

Girls

on the



move
in Greece



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SUMMARY

Debates and discourses about children on the move do not occur in a vacuum. They are shaped by social and political contexts, and create dominant frameworks about children, about gender and about migration. There are plenty of studies about unaccompanied boys on the move in Greece, yet girls have received minimal attention, consisting someone could say the invisible category of the refugee population. Though this lack of attention can be easily attributed to the low number of unaccompanied and/or separated girls on the move, it also reflects a tendency to reproduce the state of invisibility to which girls and women are continually subjected by hetero-patriarchy. The right to appear is deeply political in that certain subjects are considered worthy to appear and others are rendered less important and thus, we will have to search for scattered traces of their existence in literature, academic studies, journal articles, field researches. This is the case with girls on the move, “*the weirdos*” of the refugee population, as Hesther said, who have not received much attention until now. This study comes to cover an important gap in the existing literature on migration and refugee studies in Greece. By focusing on girls’ stories of travelling to Greece, we strive to “make space” for them by letting their stories “take place.” Instead of “speaking for them” we chose to bring their stories at the forefront with the aim to offer a better understanding of their lived realities. Drawing from our primary research with girls followed by a review of the existing literature we strive to provide a critical reflection on “girls on the move” and at the same time offer a set of recommendations that will strengthen the work with girls in the Regional “Children on the Move” program.

ACRONYMS

ARSIS	Association for the Social Support of Youth
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
GCR	Greek Council for Refugees
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IFRC	The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organisation of Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RIC	Reception and Identification Centre
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission

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I WANT TO GO HOME,
BUT HOME IS THE MOUTH OF A SHARK
HOME IS THE BARREL OF THE GUN
AND NO ONE WOULD LEAVE HOME
UNLESS HOME CHASED YOU TO THE SHORE

WARSAN SHIRE

CHAPTER ONE

SCOPE, TERMS, METHODS

1.1 Aims and framework

This research draws on contemporary refugee and feminist literature, ethnographic fieldwork and national and international reports, to inform gender-sensitive programme development for unaccompanied refugee girls (under 18) who migrate to Greece, especially during transit and upon arrival to Greece from Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and Kuwait. The research was conducted within 3 months (November 2019-January 2020). The aims of the research were to:

- a) Incorporate gender as a central analytical category of the migration experience: Gender affects all aspects of the migration experience of children, including the reason for migrating, the decision of who will migrate, the social networks migrants use to move and their experiences of integration in the destination country. When preparing for assessments and designing, implementing and monitoring programs to protect children on the move it is important to give careful consideration to the gendered aspects of migration movement from the very start.
- b) Identify and assess the situation and needs of girls on the move currently residing in Greece: It is important to assess the needs of girls on the move, in order to better assist them in accessing services and protecting them from gender discriminations, abuse, violence and exploitation. In this direction, it's important to look at:
 - Different motivations and reasons why girls are on the move
 - Key migration routes, transit points and intended destination
 - Rights violations
 - Needs and suggestions of girls on the move to improve their situation
 - Strengths and coping strategies of girls and families to ensure protection while on the move
 - Available services and respond capacity gaps of key stakeholders, both state and non-state in Greece
- c) Identify gender- specific protection risks: Girls on the move face particular risks and dangers during their journey and once they reach their destination (e.g. child brides, forced marriages, trafficking, GBV and child abuse). Efforts to build protective environments for girls on the move should also draw from girls' and parents' coping mechanisms and survival strategies, enhanced by the building of their own social

network, while also strengthening formal protection systems and program implementation by relevant key stakeholders i.e. child protection actors aiming to safeguard children's human rights.

- d) Assess the availability of, and barriers to accessing, gender-sensitive and culturally diversified services (protection, education, healthcare including sexual and reproductive healthcare, etc) for migrant and refugee girls in Greece: Consulting with girls and families on the move, as well as with formal stakeholders in Greece, on the provision and access to services, will ensure careful consideration around protection and safety, integration, livelihood opportunities, and non-discriminatory access to a range of care and support services.
- e) Identify and analyse protective and gender-sensitive factors to inform programming and advocacy work that strengthens the fulfilment of gender equality, addresses both immediate and root causes of children rights violations, and supports migrant girls during the different stages of the journey.

The research consisted of three parts:

- A review of recent literature on Girls on the Move with a focus on Greece.
- A qualitative and ethnographic study with accompanied and unaccompanied girls who have migrated to Greece.
- A survey- questionnaire with 46 girls on the move. The questionnaire was designed by Diotima and Save the Children and received the approval of the Public Prosecutor for minors in Athens. The final survey contained 23 questions and was completed in total by 46 girls. It was translated in English, French, Arabic and Farsi and was given to the girls in the language they felt more comfortable with to complete it. In Greece, there are 10 shelters for UASC girls (some of them host young boys too). In total, 4 shelters agreed to distribute the survey to their residents, 2 of them located in the capital of Greece, Athens and 2 in northern Greece. The shelters were:
 - a) Ilion, based in Athens. 9 girls completed the survey.
 - b) Pugad, based in Athens. 8 girls completed the survey
 - c) Pentalofos Shelter, based in Pentalofos, Kozani. 28 girls completed the survey
 - d) ARSIS Home, based in Thessaloniki. 1 girl completed the survey.

The girls who participated in this research came from three different areas: shelters, organized accommodation and independent living. In particular, we interviewed 15 girls from 2 shelters (Home project- Pugad and IOM-Ilion) and 1 accommodation program running in Attica (Arsis-Estia program); we interviewed 2 key stakeholders and conducted a focus group discussion with 3 front- line professionals. The girls were 15- 19 years old and had travelled to Greece within the last one to three years; 9 girls were unaccompanied and/or separated and lived at shelters in Athens and 3 girls lived with their families at independent flats run by Arsis (see Annex A). With the aim to protect the confidentiality of participants and their lives, all the names and locations are anonymized and only

information, which is very pertinent to the analysis, is provided. We received the informed consent of all informants (girls, parents, key stakeholders) who took part in this research. The interviews were conducted with the help of interpreters provided by Diotima (Farsi and Arabic) but also by IOM (Arabic, Urdu). The sampling followed the method of the “snowball effect”, which entails asking participants after the interview for other potential participants but also creating a network of collaborators amongst different organisations. Diotima’s previous work with young women and girls was also useful in helping us identify refugee girls- ex. beneficiaries of Diotima.

After mapping out the shelters as well as accommodation programs that run in Athens/ Attica we were able to identify key persons who helped us in the sampling process. The process of building up a network of trust took longer than anticipated so it was decided to capitalise on our pre-existent network. Informal chatting with professionals and interpreters helped us build trust with girls and in many occasions, we were introduced as “persons of trust.” We chose to conduct open- ended interviews and a focus group discussion alongside participant observation. Our questions were open-ended, broad and non-intrusive in the sense that we followed the flow of the conversation. Silences were key in this process since they create the emotional space for stability, self-reflection and calmness. To a certain extent, we were able to employ certain aspects of ethnographic fieldwork- taking notes of things we observed in natural environments, taking notes of arguments, silences, feelings (from awkwardness to bitterness and sadness) and then we tried to analyse this data through the lens of girls’ narratives. We drew from our previous experience as researchers in handling trauma and balancing between emotional distance and proximity to the field. We consulted with the psychologists and social workers of the girls in the shelters in order to inform us about any issue that may trigger stress and uneasiness to the girls. In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the spaces (shelters and houses) and girls we decided not to take any photos.

1.2 Challenges and limitations

One of our primary challenges concerned gaining access to the field. Though we had a network of contacts we were able to activate, we still had to get the consent of the Public Prosecutor for minors in order to conduct research with girls under 18. This is particularly challenging since any research with minors has to be considered beneficial to the child, that is, it has to serve the best interests of the child. In our first contact with the Public Prosecutor, she responded negatively and we requested a personal meeting (with the support of Diotima’s legal team) to discuss the details and orientations of the research. The Public Prosecutor acts as the children’s legal guardian but also as a gatekeeper who has the power to open or close doors to researchers, professionals etc. that aim to collect data regarding the life of migrant and refugee minors in Greece. An external power figure, who has no contact with the girls whatsoever, gives or withholds access to the field. Though this may seem legally and politically plausible, this limitation sheds light to the power structure

in which a migrant/refugee girl finds herself upon arrival to Greece. In the end, we received a positive response. This gave us access to two shelters in Athens, the Pink House and the Purple House.

Though we had made prior contacts with both, the Pink House was still not willing to give us access by arguing that it can be a re-traumatising experience for the girls. Apart from Hesther, who was 19 years old, none of the girls spoke to us, though they participated in the survey. It's interesting to note how even though we had the signed approval of the Public Prosecutor for minors, professionals at the Pink House decided not to provide us access under the framework of child protection. This shows that sometimes child protection can be too rigid and single-dimensional and while professionals strive to protect children from further harm and malaise, they are hesitant in renegotiating the meanings of child protection in different ways.

Throughout the research we encountered various setbacks whilst the complexities of the fieldsite set its own temporal rhythm. One pregnant girl, who was 20 years old and had travelled to Greece when she was 17 years old, cancelled our meeting twice. Another family cancelled the interview because they got scabies and we had to postpone the interview once they were better. Finally, the first day we went to the shelter, one unaccompanied girl had gone to the airport in an effort to leave the country. Once she was back, she was in no emotional state to talk.

Another challenge relates to the painful and difficult experiences girls were narrating and the kind of memories and/or expectations they brought along. We tried to build rapport by dedicating some time to talk to the girls about their interests in life (music, hobbies etc) in order to get to know them and make them feel comfortable around us. Body language (smiling, eye contact) was decisive since girls commented on how our eyes were warm and how we made them feel at ease (*"our conversation was a soft touch to my heart"* said Itimad by the end of the interview) and through our interaction with them we tried to create a space for softness and affection. We would offer to refugee families desserts as a thankful gesture for their hospitality and generosity as they opened their homes to us.

It is also important to acknowledge our positionality as researchers as this shapes and influences the type of work we produce. We have worked extensively with migrant and refugee communities, including children. As researchers working with feminist theory and tools we have used our research in the past to promote social justice agendas and the rights of all women and girls. The process of conducting research with vulnerable communities requires an ethics of accountability and responsibility that acknowledges and continually reflects on research power dynamics: From our positionality to the preconceived notions we carry as researchers. We tried, therefore, to let the voices of the girls we engaged guide our understanding and knowledge of what it means to be a girl on the move. It is their narrative that helped us identify themes and shape our subsequent analysis.

1.3 Definitions of terms and categories

Before going further with our analysis we should clarify the use of terms and categories that appear throughout the text. We adopted the following definitions of UNHCR and Save the Children:

- Unaccompanied minor: An unaccompanied child is a person who is under the age of eighteen, unless, under the law applicable to the child, maturity is attained earlier and who is “separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so.”¹
- Separated minor: Separated children are children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or their previous legal/customary primary caregiver. Some children are totally alone while others, who are also the concern of this research, may be living with extended family members. All such children are separated children and entitled to international protection under a broad range of international and regional instruments. When we use the word “separated” rather than “unaccompanied” it’s because it better defines the essential problem that such children face. Namely, that they are without the care and protection of their parents or legal guardian and as a consequence suffer socially and psychologically from this separation.²
- Children on the move is not meant as a “new” category of children. It is an umbrella definition which brings together the multitude of categories in which children who move have been, often unhelpfully, divided. This definition therefore includes: children who have been trafficked; children who migrate (e.g. to pursue better life opportunities, look for work or education or to escape exploitative or abusive situations at home); children displaced by conflict and natural disasters. All of these children might find themselves at risk, especially the risk of being exposed to various forms of abuse and involved in the worst forms of exploitation. This concept, by highlighting the common risks and challenges faced by these children but also their differences in terms of gender, age and their agency, aims to re-focus interventions and ensure coherent policies by placing the protection of the child at the centre as well as the need to support the positive effect that mobility can have on improving children’s life chances.³ In this context, we perceive the notion of being “on the move” as an ongoing process that spans across time and space, as a cartography of geographical spaces, border crossings, emotional landscapes, spheres of (self-) knowledge and embodied experiences.

¹UNHCR, “Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum”, February, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/3d4f91cf4/guidelines-policies-procedures-dealing-unaccompanied-children-seeking-asylum.html>, 1997, p.5.

² UNHCR& Save the children, “Separated Children in Europe Program, Statement of Good practice” <https://www.unhcr.org/4d9474399.pdf>, 2004, p.2.

³ Global Conference on Children on the Move, Concept Note, <https://www.childrenonthemove.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Concept-Note-Global-Conference-on-Children-on-the-Move.pdf>, 2017, p. 1.

- Trans-localism: An umbrella term that emerged recently in social geography, anthropology, border studies, which is still hard to pin down. For reasons of brevity, we should clarify that trans-localism refers to the local-to-local connections across national boundaries that are created through everyday practices of transnational migrants (for example, the translocal networks girls create with the use of social media).

1.4 Methods of data analysis: Ethnographic writing and narrative inquiry

The data is analysed with the combination of two methods: ethnography and narrative inquiry. By writing ethnographically we managed to go in depth into girls' narratives, to use creatively some field notes and reflect on the material from different sides. It was only when we let ourselves into girls' narratives that we managed to locate common threads and themes fraught with ambiguity. In addition, the ethnographic method provides the tools for the potential upstage of the researcher's authorial voice (in-depth representation with thick descriptions) and helped us pay attention to other elements besides the narrative (in natural environments, interactions etc). On the other hand, narrative inquiry involves actively listening to participants' stories and looking for ways to understand and represent their experiences through these stories. In this direction, we analyse girls' stories by "restorying" them through a thematic framework that conveys their meaning.⁴ A linear temporal framework- pre-migration, journey, arrival- is used to structure the way girls talked about the complexities of their journey. However, their journey narratives were non-linear and fragmented, drawing from different times (pre-migration, transit, arrival) and places (country of origin, destination, transit countries, camps). The study of girls' experiences as story is first and foremost a way of thinking about the experience; it involves looking closely to the stories (with direct quotes) and providing interpretations but also inviting the reader to make his/her own interpretation of the material presented.⁵ Throughout this work, we strived for ways to preserve the integrity of girls' narratives and to have their lived stories become stories told in the most complete way possible. Thus, ethnographic writing and narrative inquiry as methodological tools guided us to "think through the story" and consider girls' lives and our representation of it, so we can later consider a specific set of policies that lead to meaningful changes and contributions.

⁴ Munro- Hendry P., Mitchell W.R. & Eaton P.W.: "Troubling Method Narrative Research as Being", New York:

⁵ Ibid, p.80.

CHAPTER TWO

PRE-MIGRATION

2.1 Why girls migrate?

Girls migrate for many different and often overlapping reasons: to get away from an abusive home, to escape political or other forms of oppression, to be reunited with their family- the order here doesn't have to do with frequency, it follows the structure of the chapter. Most girls migrate with another family member based on a decision that was made with what seems at first sight low personal involvement on their part. Low personal involvement here refers to the fact that many girls didn't choose the routes or the destination and were frequently unaware and confused about which countries they passed. This is also verified from our survey according to which 59% of the participants (27 girls) left their home country with other family members. However, the portion of girls that traveled alone from the beginning of the journey was not small: 32% of the sample (15 girls) left their country of origin alone. What at first sight appears to be low personal involvement doesn't necessarily entail that girls do not act as agents, yet it puts forward a need to rethink personal choice and experience beyond the framework passivity/victimhood- activity/agency. Official discourses as well as the work of many people- professionals and activists- in the refugee field- is overwhelmingly premised on the assumption that the migration of children is more or less involuntary in nature.⁶ Though this may be true in that parents and close kin act as decision-makers (regarding the route, destination and planning of the journey), girls should not be reduced to victims- of conflict, of impoverished livelihoods, of smuggling and of different forms of oppression and exploitation. Drawing from the semi-structured interviews we conducted with the girls, it appears that even though girls are not active decision-makers they are not absent from the journey. Girls' agency emerges in the sensorial memories they recall, in the ways they re-articulate their parents' story about the journey and when they reflect on their life "here" and "there." From this line of thinking, therefore, it follows that the journey should be treated as a multi-faceted terrain that involves girls' agency on various levels and on different scales that go beyond the activity/passivity nexus.

⁶ Sarantou, E. & Theodorakopoulou, A.: "Children Cast Adrift: Exclusion and Abuse of Unaccompanied Children in Greece" {in Greek & English}, Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, November 2019; Ombudsman of the Child {Sinigoros tou Paidiou} & Unicef: "The rights of children on the move" {Ta dikaiomata ton paidion pou metakinountai}{in Greek}, <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/docs/ee2018-kdp-dikaiom-paid-pou-metakin.pdf>, Annual Report 2018.

2.1.1 Gender- based violence

Gender- based violence, including domestic violence, forced marriage and rape, act as the main factors of migration for some girls and their mothers.⁷ Out of the 15 girls who participated in the qualitative study at least 4-5 mentioned violence in the family as key factor of migration. One of these girls is Moska from Afghanistan, who migrated to Greece with her mother, sisters and brother one year ago. While narrating her journey and the dangers, fears and difficulties she faced she mentions that she prefers not to have any contact with people in Afghanistan since she is afraid her father will track her down. At that point in her narrative, it became clear that Moska faced the danger of being sold by her father to an older man and fled with her mother and siblings in the middle of the night.

“The reason we are here is my father. My father was taking drugs and gambled....He troubled us a lot and in the end, he wanted to lock us in Afghanistan. He wanted to sell us, me and my sister, to somebody who was much older (than us: our explanation), who had his own family and kids and was giving a lot of money to my father...There was another man in the neighborhood who had done the same thing, he had given his daughter to a married man with children. Imagine the daughter was 18 and the man had a 22-years-old child. He had sold his daughter and the husband-to-be had given in exchange a piece of land, my father had heard the story and was thinking to do the same...to sell us...We spoke to my mother, we made the decision, one night we escaped, we went to stay at my sister’s for one night, we had already talked to the smuggler and everything...”

From the perspective of the mother, Naghma, the decision to leave was the only option she had to save her daughter. Mother-daughter relationships are crucial to the decision and planning of migration especially in cases of forced marriage. Throughout Moska and Nagham stories the bond between them consisted in the promise to save each other, which gave them strength, love and courage to go through their plan. Naghma describes the emotional and physical struggle she was going through in her marriage with the bargaining and selling of her daughter, Moska, appearing as catalytic for her decision to leave her husband:

“My husband gambled, he had lost everything we had, our home, our property and since he had lost everything, he didn’t have anything else to put on the table so he put my daughter and he lost my daughter...These guys had guns, they were very strong, they could come and take her away....There was no other solution,

⁷ IFRC, [Alone and Unsafe: Children Migration and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#), 2018, p. 15; UNHCR, UNFPA, WRC, [Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis](#), 2016, p. 6.

no other way, they only thing I thought is to take my daughter and leave Afghanistan.”

In other cases, gender- based violence doesn't stem from the family structure, namely from the acts of an abusive father and husband. Instead, it emerges as a result of the rise of jihad organizations, totalitarianism and civil war in the country of origin. War rapes, forced marriages, girl abductions become an everyday threat for girls and their mothers. Shararah's story sheds light to the intersections of gender violence with the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan. During their rule from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban and their allies committed massacres against Afghan civilians, denied UN food supplies to 160.000 starving civilians and conducted a policy of scorched earth, burning vast areas of fertile land and destroying tens of thousands of homes.⁸ According to the United Nations, the Taliban and their allies were responsible for 76% of Afghan civilian casualties in 2010, 80% in 2011, and 80% in 2012.⁹

Shararah currently lives in the Purple House. She migrated with her mother and sister from Afghanistan one year ago, yet she lost them during the journey.

“...when Taliban caught my father, they took the cell phone, we lost contact for some time, I could not find my sister...I lost her...in Afghanistan, at the village we lived, there were the Taliban, they caught my father and then forced us, they forced us to marry without our will, me and my sister. That's why my mother decided to leave {...} my mother thought the area we live has Taliban, she thought of my brother...cause they could catch him and take him with them.”

The Taliban have been condemned internationally for the harsh enforcement of their interpretation of Islamic Sharia law, which has resulted in the brutal treatment of many Afghans, especially women.¹⁰ The Taliban's policies extended to matrimony, permitting and in some cases encouraging the marriages of girls under the age of 16. Amnesty International reported that 80 percent of Afghan marriages were considered to be by force.¹¹ Shararah's story also points out the role of mothers in girls' migration since the journey was organised by her mother. Similarly to Moska, the mother- daughter bond is crucial to the planning of the journey, denoting the emergence of a sisterhood of some kind.

⁸ Gargan, Edward A, "[Taliban massacres outlined for UN](#)". Chicago Tribune, October 2001; Goodson, Larry, "[U.N. says Taliban starving hungry people for military agenda](#)", Associated Press, January 1998; Goodson, Larry P. "[Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics and the Rise of the Taliban](#)", University of Washington Press, 2001, p. 121; Gargan, Edward A., "[Confidential UN report details mass killings of civilian villagers](#)", Newsday. 2001.

⁹ For a detailed report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan see the Afghanistan Analysts Network: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/>.

¹⁰ Skain, Rosemarie, "The women of Afghanistan under the Taliban", McFarland, 2002, p.41.

¹¹ "[A Woman Among Warlords: Women's Rights in the Taliban and Post-Taliban Eras](#)", PBS. 11 September 2007, Retrieved from: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/uncategorized/a-woman-among-warlords-womens-rights-in-the-taliban-and-post-taliban-eras/66/>.

Apart from forced marriages, some Afghan girls said they left the country, because they had been raped by another family member. One of these girls was Asal from Afghanistan who also lives at the Purple House for the past four months. From the very beginning, Asal disclosed that she left Iran because she was raped from one of her step-brothers and her life was miserable and unsafe after this.

“I was raped and I could not stay there, they could come near my house, outside my door. And my mother would tell me I should leave, go somewhere secure. For six months I was depressed and didn’t leave the house. I was locked in the house and didn’t go out. It was a very hard situation, very hard, I cried all the time, my sister and my brother came over and I would tell them that I want to leave. My mother-in-law also told me that I have to leave.”

In many cases, gender- based violence, including domestic violence, continues throughout the journey and upon arrival to Greece¹² (see also literature review). Bahar migrated from Iran 2 years ago with her father and her step-mother. She is now staying at the Purple House. She expressed her distress with the abuse she suffered from her father and said she is afraid to leave the shelter in case she runs into him. Despite the fact that gender- based violence here doesn’t consist the primary reason for migrating since Bahar followed her father’s decision to migrate. Yet she said she was not informed why they had to leave. What needs to be noted is that gender-based violence emerges as an ongoing aspect that affects Bahar’s life in the present. Bahar was harassed by her father in the safe zone for children at the Reception and Identification centre and she is still afraid to leave the shelter. Bahar’s story brings to the fore the temporal elements of gender-based violence which affects a girl’s life course, before migration, throughout the journey and upon arrival.

“...my father didn’t let me go to school {in Iran: our explanation}...in the safe zone he came outside and threatened me. He told me “if you dare come out, you’ll see what’s waiting for you.”{...} A woman responsible there helped me and with her help I came here {...} My father always hit us, me and my mother, she worked and made it on her own. Still my father hit her, I don’t want to go back...I don’t want to go back to this.”

¹² Medecins Sans Frontieres, Moria: [Doctors Without Borders Clarification Response](#), 17 October 2018 [in Greek]; Digidiki, V. & Bhabha, J., Emergency Within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece, Harvard FXB: Centre for Health and Human Rights, 2017, p. 21; Fili, Andriani & Xythali, Virginia. “The Continuum of Neglect: Unaccompanied Minors in Greece”. Social Work and Society Vol. 15 (2), 2017, p. 10; UNHCR, UNFPA, WRC, Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis, 2016, p. 10.

2.1.2 Oppressed ethnic minorities, war and political persecution in the country of origin

A number of Afghan girls and families who participated in this study have lived in Iran either their whole lives or a period of time. With the aim to better understand and contextualise the narratives of Afghan families with adolescent girls who left Iran we will look briefly at the recent changes in Iranian governmental policy that severely affected Afghans' status and everyday lives. In 2003, the government of Iran signed a revised Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghans by March 2005. Between 2002 and 2004, over three quarters of a million Afghans returned from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation.¹³ In late 2004, it was estimated that a little over one million documented Afghans¹⁴ remained in Iran.

In 2003, under Article 138 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, eleven articles with discriminatory effects for the Afghan minority were approved by Member Ministers of the Executive Co-ordination Council for Foreign Nationals.¹⁵ These discriminatory policies and their repercussions on the human rights situation of Afghan refugees emerged as key factors for migration. In particular, the denial of fundamental rights (access to education, healthcare, work and administrative services) followed by political persecution and forced arrests happening on the street were mentioned by certain Afghan families as part of the reasons they decided to migrate. For some families, change of faith and religion- from Muslim to Christian- acted as one more parameter affecting their decision to migrate. For example, an Afghan family, who lived in Iran for more than 30 years, left once the government changed and the father could no longer work, take his children to school and maintain a social life. The story of Habib and his family denotes the sociocultural discrimination, racism and fear they experienced once the government of Iran

¹³Abbasi-Shavazi, M.J., Glazebrook, D., Jamshidiha, G., Mahmoudian, H. & Sadeghi, R. 2005, "Return to Afghanistan? A Study of Afghans Living in Tehran", Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) with the support of UNHCR & European Commission, 2005, p.2.

¹⁴ This figure is based on a report by the UNHCR using data from the 2003 BAFIA registration project. The terms "registered" and "documented" Afghans living in Iran refer to the Iranian Government's legislation (Regulations on accelerating repatriation) that differentiates Afghan nationals in terms of those who have been registered by BAFIA in 2003.

¹⁵ These eleven articles were titled "Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals" and entailed a number of discriminatory policies that affected the livelihood of Afghans in Iran. More specifically, article 3 concerned the prevention of unauthorised employment of Afghan nationals by taking legal action against Iranian employers who employed Afghan nationals without work permits. Article 4 prohibited Afghan nationals, except for those who entered the country holding a valid passport and visa and were issued with a residence permit, from the following facilities: all administrative services; activities in all parties and political, social and cultural groups of Afghan displaced persons; opening of new accounts in banks and interest-free loan associations and financial and credit institutions; and issuance and extension of any kind of insurance policy and provision of insurance services. Article 5 stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Organisation (IRIB) would promote and encourage Afghan nationals to return to Afghanistan, and would warn Iranian citizens about illegally employing or settling Afghan nationals. Article 8 stated that renting accommodation to Afghan nationals, except for those who have entered the country with a valid passport and visa and who have been issued with a residence permit, was prohibited except with the permission of the provincial BAFIA offices (Abbasi-Shavazi, M.J., Glazebrook, D., Jamshidiha, G., Mahmoudian, H. & Sadeghi, R., "Return to Afghanistan? A Study of Afghans Living in Tehran", Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) with the support of UNHCR & European Commission, 2005, p. 2).

signed the revised Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghans by March 2005. In addition, the family's religious conversion is also mentioned as a factor for their decision to leave a Muslim-dominated country that doesn't allow the practice of other religions.

Habib: "Thirty-eight years ago when I was in Iran, nobody from the government of Afghanistan came to support its people. During that time in Iran, I felt Iran was my home country...I didn't believe I was Afghan...the first 20 years I lived there, it was good. The people were good with us. When the government changed, gradually the people changed. The first years (with the new government) my boss would tell me «go away filthy Afghan, go to your country» {...} When I would go to work, I was used to the police following me. When they saw an Afghan on the street they would take him in a corner and ask for money. If you didn't give them money, they would take you to Afghanistan, they would deport you, then you had to pay money to smuggle yourself back in the country. Except from these problems, I also changed religion, this was one more reason to leave."

The two adolescent sisters, Gulpari and Larmina, recall their exclusion from education and schooling as well as their difficulty to learn (outside the school system) Iranian Farsi and communicate while also being targeted as *"the Afghans of the neighborhood."*

"There were problems in Iran. I could not study, neither my siblings. Yes, neither I, nor my siblings {...}", says Gulpari. "In Iran we could not go to school, it was not allowed. Our dream was to go to school, to study. We had only passed outside the school", they both argued. "Our father brought us a teacher at home for lessons...still my farsi are not so good to read and write, I don't really speak them {...} Until 8 years old I didn't speak Farsi, the kind they speak in Iran, I could not communicate {...} It was hard to socialise at the neighborhood cause our father was from Afghanistan, they didn't let us", says Larmina.

Moreover, the two sisters praised the religious freedom they experience in Greece and said *"...In Iran they did not let you be Christian. In Iran there are only two types of Muslims...In Iran there was a lot of racists...they said, Iranians said that Afghans are dirty, they didn't accept them."* What should be noted here is that girls and their parents employ the notion of cleanliness/dirtiness to talk about racism. This indicates how racism goes beyond discriminatory laws, it is a biopolitical mechanism, which is encrypted in the way bodies are outlawed as "dirty", "out of place", "filthy", "foreign", "smelly".¹⁶

¹⁶ Douglas, M.: "Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo", 1966, London: Routledge.

Another Iranian girl, Malakeh, talked about the persecution of her family from the Army of Guardians of the Islamic State, Sepâh.¹⁷ The prosecution of her father from people in the Iranian Armed Forces¹⁸ with threats against his life and that of his family drove Malakeh's family away from Iran.

"...No, it wasn't for religious reasons that we left. It was my father's job. He worked with somebody powerful and when things didn't work out, the other guy had a lot of power, he was from a family that took part in the war, they had many family members in the war, they could harm my father. He was Sepâh, it's like the secret service here {...} It's not only his status that was a problem for my father. It's also that Sepâh can find information about you, your past, the whole family, we can't go back...they will harm all my family."

Finally, we talked with two Syrian girls who were fleeing after the war in Syria. They described watching their country fall into pieces, their houses bombed, and their lives scattered: *"...parents losing children, children losing parents, children having no schools, it's very bad there, Syria is now a million pieces"* says Feresteh who left her mother and siblings back in Syria and migrated with her uncle as her family didn't want to let her travel alone. She now lives at the Purple House. The stories of some Syrian families shed light on cases of political persecution which took place before the outbreak of the war in 2011. For 17 years, Mohammed, father of 16 years old Yara, was imprisoned in Syria for his political convictions; once he was released, he got married and later moved to Iraq with his wife and children where they stayed for two years but again *"political events spilled over there, the same things, the same problems and we had to leave."*

2.1.3 Oppressed sexual minorities in the country of origin

As already suggested girls migrate for different reasons, yet the category "girl on the move" is not a unified category. Girls have different ethnic, religious and family backgrounds, different family networks of support, and also different sexual orientations and ideas around women's social role. Hesther, who is now 19 years old and lives at the Pink House, speaks a lot about fear of the future as a lesbian in Iran. Once she was 16 years old she came to realise that she would not be able to have a good life as a lesbian in Iran. With

¹⁷ Sepâh consists a branch of the Iranian Armed Forces, founded after the Iranian Revolution on 22 April 1979 by order of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Whereas the Iranian Army defends Iranian borders and maintains internal order, according to the Iranian constitution, the Revolutionary Guard (pasdaran) is intended to protect the country's Islamic political system. Nowadays, it is estimated that one-third of the Iranian economy is controlled by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and its leaders.

¹⁸ For more information on the power of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard- Sepâh see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2010/04/2010421104845169224.html>; Forozan, H. "The Military in Post-Revolutionary Iran: The Evolution and Roles of the Revolutionary Guards", 2017; Safshekan, R. & Sabet, F., "The Ayatollah's Praetorians: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the 2009 Election Crisis", The Middle East Journal, Volume 64, Number 4, Autumn 2010, pp. 543–558.

the support of her mother, she decided to migrate and managed to take her life on her hands. Reports on lesbians in Iran are rare and only provide generic statements regarding the illegality of gay and lesbian behaviour in Iran. Yet, lesbians face double restrictions on their rights as women who are restricted under Sharia law and as same-sex desiring women who are outlawed given the criminalisation of same-sex conduct with the penalty of death. This discriminatory legal framework also feeds into widespread social intolerance and hate towards same-sex desiring people.¹⁹

“{...} It was my choice to leave because...ok, I am a lesbian, I had problems with the government and the society. At that time I didn't have a lot of problems but I was thinking that in the future I will have a lot of problems. I was talking with my mother...I was living with my father, I didn't come out to my mother, I told her I have problems with my father, I have problems with the life and stuff. My mother helped me {...} In Iran or Afghanistan they don't care about girls, they don't give them the confidence that women are powerful and they can do everything. It's like everything is around boys {...} Because in Iran girls are like women, they should marry, have children, clean the house but they are not born for that...”

Hesther's decision to leave since *“she would have problems both with the government and society”* shows how the boundaries between “voluntary” and “forced” mobility are fluid. It seems that the migration of girls can be an expression of agency and empowerment as well as an expression of victimhood and exploitation. The binary “active agent/ passive victim” is nothing more than a construction that serves to obstruct the co-existence of both at the same time; thus, girls are victims of forced displacement, war conflict, domestic violence as much as they are active agents who try to take life on their hands.

All the stories presented so far affirm that girls on the move are an heterogeneous group. Various factors come into play and shape the decision to migrate; different girls migrate in different ways and for different reasons. More specifically, family relations in the country of origin, family and peer networks of support, homosexuality, sudden socio-political changes (changes in governmental policy), war but also ongoing structural violence define in fundamental ways the experiences of migrant girls and their parents who are intrinsically involved in the planning of the journey. By structural violence we are referring to the kind of patriarchal violence that takes place when women are left to suffer in agonizing circumstances that are biopolitically normalized.²⁰ In this framework, we include the exertion of patriarchal control over girls' bodies, various forms of sexual and gender based violence including intolerance to same-sex sexuality, nepotism and militarization. Girls find

¹⁹ Outright Action International: “Being Lesbian in Iran”, New York, Human Rights Report 2016.

²⁰ Gilbert E. and Ponder C.: “Between tragedy and farce: 9/11 compensation and the value of life and death”, 2014: 404–425.

themselves entangled in structures of power that control the ways they learn and think about their bodies whereas they strive to break through them in an effort to formulate another type of living. To give an example, Hesther reflects on how patriarchal structures in Iran teach girls to behave in certain ways and not in others, “*cause in Iran everything is about boys*” as she says. By volunteering as a basketball coach for Afghan girls, Hesther aspires to give girls the confidence to see themselves beyond the way they have been taught: “*Because in Iran girls are like women should marry, have children, clean the house, they are not born for that...*”

2.2 Planning the journey: Decision-making, destination, promises and fears

The girls described how the journey was planned, what they took with them, how they funded it and the promises they made to the people they left behind. Most of the girls who were interviewed travelled with their parents or other family relatives. At the survey question “Did you travel alone or with others?” 15 out of 46 girls responded they travelled alone. Girls took with them a pair of clothes, food, mobile phone and any sort of paper-school degree, ID cards- which proved who they were and what they have achieved in their life- “*things I was proud of*”, says Malakeh. These items were either lost and/or destroyed during the journey and/or confiscated and/or smashed (e.g. mobile phones) by police border guards. The loss of personal items, especially mobile phones, was mentioned by some girls as loss of personal history, of past memories, and of life back “there.” Below, Massah, a 17-year old Afghan girl, who loves Billie Elish and wants to go to America, narrates with great sadness the loss of her phone as a kind of loss of her past life, a loss of identity. Thus, girls attach value on personal items; it’s their connection to the past, to the outside world but also a way of maintaining some sense of self-control against police brutality, dispossession and injustice.

“All the things we had with us, all, everything they found and took them...the policeman gathered the stuff...and I was crying cause they were taking our phones...I kissed my phone and gave it away but I was crying. The good policeman was telling me not to cry and that he would give my phone back tomorrow and I should not cry...All my life was in that phone {...} all my personal, photos, moments, everything was there. It was very important to me. The policemen changed...all the things we had, they didn’t give us back {...}”

Many girls, who travelled with their parents, said they were not aware of the destination until they reached a border, a seashore, a forest. Throughout the journey, they were often asleep and could not really remember the places they passed and/or the countries they crossed. In addition, they were not that much involved in choices regarding the route and destination.

“Personally I didn’t want to do this journey, I participated without my will, they told me we have to leave but I didn’t want, if I could choose I wouldn’t choose to leave {...} I didn’t know where we were going...our destination{...} It was my father’s decision to leave. I had my life in Iran. I went to the gym, to my classes. We had a good life, I could not imagine we would ever leave, go somewhere else and become refugees”, says Malakeh, the Iranian girl who migrated with her family because of her father’s pursuit by members of the Iranian Revolutionary Army- Sepâh.

“They hadn’t told me anything...some days earlier they told me we have to leave, you have to pack your things...I was happy and unhappy while packing, this was the kind of emotion I had”, says Bahar who left with her father but currently lives at the Purple House alone due to ongoing domestic abuse.

Some of the girls who were interviewed said they had no prior knowledge or idea about the risks they would face during the journey. One girl even said that she would not have embarked on the journey if she had known beforehand and when asked what she would advise another girl who wishes to migrate she told us: *“...It’s very hard to tell her what to do, on the one hand, she has to face the sea and the smuggler and on the other, I want her to cross if she will have a better future.”* Some girls, who were separated from their family either during the journey or had to leave them behind, talk about the promise they gave to their mothers to make the journey, to see them again, to take care of them by sending money, by bringing them to Greece etc (the latter entails girls opening the way for the family’s reunification in another country): *“...I want to bring my mother, I want to go to see her...my mother went through so much to support me...my dream is to bring my mother here”* says Bahar.

While accompanied girls received the direct protection and financial support of their parents and were less involved in making decisions regarding the journey, routes or destination, girls who travelled with peer groups- friends they met during the journey-or other family relatives (uncles, cousins, sister-in-law) seem more involved in the decision-making process. Still, their parents funded the journey and in some cases, travelled with them until a certain point. For example, Hesther’s mother travelled with her from Iran to Serbia by plane and then went back to Iran.

Girls stayed for short or long periods of time in transit countries- Serbia and Turkey- from one month to a year before they could continue the journey.²¹ Throughout this period, they stayed with relatives or at camps while waiting to receive the money to continue their journey. At least 5 girls said they attempted to cross borders more than once but were caught and forcibly returned back to the country of origin or to a transit country (Turkey): *“I attempted four times this journey, twice from Syria to Turkey with my brothers and twice*

²¹ See also our survey, the average duration of the journey is 8.7 months drawing from 24 girls (61% of the total sample).

from Syria to Turkey with my mother” says Feresteh. The duration of the journey as well as the dangers (separation from family members, loss of personal items, arrest, detention and deportation) vary according to familial planning and social networks of support. Throughout the journey, families develop strategies of survival in order to face the above risks. For example, Mohammed, who attempted twice to cross the sea to Greece with his 7 children, says: *“we were prepared, we had told my wife’s brother to go and stay at the house in Izmir and that we would call him if we made it or else we would have a place to go back.”*

The destination of the journey was decided beforehand by the family, only one girl, Hesther, made choices on the way based on her preference. The others had made joint plans with their family to go to Northern Europe, in countries where they had other relatives or where they had dreams for a better life. Central and Northern European countries represent idealised western lands of freedom, the *“lands of our dreams”* where *“we will lead happier lives”* says Mohammed when asked if he wishes to stay in Greece with his family: *“Greece is a poor country, there is no capital {...} we want to go to Germany where they have accepted Syrian customs and traditions.”* Unaccompanied girls dream to see their family again and most of them strive for some sense of stability: *“I want to be somewhere stable...not to move from place to place”*, says Mohammed’s daughter, Yara.

Most of the separated and unaccompanied girls who live in shelters- Purple House and Pink House- didn’t want to stay in Greece. The day we visited the Purple House, one of the girls, whom we later met, Feresteh, was missing. The psychologist and social worker were worried. Later they informed us that she was caught at the airport trying to leave for Germany or Austria to go to her uncle. Itimad, a bedouin girl from Kuwait, was waiting to receive her airport ticket for London, where her brother lived; her request for family reunification was finally processed. She could not stop smiling throughout the interview even when she was narrating the difficulties of her journey and the smuggler’s abuse. We went on talking about London, the big city, and her dreams about life there. Only Hesther, who lived in the Pink house, was happy with her life in Athens. Bahar, Feresteh, Itimad, Shararah, and Raha, an Afgan girl from Iran, who travelled with her mother, and currently lives at the Purple House due to her abuse from her mother, wanted to go to Northern Europe- Germany, UK, Austria.

Accompanied girls from Iran and Afghanistan who live with their family independently in Athens (through accommodation programs provided by the state and run by both state and non-state actors i.e. NGOs) were more prone to imagine their future in Greece. Though they didn’t say Greece is their final destination and expressed concerns about their life options, they underlined how important it was to escape violence and live with less fear and insecurity: *“I thank God that we made it here, we are very proud for our decision. It was the best decision we made to come here”* says Moska who lives in Athens with her mother and sisters. Malakeh, who migrated with her family for political reasons and currently lives in a flat provided by an NGO, recalls leaving Iran without her will and learning the word *“refugee”*:

“...I did not choose to leave...but now I feel differently about it...I had no prior information about the journey, I didn't even now what the word «refugee» means (our underlining).”

All in all, the planning of the journey is linked to a translocal family network between the country of origin and other countries. Girls travel on the basis of strategic considerations, preferences, and choices that households make around the best for the future of their girls. The destination of the journey is a familial decision, it is usually somewhere far away, where life is better and where other family relatives can offer care and support. The trip is either an escape from an abusive family home or war conflict or a journey planned well-ahead in search for a better future. In any case, there are many stops, set-backs, and in some cases many efforts to cross to the other side. Money is always an issue. The latter is usually covered by the family, yet in search of money, girls and their families may end up labour slaves, namely working with no money in corn farms (this was the case of Yara and her family while staying in Izmir). Finally, there is a variety of journey experiences and latent differences between accompanied and unaccompanied or separated girls regarding their degree of involvement to the decision-making process. As Hesther told us: *“there are many different journeys, there is no one story...girls on the move are not many, we are the weirdos {...}”*

CHAPTER THREE

THE JOURNEY

When the girls described their journeys to Greece the majority of them spoke about the challenge of crossing borders. During the interviews we got detailed accounts of how girls cross borders and we identified two routes of travelling by sea or by land. The sea route includes travelling from Iran, Iraq and/or Afghanistan to Turkey and crossing the Aegean sea to Lesbos or Samos. The land route includes travelling from Iran, Iraq and/or Afghanistan to Turkey over the river Evros to Greece. However, two girls, Hesther and Feresteh, travelled to Serbia, then reached the Republic of Northern Macedonia and from there arrived to Greece. Both routes are hard and risky for girls and families, yet the dangers are different as well as the means of transport. The duration of the journey varies depending on financial resources and network of support (see also survey). In every story there is a smuggler involved. Girls' experiences with smugglers spans from detached to fearful.

As previously stated girls cannot remember the places they passed and the borders they crossed. This loss of memory is due to trauma, the kind that cannot be easily verbalised, yet remains encrypted in the body. Cathy Caruth, one of the central figures who helped foster the boom in cultural trauma theory in the early 1990s, suggests that trauma is an inherently "paradoxical experience".²² An event might be considered traumatic to the extent that it overwhelmed the psychic defenses and normal processes of registering memory traces. Thus, "traumatic experience", as Caruth formulates it, "suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it and put into language".²³ Trauma cannot be verbalized in narrative, it emerges through body memories, in the ways girls talk and describe the experiences of their bodies on the move: from frozen body parts to exhaustion to wet clothes.

3.1 Travelling by land

The number of land arrivals are less (12.752 land arrivals compared to 49.438 sea arrivals in 2019²⁴), yet they are far less documented in terms of risks, routes and personal experiences- of adults, families and children. At least 5 of the girls who were interviewed entered Greece by land- Raha, Malakeh, Feresteh, Massah and Hesther. As we've already argued, girls do not always remember the crossing of borders or the names of the countries and places. There is a general sense of disorientation and girls keep saying "I don't know exactly." Below Malakeh tries to narrate her journey through sensorial memories: cold, rain,

²² Caruth, C. "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History", *Yale French Studies* No. 79, Literature and the Ethical Question, 1991, pp. 181-192.

²³ Ibid, pp. 91-92.

²⁴ UNHCR, [Mediterranean Situation, Greece](#)

and greenlands are what she recalls from the trip. At some point, she asked the researcher which countries are bordering Serbia and then said that she probably entered through Macedonia.

"I fell asleep for many hours on the bus, when I woke up, we were somewhere, I didn't know where, there was a lot of green...it was raining, it was cold, we waited for the rain to stop, we were sitting under the roof of an apartment, a house...I think we were in Bulgaria, Serbia...Could you tell which countries are around Serbia?{...}I don't know, it could have been Macedonia...I had so much stress, I can't remember where we were, the route."

Feresteh travelled with her uncle, yet once she arrived to Evros through Turkey she was put under protective custody and was separated from her uncle. The Greek words "fylaki" (prison) and "fylakio" (the name of the small village at Evros where Feresteh was held for several months at the Reception and Identification Center under protective custody) were intermixed throughout the interview. The researcher clarified with the help of the interpreter that for Feresteh the "fylakio" (where she was put under protective custody) was "fylaki" (prison). In addition, as already noted in the literature review, regarding the unacceptable practice of "protective custody", the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled against Greece in the case of H.A. v. Greece finding that the detention conditions in which the minors had been subjected to in various police stations "could be regarded as degrading treatment"²⁵, exposing in this way the unethical and illicit nature of "protective custody".

"From Turkey to Greece we walked...I don't remember the places, we were in a village and then a city, between 10pm-12pm, then we walked from 12pm-6am and reached the border {...} We sat at a forest with water, we passed by a river, we stayed for two hours and they began taking us in groups. I went with the first group but they put us on a wrong bus. The police caught us {...} Then they took us to prison for recording. This lasted two days. In the beginning we were all together, then they put me in prison. Then they told me you have to go to "fylakio." I was scared what would happen to me."

Feresteh describes her confusion as to where she was, where they were taking her, it's as if she was constantly walking into the unknown. Massah gave a closer account of her journey. Massah migrated from Iran with her mother because of problems they had with her father and his second family. She was separated from her mother throughout the journey and currently lives at the Purple House. When we met, she was wearing a distinctive cross on her neck- to indicate her conversion to Christianity- a short blue chequers dress and she

²⁵ European Court of Human Rights, "[Unaccompanied alien minors detained in degrading conditions in Greek police stations: a number of violations](#)", Press Release, 28.02.2019.

had very long brown hair; she entered the living room in a joyful manner, she commented on my pink hair and said that she is happy to see me. Massah spoke a little English so we began talking in broken English using our hands along with short phrases and words in English. She smiled and asked if I knew Billy Elish. I nodded negatively. She was shocked to hear I was not aware of the No.1 teen signer. I blamed our generation gap and asked her to show me. She grabbed her phone and opened youtube videos of Billie Elish. We shuffled through the songs, later she said: *"You are beautiful like her, ok, more beautiful than her... You are my Billie Elish."* At that moment I knew this encounter would affect me as researcher and as a person working in the refugee field. The interpreter arrived, we went through the formalities of signing consent forms and I switched on the tape recorder. It's enough to say that throughout the discussion Massah lost her joyful smile. Her re-collection of the journey was intense, both for her and for the researcher.

"...From Turkey to Greece it was very hard...very hard. Six times we tried to cross from Turkey to Greece...we tried, we tried...and we didn't make it, we stayed four days in the snow. The second time, three days it was raining, we stayed in the rain. The first time we reached a town, Dimiko. Because we were a lot of people the police caught us. The first time was very hard. All the things we had with us, the police took it. The behaviour of the policemen was very bad, it was awful. We stayed in jail for one night. All the things we had with us, they found them, they took them...they took us back to the river, at the border between Turkey- Greece and burned our things in front of us.... We were watching them burn... They were wearing masks so we could not see their faces...they told us to keep our heads down, whoever moved, they beat... It was very hard. Four days we were in the snow. Four days we slept in the snow...It was up until our knees...cause we were so close to the road, when a car passed, we had to fall on the snow, all of a sudden, so they would not see us. Every time we tried to cross, it was hard, trying to avoid the cars from seeing us, the police catching us and taking all our things. The days in the snow were so hard. Imagine being four-five days in the forests, in the snow, with no food, nothing. The last night, when I woke up, I lost my senses, I was frozen. I had frozen and lost my senses from the cold, everyone took off their jacket and put them on me so I would get warm."

Massah remembers the snow and her body freezing to death; she recalls the cold water and crossing rivers along with her body's exhaustion while walking through mountains and forests. Her body is a cartography of memories, it is through the sensorial that she recalls the change of means of transport- in the car her body was squeezed, when walking her body was exposed to the snow. Massah shared the sadness and rage she felt about police brutality- she kept repeating *"they took everything, all they took."* She tells me that if she could (meaning if she had the power) she would sue the policemen who behaved like that. She also mentioned that there is a video they managed to record which they sent to a

private channel in Iran *“to show how policemen in Greece treat us.”* By the end she claimed that I use her own name in the transcript and analysis since she wants *“anyone who reads this to know it was me who said these words.”* This reflects her discomfort with the process of anonymity, that is, being informed that she will be given a code (instead of her name) once she signed the consent form. It seems that the discourses of NGOs regarding confidentiality and anonymity contradicted with Massah’s desire to claim her individuality. By giving me her full name she claimed her independence. This act consisted an explicit performative utterance²⁶ where the “saying” of her name grants her the status of subject instead of being reduced to a generic category (“refugee”, “migrant”) or an interview code.

Hesther’s story is somewhat different in that she travelled with her mother until Serbia by plane, where she stayed at a camp for 1-2 months and decided to come to Greece to live a better life as a lesbian- *“people told me it’s better in Greece for LGBT people.”* She left with a group of friends she met at the camp. Her journey involved walking, taking a cab, taking the train to Northern Macedonia and taking the bus to Thessaloniki, where she was homeless for some time until a social worker randomly located her and sent her to the local police station. She stayed there for 3 weeks under protective custody until she found a shelter (Pink House) and has been living there for the past one year and a half. Below, she narrates the change of means of transport which was pretty disorientating for the researcher even when going through the interview transcript.

“The police took us from train and brought us to the Macedonian border. We walked for 15 hours to arrive at the border. We took a taxi, we paid double, and we went to the bus station and from there we took a bus.... I went to a city near the border. The police took us again {...} I had met another couple from Iran, the boy spoke Serbian. They put us in a camp for three days near the border. After 3 days, they took us...it was a train station, we passed it, no police showed up to take us. In Greece no police showed up. We walked 2-3 hours, they found us...we waited for a bus to come...I don’t know the village/city we arrived in Greece. The bus came, we bought a ticket for Thessaloniki. My friends left...I was alone, I was getting cold, I was really fucked up, the police didn’t take me, I went to the police station to stay there but they didn’t take me²⁷. I was homeless, I had no money...A girl from Arsis found me on the street. It was completely a miracle, she found me and brought me to the office of Arsis in Thessaloniki. She wrote a letter for the police station{...} I had a lot of problems but we passed. I didn’t have money, I got hungry, thirsty, I didn’t have anything, I was getting cold on the street.”

²⁶ J.L. Austin, “How to do things with words”, Oxford University Press, 1962.

²⁷ As stated in the literature review it is the obligation of the police once an unaccompanied child is identified to inform the Public Prosecutor for minors and for the child to be put under protective custody.

Travelling by land involves walking long distances from 10 to 15 hours in harsh weather conditions (Massah); losing sense of space and time (Malakeh); facing police brutality (Massah) as well as violence and detention under protective custody (experienced as imprisonment by Feresteh); wandering the streets homeless and hungry (Hesther); and being separated from family relatives (Massah). The choice of the route is made by parents or other family relatives with whom girls are travelling with the exception of Hesther, who travelled with friends and chose the route herself. In addition, the choice of route (referring here to girls travelling with parents) depends on rumours that circulate amongst the community regarding potential dangers and risks, which are deeply gendered. Land routes bring higher risks with rape representing the main danger for women and girls. In other cases, smugglers are in full control of the journey, including the choice of routes. Below, Mohammed, Yara's father, and Habib, the father of Gulpari and Larmina, shed light on the gendered risk factors that inform their route choices.

"I didn't know...they told us that by land you have to walk and it's much more...they have...they told me you can get robbed or even killed", says Mohammed who travelled with his family by sea from Izmir to Lesbos.

"They told us that since we have girls to go through Bulgaria, others said through Rumania, others said that the border police guards rape girls and women so we choose the sea route", says Habib who travelled with his wife and children via the Aegean.

3.2 Travelling by sea

Many girls and families from Afghanistan, Iran and Syria arrive to Greece usually via the Eastern Mediterranean route (from Turkey to Greece). The conditions of travelling have been widely documented- overcrowded boats; violent operations of pushbacks by Hellenic Coast Guard; risk of drowning.²⁸ In 2018 alone, at least 65 boys and girls have lost their lives trying to reach Greece by land or sea from Turkey.²⁹ Among the girls who nearly drowned is Itimad who was thrown into the sea by the Hellenic coastguard once they located their boat.

Yara, who travelled with her father Mohammed, her mother and siblings, was feeling safer compared to separated girls. Her recollection of the journey is fragmented, she recalls crossing forests, shivering in the cold, losing her dresses in the sea when they nearly drowned, walking on a road with sharp nails and being constantly on alert for the police.

²⁸ UNHCR Greece, [Sea Arrivals Dashboard, September 2019](#); IOM, [Fatal Journeys Volume 4: Missing Migrant Children](#), 2019, p. 16-17.

²⁹ UNHCR, [Desperate Journeys: Refugee and Migrant Children Arriving in Europe and How to Strengthen their Protection](#), 2019, p. 12.

"...we passed by many cities of Syria to arrive to Turkey. I remember we were a lot of people and walked through forests, we stayed in the cold, we slept there...we had to leave our things behind in our journey from Syria to Turkey {...}, we walked a little and they told us «the police came, lie down». We went through forests, in some places there were nails on the road {...} we climbed mountains, we went through rivers; we went through all this..."

Within this fragmented narrative girls appear to highlight different moments: Some girls talk a lot about the hardness of the travel (the cold, the famine and the change of scenery), others recall the frequent changes in means of transport (Hesther) and finally others remember the moment they lost their mothers and/or siblings. Below, Shararah narrates the moment she was separated from her mother and siblings when she was forced by the smuggler to get on another car. She hasn't managed to locate her family since then.

"In Turkey we were two groups and two cars. My sisters, my mother and my brother were in one car and I was in another. I think the police may have caught them...I don't know what happened. I arrived alone, I don't know where they are...they told me to get on this car. I got on but there was no space for my family and he said, they said, that they will come with another car. I told him I didn't want to go. I wanted to be with my family. He told me to get off but if I don't come with this car he will leave me there. And I had no choice but to get on this car and I lost my family..."

Other girls, like Moska, recall the changes in the means of transport- from car to van- the lack of control over the journey and the moment she and her family were forcefully secluded. Some girls speak about arriving very close to death and/or barely surviving while others describe feeling powerless at the mercy of smugglers. Below, Moska recalls the "death-ride" on the van from Iran to Turkey and her forced seclusion in a room.

"It was very hard, every moment we faced death in front of our eyes. Because we couldn't control what was happening...We got off the cab and they put us on a Nissan van, all of us in there, and through the mountains the van was jumping, every moment we felt we were about to fall and they (the smugglers: our explanation) didn't care at all. We went into a house, which was the size of this room, 40 people in that room....this was at the border between Iran and Turkey. We were there for 10 days."

The stories of parents regarding the sea journey are somewhat different in that adults tend to recollect the details of the journey (means of transport, money, borders etc) and present them in a coherent manner whereas girls present a more disorientated narrative and underline the loss of care reflected in the loss of basic needs (food, sleep, cleanness)

and the experience of extreme bodily conditions (exhaustion, wetness, freezing). Parents have been requested many times to narrate their arrival to Greece for asylum services, RIC centres etc. Still though their narratives are fragmented and their memories are scattered in time and space- the before, during and after of the journey becomes an enmeshed time-space through which parents try to navigate their life and that of their children. Below, Habib and Zarmisha, the parents of 9 children (6 girls and 3 boys), including the two adolescent girls, Gulpari and Larmina, narrate their journey to Greece. The girls didn't say a lot about the journey, they kept saying *"it was hard, those were very hard days."* However, at one point, Gulpari said *"it felt as if it lasted a million years"* which reflects girls' sense of disorientation and exhaustion and sheds light on the temporal dimension of the journey which cannot be understood in terms of a linear and progressive notion of time. Habib begins his narrative from the moment he left Iran with his family:

"From Iran we went to Turkey, in Teheran we found a smuggler, we walked a lot, then they took us in a house with a lot of people...at night, the smuggler told us to release the money we put as guarantee...so he can take us to Ankara. At that house there were many families and in another room there were only single people with no family. That night some of the people who travelled alone hadn't given money and the smugglers shot one...we were very afraid, the children were afraid. At night we gave them the money and they put us in a van and brought us to Alikarnasso...From there they told us to go to Konstantinoupoli. We were all day on the streets, we had no place to stay. They put us on a bus, it was very hot... we were approximately 150 people, my kid, the smallest, was so hot, I took her clothes off and was trying to open the window...From 8pm until 1am we were inside that bus."

Habib narrates his trip from Iran to Constantinople where they were left by the smuggler on the streets. They could not find a place to stay since they had no passport or identity documents (based on the survey the majority of the girls said they did not have identity documents with them). They were wandering around the city and calling the smuggler for help, who was not answering their calls. When he showed up he took them to a shelter with other families and people from various countries. The next day he put them on another bus for Izmir. There he left them at a forest, near somebody's land property. They stayed there with no food or water for three days: *"It was cold, I had no clothes for the small kid, on the way we had lost all our clothes...we had nowhere to sit so we cut leaves from the walnut trees to sit on them and keep us warm..."* When they lit fire to warm themselves, they were caught by the land owner. They begged him to let them stay. However, he called the border police guards and they were taken to prison; they were locked there for 11 days with no toilettes and only 45 minutes break to walk in an open space. At this point, his wife, Zarmisha, took over the discussion and began narrating the journey from the moment they arrived at the seashore.

“He told us the next morning he would take us. They didn’t give us life jackets, they told us that we don’t need them. The next morning two people came to cross us but not the smuggler {...} They told us to wait until the sea was calm. It was 3pm and they brought the boat. They told us that they would bring the boat so close that we would not wet our shoes. Instead we made a (human: our explanation) chain, the water reached our neck and we got on the boat....My daughters and myself and a grandma we were at the lower deck, my husband with some others and a young man were at another deck. The boat was going so fast that basically we were on air, our heads were hitting the sealing {...} As soon as we reached Lesvos we didn’t get off, they began throwing us in the water. I have the videos...as soon as they saw the Greeks...they began throwing us in the water with the threat of guns, they told us they can’t dock there, it’s dangerous. First the men and boys got off and when they arrived to the women and children, they began throwing us. Fortunately, I had seen them throwing lifejackets in the forests, I took them and told my daughters to wear them under their clothes. But the boys and my husband were not wearing...From far away, Greek policemen saw the boat approach and they began talking on the phone...they wanted to throw us, another woman was on her knees begging them not to throw us in the water, to return us back to Turkey. We had regretted it. But whatever we said, it didn’t matter, they threw us. My husband had worked for the port authorities and he knew swimming as did another young man. Those who had no life jackets were pulled first and so they pulled us towards the mountain. There the Greeks came and told us «Don’t be afraid, we will save you». They came with their boats and gathered us.”

Zarmisha’s narrative is full with anguish and pain. She felt helpless throughout the sea crossing, yet she clearly tried to protect her daughters from drowning by providing them with life jackets (which she secretly took at the forest). Both Zarmisha and Habib developed surviving mechanisms to cope with brutality, irrationality and actions happening beyond their control. Their effort to attain some minimal control over the journey consisted in keeping the children warm (Habib) and giving them life jackets (Zarmisha). In addition, Zarmisha’s story affirms what is already encountered in the literature³⁰ namely that travelling by sea involves the risk of drowning due to pushbacks from the Hellenic Coast Guards.

Some girls expressed feelings of fear about crossing the sea and others were very much concerned about losing their parents and/or close kin with whom they were travelling.

³⁰ UN Committee Against Torture, [Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of Greece](#), September 2019, p. 3-4.

³⁰ IOM, [Fatal Journeys Volume 4: Missing Migrant Children](#), 2019, p. 16-17.

³⁰ UNHCR, [Desperate Journeys: Refugee and Migrant Children Arriving in Europe and How to Strengthen their Protection](#), 2019, p. 12.

Throughout the interview girls were either detached or very much involved in the recollection of traumatic events. Some girls cried and looked us in the eyes while narrating the hardships of the journey. The fact that girls and sometimes parents could not recollect the series of events that consisted their journey to Greece reflects the impact of the journey as an overwhelming traumatic experience, one that questions the usual systems of care and control, or connection and meaning experienced by the individual. All narratives of the journey reveal its traumatic character that cannot easily exist in language- as Gabriel Schwab says “Trauma attacks and sometimes kills language”.³¹ This explains the loss of words and mechanic repetition of phrases, namely traumatic experiences cannot be put into words since there is no meaningful structure or form that can express the extreme, unbearable moments the refugee self goes through from freezing to death to being thrown into the water. Drawing again from Schwab, it seems that girls struggle to “disentangle their self from the dead bodies they are trying to hide”³² or as Herman states in her landmark study “Trauma and Recovery”: “Atrocities refuse to be buried.”³³ Massah asked provocatively and in a manner that clearly disarmed the researcher: “*Do you know how many people have died on the Greek-Turkish borders, in the snow, in the woods?*” Her question brought the dead refugee bodies to the surface and made the researcher nod, look down and say “*No, I don’t*” and later admit to herself “*and probably I never will.*”

3.3 Travelling with the “help” of smugglers

All of the girls that we spoke had crossed the borders with the help of smugglers at some point in their journey. Some of them had their parents or close family relatives pre-arrange the details of the travel while others met them on the way. It was clear that there is a strong and well-organised chain of smugglers working to facilitate informal movement across borders but also exploiting the desperation of migrants and particularly single women. Some migrants have contacted smugglers ahead of time (when they left Iran or Afghanistan) who wait for them and pick them up with cars, taxis and buses and drive them either near the Serbian border or to Turkish coasts. From there migrants go on foot via the mountains and cross Evros river or are forced to get /embark to a boat or raft and cross the Aegean to Lesbos or Samos alone or with the smuggler up to a certain point in the sea route.

Most girls had negative and fearful experiences with smugglers with the exception of Bahar who said that “*he was a good person*” and Hesther who didn’t clarify whether she travelled with the help of a smuggler. Itimad got very distressed when I asked about the smuggler. I was informed by the social worker of the Purple House that Itimad is an GBV survivor. She didn’t verbally disclose sexual violence, yet it was the only moment in her narrative that she seemed very distressed and with tearful eyes said: “*The contact with the*

³¹ Gabriele Schwab, “Writing Against Memory and Forgetting”, *Literature and Medicine*, 25:1, Spring 2006, p. 95.

³² *Ibid*, p. 95- 96

³³ Judith H., “Trauma and Recovery”, 2001 {1992}, Basic Books, p. 1.

smugglers was very hard. I wish no girl will ever fall on their hands.” The issue of girls’ re-traumatisation was something that concerned us throughout this research and we had to reform our approach based on the needs of every girl. In this context, we worked in close collaboration with the shelters’ psychologists in order to inform them in case a girl got emotionally distressed throughout the discussion. Drawing from our previous research experience with GBV survivors we remained cautious and vigilant to locate signs of traumatic distress that went beyond the reparative dimension, which is integral in the narrative recollection of a traumatic event in life.

The money girls and families paid to travel varied from 400 to 40.000 euros/dollars. Mohammed with his big family paid 400 euros per person and Naghma, a single mother with four children, including Moska, paid 40.000 dollars. Single women with children pay larger amounts of money, sometimes they even give away their whole fortune in order to secure their “safety”, which isn’t provided. Additional money didn’t provide additional security. It should be noted that the smuggler may change the amount in the middle of the journey. Below, Naghma and her daughter Moska suggest that the price of the journey depended on the fact that they were women travelling alone but also that the amount shifted as the journey continued.

“I gave them everything I had...I knew a woman whom I called Nono and she helped me with the money. 40.000 euros, dollars, I lost everything, I paid for everything, everything... He called me and asked 5.000 dollars extra and said that I should not worry they would cross my family safely, take us somewhere safe...”, says Naghma.

“We had arranged another amount in the beginning but later he asked 10.000 extra...cause there was no man with us, I think that was the reason...”, says Moska.

Some families and girls mentioned that the behaviour of smugglers changed as soon as they reached a forest, an isolated place or Greece. It should be noted that in some cases smugglers promise to take care of families when they arrive to Greece by providing them with home and jobs; thus, their interaction with the smuggler doesn’t necessarily end with their arrival to Greece. Below, Mohammed, Yara’s father, who narrated a troublesome journey with many setbacks and risks, including nearly-drowning at sea, says that the smugglers’ behaviour changed as soon as they reached the forest. And Malakeh, who travelled with her family, discusses the troubles they faced as soon as they reached Greece and went to stay at the smuggler’s house.

“In Ismir their behaviour was good and polite. But when we reached a certain point in the forest and there was no contact with anyone, their behaviour was

bad. It was the same for everyone, we were 80 people and they swore and talked bad to all”, says Mohammed.

“...on the journey, on the road, until we reached Greece, no, but when we arrived to Greece things were bad {...} When we came we were homeless, the smuggler was harassing me and my family...we paid him in Iran and he said that “when you come I will find you a house and job” and many other things and he will support us in every possible way. When we arrived he said “today, tomorrow” and in the end he disappeared...For some time, we stayed at his place. One time he locked the door and we were left outside, on the streets, we had no place to go and he didn’t answer our calls...At these houses we stayed with smugglers, they were houses for smugglers, meaning that we were 10 people living together”, says Malakeh.

The role of smugglers is important in terms of the help to cross borders. However, migrants are often exploited and tricked as they are abandoned in forests for days without food or shelter (the journey of Habib and Zarmisha) and are not always informed about the routes. Below, Moska, who travelled with her mother, Nagham, and her three sisters, expresses her fear of the smuggler and notes that she and her family were not informed at any stage about the routes. Instead she felt they were at the mercy of his choices.

“we were very afraid, so many fears I cannot even tell you, whatever he said, we said yes, he asked for more money, we didn’t react, we said whatever we said cause we were afraid of him...we didn’t react when he asked for more money cause we were afraid to react, afraid he would act in a different manner {...} No, no he decided everything. Where we stayed he locked us in a house, we were somewhere, we had no right to go outside, he locked the door”, says Moska.

The girls often felt they depended on smugglers, who “*swore, shouted, hit other men and used guns*” as Yara said. In addition, smugglers were not trustworthy and their choices and behaviour during land or sea crossings deeply affected the life of girls. Below, Shararah, the Iranian girl who was separated from her mother during the journey after being forced by the smuggler to enter in a different car (see above), affirms that the smuggler blackmailed her to continue the journey alone by threatening to leave her in the middle of nowhere. Feresteh also says that she trusted the smuggler who told her to lie about her nationality since this would help her cross the borders. This may have caused problems with her identity documents since she was initially recorded with a different nationality. Feresteh is the girl who on the scheduled day of the interview disappeared and was caught trying to get on a plane to Germany. The social worker at the Purple House informed me that “*her case is a hard one and she won’t probably get a positive response to her application for family unification. It’s very hard.*”

“... When we reached the forest, we arrived somewhere in a forest and I told him I want to be with my family, leave me here. And he said “Ok, if you wanna stay alone in the woods, I will leave you here or you will come with us, you have no choice.” And I went. He told me “get in the car and then ok, now I can go on the boat and cross to the other side, and they (my family: our explanation) will follow. We will find each other somewhere.” When I arrived to the camp, I asked for my family but they didn’t find anything”, says Shararah.

“the police caught us on the way and the smuggler told us to say that we are Turks. I don’t know why...and then I told the manager at fylakio that he (the smuggler: our explanation) told me to lie {...} but I didn’t talk much to them, I had my mother and later my uncle with me”, says Feresteh.

The risks of rape, survival sex, transactional sex and sexual harassment are a reality for girls on the move, which has been already recorded in the literature.³⁴ As we’ve already noted, some families do not choose the land route because of rumours about risks of sexual abuse and rape of women and girls (Habib’s and Mohammed’s thoughts). Yet, it seems that single women with children face the danger of sexual abuse and rape whether they are travelling by sea or by land. Below, Nagham, Moska’s mother, who was travelling with her four children (including Moska), discloses being raped by the smuggler.

She seems very depressed and throughout the conversation she kept saying *“I think all the things I’ve been through and my children, I can’t, I can’t.”* She admitted that she has suicidal thoughts and expressed feelings of despair and hopelessness about her life.

“...From the moment I left Afghanistan until I arrived here, the smugglers took advantage of me...Because I was alone with my children, I gave them more money, to take me somewhere safe, so nobody, nobody could bother us...But this didn’t change anything. They took my money, all my money, they took also my honour. It was at the borders between Iran and Afghanistan, they raped me. It was the worst that could ever happen to me. He called me and asked 5.000 dollars extra and said that I should not worry they would cross my family safely, take us somewhere safe. The next morning he called me again and I was thinking he wants us to start (the journey: our explanation) that’s why he called. He closed the door...” says Nagham.

“I lost my honour”, this phrase encompasses the impact of the patriarchal discourse of honour and shame on Nagham’s life. In this context, we should note that the humiliation and shame often experienced by rape victims are predictable results of experiencing total

³⁴ UNHCR, UNFPA, WRC, [Initial Assessment Report: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis](#), 2016, p. 10

subjugation and the intimate loss of control of one's body.³⁵ These reactions—not to mention victims' feelings of contamination, of having been defiled or desecrated—are often exacerbated by cultural judgments of raped women as dirty and impure, or as “damaged goods.”³⁶ In some cultures, these ideas are so powerful that a woman who is raped (or who has consensual illicit sex) is thought to bring shame on her entire family.³⁷ Afghan society perceives women to be the guardians of culture and the custodians of a family's “honour”.³⁸ As a result, women are seen as “dishonouring” their families and communities when they are subjected to sexual violence. As such, it is the girl or woman – the rape victim – and not the perpetrator who carries the shame of the crime.³⁹

All in all, smugglers are portrayed by girls as fearful men with guns “*who are thinking of their interests*”. Some of the accompanied girls (Yara, Bahar, Feresteh) didn't engage a lot with them since their fathers and uncles, usually men, were making all the necessary arrangements. Others, especially single women with children (Nagham and Moska) and girls accompanied with parents or other family relatives (Itimad; Malakeh; Mohammed, Yara's father), describe smugglers as abusers of power who threaten, rape and deceive them and who drive them through forests and turbulent seas without any direction. Massah put it well when she said that “*Yes, the smugglers...can the smugglers ever be good? But he has this name “smuggler.” He can never be good.*”

³⁵ Whisnant, R., “Feminist Perspectives on Rape”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/feminism-rape/>, no page.

³⁶ Ibid, no page.

³⁷ Ibid, no page.

³⁸ UNAMA, OHCHR, “Silence is Violence, End the Abuse of Women in Afghanistan”, July 2009, p. 2

³⁹ Ibid, p. 2.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARRIVAL

This study focused on Athens as the site for researching experiences of refugee adolescent girls from Afghanistan, Iran and Syria after arrival and in specific shelters, the Purple House and the Pink House, as well as families that are hosted in accommodation programs (by NGOs). Although findings vary from shelters to organised housing programs and reveal different needs and gaps, the findings in this section generally point to a lack of strategic, long-term planning which restrict refugees' efforts for social integration. It is clear that being a girl on the move comes with gendered implications which in some cases is reflected in their restricted access to education in the country of origin. Both girls and families who aspire to go to Northern and Central Europe are stuck in a state of limbo as they wait for their application to progress and cannot invest to their life in the present. The state of limbo is also part and parcel of the refugee camp, which clearly constitutes a place of transit, owing to its perceived temporariness and the makeshift solutions created for sustained living (e.g. tents). Their temporary nature often turns out to be more permanent, and refugees may spend several years in a camp before they receive a chance of resettlement. It's important to consider how refugee camps affect refugees' notion of permanence and temporariness and look at the state of limbo as the result of life in refugee camps, where migrants are without joy, family, and other identity-creating traits (cooking, cleaning, socializing outdoors). The following findings also suggest that xenophobia followed by professional inadequacies and cultural misconceptions (of NGOs , other professionals/public servants in the field and the general population) need to be addressed in order to promote inclusion, social diversity and tolerance towards cultural difference. The latter goes hand in hand with the need to empower girls to become independent and self-sufficient, namely, citizens that claim their rights to education, work and social welfare etc.

4.1 The necropolitics of camps, detention and protective custody

As noted in the literature review, until a vacancy in long-term facility is found, usually unaccompanied children live in Safe Zones which are areas within adult refugee camps, or, sometimes, in "protective custody" which basically means they are being detained in police cells and detention centers⁴⁰ despite the fact that, as it has been noted by several humanitarian actors, detention is always against the best interests of the child.⁴¹ The

⁴⁰ Defense for Children, [Athens, The Reflection of a Broken Protection System for Refuge Children](#), 2017, p. 10

⁴¹ For example, Greek Council for Refugees, [GCR's Comments on the International Protection Bill](#), Concept note, 2019 [in Greek].

conditions of living in Safe Zones and “protective custody” are below than what we could call “humanly intelligible conditions of living.” Below, Itimad describes the conditions of (not) living in Samos and the loneliness she felt partly due to lack of interpretation in Arabic⁴² and Nora, a child protection professional, attests to the horrific conditions of Samos refugee camp.

“When we reached Samos, they took me to the camp. Sleep and food were awful. First I was in a tent, then in a container. There was police outside but no security, people opened the door in the middle of the night. We were 15 girls in one container. Then they prepared my papers and took me to Thessaloniki. I was in a hotel in the beginning, the only Arab-speaking amongst Afghans, I had nobody to talk, I was alone...”, says Itimad.

“At this moment the situation is out of control, out of control. There are girls at Samos, 40 girls in half container sleeping in turns. To go to the toilette, you have to go with somebody else because of fear that something might happen to you. It’s tragic. All the places at shelters are full. How long will girls stay in these conditions? It’s pure luck what will happen to you. And you don’t stand a good chance anyway”, says Nora.

These conditions of (not) living, the kind Itimad says she “will never forget” correspond to Mbembe’s notion of individuals being “permanently injured” to refer to conditions in which the permanent wounding is used as a means of control rather than direct and active killing. Suffering in a packed container (being deprived of sleep and access to toilettes) therefore produces groups of people that are “kept alive but in a state of injury⁴³.” Within Samos refugee camp, being deprived of basic needs (sleep, food, health and public and personal hygiene) haunted Itimad’s story, who said *“the smugglers and Samos are images stuck in my head.”* For other girls, the refugee camp becomes the site where they are raped.⁴⁴ Drawing from Diotima’s previous research on GBV violence we should note that there is a reported perception among field professionals/protection officers, particularly on

⁴² The lack and/or total absence of interpreters at Asylum services, first registration, reception and identification centres at Samos, Lesbos and Evros, at hospitals and shelters has been documented at the recent study (2019) of the Roza Luxembourg Institute entitled “Children Cast Adrift: Exclusion and Abuse of Unaccompanied Children in Greece” {in Greek & English}. In addition, Diotima’s previous research on the accessibility and barriers to Gender- based violence, which was conducted during 2015-2016, reaffirms the scarcity, yet also, low quality of the available interpretation services in various public sectors (police, courts, hospitals). This research also records a limited number of female interpreters along with a prevalent attitude of gatekeeping among male interpreters from proceeding in reporting GBV violence (Diotima & Unicef, “Research on Accessibility and Barriers to Gender-Based Violence Services for refugee and migrant girls, boys, women and men in Greece”, December 2019, pp.51-53).

⁴³ Mbembe, A., “Necropolitics”, *Public Culture* 15(1), 2003, p. 21.

⁴⁴ In Moria, Medecins Sans Frontieres reported that just for the first 10 months of 2018, they treated 23 cases sexual abuse (including rapes) and 9 of these cases concerned minors (Medecins Sans Frontieres, Moria: [“Doctors Without Borders Clarification Response”](#), 17 October 2018 [in Greek]).

the islands (e.g. Moria), that female refugees may report incidents of rape or threat of rape to “gain” the vulnerability status in order to ensure access to better treatment and/or in order to lift the geographical restrictions to their movement in the mainland; a behaviour that risks being used as a pretext for overlooking the refugees’ actual needs.⁴⁵ Moska, one of the girls who was supported by Diotima (after her rape), discloses the sexual violence she experienced:

“At the island, at Moria, this thing happened, very violent, very violent...the most bad thing that could happen, in my mind I never thought that in Europe something like this (rape: our explanation) could happen”, says Moska.

The potentiality of rape, violence or even death is an ever-present reality in camps and detention centres. Girls regularly compared the experience of living in refugee camps to violent abuses and traumas suffered in origin countries or to their journey to Greece (Itimad). Asal could not manage the violence at Moria and one time she shaved her hair as a “ceremonial” act of resistance and despair to what felt fearful, sad and traumatic.

“It was one day, a big fight happened, and they put the camp on fire. After the fire and that big fight I was exhausted so much...I shaved my head...I was so sad and the fight around me and all the people I knew had left the camp...after 3-4 hours I regretted shaving my head. Later they took me to a shelter for minors, cause I was always sad, I had stress...” says Asal.

The conditions of (not) living under protective custody in police stations as well as the lack of interpreters results to girls feeling alone, abandoned and afraid. Below, Hesther describes her time in the police station from which she prayed to leave.

“Police station was very bad. No shower, cold water. A lot of people, they changed a lot of time, sometimes it was full, you didn’t have any space. The last days I was «God please, I don’t want to be here anymore», I was crying in the morning, then they said my name and I was...finally I am going”, says Hesther.

Girls described feeling lost, alone and uninformed about where they are taken, what will happen to them, where are their relatives, how long they will stay in protective custody, what are the next steps etc. Feresteh, whom we have already presented, describes feeling disorientated, afraid and alone since nobody informed her about each step of the process (partly due to lack of interpretation) and she didn’t participate (meaning, she wasn’t consulted) at any stage. She found her uncle by pure luck but the papers he provided did not suffice to prove their kin relation.

⁴⁵ Diotima & Unicef, “Research on Accessibility and Barriers to Gender-Based Violence Services for refugee and migrant girls, boys, women and men in Greece”, December 2019, p.54.

“They took us to prison for recording. It lasted two days. In the beginning we were all together, then they put me in another prison and told me that «you have to go to fylakio». I was scared what would happen to me. There was an interpreter that stood by my side. She said «don’t be afraid, calm down, we will bring you a Kurdish interpreter». Then they told me «if I can stay 7 months in prison and then I will be out». All were Arabs and Afghans in the same prison, I was alone...At some point, a man came for his niece and he knew my uncle, that’s how I talked to my uncle again, he brought papers translated... Either they didn’t believe they were real or they weren’t enough...”, says Feresteh.

Nora, a professional in the field of child protection, who has worked in different positions and with different organisations for the past years, sheds light to the systemic deficiencies- lack in information and dissemination strategies, lack in interpreters, lack in professional capacity and periodic, yet not ongoing, training of front- line professionals especially at first reception and identification centres (RIC). Her remark regarding the absence of any information given to migrant children resonates with Feresteh’s feeling of disorientation and fear.

“We had girls that arrived at RIC and it was obvious they were unaccompanied girls. They might have travelled with another family, you know like protected members of that family. They would arrive and it’s not that they receive any information regarding the services we offer them or that there is a good screening process or that professionals at first reception are well trained, we would find out they are unaccompanied later by their guardians {...}”, says Nora.

Families with adolescent girls also documented the conditions of (not) living in Moria, Evros and Samos. In particular, Mohammed arrived in Moria to find himself, his pregnant wife along with his 8 children in a tent with 4 other families. He used his hands to show me in his living room the size of the tent, which was about ¼ of his living room *“from here to here”* he pointed. They were then moved to another tent with a family of 7 children where they used a blanket to divide space. They stayed for 2 months and were later transferred to a hotel as soon as his wife gave birth.

Overall, girls described life at safe zones, RIC’s and camps as a “slow death.” As Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi⁴⁶ suggest in their study of the Calais refugee camp, the inhabitants of camps are assigned the status of the “living dead”⁴⁷; not actively killed - as would befit a “bare life” reading⁴⁸- but destined to suffer the harm and indignity of long-term cruel

⁴⁶ Davies, T. & Isakjee, A. & Dhesi, S. “Violent Inaction: The Necropolitical experience of refugees in Europe”, *Antipode*, Vol. 49 No. 5, 2017, p. 1280.

⁴⁷ Mbembe, A.. “Necropolitics”, *Public Culture* 15 (1), 2003, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Agamben, G. “Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life”. London: Stanford University Press, 1998.

conditions. The brutality that girls, women and families suffer in such places becomes a “socially sanctioned dehumanisation”⁴⁹, that is, a normalization of suffering. Nora’s remark of Samos camp is indicative of the “death-worlds” girls are describing.

“It’s hell on earth. It’s extreme violence. This thing. I haven’t seen anything worse in my life, what I told you. The girls (40) in Samos in half container and sleeping in turns at night, next to the police, and having to ask for someone to escort them to the toilette. I mean, I don’t know, I can’t {...} And when I went to Moria and it’s been some time since I went, not recently. It’s a brutality. Imagine working there every day. Humans can get used to brutal things. You get used it, that’s for sure....But it’s horrific, horrific. And people are left there, the ones working there, there is the secondary traumatising of professionals... We are left there, we are abandoned”, says Nora.

4.2 A place to call home: Shelters, accommodation and life in the city

Most girls lived at safe zones (Shararah: 8 months; Bahar: 1 month; Asal: 4 months), refugee camps (Mohammed family: 2 months), police stations (Hesther: 2 weeks) and/or other forms of temporary accommodation such as hotels (Mohammed’s family: 4 months) or under protective custody (Feresteh: 2 months) for more than 1 month on average before they were sent to a long-term facility (a shelter). None of the unaccompanied girls, who were interviewed, and currently lived in shelters had a personal guardian (only one girl at the Pink House had a guardian). As noted in the literature review in some regions Public Prosecutors are acting as temporary guardians for hundreds of children, thus being, in practice, unable to fulfil their responsibilities as guardians. The guardianship program which was initiated by the NGO Metadrasī to cover this legal and institutional gap was recently significantly cut down to 1 guardian per 100-120 children (from 1 guardian per 20 children)⁵⁰ and rumours had it that it might be permanently suspended.

The Pink House and the Purple House hosted 20 and 32 girls, respectively. There were no interpreters working permanently in the facilities with the exception of the Purple House who had an Arab interpreter but no interpretation in Farsi/Dari even though it hosted 8 Afghan girls. Both shelters collaborated with interpreters who visited the shelter when needed (in Farsi/Dari, Urdu and Arabic). The Pink House was situated at the centre of Athens, it was a two-floor building with a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and the

⁴⁹ Castro, A.F.H. “From the «bio» to the «necro»” in S.E. Wilmer and A. Žukauskaitė (eds). “Resisting Biopolitics: Philosophical, Political, and Performative Strategies”, London: Routledge, 2015, p. 248.

⁵⁰ Metadrasī, “Metadrasī announces that its Guardianship Network cannot respond in the rising number of unaccompanied minors cases”, Retrieved from:

<https://metadrasī.org/%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%AC%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%B7-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%AF%CE%BD%CF%89%CF%83%CE%B7-%CE%B4%CE%AF%CE%BA%CF%84%CF%85%CE%BF-%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B9%CF%84%CF%81%CF%8C%CF%80/>, 9/12/2019 [in Greek].

bedrooms of the girls on the second floor. It was particularly warm and homey. The professionals were welcoming and helpful upon our first arrival, yet the following days, they seemed over-loaded with work. The Purple House was located in a working class suburb close to a big park. There was no heating on the whole building. The professionals were working in a small room with an air-condition and the rest of the building was freezing. Given the fact that we visited the Purple House before Christmas and the temperature was low, it was almost impossible to stay inside the shelter without a jacket.

When discussing with the girls about life in the shelter most of the them said they felt safe and supported by the staff. In the relevant survey question, 63% (29 girls) answered positively, while 30.5% (14 girls) answered negatively in this question while 6.5% (3 girls) chose not to answer this question. What should be noted is that some girls wrote that they felt safe but not happy, something that could not be reflected in the questionnaire. Some of the girls were comparing life in the shelter to the horrific conditions at safe zones. For example, Itimad underlined that now, here (meaning in the shelter) it's much better compared to Samos. Hesther mentioned that the Pink House can get noisy and girls fight loudly, yet she was content to be there. Bahar felt safe in the shelter but afraid to go out: *"I feel safe, however I go out with stress and frustration that my father will find me."* Asal was waiting for the interview to finish to disclose some important information about life in another shelter. It seems that girls create networks of support amongst each other even when they are far away or have met randomly for a short period of time. By the end of the interview, Asal confided to me some information regarding the conditions of living in another shelter for girls. She had promised the girls there that if somebody came and asked information about unaccompanied girls, she would tell him/her about their conditions of living. This further reveals how girls develop a network of resistance that gives voice to their needs, abuses and demands.

Within shelters, girls develop relationships and friendships that may last long after they are moved to another accommodation. Feresteh against all odds and while being detained under protective custody met a Kurdish girl whom she came to love:

"The Kurdish girl I met in prison they took her at «White smile», we became friends, I loved her, she loved me. It was at «fylakio». We dreamed we would go out together and would go out for walks in Athens", says Feresteh.

Most girls said they had social life inside and outside the shelter. Asal is the "informal" hair-dresser for other girls in the shelter; Hesther cooks food for refugees and volunteers as a junior basketball coach for Afghan girls. For Hesther, basketball coaching is a form of life coaching, she sees it as an empowering activity that can help Afghan girls gain confidence:

"I am the only junior that is a coach and talks Farsi. So I have these girls, I like to help. In Iran or Afghanistan they don't care about girls, they don't give them the confidence that the woman is powerful and they can do everything. It's like

everything is around boys. So when I see them I like to tell them that they are better than this. Because in Iran girls are like women should marry, have children, clean the house; they are not born for that. I like it when they participate in this group.”

Other girls are lonely and aspire to leave the shelter and be with their mothers like Massah whose best friend is her teddy bear: *“I have my teddy bear in the room on my bed. A big teddy bear.”* Others, like Raha, say they participate in various external activities, sports, music and theatre classes. Drawing again from our survey regarding the participation of girls to other activities, 17 girls (37% of the sample) responded positively, 15 girls (33% of the sample) and 14 girls (31% of the sample) did not answer at all. Of the 17 girls that responded positively only 7 girls specified the other activities they have access to. These included cooking, gymnastics, dancing, music, religion, theater, sports, school and arts (drawing). However, most of the above-mentioned activities are not provided as services to the girls, they are interests that may or may not be covered depending on each organisation.

Life in a shelter can be different for each girl depending on her status, her needs and desires but also it largely depends on the professional capacity, strategic planning and priorities of each organisation. As stated by Nora it really depends on the culture of each organisation, for example, whether the organisation has previous experience with child protection as well as the general skills of the workforce. She underlined that there is no guarantee (an effective and doable evaluation process) that each shelter meets certain conditions of living.

“It really depends on the culture of each organisation. Cause there are shelters and facilities ran by organisations who had no prior engagement with child protection. All of a sudden because of public funds they decided to open a shelter but they had no prior children’s unit or knowledge for it....You can’t have 40 kids with 20 workers in a country where facilities- hospital, schools- aren’t prepared to host refugees and have so many gaps...I believe in shelters you get an institutionalised⁵¹ kind of caring, where the individual needs of each kid are usually lost. These are shelters of general hospitality, meaning that vulnerabilities are not targeted as such...it usually depends on the personal effort of some professionals, who are already over-worked and exhausted”, says Nora.

Families with adolescent girls who live in accommodation provided by NGOs experience life in the city quiet differently, yet they were stressed that they may lose their house once they will stop being considered eligible for accommodation e.g. once they get asylum. Mohammed, Nagham and Habib with Zarmisha are stressed about their housing since they are unemployed and Greeks, as Malakeh says, do not want to rent their houses to migrants. These families were informed that they have to consider finding another place and

⁵¹ Meaning a type of care resembling an asylum.

they were given a provisional deadline. Parents do not speak Greek and have no occupation. Interestingly, there were families with adolescent girls that found accommodation with the help of other migrants who have been in the country for some time and were willing to help and guide them. This shows that there are small, yet existent, networks of support, self-organised by migrants and for migrants and refugees. Malakeh's family, that lived at the smuggler's house, managed to rent a house with the help of another Afghan family, who also helped Malakeh enrol to school. Neither NGOs nor the Greek state helped Malakeh and her family. Below, Malakeh describes the help she received from this Afghan man and his family as well as her family's difficulty to rent a place independently. She also mentions the existence of a network of small, self-organised initiatives, mostly related with religious sects ran by other migrants. She volunteered there as an interpreter and teacher in English and Greek language.

"...all our money we gave to smugglers, that's why we couldn't go anywhere, we couldn't rent a house on our own. It was only the smugglers, I think Greeks didn't want to rent their house to somebody who was a refugee...I mean we found a house, we went to see it but they didn't give it to us. The same man helped us rent a house, he told us it's best not to live with the smuggler, he helped us in the process {...} He and his wife gave us hope, neither the Greeks, nor the smugglers, nor the organisations, nor the Greek state...every organisation we went, they told us «your file is there, it's left down there» {...} I taught Greek to an organisation called Orange centre. I taught English to another organisation, it was not an NGO, we made it, it's been some time I haven't been there, it was called "Yellow centre", it helped refugees. It was other migrants who had some time in Greece and helped those who arrived. I found them at the smuggler's houses, we were many families there I don't know if they are still there but they knew them", says Malakeh.

4.3 Too young to know, too old to wait: Age, schooling and languages

As noted in the literature review, the right to education is a fundamental right based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Even though there is an apparent gender equality in terms of access to education (60% boys, 40% girls)⁵², almost 4 of the girls interviewed said they were not allowed by their fathers to go to school in the country of origin, which indicates that patriarchal oppression can have long-term effects in a girl's life. Bahar went to school only for 3 years since "my father didn't let me go to school." She is currently thinking of learning English, she considers it a language that can be useful for her future. Moska, who lives with her mother, Nagham, went to school in Iran for 6 years, her

⁵² Greece Education Sector Working Group, "Access to Formal Education for Refugee and Migrant Children Residing in Urban Accommodation (Apartments, Shelters and Hotels for UAC, SIL), June 2019.

father did not allow her to continue. She is currently facing problems in accessing education since she is registered 18 years old even though she is 17 years old and cannot be admitted at any public school.

Within the current migration system, age consists an instrumentalised asset since being registered under 18 years old provides migrants with certain benefits (access to accommodation, education etc). Misregistrations at RICs are common. In our discussion with Nora, she noted: *“yes, many cases of vulnerabilities, there was a case of a pregnant adolescent girl, who said she was underage and still she was registered as an adult, just because she was pregnant, you can see these kind of things happening.”* For Moska, the misregistration of her age became an impediment to access education. She was particularly stressed that the NGO that provides her and her family accommodation could not help them with school registration.

“Wherever I’ve been, it can’t happen. I have applied to learn the language, I’ve been to various organisations and they tell me in one or two months they will answer and I am still waiting and probably it’s not meant to happen...We are four, five kids and me, I want somebody responsible to enrol us at school, to take us here and there and take care of us, to protect us in this way....My mother is illiterate and my brother is 8 years old and still we haven’t managed to go to school...Only the person in charge could help us, but 3 months we are here and nobody...we don’t have somebody to help us”, says Moska.

Feresteh, Raha and Asal go to school, yet it was after the efforts of the shelter’s professionals, who came in touch with the local public school, that an induction class (Zone of Educational Priority)⁵³ was organised for the girls. Massah and Yara don’t wish to go to school, they hope to leave Greece soon, as does Raha. Many families and girls are in a state of limbo, waiting to leave for *“the land of their dreams”*, as Mohammed said, or to be reunited with their family like Massah. This state of limbo often results into years of waiting, fatigue, isolation and frustration. Mohammed says they are like *“captives at home”* since they never go out and his daughter, Yara, says she is not interested to make any friends in Greece. However, her father doesn’t allow her to go to school alone since her brother stopped going. It was clear that Yara carries the gendered duties and family burdens of caring for her younger brothers and sisters and the newborn baby. On the other hand, Massah was heart-broken to have been separated from her mother one year ago and is counting the days to leave: *“I wait for time to pass, days to pass quick so I can manage to leave....My future is in Germany, my family is there”*, says Massah. Drawing from our survey,

⁵³ With the aim the integration of minor refugees into the national educational context, two different systems have been created: Structures of first induction with 20 students per class and the Intensive tutoring classes (Zone of Educational Priority). The basic difference between them is that Intensive tutoring classes are morning classes that run in parallel with morning schooling time whereas Structures of First induction are afternoon classes only for refugees (Sarantou, E. & Theodorakopoulou, A., “Children Cast Adrift: Exclusion and Abuse of Unaccompanied Children in Greece” {in Greek}, November 2019, p. 104.

the majority of girls go or wish to go to school. In particular, 63% of them- 29 girls- are going to school, 22% (10 girls) do not have access in school classrooms even though they would like to and 13% (6 girls) responded that they do not go to school, making a total of 35% (16 girls) with no access to school at the time of the completion of the survey.

In addition, girls have to face the islamophobia, racism and xenophobia of Greek society. More specifically, on September 2019, at the beginning of the new school year, the Parents Assembly at four schools in Thessaloniki voted that they do not wish any refugee children admitted at “their schools.”⁵⁴ In particular they stated that it’s “a matter of health” and that “we don’t need to integrate them in our society if they are just guests.”⁵⁵ Yara, as well as her father, Mohammed, described a racist attack that took place at Omonoia square during the time they were living in temporary accommodation at a nearby hotel. Yara was out for walk when a stranger pulled her from behind and took off her head scarf.

Maria and Elena, two front line professionals who work at the Purple House, suggest that language is key to girls’ independence, yet girls aren’t motivated to go to school since they perceive their time in Greece as a transitional phase (while waiting for the family reunification application to be processed) to which they don’t wish to invest much time and energy. Below, Maria and Elena, who participated in the focus group discussion, which was part of this research, comment on girls’ motivation (and the lack of it) towards schooling.

“We push them a lot to go to school. At first, it was the language barrier. When children who can’t understand Greek go to classes based only on their age but they can’t write the Greek alphabet and all of sudden they are taught Ancient Greek at high school, that’s a huge gap in the education process. But also when we managed to create an induction class at the local school and brought a professor to teach Greek as a foreign language and it was a class focused on their needs since 10 girls from the Purple House were meant to go, they still didn’t go. They have the motivation in the beginning but lose it, I don’t know why, they don’t receive enough feedback from school to keep them going. I don’t know, in the “ordinary” class they can’t go because of the language, they can’t understand a word in Greek, in the Induction class, they feel isolated and very soon, they get tired. Very easy and fast...” says Maria.

“...Even if we find them language classes in German for example if they say they want to go to Germany, they still don’t go. I think they treat their time in Greece

⁵⁴ “Thessaloniki: Two Schools in Alexandria say No to the admission of refugee children” {in Greek},17.03.2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.iefimerida.gr/news/290650/thessaloniki-dyo-sholeia-stin-alexandria-lene-ohi-sti-foitisi-ton-prosfygopoylon>.

⁵⁵ “New Oraiocastro at Fillipiada: They don’t admit refugee children at schools {in Greek}, 20.09.2019: <https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/neo-wraiokastro-sti-filippiada-den-dexontai-paidia-prosfugwn-sto-sxoleio>.

as a transitional period and they don't want to invest, they want to go through this time without a lot of hardship", says Elena.

Maria and Elena suggested that contrary to adolescent girls, younger girls (below 13 years old) are more prone to go to school. At the same time, most girls use mobile phones and social media to communicate with family relatives (see: survey analysis) and some spoke and/or were able to understand "broken" English- they could complete the questionnaire in English without the help of an interpreter. However, there was one illiterate girl, who could not read or write in her mother tongue, which also points out the long-term effects of patriarchal oppression in the country of origin- namely, the withdrawal of girls from school at an early age.

Malakeh, Gulpari and Larmina, who live in Athens with their families, were more committed to school. They were learning Greek with the aim to study and find a job in Greece. Malakeh wants to become a pharmacist, Gulpari wants to be a midwife and Larmina, a clothes designer. Zarmisha, Gulpari's and Larmina's mother, was very proud that her daughters are going to school and aspires they will have a better future. Malakeh's mother, Nagham, though depressed and tired, was happy to see her daughter progress in life. The mother- daughter bond emerges as a motivational (or discouraging, in the case of Bahar) factor for girls' advancement. Hesther spoke English well enough to participate in this research without an interpreter, yet she doesn't speak Greek and since she is 18- 19 years old she cannot enrol to a public school. Again, age and the way the migration system perceives it (as an asset that gives access to certain rights with accommodation being the most important) becomes a barrier for the social integration of girls who arrive at Greece at 16-17 years old. As noted by Paola, a professional who works for accommodation programs in Athens, it's confusing how the system treats these children who have pre-maturely grown after what they've been through: *"I tell children they are young and need to learn and at the same time, I am asking them to take life on their hands since they will soon leave this house and need to make plans for themselves. We treat them like small kids, then like adults, then again like small kids. It's so confusing how we approach them."*

4.4 Journeying as an ongoing process:

Past longings, recurrent traumas and dreams for the future

Girls find themselves in a state of traumatising temporariness⁵⁶- Massah, Raha, Bahar, Yara amongst others- since they feel they do not belong neither to the country they left behind nor to the country of first reception. Life in both places becomes a major part of girls' traumatic experience, as the sheer uncertainty of these places creates an existential fear, namely, who they are and what will become of them. In many cases, home can no longer be perceived to have a role in their existence, because it has been torn away from

⁵⁶ Isaksen, A.T & Vejling, T.V. 2018. "Traumatic Movements: A study on Refugee Displacement and Trauma in Contemporary Literature", Aalborg University: Unpublished Master thesis, May 2018, p. 90.

them: *"Syria is now a 1000 pieces"*, says Feresteh; *"We can't go back"*, says Malakeh. This realisation is difficult because it makes the return almost impossible- and as refugees the trauma of temporariness is magnified. They perceive that their stay in Greece is temporary and are trying to adapt to the thought that their home and themselves have changed. The latter requires the creation of lines of connection between past and present, between the "here" and "there" of their lives. This is a very demanding and hard process as it has been variously stated by professionals. It needs a lot of effort to create threads of connection between broken identity pieces. Elena and Maria, who work at the Purple shelter, and Paola who works at accommodation programs in Attica, while discussing inter-cultural differences and communication with minors argued: *"You shouldn't try to uproot who they are"*, says Paola, *"yes, their past, we work a lot on who they were before they came here, where did she live, how did she celebrate her birthday, what kind of connection is there and if something from the past can connect her to the "here and now" it's very helpful and therapeutic for them"*, says Maria.

In other cases, the family which is left back home becomes a source of pressure and guilt for girls who feel they have to save those left behind. For example, Bahar could not let go of the thought of her mother and talked about her with great remorse since she is still living in an abusive environment: *"My biggest dream is to have my mother close...I want to work and make money to send back to my mother."* The fear she escaped is still present every day with her mother who still lives back home. The latter is also affirmed by Elena and Maria who argued that *"girls often blame themselves, they feel responsible to save others who are left back in Turkey, in Syria"*, says Elena and Maria adds *"when her mother is left back, somewhere far away, back with her father and still experiences the abuse from which the girl escaped, then girls feel guilty."*

At this point we will be drawing again from Caruth's approach where she describes "the repetition of traumatic event, which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight [as] a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or be known."⁵⁷ The central argument of Caruth's theory is that trauma induces a condition in which the individual has not fully experienced the trauma and as such will continue to search for a true experience through repetition.⁵⁸ In this line of thinking, girls go through somatic repetitions of traumatic experience which becomes a testimony, a sort of retelling of their story but also it's as if they are experiencing it for the first time.⁵⁹ Below, Bahar describes the moment of re-experiencing trauma as the time she is *"out of herself"*. Also, Maria and Elena point out the episodes girls are having particularly the first months they move to the shelter from a refugee camp.

⁵⁷ Caruth, C.: *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 92.

⁵⁸ Isaksen, A.T & Vejling, T.V. 2018. "Traumatic Movements: A study on Refugee Displacement and Trauma in Contemporary Literature", Aalborg University: Unpublished Master thesis, May 2018, p.9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.9

“I have this problem lately, when I get stressed, very stressed, I panic. It happened some time ago and I was 5-6 days in the hospital...I forget everything. When I get into this panic, I forget everything, I don't remember anything...Every time I don't feel well, they've told me to go and talk to people here and then I feel very beautiful. I don't know how it is when I panic, they've told me, I scream, cry, shout, and my hands and legs and whole body becomes like, like a rock. And the colour of my body changes or my face”, says Bahar.

“{...} girls come to the shelter and after a few days when they feel safe they will have a crisis, it's like somatic spasms whether they are conscious or not” says Maria, “{...} ok, they arrive to the shelter and they don't have to worry anymore if they will have a place to sleep and eat, then the pain and violence they have experienced will come out, it will be embodied in some way”, says Elena

An inherent consideration with trauma is the concept of moving past the traumatic experience and reintegrating into life, namely moving from the state of transit of the refugee camp to “normal” life. As already mentioned the girls of the Purple House socialise through extra-curriculum activities (music, drawing, dance classes), yet each girl feels differently, Massah was more lonely- her friend is her teddy bear- yet she asked me where Greeks prefer to go on Christmas; Asal said she had two friends but they left; and another girl, whom we didn't interview, was wandering around the office and hanging out with professionals. She would barge in the room, make jokes, tease them and leave. Most of the girls (Raha, Bahar, Shararah) responded laconically to the question “Do you have any friends?” Hesther, who lived in the Pink House, was the bright exception. She knew many lesbian bars in Athens, she had girlfriends in the past, she enjoyed going out at night and she had friends from different social environments (basketball team, shelter etc). Yara had no friends, she stayed at home with her family and took care of her younger siblings. Moska, who lives with her mother Nagham, said she did not know what is a friend as she hasn't experienced the meanings of a friendship. After Moria she doesn't feel safe to invite anyone home. Gulpari and Larmina have Greek friends, who help them learn the language fast, yet Gulpari doesn't go out alone since she was recently attacked on the streets by a group of men and since then she only goes out with her sister, Larmina. And finally, Malakeh seemed confident and sociable.

The majority of girls have dreams of studying (and going to university, see: survey analysis) and travelling in Northern and Central Europe and the United States as well as getting married- some of them have boyfriends in the country of origin. Feresteh wants to be a nurse because she likes helping others and surely her *“strong heart will guide her towards her life goals”*, the researcher commented. She also wants to bring her mother and siblings close to her or go to her uncles in Germany/ Austria; Massah wants to go to Germany and finish school, she will then study in the UK and later once she has her documents ready she will move to America with her boyfriend; Asal wants to be a model

since she is tall, fashionable and can dye her hair in super trendy colors; Shararah likes to draw and wants to be a journalist, she wants to bring her mother to Greece or go to her sister in Germany, yet her request for family reunification has been declined twice; Bahar is thinking a lot of her mother who is back in Iran in an abusive environment, she wants to move with her in another country with the aim to support her emotionally and financially; Itimad wants to be a lawyer and is waiting for her ticket to London; Hesther wants to study tourism since she likes history and travelling and enjoys her life in Athens; and Raha constantly changes her future plans but wants to leave Greece. From the girls living with their families, Moska is really eager to go to school and learn Greek; Gulpari wants to finish school and become a midwife; Larmina wants to be a clothes designer; Yara is dreaming to move to Germany, finish school, get married, study and do whatever is written for her (her fate); and finally Malakeh, who is close to finishing school, wants to go to university and become a pharmacist in Greece.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Core Recommendations

- Talk to girls about their needs, desires and living conditions: It is essential to consult girls to their needs and living conditions before planning any sort of intervention that may affect their daily lives. Raise awareness amongst front-line professionals on issues of cultural diversity and how to address girls' religious practices and beliefs in an inclusive manner.
- Make gender analysis a prerequisite in proposal design, programming and advocacy for girls in migration and displacement: Employ a gendered approach that considers the risks and needs of children on the move that looks on the needs of boys and girls. The category "child on the move" cannot be treated as a neutral/generic category since gender affects children's lives from the very beginning.
- Employ an intersectional gendered approach that brings together various facets of the girls background (race, class, religious beliefs): In order to address Islamophobia and racism we need to incorporate on the category "girl on the move" other aspects that define fundamentally a girls' life and how she is socially and culturally perceived in the host country. This will enable us to craft multi-dimensional approaches and tools that enable us to re-think the category "girl on the move" (and her agency) and how it is entangled within, beyond and against the rise of alt-right discourses. Until now, most researches and programs in Greece focus on the gendered dimension of a refugee girl's oppression. Islam is often reduced (by professionals) to the cause of girls' oppression, it's rarely regarded as a religious practice or even part of girls' agency. In addition, racism, living as a brown girl in a white-dominated country is not analysed as a factor of girls' oppression. By ignoring the importance of racism in a girl's life and rendering Islam an oppressive fundamentalist religion, there is the danger of producing policies based on white and Eurocentric beliefs. An intersectional analysis that brings together religion, gender and skin colour will help us develop policies that address the needs of brown Muslim girls.

5.2 Recommendations for programming

On a national level (programs for boys and girls):

Legal and institutional reforms

- Abolish the measure of “protective custody” which resonates (for girls) with practices of imprisonment.
- The direct abolition of the measure of “geographical limitation” at hotspots and islands that has led to over-crowded camps with people in humanly unintelligible conditions of (not) living and in a gross violation of human rights and child rights.
- Regarding guardianship, ensure that all unaccompanied and separated children have a personal guardian regardless of their age, living condition, gender and vulnerability. The Public Prosecutor for Minors cannot provide adequate support and state authorities do not have the capacity to develop an operational and effective guardianship program. NGOs need to continue offering their support through leveraging their respond capacity.
- The institutionalisation of common standards of living in shelters with regular monthly inspections to assure that girls’ basic needs (warmth, food, sleep, clothing, hygiene, including sanitary pads for menstrual flow) are covered.
- Ensure that the age- assessment procedure is followed at RICs throughout the country.
- Children should not stay at RICs and safe zones. Children should be directly allocated to a long-term accommodation program and not be held for months at closed or open temporary units.
- Enhance the development of pilot programs of semi-independent living programs (with 4 children per apartment).

Improving the capacity of the child protection system:

- On training/capacity building of professionals - The establishment of a long-term, operational and adequately funded program that is well-equipped with professionals, who receive the ongoing support of a group of consultants on child protection and GBV. It has been observed that two-day, ad hoc trainings on child protection for professionals work only on the level of raising awareness and cannot affect long-term effect (such as the development of tools and the ongoing exchange of knowledge and capacities). Develop mentorship programs with professionals and experts in child protection that can support NGOs, state authorities, and local authorities on a regular and long-term basis.
- On gender and cultural diversification of public services - Ensure that all professionals abide to a code of conduct and ensure that girls do not suffer from

abusive malpractices of professionals.

- Ensure the support of public hospitals and gynecological clinics with interpreters (in Arab, Farsi, French) and cultural mediators.
- Raise awareness of all professionals (doctors, police force, front- line professionals, NGOs, public sector workers) on cultural diversification in order to tackle latent racist and Islamophobic perspectives and encourage the development of an ethics of tolerance and acceptance of diversity.
- On accommodation - Encourage types of accommodation that are not communitarian (in shelters) where children receive a professional/institutionalised type of care that cannot address easily their individual needs.
- Develop a clear exit-strategy for children who currently live at shelters and/or families with children at accommodation programs, which is also combined with measures towards their independence (seeking job, learning Greek).
- On education: - Ensure that each child is enrolled to school while also taking courses in Greek language regardless of his/her age. - Increase the number of induction classes across the country. - Encourage language courses of children by fellow migrants. - And finally, train teachers on teaching Greek as a foreign language and on developing a climate of tolerance and acceptance within the classroom.

On a regional, European and transnational level:

- Encourage and support programs that strive for the creation of networks of support between migrants: It is essential that girls make use of their skills and capacities but also that they receive the support of migrants who have lived in the host country and are capable to exchange knowledge (on housing, language) and support amongst each other. Girls who were involved in small, grassroots initiatives led by migrants felt more empowered and included in society.
- Promote a transnational program of guardianship in collaboration with the European Guardianship Network: At the moment the guardianship program running in Greece is put on hold and many girls (and boys) are without guardians. Promote a transnational program of cooperation and coordination between guardians of girls on the move in different countries and ensure that every child on the move is not left without guardianship.
- Differentiate interventions to be specific for specific categories of girls: There is no homogeneity among girls on the move. Girls from Syria who are affected by war-conflict have different needs from girls from Afghanistan who migrate in order to escape forced marriage. Girls who migrate from African countries and girls who migrate from the Middle East bring different cultural backgrounds and face different risks. Categories that can be considered include country of origin, risks of violence, number of girls who are mothers, local context of accommodation, and existing

coping strategies developed by girls.

- Implement awareness-raising activities and empowerment programs for girls: It is essential to provide girls on the move the political and social tools to face their realities (comprehension of power relations; training on life skills; trainings on female defense techniques) and offer them the support they need to lead independent lives.
- Develop specialised programs for survival sex, sex trafficking, domestic violence: Though there was no case of survival sex or sex trafficking that came to our awareness it was noted by stakeholders that these cases are invisible and rarely go beyond the level of suspicion that this is the case. Girls who suffer domestic violence or are still suffering at safe zones, RICs at hotspots (Samos, Lesvos, Evros) need to receive special support.
- Link agendas and programming on gender violence with combatting structural violence and racism: Undertake targeted community-based urban programming and engagement with relevant authorities and multi-sectoral stakeholders to change attitudes, improve knowledge on what constitutes structural violence and discrimination and hold them accountable for violence and discrimination against girls. This should be implemented in a manner so as to benefit girls.
- Institutionalise reporting procedures where girls can file a report to an independent European organisation for the violence and discrimination they suffer by authorities throughout their journey and where they currently live.
- Encourage and speed up processes of family reunification across Europe to ensure that separated children do not wait more than six months to a year for their application to be processed.

5.3 Recommendations for advocacy

- Raise awareness about the brutal conditions in refugee camps (and safe zones) that condemn girls in a lifeless quest for survival. Hold responsible local and international actors who ignore the violation of human rights and child rights.
- International and European policies aimed at further restricting migration and making legal entry into a country harder need to be challenged as they will increase the risks that girls face to migrate. The findings are clear that migrating with smugglers raises the risks of death, sexual violence, and abuse.
- Save the children, UNICEF, and Amnesty International need to cooperate with local actors and key stakeholders to ensure that a guardianship program works across Europe and that no child is left without a guardian.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

- Undertake research in the journeys of women and girls from African countries

that are currently residing in Greece and more specifically in parts of central Athens.

- The use of social media (and smart phone applications) as a tool that creates translocal worlds and can be used as in refugee resistance struggles.
- Undertake research on how to locate, prevent and respond to survival sex and sex trafficking.
- Research to explore the role of interpreters and cultural mediators in camps, shelters and accommodation programs. There is evidence from the field that they may restrict girls' autonomy and independence and/or continue to exert social control.
- Undertake an intersectional analysis that considers the cultural perceptions of professionals and the general population (around camps and accommodation sites) on skin colour and Islam with the aim to develop policies and programs that seek to tackle racism and Islamophobia in these targeted groups (professionals and the local community). This will help us explore how the refugee woman/ girl is constructed as "threatening", "different", "matter out of place", "invisible", "unwanted", "culturally less progressive" by professionals and the local community. From this analysis we will be able to locate common themes such as "brown skin colour as dirty matter", "Muslim women as oppressed victims that need to be saved by Europeans" towards which we will develop educational programs, targeted trainings, and cultural initiatives (for example, strive for the funding and creation of a multicultural centre for refugee women and girls).

ANNEX A

Sites, sampling and participants

Adolescent Girls

Research Area	Number	Ages	Research tool	Countries of origin
Shelter: Purple House, Attica, Athens	8	16, 17, 17, 16, 16, 16, 16, 16	Interviews/ participant observation	Iran, Iranian Afghan, Iran, Syria, Kuwait, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria
Shelter: Pink House, Attica, Athens	1	18	Interviews/ participant observation	Iran
Accommodation Program "ESTIA", Attica, Athens	3	16, 16, 16	Interviews/ participant observation	Syria, Iranian Afghan
DIOTIMA beneficiaries, Attica, Athens	2	17, 16	Interviews	Iran, Afghanistan
Total	14	Range: 16-18 (travelled before 18)		

Parents of accompanied girls (Mothers and Fathers)

Research Area	Number	Ages	Research tool	Countries of origin
Accommodation Program "ESTIA", Attica, Athens	3	-	Interviews/ participant observation	Syria, Iranian Afghan
DIOTIMA beneficiaries, Attica, Athens	1	-	Interviews/ participant observation	Afghanistan
Total	4			

Key stakeholders

Research Area	Number	Ages	Research tool	Countries of origin
Attica, Athens	2	-	Interviews	Greece
Attica, Athens	3	-	Focus group discussion with front-line professionals	Greece
Total	5			

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