "imagined community" (Anderson [1983]2006) though, doesn't mean that it has a place in the real, everyday life of people. It is there to satisfy people's imagination of "a lost paradise or utopia" (ibid: 9). People in ethnic communities mostly share a sense of belonging through participation in cultural events, or a sense of connection with their (idealized) past.

Religious communities

I approached two different religious communities in Athens, the *Catholic Parish Church* and the *Mosque*. Catholic and Muslim believers who visit these religious places are often of refugee or migrant background, since in Greece, the Greek nationals are more often Christian Orthodox. Greece is not a secular country, but recognizes the Christian Orthodox religion as the dominant religion, as per the article 3 of the Greek Constitution. According to the United States Department of State report "81 to 90 percent of the population identifies as Greek Orthodox"[20]. According to the same report, "4 to 15 percent identify as atheists and 2 percent as Muslims".

Going to these religious places happened naturally, without plan, because many of my interlocutors brought up religion in our discussions without this being my intention. Religion came up, when we talked about family, names and namedays, "help" or support by the community, or about where people gather. Church and Mosque seemed to me as places where I could take part in community events, as places where refugees go to or meet.

Usually, religious places are open to newcomers. Accessing religious communities of different religion to mine, were the second most difficult communities to access after the ethnic communities. Although I had physical access to the public area, where the prayer or Holy Mass was taking place, I couldn't really fully participate, because I was not familiar with the Catholic or Muslim religions. Not fully participating means to me, that I was more of an observer. Even though I feel like I am secular in my everyday life, when I was confronted with different religious practices to mine, I was hesitant as to what extend I should participate for the purpose of my research. What will it mean for me, if I practice a different religion within my researcher's role? Will that signify that I am changing or betraying my religion? Maybe I am not so secular or indifferent towards religion, as I thought before this research. Many times I found myself frozen in the religious place, thinking how I should participate. Will people think that I am insulting them, if I mimic their moves, like for example hand-crossing and bowing, or if I participate in the sacrament, since I am not interested in converting? What are my limits in terms of my identity and how much can I extend or change my identity for the purpose of this research? The answers came just by being there and through my interactions with the people I met there.

Catholic Church

According to the website of the Catholic Church in Greece, there are approximately 250,00 Catholics who live in Greece[21], some of which are of refugee and migrant background while less are Greeks. Unfortunately, there are no official data on religious minorities in Greece, as during the census, the state does not collect data on religion. The Catholic Church I visited is part of the Archdiocese of Athens, one of the nine Dioceses of Greece. The Holy Mass takes place every Sunday at different times in different languages; in Greek, English and French. I visited the Church on five different days, attending the English speaking Mass, where attendants varied from ten to approximately one hundred people or more during Sundays. In the English speaking Holy Masses, the people with whom I briefly met are mostly of African descent, and less of Filipino descent or other countries. The data I collected are based mostly on my observations and less on participation. I managed to talk to people who attended the Holy Mass only two times after the Holy Mass had ended and posed them a few

[20] U.S. Department of State Report 2022, https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/greece/ , [accessed on 9 August 2023]
[21] Website of the Catholic Church in Greece: https://cathecclesia.gr/%ce%b7-%ce%ba%ce%b1%ce%b8%ce%bf%ce%bb%ce%b9%ce%ba%ce%ae-%ce%b5%ce%ba%ce%ba%ce%bb%ce%b7%cf%83%ce%af%ce%b1-%cf%83%cf%84%ce%b7%ce%bd-%ce%b5%ce%bb%ce%bb%ce%ac%ce%b4%ce%b1/ , [accessed on 9 August 2023]

very simple questions, trying to get to know them, but I found it difficult to interact with them, because I felt as an external and "curious" observer and this made me feel uncomfortable.

The Church is situated in a central place in Athens. On Sundays if you pass outside the Church, after the end of the Holy Mass, you will see men, women, boys and girls of all ages in its courtyard. The Holy Mass starts at 12.00 at noon and finishes at around 14.00. People arrive at 12.00 or later, even one hour late. Most of them on Sundays wear their very best clothes. Women wear dresses, some of them very long and tight along with impressive big jewelry, while other women might wear more simple clothing, still traditional and official. Some fewer women might come with their everyday clothes. Younger generations wear their best clothes too, but for them being officially dressed often means wearing their best pair of trousers and sneakers and a meticulous hairstyle. Men wear preferably one color suits or single color traditional clothes.

The area, where the Church is, is very densely built with flats, so you might miss the fact that there is a Catholic Church as you pass by, because it is a bit hidden by a neoclassic building, while its facade seems like every other building. The only indication that this is a Church, as you pass by, are the vitrail windows, which are also hidden by the orange trees on the pedestrian street, right outside the building. In order to get into the Church's small yard, you have to cross the dark green banisters. Then you turn right, and there is the door of the Church, which seems almost like a usual wooden door.

Inside the Church, on your right hand and close to the entrance there is a place for the candles, while on your left hand, you can finally see the big hall. The Church is simple in its decoration inside and outside. The nave has wooden benches for the believers to sit down right and left from the central aisle, while on the ceiling three arches are formed. The walls of the church are painted with light ochre color. There are no religious paintings on the wall. The only presence of a Saint is the image of St. Therese at the beginning of the aisle, where believers bow and make their cross as they get inside the Church. At the end of the central aisle is the apse, where the clergy preaches. At the centre of the apse a simple big wooden cross is fixed on the wall and over the cross, a single central vitrail window. All along on both sides of the nave there are three main big vitrail windows of a very simple design and colours, just to make the light coming from outside a little warmer. What makes the church warm though, is the singing of its people along with the Choir.

The Choir is situated on the front right part of the nave. There is a group of three percussionists who sit next to the choir on the side and play the rhythm for the choir and for the believers to sing along in one voice. The conductor of the Choir is a leader of one of the ethnic communities. He conducts and sings with zeal standing in front of the Choir. The conductor has often a big smile and intense expressions from his effort to take the best out of the choir members, women and men. The songs sung by the choir are mostly joyful, about praising the Lord, bringing Glory to God and about their strong belief to God. The believers sing along with the Choir and the atmosphere, all of a sudden, and in between the preaching, becomes extremely joyful and cathartic. Some of the believers move their bodies left and right as they sing and others might raise their hands up to express themselves along with the melody. I felt the melody of the songs taking me away too, to a better place and I sang along with the believers and the Choir's backing vocals. The backing vocals and the high and low pitched voices of the people in the Church create an uplifting experience. In some songs there is the motif of question and answer, which make the songs more lively and easy to sing along.

In some of main songs, the believers sing the below lyrics, which are often projected to a screen visible to all attendants.

- "Do you believe? Yes, I believe", Catholic Hymn

(Question) "Do you believe?"
(Answer) "Yes, I believe
in the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit.
Yes, I believe."

- "In thanksgiving and love" *(composed by Sir Jude Nnam)*

"Oh yes, in the presence of the Lord,
I will bring my gifts
in thanksgiving and love.
There is joy in my heart
it is flowing like a river.
I will praise the Lord
in thanksgiving and love."

The Pastors of this Catholic community were referring to their community as "our English community" or "for our Church and our Parish community". Sometimes during the sermon the Pastor asked people to pray for their families back in their country. He named the country and it was clear to me by then that this religious community was connected to one ethnic origin more than others. The Pastors lead the Holy Mass. Their preaches are interrupted by the songs of the Choir every several minutes. During my visits to the Church, I saw two different Pastors. They wore a purple or a green cape with the initials on the chest "JHS". One pastor had a more lively speech than the other walking on the aisle in between the wooden seats, among the believers, with the microphone on his hand, raising his voice when he puts emphasis on an issue (almost all the time!), moving his hands intensively as he speaks, showing sometimes someone from the crowd or staring at someone, as if he is addressing them specifically. The other pastor was preaching from the apse, where there was a podium and a microphone. This pastor was staying closer to the texts and his examples and stories from everyday life were shorter. During the preaching, there was often a question and answer motif between the Pastor and the believers. The Pastor interrupts his speech saying*, "God is good"* and the believers reply *"All the time". He continues by saying "and all the time"* while the believers reply, *"God is good".*

Usually, every Holy Mass has a central religious and life theme, around which the preaching evolves. For example, on one Sunday, the main themes were the Fifth and Sixth Commandments, "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not commit adultery. The pastor said that the Fifth commandment should not be seen only in a literal sense. It begins with not having anger in the first place, because, anger drives people to act. For example, he said, many of us, do not speak to someone or we are angry with something for days, weeks or years. He said that some men hit their wives because of their anger and this is not acceptable. It's a sin. He asked that the people who will come to this Church the next time they should have solved their anger, not by hitting their wives. He said, "you make sure you are clean before you enter this ground" and he showed the ground of this Church. Then he moved to the Sixth Commandment, which again it should not be understood, as he said, in a narrow way. Adultery includes all the sins of the flesh. It includes fornication and sex out of marriage. He said that having a relationship out of marital union, out of Church, out of tradition and out of civil law, is not good. This is important also because of marital rights. He said that unlawful marriage is a combination of fornication and adultery. He continued on this subject by saying that teenagers should not have sex with each other and that they should not have boyfriends or girlfriends. Their parents should not allow their children to commit such sins. The pastor said that he wishes that this community has and will continue having a lot of virgins. He also named masturbation and wearing sexy fashion, as sins.

The pastor talked about righteousness and that this is necessary for the believers of the English Catholic community, so that they can go to the kingdom of heaven.

Almost every Sunday, just before the Holy Mass starts, some families or couples are welcomed to the community by coming through the aisle towards the apse with the Pastor. The couple or the family, wears their best clothes. When you get inside the Church before the Holy Mass starts, there are two men associate pastors, who give copies in paper with the readings, so that the believers can read along. The associate pastors usually stand close to the entrance of the Church and make sure everyone is well received. In the Holy Mass, every Sunday believers receive the Holy Communion. At a certain moment, they stand up and walk around the Church with the guidance of the associate pastor. Each time one row stands up and walks around the Church, while the whole church sings. Then, they return to their bench and the next row of people walks around. This continues until all the people have stood up and walked. In some parts of the sermon, the believers kneel, in others they sit, while in others they have to stand up. All these acts happen naturally by looking at the people next to you or in front of you. I often felt uncomfortable to participate in all these acts, because I didn't want to make a mistake or insult another religion, just because I was baptized orthodox. Towards the end of the Holy Mass, believers shake their hands with the people in front of them, behind and on the side saying to the other "peace" while smiling. This was one of my favorite parts of the Holy Mass, because I felt seen and welcomed. Shaking people's hands, I could see their faces and give and take good energy.

After the Holy Mass at around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, people would receive the Eucaristic bread outside the Church. I sat there too and observed people. Children would make their own groups talking about which school in Athens they attend and about their grades in exams. They talked both in their "mother tongue" and in Greek. Most of the people new each other and they would greet each other. There I saw the Choir conductor. I approached him and I told him that the Choir is amazing. He told me, "κάνουμε ό, τι μπορούμε" ("kanoume oti boroume", means "we do the best we can") for the community. This man is also the President of one of the ethnic communities. From our short discussion I understood that he has a plan about creating a sense of unity and shared values among the members of the ethnic- religious community. I asked him about his family and he told me that this year his oldest daughter that goes to school, is going to make a decision about which profession is going to follow. So, the next week, he said, they are going to sit together, have a discussion and make a plan about her future.

At the Church I managed to talk to two people after the Holy Mass had ended. I asked a man on the stairs of the Church, why he likes this Church. He told me first of all, because the sermon takes place in English language and, secondly, because here there is a black community. I asked the lady next to him the same question, but she looked at me with contempt and did not answer to my question. She asked me if I am Catholic myself and I told her that I am not. I told her that I am a Master student doing my research on communities of refugees in Athens… But this didn't make any difference for her. After the many times that I had been to the Church, I still felt an outsider.

The subject of religion came up often with some of the other people I met during my fieldwork. Alicia[22], a woman that I met through the Chairman of the "Z" community came to Greece in 2016 as a visitor and then since 2018 she started working on one of the Greek islands during the touristic period. I asked her, who helped her through all her struggles in Greece. She said that "No one helped me". She had been through difficult times, as she had been through domestic violence in Greece from her partner. She divorced and with her own perseverance she managed to get a lawyer from an NGO, who supported her with her divorce and her residence permit. Alicia was seen with mistrust from her lawyer, she experienced discrimination in work, on the street and in the public transport. She had

[22] See other story on Alicia on pp.21-22.

studied Communication in her country, but in Greece the only job she could do was to become a cleaner. However, she plans to become a businesswoman and open a restaurant of her own, as she is a very good cook. Alicia is the person that is full of stories. I did not need to ask her many questions to tell me about her life. She is also the type of person that is born a manager. She has everything under control and she has a very sharp mind. She told me that neither friends nor relatives nor the community helped her during her difficult times. I asked her if she goes to Church and about the Catholic Church community. She told me that she doesn't go so often, but she prays. "Only God helped me and praying", she said.

This discussion made me realize that religion plays an important role for people who migrate when they are confronted with new and big difficulties in their lives. People who migrate or flee, do not have a social network, which they can trust, take strength, support and courage from. As a result, God, religion and prayer is a resort of help, strength and courage that guides some people through the unknown. As Falk (2015: 48) writes, the "religious faith and belonging [are] a key support for the displaced communities". However, the "depoliticized" identity of "refugees" (Malkki 1995) and "secular humanitarianism" (Falk 2015: 47), simply makes them objects of the state, holders of rights, but with no identity and no future.

Unlike Alicia, Angela had a different story to tell about religion and its relationship with women. Angela is the leader of a women's organization. This organization exists now for over a decade and its goal is, as Angela told me, to bring women together to help them integrate into the Greek society. During the covid-19 pandemic, the organization offered food to some members. Through their network trafficked women that reach out to them, get referred to organizations, who can help with legal and social support. They also sometimes help with looking after children of some women.

In the beginning, she said that this organization was criticized. She said that, "men want to have women under their control". Some women say that "my husband doesn't want me to be in this organization". "Women should behave like African women behave. As time goes on, they start to understand, but not all of them. They recognize the organization and they respect it." She said to me, "Do you know a phrase saying, "those who were seen dancing were thought insane because they could not hear the music"? "Now the men they begin to hear the music."

I found this organization by asking around within refugee and migrant communities and someone gave me her phone. I met Angela only over the phone, where we had this discussion, because she was ill and she could not meet. When we came to the subject of who helps you, she also talked about religion. She said, "I am not a religious person. I was baptized Orthodox Christian and I participated in the local African religion. The Churches want the African women to believe in them. This is a problem, because people believe more in Churches than in organizations. We have these "απατεώνες" ("apateones", that means impostors) the Pastors, who take money from people... In one case the Pastor was asking money for giving services. This thing still continues in my country but also in Athens". However, revisiting Angela's account, from where we talked online, I saw her profile picture had changed, now saying "With God, all things are possible".

Getting to know Pastor John (from the "Z" community), whom I met for the first time at a café, I realized that Angela's story made sense. Pastor John had two male refugees under his protection or so it seemed. However, he soon withdrew his support to these two, Jason and Joseph, whom he introduced to me. Pastor John presented himself to me as a man who knew a lot about this ethnic community and about religion. When we met for the first time at a café, the conversation very quickly went to religion, perhaps somewhat coincidentally, perhaps not. Pastor John didn't tell me from the start that he was a Pastor. This came up later in our conversation when he suggested something and then I asked. Even though he brought me into contact with Jason and Joseph, when he was present in

our meeting with the two, at the ethnic restaurant, he tried to direct my questions to the two men, in his own way. One of the two, Joseph expressed that night that he strongly believes in religion and that he was relying heavily on the Pastor's help. Joseph had a heart condition and had already been in Greece for three years without papers (and without legal status). As a result of this, he was unable to access the health care system. He relied on the Pastor to find him a solution. Joseph relied so much on his faith and the Pastor's help, that he had come from the village of Filiatra, where he was working at the fields picking tomatoes and cucumbers.

Taking the bus from Filiatra is at least three hours by bus and a considerable expense for Joseph. Probably the price of the bus one way, is the wage of one day for him. On top of this, he had to find a place to stay cheap for some nights, or for free, and lose the salary of at least two days, to have the chance to see him in Athens. Surviving as a person without legal status in Greece, is very difficult, because Joseph is a "ghost" for the Greek society. He cannot work legally, go to the hospital, take the bus or walk freely in the city. That night, at the ethnic kitchen restaurant, I kept the phone number of Joseph and we stayed in contact for several months. Joseph told me that he was relying on the Pastor's help to access the hospital for his heart condition. It was so important for him, to access the hospital, because he had shortness of breath, which prevented him from being able to work in the fields. Not being able to work meant that he could not survive in Greece. After one month that we were talking with Joseph, he texted me saying that the Pastor had disappeared and was always too busy to answer to his messages. Joseph was very disappointed. I tried too, to contact the Pastor, as we had agreed that we would meet again, but he would answer my messages after days saying that he has a lot of work.

From the stories of Joseph and the Pastor, Angela, Alicia and my observations, I realized that to all people, who are refugees or migrants, religion is very important, but their relationship with it, is expressed in different ways. Some people want to be part of the Church and the community because they feel they belong there and because they might be supported in a practical way. Others, though, want to keep only the relationship with God. In all the above stories, all my interlocutors wanted to have a relationship with God, because for them it is a way to connect with their inner, past and future self. The problem is though as within all communities that there is a power imbalance between the established and the outsiders (Elias [1965] 1994). This might result in exploitation or exclusion of the members with less "social capital". These members might feel unsafe or threatened and avoid the Church or the religious community. However, the ones who belong increase their social capital through networking and social and spiritual participation.

The Mosque

At the Mosque there are people of different national and ethnic backgrounds and different languages, who share the same religion. They all pray in the same room. This community is not only comprised of refugees and migrants who go there but also Greek citizens (like the Imam) who have migratory or refugee experience (since Greece is not a country with a significant Muslim Greek population).

The Mosque, opened its doors in November 2020 and is the first official and public mosque in Athens, that functions as a religious space for Muslims[23]. In the news it is being said that approximately 100 mosques exist in Athens, which are unofficially used as worship areas by Muslims (Triantis 2018). However, only four of them are considered "legal" and recognized by the state (ibid). It is estimated that approximately 500,000 Muslims live in Athens (ibid, Pew Research Center 2017: 30), while other

[23] You can see some photos of the Mosque here: https://www.lifo.gr/now/greece/anoixe-episima-tzami-stin-athina , [accessed on 9 August 2023]

sources say that they are approximately 250,000 (Sakellariou 2017, U.S. Department of State 2022, Section I). The majority of the Muslim migrants arrived in Greece in the 1990s (Antoniou 2003: 155).

A constant problem for the Muslim population in Athens, apart from the Mosque that took over one century to be built in the outskirts of Athens (Sakellariou 2011, Antoniou forthcoming, Lakasas 2019)[24], is the fact that up until today there is no official Muslim cemetery in the region. It seems though, that there are plans for a Muslim section to be introduced in the cemetery in Schisto, a suburb of Athens (Antonopoulos 2023). The only Muslim cemeteries in the country can be found in the regions of Komotini and Thrace, in Northern Greece, otherwise the family of the deceased has to send the dead body back to their country of origin (ibid). Therefore, as Sakellariou (2011) argues, the whole Islamic community in Athens, is treated as an "invisible community" and the Mosque as an object of "symbolic violence" by the Greek state.

Arriving at the Mosque for the first time, I was very impressed with its existence and the fact that I had never heard from my interlocutors about it. Only Mamadou told me about it when he showed me some selfies on his mobile phone, that he had taken with some of his compatriots. From what he told me, I understood that the Mosque is a meeting place on Fridays, when the big prayer takes place.

To get to the Mosque was a difficult task. I went there by bike and I searched for it in advance on *Google maps*. Even though the location was correct on the map, it was not showing me the correct route to access it. The area where the Mosque is built, is a land plot, which belonged to the Greek Navy. The surroundings are an industrial area of warehouses and small factories. In order to see the Mosque you have to go through a metal door that seems like a door to a private property and not to a road. Turning to the small street and going through the metal door, I passed by a police car with the engine turned off. At the end of the narrow street, a big parking area appeared, and then I could see the very large square with a small fountain in the middle. The building of the Mosque didn't seem like a Mosque at all. The Mosque is not of traditional Islamic architecture, but it is a modern, plain and rectangular building made out of metal. On its forefront it is written "MINISTRY OF EDCUATION AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS" and below, "Mosque of Athens". The metal white plaque with the blue letters and the logo of the Greek government can be read both in English and in Greek.

Entering the Mosque is a process. Normally you have to wash yourself and take off your shoes. Some people sit outside on the square in between the prayers and go in when the prayer starts. As a woman, I could only access the part that was dedicated for women to pray, on the side of the building. The space for women to pray is considerably smaller than that for men. I took off my shoes and entered the women's division. I took a plastic carpet from the lady at the entrance and I sat on the side of the room on my plastic carpet. There were only three women praying in the room. The room had a wall between the men's and our room, so we couldn't see the Imam, but just listen to him.

After some minutes, listening to the Imam and looking around me, I saw some books on a wall recess with a small window. The books were copies of the Koran (the Holy Book of Islamic religion). I took one book that was written in Arabic, a language that I do not understand, and I started to go through its pages in an effort to connect with the religion. I remembered that I actually have to start from the last page and go to the first, since Arabic language is written from right to left and therefore the books start from the page on your right hand to your left hand. A lady wearing a black dress with her head covered in Hijab, approached me and asked me if I was Muslim. I said that I am not. She said that "with all respect, the Koran cannot be held by people who are not part of Islam" and that "you have to be clean" to touch the Koran. She said she was sorry for this remark and that she didn't want

[24] According to Lakasas (2019), the area for the Mosque had been identified since 1880, but the Mosque was finally built and open its doors in 2020.

to offend me. I told her that I was not offended and that I understand. However, I felt again that it is difficult to immerse in the Islamic religious community and do further research, because the fact that I am not a Muslim seemed like an obstacle to me.

Being a Muslim, is a big part of one's life. According to the religion, the believer should pray approximately two to six times a day depending how religious they are. When I met Oumar in the shop, where he worked as a tailor very close to Platia Amerikis (America Square), after one hour that I was in the shop, the Muslim prayer started automatically. I asked Oumar, as I have been curious for many years, where the Imam actually is that suddenly starts singing. Oumar, explained to me that there are some mobile phone applications that, receiving your location, can inform you about the actual times of prayer. Therefore, you do not need to connect with a Mosque online, but the application automatically informs you when to pray depending on the sun position and the time during the year. I was so impressed to hear that the application is the one that calls the believers to pray and that technology is introduced to such a traditional practice, such as prayer.

When I asked Mamadou, why he thinks he received asylum, taking under consideration that some people take asylum, while others don't, he told me that the reason is "benediction". I thought that "benediction" is a kind of luck. I asked him what is benediction and how can someone obtain it, why someone has it, while another doesn't? He told me that it is not so much connected with the Christian or his traditional (tribe) religion, but it is something that comes from the family. He said that if as a child you are not a burden to your parents and you make their life smooth, then benediction comes to you as a gift, which might protect you in a difficult situation.

Mamadou is both a religious and a modern person. As a religious man, he tries to go to the Mosque every Friday, and during Ramadan, when he fasts, even more frequently. As a modern man, he has his job but he tries to have a job that will also leave him with some free time to go to Greek language courses and to the Mosque. When it was the end of Ramadan, towards the end of April, he told me that he was homesick. The celebration at the end of Ramadan that takes place each year, also at his country of origin, where his family and friends are, makes him nostalgic. Religion for him is a way to connect with himself but also with his family and friends in the country. From my observations and our discussions I understood that following the religion gives him a sense of the rhythm of the year, a good reason to call his family and exchange wishes, and also to go to the Mosque to pray. Mamadou is a kind of person that believes in "whatever is to come, will come" and he often advised me to relax, not to have stress about things beyond my control.

The subject of religion came up again when I talked with other people in my research about "help". Oumar, the 19 year-old tailor that I met at the tailor's shop in Platia Amerikis. Oumar told me that "praying helps very much the person. It makes them calm. God gives power and health to the person to work. When the Muslim app calls you, you need to make time for your prayer". Oumar prays at least two times a day, trying more frequently depending on his time. He also goes to a technical school (upper secondary education) apart from working as a tailor.

The discussion with Oumar took place at the shop of, Malick, his boss, who is also a tailor. Both were working on their fabrics as we were talking. At their shop they make clothes of African and European style depending on the client's wishes. At the window of the shop they mostly show women's African dresses but they can make anything the client wants. As we were talking, Malick was using the sewing machine and Oumar was cutting fabric. At some point Oumar left his bench to make his "chai" (tea prepared in the African way) even though it was already past 9 o'clock at night and we were still talking. I asked Oumar if he knows what is "benediction". He told me that it is, "when you have faith and God comes and help you, when you have a problem". He told me that "God *beni* everybody.

Benediction is for all persons. God created humans, sky… etc. We don't know how we were born. If you believe in God, you have Faith and you believe that God created us, then you have benediction." Malick, his boss, put it in a different way. Benediction is "when you do something good for the other person". Therefore, I understood that "benediction" is a religious word of different meanings for each one and it carries with it the philosophy and ethics of the person.

Based on my observations religious communities, are formed as communities for several reasons: people go there because they want to connect with God and their spirituality, God gives them strength and help (believing), religion is part of their traditions and every-day life, it offers structure in their days, weeks, years, it enables them to connect to their past, inner-self and future (self), it offers connection with people from their country of origin, such as their relatives who also go to religious spaces, and finally, the Church or the Mosque provides a way to socialize and network.

Religion of "refugees" is often seen in Europe as a "major cultural difference", even though the needs and the reasons, for being part of religious communities, remain mostly the same. On the grounds of this difference, people are considered as "others" and as not belonging. In Greece there have been violent events specifically in islamic religious spaces, that are usually frequented by refugees and migrants.[25]

On a final note, it is obvious that religion functions, as a protective, supportive or helpful practice for refugees, but has been neglected by state and humanitarian organizations and policies that aim to support refugees, even though there has been some research on the subject (Ager et al. 2015). Muslim religion is mostly seen with fear and hate by the Greek society (Kirtsoglou and Tsitselikis 2018: 1880). In Greece, being of another-than-Christian Orthodox religion, by some parts of the society, is considered identical to being a refugee and/or migrant, a "racialized other" and a threat (ibid: 1882). As a result, politically and socially, the presence of refugees in the Greek society, puts at stake the shared feeling of belonging to a Christian Orthodox society and state. Since 1833, the Greek state has been connected to the Orthodox Church and is a theocratic state (non-secular) up until today, 2023. Thus, some parts of the Greek society perceive people of a different religion (other than Christian orthodox), as a threat to the Greek identity up until today[26]. Taking into consideration all the above helps us understand the contested character of the refugee identity, as perceived in the social landscape of Athens, in relation the religion.

[25] Event of attach in Agios Panteleimonas neighborhood in 2009, where a Muslims' worship area was attacked and set on fire by people wearing black clothes and covers in their faces (https://www.in.gr/2009/05/23/greece/empristiki-epithesi-se-xwro-proseyxis-moysoylmanwn-ston-ag-panteleimona/

[26] Political leader of the party "Greek Solution" ("Ελληνική Λύση", pronounced as "Elliniki lysi") received 4,45% of votes (16 out of 300 seats in the Parliament) in the elections of 21/05/2023, suggested that the Virgin Mary, is being represented in elementary school books as "Geisha" or "Indian" and this is inacceptable. While he was on a political debate and while showing the picture to the TV screen, he said "isn't this vulgar? Isn't this christiano-phobic?" He also added that "you have mixed up progress with living against nature".

Solidarity School

Solidarity School ("Αλληλέγγυο Σχολείο", pronounced as *"Allilegio Scholio",*) is a network of schools which provides education services and support to social groups, which are often excluded from the process of learning or need additional/ different type of support. Within this network, I joined the *Open School for Migrants* ("Ανοιχτό Σχολείο Μεταναστών", pronounced as *"Anichto Scholio Metanaston*"), which is situated in Piraeus, practically another city adjacent to the city of Athens. The school addresses its courses to migrant and refugee adults who want to learn Greek. Giannis, whom I met at the umbrella association of refugees, told me about the existence of this school. He told me that the School does a considerable effort and that through the school I could probably meet some people for my research.

The Solidarity School uses for its premises, the premises of a public High School in the area and opens on Sundays, when children do not go to school. When I arrived there for the first time, an event for the new year took place, another "kopi pitas"[27]. Inside one classroom the teachers were cutting the cake and sharing it with the students.

This school, as well as NGOs, fill the gap of teaching the Greek language free of charge to adults, since the state does not provide such a service. There are some municipalities, such as recently the Municipality of Athens, and NGOs, that provide Greek language courses, but attendants of such programs always have to fulfill some conditions. One of the most basic conditions is that the student must be an asylum-seeker, a refugee or a migrant, thus have a legal status.

The Open School has no such conditions. Its members agree that education is a good that does not need any precondition, apart from the student's will to learn. Moreover, its members, based on the discussions I have had with them and on one general assembly that I attended, believe that the school is a social environment, which introduces a person into society, something that is necessary for every human being, regardless of their status, whether they are refugees, migrants or none. Therefore, the School provides more than learning Greek. It covers the need of the student and of every person to be part of a social community in which he or she already lives and works.

The members of the Open School for Migrants, volunteer teachers, migrant and refugee students, people who support the school materially and providing administrative work are people of different backgrounds. This is an important part of the story, because as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I was looking to meet with "refugee communities," but instead, I found that communities are not only comprised of refugees. They are comprised of Greeks, refugees and migrants. Often refugees and migrants have become locals and Greeks often have a refugee or migrant background.

For example, Mahad, an ex-student of the School and now an active member in it, came to Greece from another country more than 15 years ago as an unaccompanied minor. This year he successfully passed the Greek language examination for the naturalization process. Therefore, he is soon (most probably) to become a Greek citizen. Another example, is the story of Caterina, who came as a migrant several decades ago. She learned Greek with the support of the Open School and she became a Greek citizen. Caterina currently teaches the Greek language at the Open School of Migrants and provides Greek lessons for a living. These examples confirmed to me once more, that I have to think differently and more openly about the so called "refugee communities". There are no "refugee communities". In my research I did not find communities comprised only from refugees, people with one legal status only. In the School community, the members are refugees and migrants who sometimes become Greeks and locals, and the opposite, Greeks and locals, whose family has a

[27] See p. 34 for "kopi pitas" (κοπή πίτας) meaning.

refugee or migrant history. The area of Kokkinia, where the School is situated, reminds me of this again. It is in a neighborhood that received a lot of Greek (from Turkey) and Armenian refugees in the 1920s and the decades that followed.

The most important characteristic, though, of this community is in what Takis, one of the teachers, told me:

"…this [the School] is a first stage through which they can understand the meaning of society, the act of participating and being responsible for something. Right? So, I think that to a big extent [this School] is not about integration, but about social osmosis. Something (…) that occurs as reaction between us. I have to understand, and they have to sense, that it is about the common good of everyone. The other [the student] has to understand that they have both the right and the responsibility on this. Then, you make the other able to give, not just take. Because, the biggest anxiety, that I feel that these people have, is to feel that they are useful. That they are indispensable. Right? That for example, someone might be absent and the fact that I will call him, makes him understand, that I miss him, he will – in any case- understand that he is valuable to me at whatever level. These people feel that they belong somewhere. It is not about something that is provided to them. Therefore, they better understand, the notion of belonging, being part of a community and being able to interact in it."

The Solidarity School challenges the strict limits that the words "refugee", "migrant" or "foreigner" set. There is no migrant or refugee, no migrant or refugee story. There are students who every Sunday go to School to learn Greek, and teachers who teach the language. It is also about active participation and solidarity ("allileggyi", αλληλεγγύη) in its political sense. As Rozakou (2018) writes, such spaces and groups are not simply just pro-migrant and pro-refugee but they have an "anti-state philosophy", challenging the way citizenship, the role of active citizenship in society, education and other notions are understood. Such groups, put sociality and solidarity at the center of their actions.

Takis also told me, that "decisions are made collectively through assemblies". "The school is not only a result of the teachers but also that of the students. They (i.e. the students) have the right to teach their own mother tongue, to elect and to be elected." During my presence at the school, I did not see any classes taking place in the mother tongue of the students, but one of the students was elected as a member of the Board of the School and I indeed saw that students participate in the assemblies. Takis emphasized that "these social and political rights are not recognized by the society and the institutions".

Apart from what Takis told me, I observed that people, teachers and students, would also meet outside of the School, and I was invited to join sometimes as well. The School organizes social events and activities for everyone, like for example, art workshops and discussions, that have been taking place in the past years, attending a theatrical play, General Assemblies every several months, the "kopi pitas" ("κοπή της πίτας", the new year's cake with the lucky coin), a dinner before the Easter vacation and a camping excursion that takes place once a year at the end of the school year. The members of the School actively provide to students and teachers the social, political and geographic space to interact both inside and outside the School and always at an interpersonal level.

Another event that shows the community's character, is about how people support each other. There is no "help" provided, but a feeling of "we are all together in this". One of the teachers told me about what happened to one of the students recently. Salman, had been attacked in his apartment by some right group people, who entered his house and threatened him with a gun, because, as the teacher told me, Salman had an argument with a neighbor on the use of common spaces the previous days. The School employed its solidarity among its members, assisted Salman to recover from the event, to

find him another safe place to stay the following days, to change apartment, and to help him find a lawyer to support his case, to go to the Police to testify and so on.

As I felt it, creating this common social space, was something that comes both naturally and with an effort. What I mean with this, is that it seemed to me a conscious choice for Takis, and other teachers to spend their whole Sunday, from morning at 9 am to 8 pm, in the classroom, which functions as a common room and an administrative office of the School, where students always know that they are welcome. I passed a lot of my time there. Many of the students, who had a class, would also pass by the office to say hi to the teachers, to ask for some advice on a personal matter regarding their papers or their job, or just sit with the group and participate in the discussion.

3. Having a job is the biggest help

Asylum is integral to political processes[28] as Fassin (2005: 368, 380; 2013: 46-47) has very centrally claimed in the field of anthropology. Refugees, after all, are produced by politics of, so called humanitarian interventions, wars, borders, nationalism, racial and other types of discrimination that take place within or across borders. For this reason, I would argue that protection is subject to different interpretations, stemming from different political ontologies among those who grant it, those who receive it or are excluded from it, and it is even differently understood within the same nation-state, among different political parties, for example. My intention thus in this chapter is to present what protection is for refugees themselves. Is it the legal paper, the (imaginary) refugee status? Asking refugees (and other border-crossers) what helps them, what protects them, the answer that I most often received was, that "having a job is the biggest help".

Within the humanitarian system, this aspect of "protection", I believe is undermined. Refugees are seen by the humanitarian system (international and local organizations, states) as political subjects, but their social life and individual life, becomes secondary. People who cross the borders and wish to apply for asylum remain for months, up to years, without legal status relying on their own abilities to make it. Either undocumented or within the asylum process, work is the only means that helps people make it. Providing protection within the humanitarian system, presupposes that someone else is doing something for somebody else, i.e the system for the user. However, refugees, whether they use the asylum system's services or not, have agency and do not identify themselves with "assistance" or "help" (Ghorashi et al. 2018). They take initiatives and try to become independent, in order to leave the state of liminality, vulnerability and dependence that their "label" has put them into (Zetter 1991).

UNHCR, the international agency responsible for the protection of refugees approaches the concept of independence of refugees through the concept of "self-reliance". "Self-reliance" is seen as a desired state for refugees, which they should reach, after they have received humanitarian help. For this reason, UNHCR implements programs, called "livelihoods". This includes cash assistance, a monthly lump-sum to refugees and asylum-seekers in order to cover their basic needs and employability programs, which bring employers and refugees together, in order to facilitate the latter's access to the labor market. Of course, these programs are designed only for the people who have access to legal protection, which has often been problematic in Greece.

Working conditions in Greece for asylum-seekers and refugees are harsh. In practice asylum applicants and refugees face difficulties in issuing a tax, social security number and opening a bank account which are prerequisites for being employed, as reported by Greek NGOs (AIDA 2021: 185-186). Asylum-seekers and refugees face discrimination in employment, cannot access work because of local language limitations, usually do not have a local network and the knowledge of bureaucracy to open their own business. This means that many end up in working in the, so called black market, being exploited or working for food instead of payment (UNHCR 2022a: 13-14). The official reports do not include how other (non-)citizens, that were rejected from the asylum application, deal with the issue of finding a work, their working conditions and on how they survive. In Greece however, it should be noted that the black market of unregistered third country nationals has taken very big dimensions, if one refers to *Manolada case* of 2013, which is just one of the incidents of migrant

[28] See for example the each time special treatment that certain nationalities enjoy depending on the political proximity of national Greek and EU governments towards other certain countries. The example of Syrian refugees the period 2014-2021 (*fast-track* procedure) or Ukrainian refugees the period 2021-2022 (immediate temporary protection status, non refoulement) is characteristic. Ukrainian refugees are provided with full access to economic and social rights, as opposed to other refugees of other nationalities whose access is administratively hindered. Of that character is for example the provision of free of charge public transportation in Athens, among others, as opposed to other refugees and asylum-seekers.

undeclared work, that made it to the press and the European Court of Human Rights (Krithari 2019, Smith 2017). Kapsalis et al (2021) write on the labour exploitation that takes place in that area and how they are put in "a state of expectancy". Refugees and migrants were allowed to work under a particular semi-legal status, which did not provide them with any title of residence permit.

In this chapter I am going to discuss my empirical findings, which I mostly found by using the methods of observation and unstructured informal interviews.

Work

When I started my fieldwork in Athens in early January 2023, I soon realized after talking to Joseph and Jason, the people whom I met at the ethnic restaurant, that the most important thing for surviving and being independent is "having a good job", as Jason said.

Jason came to Greece from "Z" country in 2019 and since then he works in "black jobs" ("doulevo mavra", which literally means "working in black" and actually means working in an undeclared job, without insurance. Working in black jobs is necessary for Jason, because he has no legal documents in Greece. He applied for asylum at an island, his first point of entry to Greece, but because the living conditions where very bad there, he decided to leave and come to Athens. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was very difficult to find a job but this was the only way to survive. During that period he tried to continue his asylum application, so he was calling on skype, an online account of the Asylum Service, which is where asylum-seekers should call for booking an appointment. So, Jason would call on Wednesdays and Fridays, between 09.00- 10.00 a.m., the time slot for English speaking people, as he told me. The lines on skype were always busy and sometimes by talking to friends he realized that other skype accounts were working instead of the main one (Mobile info team 2021). Eventually, three years passed without him reaching a line, without him being able to simply register his asylum application.

Jason works for "cargo business" as he told me. They transfer used or new things from the EU to his country of origin. His boss, also a man with African origin, makes the arrangements and decides where the things will be sent. Himself, he is "just an assistant", as he said. When I asked Jason what is the best job for him, he said that "the work here is easy". "Any job. I don't have a problem with that. A foreigner here cannot do the job that you [i.e.me the researcher] are doing in the country. For example, be a manager. And I've met a lot of people… If you have qualifications, then you should take the job. Here [in Greece] they prefer to use you. They call you "kalo paidi, kalo paidi" ("καλό παιδί" means "good kid")". He then asked me, "do you know any black people working in a good office? Maybe black people are working in an office as cleaners, but not in a white person's job. A black person can be employed in an office but not at the level of a white person".

Jason works from Monday to Saturday from 6 am to 6 pm approximately. His job is to load and unload things. I understood that his work requires a lot of body and muscle effort, as at some point he told me that his back was hurting a lot. Every day he wakes up at 5.15- 5.30 am and he takes the bus to go to the very edge of Athens for his work. Even though he told me that this is an easy job, another day he told me about the very difficult day he had, when it was raining. He said that "it is difficult, but we have to survive". Jason doesn't have legal status in Greece, therefore he works a "black job", which means it is an undeclared job. Working in the "black market" means that you cannot have a bank account, you are paid in cash, no contract or law protects your labor rights, you have to commute in fear of being caught by the police and you do not have health insurance in case of sickness. Jason told me that during the pandemic of covid-19 it was extremely difficult to find a job. He has been in Greece since 2019, and it has been impossible for more than three years to reach the Asylum Service through "skype" call to request his asylum application to be registered.

Work is a very important means to survive for refugees. When I asked them about who helps them in their everyday life, the answer I got was that having a job helps them. Work for refugees is about being independent, but it is also a source of pride for them. One of them told me about the self-portrayed image, that comes through "stories" on Instagram. It shows to their relatives back in the country their status, even though reality might be different. Being able to send money to their family is also part of this pride, especially for males, who see themselves as providers.

Mamadou told me that the network that people have through their ethnic community helps them sometimes to find a job. People that you know from the community might call you telling you about a job post they know and he might do the same. He told me that the job agencies also help you find a job, but they take advantage of you. These agencies are mostly owned by Greeks. They make you sign a contract in Greek and then you don't know what you signed. For example, this happened to him with an agency in the area of Aspropyrgos. Every day they would pick him up and they would take him to different places in the outskirts of Athens, where there are warehouses of companies, to do whatever job there was available. They would make him work from Monday to Saturday, but they would not pay him extra for Saturday, as they should by law. Mamadou understood that they were taking advantage of him and he left the job.

Mamadou's philosophy about work, is that the work helps you survive and that you don't need to live just for working. He told me that "some people will do anything for the money". "I wouldn't get a job that doesn't leave me with free time or through which I don't get the money that I am worth for the time that I spend." He also said that he prefers a job where he can work at his own pace. For example, one of his favourite jobs was being a painter because he could work at the pace he liked, it was quiet and his colleague was also cool and wouldn't talk too much. In some jobs the pressure to do everything quickly is very big. He told me a story about him working in construction ("οικοδομή" , pronounced as "ikodomi"). As he was new at the time he was put by the other workers to do the most unpleasant job, which was to dig some material from the ground and throw it with a shovel into the cement machine. The problem was that this machine was pouring some kind of toxic gas on his face. His colleague asked him to work faster and faster and Mamadou told him that this was not possible, also because the gas was coming directly into his face. He then asked his colleague to take over and to show him how fast he could do it. When this happened, his colleague realized, that he was pushing Mamadou to do something impossible.

Mamadou has taken some cooking classes through a project of an NGO and he would like to be a cook someday. When I met him he was working at a shop where he would make a traditional local sweet called "loukoumades". He soon left this job, but he didn't tell me why. For some weeks he was unemployed and then he started volunteering at a small NGO as a cook in order not to stay at home all day, but actually meet people. This NGO prepares meals for refugees and other people and offers them for free. One of the goals of this NGO is to provide job opportunities for refugees and thus hired Mamadou as a part-time cook. Mamadou, through his own network found a job that is much closer to what he wants to do in life. However, initially, when he came to Greece through an island, three years ago, he had to do some work that he really didn't like. Probably because he was ashamed of it, he didn't want to tell me about it.

Alicia decided to settle in Greece in 2018 and that summer she went to a Greek island in Cyclades region to work for the summer season. She found the job through a work agency. She told me that "this agency takes advantage of its clients". When they found her the job, Gina from the agency told her that the working hours are from 8 am to 9 pm. However, she had to work from 6 am to 6 pm. She had informed the agency that she has a knee problem and that she cannot climb stairs to the second floor, only until the first floor. This hotel, where she was assigned to work, though, at "Kyria Katerina"

(translates as Miss Katerina) had two floors. The food that *Kyria Katerina* was giving her was of very bad quality, "like a food that you would give to a dog". She made a picture of it and she sent it to Gina from the job agency asking her if she would eat that. Alicia told me that this food seemed like food you would collect from the beach from left-overs of other people.

Alicia had never been a cleaner in her country of origin. She studied Communication and Public Relations and she had been working for the Army and another institution, but in Greece her diplomas are not recognized. She said that in her country she had never worked as a cleaner and she wouldn't have to because she has studied, but in Greece she has to do this job. Alicia thinks of herself as a well-educated business woman. She works at a restaurant in a very high class neighborhood in Athens during the winter and during summer she goes to Mykonos island for work. There, she works as a cleaner at a restaurant. Normally she makes enough money because of the large tips she gets by the clients. However, this year the touristic demand has dropped significantly and she doesn't make enough money. We kept communicating from time to time through messages. She wrote to me that "No much tips ☹… too much work and very little money". She also told me that "they just want the job done and don't care how you feel about it. I personally told my manager about my health conditions and to my greatest surprise he felt like *so what*… ? He didn't say it to me, but I can read it from his reaction. And this really breaks me because I put a whole lot to make sure he gets workers… including spending my own money to get them workers and no one gives a fuck about me :'-(".

Alicia is the person that told me that in Greece no one helped her (see chapter 2, page 38). Therefore, she really depends on herself to make ends meet. She has a teenage daughter back in her country of origin and therefore, apart from herself, she has to provide for her. Alicia wishes that sometime she will open her own business as a restaurant owner. Because she cooks very well, she often cooks for other people who ask her for a portion of food. So, from time to time, when she is in Athens, she cooks for her friends. With the jobs that she currently has, she puts aside some savings for opening her own restaurant at some point.

Joseph has no legal status in Greece, since 2019, when he came to Greece. Like Jason, he had been calling the Asylum Service through the "skype" application in order to be registered and have a legal title of residence as an asylum applicant. He has been working in "thermokipia" ("θερμοκήπια" means greenhouses) near the village of Filiatra, which is three hours by bus from Athens. In 2020-21 there was no job, as Joseph told me, because of the pandemic of covid-19. During the pandemic it also became much more difficult to book an appointment with the Asylum Service for registering his application.

In "thermokipia" Joseph told me that he plants and picks tomatoes and cucumbers. The work was valued for 20 euro per day some years ago, but now it has been increased to 30 euro per day. The work is approximately 8 to 9 hours a day but without any break. "If you stop, the boss will swear at you. He will say "malaka[29], what are you doing?"". The salary differs depending on someone's country of origin, he said. For example, Pakistanis are paid 44 euro per day. Joseph told me that "Africans work separately from Bulgarians, Egyptians and Pakistanis." He said that, Africans do the hardest job but they are paid the lowest. He found this job from a compatriot who told him to go there. He took the bus and went without knowing anyone. In the beginning it was very difficult because he didn't even have a mattress to sleep on and he wouldn't be hired immediately. He had to wait three weeks until he was hired. He lived in a house with no window and toilet, in an abandoned building near the village.

Joseph now works on one of the most well-known Greek islands for tourists at a restaurant's kitchen. His work is to wash dishes seven days a week. His mentality is to go wherever there is work and where

[29] "Malaka" is a swear word ("μαλάκα") and translates as "asshole".

he can make good money. He prefers more to be outside Athens because “there is no problem with the Police because of people working”. In the province he can also access the hospital and now he receives some medication for his heart problem. However, Joseph can only work in “black jobs” as a person without a legal status in the country. In the past he paid 400 euro to someone who told him that he will get him a paper and then 100 euro for a paper for protecting him from arrest. In both cases the person did not provide him with any paper at the end.

Mahad told me one story on how some people without legal status can work for a famous delivery company without any legal problem. I have been wondering for years how “black jobs” of refugees and migrants is allowed as a common practice in Greece, but the legal status of these people is always ignored. My discussion with Mahad, didn’t answer all these questions, but it answered one part of it: how companies “allow” such practices.

Mahad works for a delivery company that provides its services via a mobile application through which the clients can connect, find the store of their preference and order food, coffee or other goods that will be delivered to their doorstep. The delivery men (I have never seen a woman employee of this company) are often people of migrant or refugee background and it is quite common -from my experience- that they might not even speak a small phrase in Greek. I asked Mahad to tell me how it is possible that people work without any “legal papers”. The trick is that people can be hired as contractors and then they can hire sub-contractors to do the delivery for them. The company is not obliged to check the working conditions at the sub-contractors level. As a result, Mahad told me that it is a common practice for some people of migrant or refugee background who work for this delivery company, to hire their compatriots unofficially and give them less money per package. The delivery company pays the contractor for each package and therefore, the contractor controls how much money he will give to his sub-contractors. What happens is that, sub-contractors are paid much less per package and the contractor profits from them.

At this delivery company, in general the working conditions are not good according to Mahad. The delivery people are paid 2,10 € per package, which is a deduction from what it was before. In addition, the extra amount of money that they used to receive depending on the distance and the bad weather condition has stopped. For all these reasons, Mahad stopped working for this company after some weeks. He just needed the job, because he had decided to leave the job, where he was working as an interpreter, because he was completely drained. He used to work for an NGO that provides accommodation and social services to refugees. As an interpreter he had to take shifts keeping the emergency phone for the people who were staying at the apartments that the NGO was managing. The emergency phone is a 24/7 line, where the beneficiaries of this program can call and ask for help in case of emergency. As Mahad told me, of course the phone was not ringing only in times of emergency. Since there was no other interpreter talking that very language, he had been working for many months without the ability to disconnect from his work. Because Mahad has very high ethical standards as a person, he also felt the responsibility that he should always be available for his refugee compatriots who might be in an urgent situation.

Based on the stories of Mahad, Joseph, Jason, Alicia and Mamadou, I realized the central role that work has on their lives. Work increases their agency, as they gain money, independence and a social position within society, but at the same time, the conditions under which they are allowed to take part, are very restrictive.

Conclusion

This research started as an ethnographic quest to bridge the gap between the legal and social realities of refugees. It ended up being stories of Hasan, Maya, Takis, Mamadou, Alicia, Angela, Joseph, Jason, Mahad, the Chairman, Giannis, Farid and Pastor John, and many more who didn't fit into these stories.

In this ethnographic research, I firstly argued that the way we see, read about and interact with "refugee identity" is through humanitarianism, a legal, bureaucratic, colonial and racialized lens. I provided my own positionality and my gaze shift and the perceptions of refugees on the "refugee identity". Secondly, I showed how the politics of belonging work within refugee communities and how social difference is produced through them. Moreover, I showed that it is possible for locals to be foreigners and foreigners to be locals at the same time. By presenting different types of "refugee communities" or communities where refugees participate, I showed the various ways in which such communities are protective, supportive, helpful (or not) for their members. Thirdly, I provided narrations of refugees on work, as for them, work is the best way to protect and support themselves. In the final chapter on the one hand I presented the perceptions of refugees on work, and on the other hand how work, due to their racialized identity, creates room for discrimination and exploitation.

This research started as a research about refugees and *it came out being more about me and the way I look at others*. The way we look at others, has to do a lot with ourselves. As Elkins has written, "our texts may appear as history, as facts, as discoveries, even sometimes as truths, and they function in all these capacities; but they are also our way of recording who we are" (1997: 296-297). The way we *see* the world is often through categories, in an effort to make sense of it. Sometimes, though, the world doesn't make sense, even when we *look* through our culturally constructed categories. The problem with these categories, such as those of "refugees", "asylum-seekers" and "undocumented people", is that they *do* something to us (Pels 2022). By doing, Pels means that they have a social impact. Can we undo these categories just by seeing through them? It is like fear of the unknown. Often if you know the unknown, it becomes less scary. Throughout my research I felt this fear, before and after realizing my own glass wall. We have grown up, me included, with the phrase that "we shouldn't talk to strangers". Refugees and migrants in Europe are seen as dangerous strangers.

I started doing this research because I believe that these categories are not socially useful to us. My main suggestion is that if we want to undo these categories, we should change the way that we see, feel, think and interact with these categories. The technology of (international) law that captures these categories and reproduces them, should also be subject to this undoing, this change. Bateson (1972: 282) writes that "the simplest and most familiar form of change is motion". I would add that not only motion is change, but e-motion as well. Emotion is a created state when we come close to people, and hence develop emotions. We need to be "moved", metaphorically and literally. Bringing these stories closer to me and to you, is an effort in this very direction.

The contribution of this research in the discussions of political and legal anthropology is to provide a localized and social understanding on the "universal" – as often seen, legal- identity of refugees through the perceptions of refugees themselves. It does so by discussing contested narratives on the identity of refugees, the politics of belonging to refugee communities and finally, work, as both a means for their protection and exploitation.

Contested refugee narratives: belonging and not belonging

Looking back at all the stories of this research, refugees appeared in various social and political positions, roles and identities.
Commencing from the perspective of humanitarianism, there is the narrative that refugees are dependent. This happens when they are seen as vulnerable, beneficiaries, applicants, subjects of colonialism, frustrated, frightened, not knowing, "kalo pedi" (good boy). If though we again follow their narratives, we see them as agents, as independent. These are narratives about being hard-working, professional, educated, proud and community leaders.

Following narratives around their sociality and trustworthiness, people from the refugee communities said themselves that some people within the communities are seen as a threat, that they are "apateones" (impostors), who would take advantage of people in need. This is a narrative that persists mostly in the Greek media, usually by portraying them as traffickers or people involved in crime. On the other hand, there are also positive comments about refugees, that address them as neighbors, brothers, "kalo pedi" (good boy) and friends. Not only locals see refugees as friends, but also refugees talked about other refugees, as their friends.

Refugees are rarely known for their political and religious convictions, because they are referred to in public discourse as apolitical. However, refugees can be conservative, progressive, religious, political, apolitical, activists and solidarians. In terms of their employment, refugees are mostly known for low status jobs, like working in the fields, as cleaners or delivery boys. However, refugees are also students, businesswomen, businessmen, cooks, talented, interpreters, journalists and writers.

What refugees are mostly identified with is their association with law. There usual attribution is that of being illegal *and* foreigners. Sometimes though -exceptionally- they might be considered as legal foreigners. Perceptions of the Greek society about refugees as legal foreigners, usually include people whose country of origin or ethnicity is considered closer or more friendly to the "Greek identity".
What refugees are least identified with, is their attribute of being locals. In general terms the Greek society considers their "foreign-ness" as incompatible with them being locals. Locals means to be considered as neighbors, inhabitants of a certain area, people who frequent certain places or go for shopping in the neighborhood. Some of the refugees who are locals *and* legal are considered as "integrated". These are people who have their "papers" (hartia) and are able to take part in the Greek society, but still remain refugees, which means that they were granted a temporary residence. For refugees being legal locals one might think that they are visible. However, many of them remain invisible, socially excluded because of the difficulties they face in accessing a social insurance number, tax number, having a bank account, or for example because they are waiting for the renewal of their papers. The most invisible of all, though, are the refugees who are illegal locals. These are people who are "ghosts". Ghosts means that they are able to go out from their house only at night. They might not be able to take the bus or to have a legal work. The people who are "ghosts" are considered as non-existent, not even as illegal foreigners, who are seen as a threat.

In terms of ethnic identity refugees in general are seen as "others". This otherness is connected with being non-white, non-European, "black" or Muslims. Refugees though, are also Christian, "white", part of Greek history (as for example "Polites") or refugees who have received the Greek citizenship and are now officially Greeks. These last categorizations about ethnic identity and race are not mutual exclusive. However, the stereotype of the refugee in Greece and in Europe tends to be the racialized Muslim "other".

All these categorizations that came up from this research in the previous chapters, depending on (our) perceptions, affect and are affected by different levels of belonging and not belonging. All of us,

adopt narratives about refugees with whom we are most familiar with. However, there are also these narratives that are “strange” to us. Anthropology through its lens often makes the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Thus it’s up to us what narratives we choose and how we ourselves create and recreate politics of belonging.

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