

SEEKING ASYLUM IN GREECE:
INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSES TO AFRICAN
MIGRANT WOMEN IN ATHENS

by

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To Dimitris and Kalliopi

Abstract

During the “refugee crisis” Greece was a major transit point with most refugees aiming for Central European countries (Crawley et al., 2016). After the closure of the borders 58,000 immigrants remained blocked in Greece (Ministry of Economy and Development, 2016) with Greek society having to integrate many asylum seekers. Fewer in number than Syrian refugees, Africans nevertheless form an important, yet overlooked, group. Even though research on African immigrants has been conducted in other European countries, with some studies focusing on African women specifically (Taliani, 2012), research concerning Greece leaves important subgroups and their problems unexamined. This thesis contributes to filling this gap. By analyzing fieldnotes, 23 interviews with aid workers, and five interviews with African women, this thesis highlights the barriers African women face in Greece as well as their strategies and resilience.

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Introduction

One of the very first moments I began to reflect on African women was when I worked in an NGO that provided cash to asylum seekers. According to the regulations, asylum seekers who lived in an apartment in Athens could apply for cash by completing a form. Since funds were limited, we were instructed to mention this service only to extremely vulnerable migrants after identifying them according to established criteria. We had been processing applications for cash for a few days when a significant number of African migrants started approaching us, waited for our arrival in the morning while quite often, having waited for so many hours, they had become aggressive and complained loudly. Greek citizens who owned stores in nearby streets complained as the large gathering of Africans was damaging their trade and prevented customers from entering. Some colleagues mentioned that some of the applicants were selling drugs and that certain men brought women with them, held them aggressively by the arm, and seemed to be trying to control them for as long as the application procedure lasted. As we lacked a French interpreter, some of the African women offered to help us with translations. After a while it was reported to us that the volunteer-interpreters had been asking other African women to give them a percentage of the cash assistance as a compensation for translating.

While I was processing the applications, I noticed that there were women who were single mothers and said they didn't receive any form of support either from their partners or from the Greek State or NGOs. As weeks passed, I noticed that the applications of Syrians were the main ones to be processed, even though they were fewer in number. When I asked our coordinator why this happened, she claimed that most of the Africans had fake asylum cards and mafia-like behavior but couldn't mention anything more specific. After a few weeks, it was decided that the cash program stops as it was thought to endanger aid workers. The vast majority of the employees agreed with this decision, while a minority, consisting mainly of interpreters who were refugees themselves, argued that cash is the most important support provided to asylum seekers and that it should continue. The second reason why we stopped providing cash was that due to the overwhelming number of applications, much larger than initially expected, the donors were simply unable to meet such a huge demand for cash. Even when cash was provided, the process of applications turned out to be quite lengthy and could exceed the designated duration of the intervention (three or four months from receipt of the application). Following these events I started thinking that we were probably causing more harm than good to migrants, who were planning their lives hoping that they would receive 150 euros per month when in fact we knew the program would be shut down. But this did not seem to raise concerns either to our donors or to our superiors.

The aforementioned incident contains all the protagonists of this thesis: the African women themselves, the humanitarian intervention programs, the aid workers and Greek citizens. This incident gives a glimpse of the relations of African women with NGOs and the situation they live in the Greek society. When the refugee crisis began, Greek citizens were experiencing the aftermath of the austerity measures. Many Greeks, having seen their standard of living drop, found themselves in difficult circumstances. For this reason, they treated African people –and possibly all refugees– as unwanted strangers and a further financial burden. In addition, organizations and their staff treated Africans as migrants, rather than as refugees, even in cases where African women had applied for asylum. Quite often, aid workers reproduced common stereotypes about African

women and even though they were supposed to assist them, treated them either as helpless victims or immigrants unworthy of their support.

Not registered in refugee camps and without any significant humanitarian assistance, African women mainly reside in cities and try to make ends meet on their own, despite their serious vulnerabilities. This dissertation contributes to understanding the refugee crisis in Greece, looking particularly at the plight of African women who, in spite of their differences, share the common experience of coming to, and living in, Greece. The dissertation sheds light on African women's access to services and interaction with Greek NGOs. It contextualizes this issue in the broader context of the refugee crisis in Europe and Greek policies in relation to refugees.

The Refugee crisis

Since 2014¹, Greece has been facing a significant inflow of asylum seekers, while in 2015 more than one million refugees from various countries crossed the Greek borders (UNHCR, 2017). The ongoing civil war in Syria that started in 2011 resulted in the mass departure of millions of Syrians from their country to neighboring countries and Europe, while seven million were internally displaced (Talhouk et al., 2016). As most Dodekanese islands are less than 5 km from the Turkish shores, they constitute a relatively easy bridge into Europe (Ambrosini, 2017). Unable to handle this pressure in their national system, both Greece and Italy, more or less, allowed migrants to cross their northern borders and head to central European countries. This amounted to a suspension of the Schengen principle, according to which every non-European citizen who wished to enter in a European country that has signed the Schengen agreement must meet certain criteria, such as holding a valid passport or a visa; disposing of resources deemed sufficient to cover expenses during the period that would spend in the EU country; and justifying the reasons of the visit. The suspension of the Schengen principle made it even easier to cross the borders and resulted in an increase of arrivals. For the first months of the so-called "refugee crisis", Greece was just a transit point. According to Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon and Sigona (2016), who studied the motivations and plans of migrants, the vast majority of the migrants they interviewed in Greece wanted to leave the country and head to northern European countries. By contrast, 68% of the respondents in Italy answered that they preferred to stay in Italy (Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon, & Sigona, 2018). Greece was having a hard time to cope with the "refugee crisis" and Europe started having to acknowledge that.

In May 2015, the President of the European Commission announced the relocation mechanism according to which 40,000 asylum seekers would be able to apply for asylum in European countries, beyond Greece, Italy and Hungary. The quotas of asylum seekers that each country would receive was calculated on the basis of wealth and population density (Trauner, 2016). The relocation program distinguished "refugees" and "migrants" on the basis of nationality. Based on asylum statistics, it was presumed that the nationals of certain countries had higher possibilities of gaining asylum and could be relocated, while those of other countries did not (MacMahon & Sigona, 2018). The announcement of relocation triggered intense reactions by several EU member states. Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia decided to file a lawsuit to the European Court of Justice for the relocation proposal (Karolewski & Benedikter, 2018 p.40). Following the terrorist attacks from ISIS in France and Belgium, which spread fear of new attacks,

¹ For a timeline of the most important events of the refugee crisis, please see table 1.

combined with the magnitude of arrivals to Europe, Northern and Eastern European countries decided to close their borders –which now implied a reassertion of the Schengen principles. This resulted in thousands of refugees (who had crossed the European borders and reached Greece) being unable to travel to northern European countries. In September 2015, the European Commission ruled in favor of an additional relocation of 120,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other European countries (Ambrosini, 2017).

The lack of coordination between EU members, and inability to manage a crisis of this magnitude, resulted in the decision to put pressure on non-European countries which were close to Europe's external borders. More specifically, responsibility for preventing migrants from entering Europe and consequently reducing the flows led to agreement conclusions with Turkey. On 18 March 2016, an agreement between Turkey and the EU was signed and started being applied as of 20 March. According to this, each asylum application would be examined on the Greek islands in order to assess whether Turkey is a safe country for them (Greenhill, 2016). Recognizing Turkey as a safe third country would imply that refugees who reached Greece would be sent back to Turkey. Asylum case workers had to evaluate who could return to Turkey. Then the EU had to persuade Turkey to accept returnees. This required negotiations as well as financial incentives (Greenhill, 2016 p.327).

Reports by several organizations cast doubt on whether Turkey was indeed a safe third country. Due to this and to the lack of a well-organized system for the management of returns to Turkey, this part of the agreement was not implemented. In cases where Turkey was not considered a safe third country, immigrants were not allowed to enter mainland Greece and had to apply for asylum in Greece while residing temporarily in the Greek islands. Depending on the decision made on their asylum applications, they could travel to the rest of the country (if the decision was positive), or return back to Turkey. Extremely vulnerable people, or people in need of special care that could not be provided on the islands, were given permission to relocate to mainland Greece while their application was still being processed. NATO guards the sea borders between Greece and Turkey (Dalakoglou, 2016). Since the EU-Turkey agreement and the consequent border closure until the summer of 2016, 4,000 people are estimated to have drowned in the Mediterranean; 5,000 men, women and children had been trapped in Piraeus; while in Idomeni, a small town of less than 500 inhabitants in northern Greece, the number of refugees exceeded 12,000 (Glytsos, 2005). After the closure of the northern and eastern European borders on 20 March 2016, the Greek society had to integrate a significant number of asylum seekers. Overall, the measures that aimed at controlling migration and reducing flows of migrants to northern Europe resulted in almost 58,000 asylum seekers out of the 1 million people who crossed the Greek borders willingly or unwillingly remaining in Greece and receiving the support provided there (UNHCR, 2017).

Date	Events
23/4/2010	The Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou (center-left government) announces the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
2011	The civil war in Syria begins.
May 2011	Massive Demonstrations are organized outside the Greek Parliament against the austerity measures.
13/2/2012	Second MoU voted by the Greek Parliament introduces new austerity measures. Massive demonstrations take place across the country.
6/5/2012	Greek elections – no political party garners enough votes to form the new government.
17/6/2012	Elections are repeated. Right-wing party ‘New Democracy’ wins and Antonis Samaras is elected Prime Minister. Golden Dawn (far-right party with strong anti-immigrant views) enters the Greek parliament as third largest party.
2012 – 2013	Golden Dawn members repeatedly attack migrants, political opponents and anti-fascists. One of their victims, a migrant who was on his way to work early in the morning is brutally murdered. On 18 September 2013 Golden Dawn members murder Pavlos Fyssas, an anarchist and anti-fascists singer. Massive demonstrations break out, and some Golden Dawn members, including their leader, are arrested.
2014	Flows of migrants rise to around 700 hundred asylum seekers arriving in Greece per month.
25/1/2015	SYRIZA (left-wing party) wins the elections.
Early 2015	International NGOs start operating in Greece. Very few specialized services for refugees and asylum seekers existed up until then.
1/5/2015	European Commission President announces the creation of the relocation program according to which 40,000 asylum seekers will be transferred to other European countries in order to decompress the situation in Greece and Italy.

5/7/ 2015	After months of negotiations between the Greek government and European institutions, the Greek government announces the holding of a referendum on the EU's proposed austerity measures. The referendum is held on 5 July 2015 . Greek citizens are asked to vote for or against the austerity agreement between the Greek government and the European Commission, ECB and IMF. The majority of Greek citizens vote against the agreement.
8/7/2015	Despite the results of the referendum the newly elected SYRIZA Prime Minister submits an official request for support to the European Commission, ECB and IMF.
14/9/2015	Germany closes its southern and eastern borders, stopping migrants and refugees from entering the country
16/9/2015	Hungary closes its borders
18/9/2015	Croatia closes its borders
20/09/2015	Following the signing of a third Memorandum, elections are held. SYRIZA is elected again.
22/9/2015	Announcement of additional relocation of 120,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other European countries.
2016	New law 4375/2016 allows asylum seekers to work as soon as they have their asylum id card.
18/3/2016	Signing of the EU-Turkey Statement according to which Turkey is considered as a safe third country to which Greek authorities can return asylum seekers as of 20 March 2016 .
12/9/ 2016	<i>Author starts working for international NGO.</i>
31/12/ 2016	<i>Author is forced to quit as the NGO suspends its operations in Greece.</i>
2017	Steady decrease of migrant "flows" and gradual suspension of operations for several international NGOs. UNHCR along with partners begins the implementation of ESTIA program that offers accommodation in different cities for more than 25.000 asylum seekers.
7 /1/ 2017	<i>Author starts working for Greek NGO.</i>
30/7/ 2017	<i>Author quits due to bad working conditions.</i>
30 /5/ 2018	<i>Author starts working in international organization.</i>

Table no1: Timeline of the most important events of the refugee crisis. Auto-biographic events are in italics.

Being and becoming an African migrant woman

The composition of migrant flows changes constantly. Alongside Syrians, migrants from several other nationalities crossed the borders and entered Greece. Some of them were originally from Africa. Fewer in number than Syrian refugees, Africans form an important, yet overlooked, group. During the refugee crisis, more and more African women seemed to travel independently of partners (and leaving their children behind), a phenomenon that some authors refer to as “feminization of migration” (Andall, 2017). However, the causes for Syrians’ migration are known and accepted as valid justifications for asylum seeking, whereas the Greek bureaucracy that manages incoming flows of migrants does not consider African countries as affected by the same type of emergency as Syria (McMahon & Sigona, 2016 p.2). Therefore, they are inclined to associate all Africans with deeply impoverished economic migrants seeking to improve their livelihoods in Europe but lacking the credentials to be granted with asylum. African women don’t come from countries that in Greece are perceived as “refugee-producing” and are treated as migrants (McMahon & Sigona, 2018 p.498). As a result, they receive insufficient attention both from the Greek authorities and from the aid organizations that focus primarily on refugees.

The classification of migrants as refugees or asylum seekers affects the perceived legal and moral obligations of the receiving state towards them (McMahon & Sigona, 2018 p.52). It has been argued that the causes of migration are much more complex than the legal categories used to describe migrants (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017p.3): a migrant can change status from one period to another. For example, someone may leave his/her country for economic reasons and then an armed conflict may start. Or someone may fit in two different categories at the same time (Koser & Martin, 2011). For example, someone may leave from his/her country due to war and go to a neighbor country from which he/she may leave and come to Europe believing that there are better job prospects. Although several authors highlighted the ambiguity of the category “migrant”, refugees continue being considered worthier of protection and support services. African migrants are either threatened with deportation –if they don’t have the required immigration documents– or may be allowed to live in the country², but without the support that refugee status gives access to. This unequal access to protection on the grounds of Greek bureaucrats’ biased ideas about Africa and Africans makes African migrant women in Greece particularly vulnerable, in addition to other vulnerabilities that have been described in other European countries as well, where the sex industry, trafficking and European demand for domestic workers constitute a pull factor in African women’s migration (Andall, 2017 p.14).

A significant amount of research has been conducted in regard to the plight of Nigerian sex workers in Italy. The majority of Nigerian girls seem to either have debt bonds and be forced to work on the streets in order to repay the money they owe, or are bonded to their traffickers by specific rituals, such as “juju” (Aghatise, 2004 p.1130) or “voodoo” (Beneduce & Taliani, 2006 p. 440). The traffickers use these spiritual methods in order to be sure the women will repay the money

² The different legal statuses allowing African women to live in Greece are analyzed thoroughly in Chapter 1.

owed to them. Women are forced to continue sex work in fear that spiritual punishment would hit them or their families if they broke their oaths (Uyanga & Ermisch, 2015). Once the debt is paid, some women abandon prostitution, others work as independent prostitutes, while others yet become madams (Cole, 2006 p.217). According to Simona Taliani (2011 p.14) who had been working with Nigerian women, European law and African customary law constitute the normative frameworks that regulate these women's lives. Taliani (2012 p.582) argues that Nigerian women are trapped between the narrow conditions for protection offered by the Italian state and the bonds, beliefs and customs of their family and culture. More specifically, in order to have access to protection, women have to report to the police that they have been exploited, possibly trafficked. However, this action is impossible for most of them who live in Italy illegally. By approaching the police, they would risk being detained or deported. In addition to this, women may be afraid that their families would be harmed if traffickers found out that they reported them to the authorities. What Taliani (ibid) describes happens also in other European countries, including Greece. Women migrants are highly vulnerable: they may be victims of trafficking or asylum seekers, but they struggle to prove their vulnerability to the authorities.

In the UK, trafficking victims who seek asylum must demonstrate that they are unfree and unable to liberate themselves (Lawrance, 2017). Trafficking victims have to reproduce the dominant discourse that defines who should be granted asylum and why, by producing what Benjamin Lawrance calls "unfreedom papers" –experts' certificates which demonstrate their victimhood– in order to stand a chance in the asylum procedure. In this case, they are trapped between the difficulties that pushed them to leave their countries and the awareness that their difficult circumstances will not necessarily entitle them to protection and the legalization of their status in the UK. The long-lasting asylum application procedure, either for trafficking victims or for other categories of asylum seekers, creates a sense of uncertainty for African women and forces them to put their lives on hold.

Simon Turner (2016 p.39), who studied Burundian refugees, called this situation of being constantly on hold "dia-placement"³. Turner introduces this term to describe a situation that is neither displacement nor integration, but corresponds to the protracted state of transition of someone who experiences "being" a refugee right now and "becoming" someone (in the future). Turner's work on dia-placement focuses on how refugees *respond* to displacement. More specifically, the Burundi refugees who lived both in camps and cities actively avoided integration. They did not want to get too involved with their lives in their country of asylum because they wished to return to their country of origin in the future (Turner, 2016 p.40-41). Just as Burundi refugees are dia-placed hoping to return back to their countries, African women, remain dia-placed as they are unable to settle. Turner describes a situation where refugees do not wish to be integrated, while in Greece, African women are not allowed to integrate due to the insufficient support they received and the burdens they face.

This research attempts to raise awareness of the barriers faced by African migrant women in Athens as they try to build their lives here. On the one hand, they ran from their countries of origin and they are indeed afraid to go back. However, when they arrived in Greece even though they are provided the opportunity to apply for asylum, the same standards are not applied in the assessment of their asylum application as for applications of non-African migrants. They may be typically eligible for services, as the rest of the asylum seekers. However, due to widespread stereotypes

³ "dia" comes from the Greek word "dia" which can be translated as "through".

they are viewed as migrants, unworthy of protection, or as prostitutes, causing moral panic (van Dijk, 2001) among Greek citizens. They face unequal access to social housing, they are perceived as liars by asylum case workers, and are excluded from relocation procedures. This thesis attempts to describe the factors that dominate African women's lives, trap them, make them go under the authorities' radar, prevent them from settling and, in the end, make them one of the most vulnerable and invisible groups in Greek society.

Migration during crisis and as crisis

According to Katerina Rozakou (2012), *φιλοξενία* [filoksenia] plays a very crucial role in the cultural and social imaginary of the Greek society and is also used frequently by the Greek state in order to characterize its practices toward immigrants. According to Greek tradition, *Ξένιος Ζευς* [Ksenios Zeus], namely "Zeus the Hospitable", was the protector of strangers. For this reason, in ancient Greece it was important that everyone treat strangers with respect and generosity. Even today, generosity toward strangers is a matter of national pride. It is noteworthy that before the crisis, migrants found to be in breach of immigration law were held in detention centers called "*Πρότυπα Κέντρα Υποδοχής και Φιλοξενίας Λαθρομεταναστών*" (Reception and Hospitality Center for Illegal Immigrants). In those centers, immigrants remained in detention until they were extradited to their countries. However, protection offered to refugees and asylum seekers and the number of policy programs in Greece before the refugee crisis was quite limited, while the very few already existing programs didn't specialize in refugees. During the refugee crisis, which coincided with the change of the right-wing government of New Democracy with the center-left wing government of SYRIZA, there was also a change regarding migration policy. Migrants weren't anymore detained for illegal entry (where relevant), but stayed in "*Ανοιχτές Δομές Φιλοξενίας*" (Open Hospitality Centers). Despite the political change, hospitality seemed to remain a national virtue and a duty of the [Greek] state towards migrants who came to the country (Rozakou, 2012). In addition to the "hospitality" offered by the Greek state, amidst the refugee crisis, a large number of international and local NGOs started to operate in Greece and offered their services to African migrants, some of them targeting specifically to migrant women.

NGOs provided jobs to a significant group of people ranging from social workers to lawyers and doctors. Furthermore, they created a network of volunteers that was joined by a huge number of Greek citizens who provided refugees with clothes and food, while others got actively involved in reception sites on the islands (Papataxiarchis, 2017). Sometimes, refugees ended up living in the houses of volunteers (Chtouris, 2017). NGOs that operate in Greece have solid hierarchical structures and functions (Morgan, 1977) and from one point of view, attempt to provide neutral and scientific solutions to developmental problems (in this case to the refugee crisis). However, they have been criticized mainly for their inability to consider the political aspect and the multilayered dimensions of developmental issues (Mosse, 2005).

According to David Lewis and David Mosse (2005 p.87), who were influenced by Michel Foucault's work on discourse and power, there are different agents and actors that negotiate with each other for the control of discourses in development. During the Greek refugee crisis, aid workers from different NGOs produced different kinds of discourse about African women. Depending on the aid workers' positionality, African women were represented alternatively as liars, as prostitutes, or as victims of abuse. These characterizations are useful for justifying –or

not– the intervention of national and international organizations in their lives (Rossi, 2015 p. 309). The aid workers' representations of migrant women were both descriptive and prescriptive. More specifically, if aid workers in charge of completing surveys, questionnaires, and health screenings of migrants classified African women as victims of crimes, the latter would be referred for legal support. In case they were presented as trafficking victims, they would be referred for shelter; while if they were considered prostitutes, but not victims of trafficking, they would receive a negative asylum decision. This way, the aid workers were reproducing different official discourses about migrants and prescribed different interventions in relation to African women.

According to Christina Oelgemoller (2017 p.7), the contemporary management of migration is based on a discourse that conceals the power imbalances and claims to be democratic even though it is not. National and international organizations decide, based on each migrant's characteristics, whether a migrant is or can be economically productive and, therefore, whether she/he can be integrated into the host society or should be denied access. The use of the terms "legal" or "illegal migrants" is an act of normative violence against those who are systematically excluded, as is most often the case for the African women discussed in this study. Aid workers are in a position to decide who amongst migrants should, and who should not, receive support. On the other hand, African women's lives are considered as unworthy of protection and are allowed to become suspended (Oelgemoller, 2017p.33). In this thesis, the reasons for this unequal access to services have been traced back to several factors, such as the less known causes for African migration or the alleged "culture of violence" in Africa. Aid workers played a critical role to the decision determining whether African women should be provided services by the NGOs or not, acting as mediators between African migrant women and NGOs.

Thomas Bierschenk, Jean-Pierre Chaveau and Jean- Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2002) focused on the role of aid workers as brokers between NGOs and African populations. They are seen as brokers bringing together different social, cultural and political agents, assisting with beneficiaries' demands for particular types of intervention, and/or facilitating the relationships between donors and target population. The aim is not only to achieve financial benefits, but also to maintain certain representations and constructions of reality (Lewis, 2014 p.296). These studies refer to post-colonial contexts, mainly development projects in Africa, whereas this study is intended to help understand aid workers' role as brokers between NGOs and African women in Greece. Working for aid agencies was one of the very few alternative options for unemployed Greeks during the financial crisis. In order to be employed by NGOs during a period of severe unemployment rates, Greek candidates had to show familiarity with the potential employer's practices and to reproduce official aid discourses about African women and other refugees. This way, they provided partial and conditional support to African women, acting as mediators for what the women sought to obtain and what the state and NGOs offered. The support they were able to provide was influenced by personal views and circumstances.

Nick Gill and Anthony Good (2019), in their work on asylum determination in Europe, examine the forms of agency asylum case workers have during the asylum procedure. According to them, asylum determination is perceived as an everyday practice for those involved in the process and therefore is affected by several factors, such as professional routines, individual habits and emotional involvement of case workers (Gill & Good, 2019 p.19). The wide range of people who take part in asylum application assessment procedures are capable of influencing both the process and the outcome. This thesis concurs with their argument, as it shows that the aid workers' stereotypes, beliefs and circumstances (including their financial security) affected the way they

provided services to African women. More specifically, many Greek aid workers considered African women lie in order to ensure their protection, or that they victims of abuse who often got into trouble due to their naivety or some psychological trauma. These representations of African women were connected with the difficulties aid workers were facing in their own lives, as they themselves were in a vulnerable position.

Liisa Malkki (2015) argues that aid workers have a personal need to help others for various reasons (e.g. socialization) and through their work they fulfill their own needs as well as the needs of beneficiaries. Instead of prioritizing the former, Malkki mentions that aid workers are needy, too, arguing that working in the humanitarian sector might as well derive from the aid workers' urge to help. This urge can be traced back to experiences of domestic attachment. Aid workers are not "saviors". Their commitment to helping others is guided by more complex imaginative processes and conceptualization of the self. In Malkki's (2015) work, some of the aid workers wanted to escape from their routine life or sought after personal and professional development, whereas others simply wanted to feel part of something meaningful. During the interviews I had with aid workers for the purposes of this project, I realized that most of them were in a very vulnerable condition because of the economic crisis in Greece. However, their vulnerability is different in some aspects from what Malkki describes.

Even though some Greek aid workers showed an inclination to participate, in order to feel part of something more meaningful, and to contribute to solving the problems of more vulnerable people, the main reason for doing this job was economic insecurity. Economic austerity was forcing Greek aid workers to move from one city to the other, working under fixed-term contracts and very difficult and strenuous conditions. Most of them had to work for several NGOs and change their place of residence in order to remain employed. In many cases, they were in desperate need to find or retain a job. The provision of aid to refugees was one of the few available options to (relatively temporary and precarious) employment. Aid workers had to transform themselves into flexible workers, willing to sacrifice their personal life and accept terms and conditions that would not have been acceptable in Greece until then. By accepting such terms of employment, they stood a chance to survive in a society struggling due to the applied austerity measures. On the other hand, those with managerial positions in humanitarian organizations are usually international aid bureaucrats with different backgrounds. Development elites receive fat salaries and enjoy the privileges of such prestigious positions. The different treatment between beneficiaries and aid workers, as well as among aid workers, is evidence of social and economic inequality. NGOs offered material rewards as a means to "persuade" aid workers to become "obedient" workers, as demanded by the Greek state⁴. This thesis agrees with Malkki's suggestion that the line between helpers and those helped is thinner than expected and exemplifies this argument in relation to the situation in Greece, in which aid providers (not just aid recipients) are very clearly dependent on the aid provision system.

Based on Malkki's positions, this thesis challenges the notion that aid workers are powerful self-sacrificing individuals dedicated to saving other people's lives. This might be what is, in fact, implied by the narrative of Greek hospitality offered as a gift to asylum seekers, as an one-way generous act, such narrative actually entails power inequalities, as hosts find themselves in a more powerful position than foreigners (Herzfeld, 1993), with some actors in the host society being

⁴ More information with regard to the working conditions and the austerity measures can be found in Chapter 3 below.

more powerful than others. Greek aid workers facilitated African women through various forms of assistance and, in the mind of the migrants, acted as gatekeepers of available helpful resources. At the same time, the management of the NGOs active in Greece also served as intermediaries between aid workers and the Greek state, giving aid workers access to needed paid employment. If Greek aid workers wanted to be selected for an open job position, or to keep their job, they had to reflect the views of their managers, who mainly aimed to retaining their fat salaries and privileged positions. This way, Greek aid workers repeated the aid-related discourse and provided African women partial support that wasn't necessarily meeting their needs. Aid may had been supportive for some women under certain conditions, but for various reasons it wasn't that African migrant women were seeking for "aid" (see also Rossi, 2015p.312).

A double identity: the researcher and the aid worker

I grew up in a family of refugees from Asia Minor and as a child I heard stories about how my grandparents struggled to be integrated in the Greek society and the racism they faced by Greek citizens. Despite the fact that I knew that the members of my family were refugees, during my studies as well as at the beginning of my career I wasn't interested in studying or working in a job related to refugees.

After my studies at the University of Crete, I moved to Athens in order to find a job more easily and to continue my studies. Even though I didn't want to work as an aid worker, I soon realized that the vast majority of vacancies announced were related to the refugee crisis. I applied many times for those positions but the fact that I was an unexperienced psychologist resulted in my remaining unemployed for several months and finding only low-paid temporary jobs irrelevant to my studies. At the same time, I had been working as a volunteer in order to increase the possibility to find a job in the field of my expertise. After a year between unemployment and informal work, I finally found a job in an NGO which urgently needed to hire a psychologist and didn't have enough time to conduct proper interviews. My lack of experience wasn't a problem. My first contract lasted only one month and it was renewed upon successful performance. The salary was much higher than what I had been paid from my previous jobs. After three months, the NGO decided to suspend its operations in Greece and I was asked to resign and received two extra salaries as compensation.

Luckily, I soon found a job in a second NGO in which even though I was a full-time employee, I was forced to work as a freelance consultant psychologist. The reason that NGOs force aid workers to work as consultants is to avoid paying benefits. This time, due to several problems between the NGO and its donors, I wasn't paid for months, borrowing money from my friends in order to cover my basic needs. Unable to handle these difficult working conditions, I was thinking of quitting, but was afraid that I would lose several months of unpaid salaries. Furthermore, I couldn't report the working conditions to the relevant authority as I had a freelancer contract⁵. I was trapped between the need to have a job and the fact that I couldn't rely on the job I had. After receiving the money owed to me, I decided to quit and search for a position with better working conditions.

During that time, the EU-Turkey agreement started to be implemented⁶, something that led to a reduction of migrant flows. Several international NGOs suspended their operations in Greece. Many candidates were competing over few positions. I was unemployed for several months for the second time. Even though I examined the NGOs critically, during my third job and under the constant fear of being unemployed again, I did everything I could to prove to my employers that hiring me was the right choice. My contract lasted only for a few months, during which I underwent several performance reviews. I knew that if my organization suffered funding cuts, all employees would be assessed very strictly and only those with the best performance would have their contracts renewed. For this reason, and despite my criticism toward NGOs, I started reproducing their discourse in order to maximize my chances to keep my job. These experiences influenced how I perceive, represent and treat African women.

⁵ The authority responsible for examining reports of employers' abuse of power accepts reports from full-time workers and not freelancers.

⁶ For a timeline of the most important events of the refugee crisis, please see Table no1.

Before working on the refugee crisis, I hadn't had any contact with African women or African culture. My first contact with them was as a service provider. I learnt about African women through intense trainings provided by international aid workers who had worked in several African countries. The training's subjects were trafficking, Female Genital Mutilation and SGBV and the instructors' narratives directly linked African women with those phenomena. This way, I was trained to consider African women –first and foremost– as victims that needed our intervention to be safe. If I wanted to be appreciated by my colleagues, I had to “save” them.

Because of my background and positioning, I inevitably developed a research project based in part on autoethnography and self-reflexivity. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing “that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand culture” (Ellis et al., 2011 p.1). Autoethnography, influenced by social constructionism, supports that knowledge production is a process affected by the researcher's positionality and values (R-student, Kendall & Day, 2017 p.584). Instead, subjectivity as well as the personal experiences of the researcher are put at the center of the research, something that is based on the assumption that by analyzing critically and systematically our own personal narratives, we can better understand our culture as well as how our identity is shaped. It connects ethnography with autobiography (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008 p.446). Moreover, autoethnography suggests that, even though people are socially situated beings, they interact actively within their environment rather than simply internalize it passively. As a consequence, their identities are reconstructed constantly in an active and ongoing process as well as through complex interactions between lived experience, social structure and subjective processes (R-student, Kendall & Day, 2017 p.584).

Reflexive anthropology entails critical reflection on various interacting subjectivities: the researcher (along with the theoretical perspectives of his/her discipline) and the participants (with their perspectives too). Being reflexive enables researchers to critically consider their own cultural biases. A reflexive perspective also emphasizes the socially constructed nature of knowledge production and therefore, researchers should be aware of their own positionalities when they ask questions or when they interpret the answers they're given. Anthropologists are also devoting considerable attention to the varied influences that their presence and scholarship may have on the people they study (Li, 2008). The evolving researcher-participant relationship in field research is conditioned by the researcher's personal characteristics such as gender, race, and age (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002).

In this project, the researcher shares the same cultural, educational, political and more or less socioeconomic background with half of the research participants (the aid workers) and a different cultural, educational, political and socioeconomic background with the rest of the participants (the African women). Research focuses on two axes: 1) the perceptions and practices of aid workers who have the same skin-color, nationality, education and socioeconomic status as the researcher and 2) the experiences of migration of generally poorer, of different color, and less formally educated women. I refer to field notes taken during my time working in different organizations (September 2016 until December 2019) regarding conversations with my colleagues, my supervisors, our donors as well as incidents happened while working with African women. The anonymized women's stories derive from experiences of interactions I had over the last four years of involvement with migrants and refugees. In addition to reflecting on my previous experiences and referring to my notes, I conducted 23 interviews with aid workers and five interviews with African women. Semi-structured interviews were preferred for this project (Bernard, 2006).

I attempted to approach NGO workers by contacting the NGOs officially and asking their permission for having an interview with them. Only one of the NGOs I approached as a researcher allowed me to interview its aid workers. As I faced rejection when I approached NGOs, I decided to contact aid workers individually, as some of them were former colleagues or people I met as I worked in NGOs. I fully explained the purpose of my study, I guaranteed confidentiality and obtained informed consent from them. The vast majority of the participants were single young women, between 25-35 years old who have worked in different NGOs during the past years. The profile of the sample of interviewed aid workers broadly reflects the type of services provided to asylum seekers with a wide range of psychologist, social workers, lawyers, doctors, sociologist, political scientists etc. It is also important to mention that three more aid workers were interviewed, all from the same organization, but do not feature in the table below. They asked me to withdraw from the study a couple of weeks following the interview, as they were afraid that this would affect their job. Their testimonies were completely erased from the records. The interviews focused on the aid workers' experiences and attitudes about African women. What was the nature of their collaboration with African women? What were the African women's main requests? What are their perceptions of the African women's stories?

No	Name	NGO	Studies	Years of experience	Handled cases of African women from
1	A.P.1	International Organization	Anthropologist	2.5 years, same NGO	Cameroon, Somalia, DRC
2	I.P.2	International Organization	Psychologist	3 years, same NGO	DRC
3	M.K.3	Local NGO	Psychologist	2.5 years same NGO	DRC, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Guinea
4	F.H.4	Local NGO	Sociologist	1.5 years, same NGO	DRC, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia
5	M.A.5	Local NGO	Lawyer	2 years, same NGO	DRC, Cameroon
6	F.L.6	International Organization	Lawyer	2 years, same NGO	Somalia, Soudan, DRC, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria
7	E.L.7	Local NGO	Psychiatrist	7 years, same NGO	Morocco, DRC, Ivory Coast
8	S.P.8	Local NGO	Psychiatrist	3.5 years, same NGO	DRC, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Nigeria
9	S.K.9	International Organization	Interpreter	5 years, different NGOs	DRC, Cameroon

No	Name	NGO	Studies	Years of experience	Handled cases of African women from
10	F.A.10	Local NGO	Interpreter	8 years, different NGOs	DRC, Senegal, Eritrea Morocco, Ethiopia,
11	A.K.11	International Organization	Doctor	6 years, different NGOs	DRC, Eritrea Cameroon,
12	M.P.12	International Organization	Lawyer	1.5 years, same NGO	DRC, Somalia Cameroon,
13	G.C.13	International Organization	Sociologist	3.5 years, different NGOs	DRC, Cameroon
14	K.S.14	International Organization	Lawyer	2 years, same NGO	DRC, Somalia, Eritrea Cameroon,
15	I.G.15	Greek State	Political Science	4 years, different NGOs	Marocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt Algeria,
16	I.P.16	Greek State	Political Science	11 years, different NGOs	Sub-saharan Africa, mainly DRC, Ethiopia
17	M.K.17	Local NGO	Psychologist	5 years, same NGO	Nigeria, Kenya, DRC, Ivory Coast
18	V.K.18	Local NGO	Anthropologist	5 years, different NGOs	DRC, Cameroon, Nigeria Ethiopia,
19	A.X.19	Local NGO	Psychologist	1.5 years, same NGO	DRC, Cameroon
20	G.H.20	Local NGO	Social Worker	2.5 years, different NGOs	DRC, Cameroon
21	D.P.21	Greek State	Lawyer	4 years, different NGOs	DRC, Cameroon
22	L.S.22	International Organization	Doctor	3.5 years, different NGOs	DRC, Cameroon
23	I.P.23	Local NGO	Lawyer	2 years, same NGO	Eritrea, Ethiopia, DRC, Cameroon

Table 1: Participants: Aid workers

I also interviewed five African women who are currently living in Athens and applied for asylum in Greece. I attempted to approach African women through the NGOs by providing a letter to the aid workers and asking them to hand it out to women in their programs. In this letter, I explained

the purpose of my project, the confidentiality of the research process and asked for their consent to participate. I stated clearly that the NGO workers who followed their case would not be informed about their participation in my study. This precaution was taken to avoid that women participate in the project in the hope to obtain support from the organization. Only one of several NGOs that I contacted allowed me to provide case workers with letters for African women, but no woman ever returned to me and expressed interest in participating in the research project. Simultaneously, I started approaching African women groups as well as African churches in Athens. This did not yield significant results either.

If approaching field workers was somewhat difficult, approaching African women had been almost impossible. I mistakenly expected that they would want to participate, feeling grateful that someone decided to give voice to their neglected community. Reality, however, was frustrating. My efforts to reach communities of African women failed one after another. I decided to go to the various churches I knew they were visiting at Athens' center. African women were always very polite with me and never made me feel unwanted, but I could sense some resentment towards me. Although many women gave me their phone numbers, I failed to arrange interviews with most of them, with few exceptions, listed in the table below. Two of the participants were interpreters working in different organizations, one participant accepted my invitation when I visited her church, another woman was participating in an African organization (see chapter 4) and the last participant was one of my neighbors.

No	Name	Country of origin	Legal status	Years in Greece
1	L.K.1	Sierra Leone	Immigrant	25
2	I.P.2	DRC	Refugee	5
3	M.D.3	Cameroon	Refugee	2.5
4	F. S.4	Kenya	Immigrant	15
5	F.J.5	Somalia	Asylum Seeker	2.5

Table 2: Participants: African women

Once one woman whom I met several times in church once expressed anger in relation to my double identity as researcher and aid worker. After I explained to her the subject of my project and why her participation was important, she asked me plainly: “and what will you give us for this?” “I do not have anything to give you”, I answered. “My job dealing with the refugee crisis has nothing to do with what I ask of you, that's for my master. I cannot give you something for the interview.” “This is not fair. You come here, asking me to tell you my personal story, to share with you details of my life and you give nothing in return. You just want to learn my story.” This woman recognized my privileges and as soon as I asked something from her, she expressed her desire to obtain some remuneration. Her reaction was probably a response to my explanation that I worked in an organization dealing with refugees and immigrants. She perceived me as someone who could help her. So why was I now asking her to help me and to relate to me as a researcher rather than as an aid worker?

This woman, and others like her, had been looking for help in vain, approaching several aid organizations, waiting for long hours often to achieve nothing. Organizations often required potential “beneficiaries” to share their personal story again and again, but, in the end, failed to provide the assistance and protection migrant women desperately needed. As the woman expressed her disappointment to me, I realized how I must have appeared to her as I asked permission to interview her without being able to offer her something tangible rather than an abstract promise that the voice of the African women would be heard. My position as an aid worker made me popular with women in the refugee camps, but my requests as a researcher angered women who had lived several years in Greece and never received the help they asked for.

The fact that I had worked for several years in various NGOs did provide me with an in-depth understanding of the dynamics regarding African women in Greece, but, on the other hand, this also raised ethical issues. I was an active aid worker during the research project, a fact that could raise potential conflicts of interest. More specifically, even though it would have been easier to ask women whom I had previously helped during my work to provide me with an interview, doing so would have been ethically problematic, as the power relation between us could have affected their decision to give their consent for the interview. Even though I did not contact those women, I could not delete from my memory the experience of working with them, an experience that shaped my understanding of the issues discussed in this thesis as much as the research carried out specifically for the thesis. Since I had promised confidentiality to all the women I had worked with in the past, I chose to discuss my own experience of my encounters with them, while avoiding to cite directly their statements and making it impossible to identify them. All the stories mentioned in the thesis are totally anonymized and some details of the stories that could lead to identification have been altered. They are mostly collected as part of my research for this study, with the informed consent of the participants in the study. Yet, few of the events discussed in the chapters are based on my recollection of interactions with anonymous migrants, whose stories contributed to my understanding of the phenomena researched in this thesis and to my reflections on the relation between aid workers and the so-called “beneficiaries”.

Structure of the thesis

The first chapter describes the process of obtaining asylum or a residence permit in Greece, as soon as an African woman enters Greece. Options for family reunification and relocation are also presented. The thesis also covers all stages from pre-registration (if someone applies for asylum) to what happens after the asylum interview, when it is decided whether asylum is granted or not. If the application for asylum is not granted, then there is the option to appeal. This chapter describes the procedures to be followed and the asylum seekers’ perceptions and options. In addition to describing the asylum process, I approach the issue of where African women stand in relation to such procedures.

In the second chapter, the findings from the case workers’ interviews are presented. The refugee crisis emerged while the Greek society was experiencing the aftermath of austerity, making the refugee crisis a second crisis. The ways these social conditions have affected Greek aid workers are examined. In addition, aid workers’ representations of African women are analyzed. What are the main representations of African women? What factors contributed to shaping these

representations? Do aid workers have stereotypes about African women? If yes, do these stereotypes affect the access to services?

Finally, in the last chapter, I present African women's views on their access to services. Their choices regarding accommodation and legal status are presented. But what do these different circumstances actually mean for their lives? Is it different for them to live in a house instead of a camp? How do they perceive the services provided by NGOs? Are they helpful? Or not? If not, how do they cope with their everyday challenges? What is their opinion about aid workers? Do they have stereotypes about them?

Chapter 1: The asylum procedure and migrant policies in Greece

Introduction

Greece has been a country of emigration and immigration for several decades. For this reason, in order to better understand the position of African migrant women in Greece it is important to examine the history of migration and migration policy in Greece as well as the options provided to migrants in order to be allowed to stay legally in the country. In this chapter, we analyze each stage of the lengthy asylum procedure that each asylum seeker should go through as well as the different options of migrants when they reach Greece. What options does an African woman have when she arrives in Greece? Is she allowed to remain legally or not? In addition to the asylum procedure, this chapter also examines the services provided to migrants during the different stages of their application and in different legal statuses. What are the main policies? Are African women eligible for the policy programs offered? Exploring asylum procedures and policies contributes to understanding the barriers African women face during migration in Greece as well as the resources – if any– available to them to overcome the problems they may face.

History of immigration and migration policy in Greece

After World War II, there was a period of time characterized by huge immigrant flows going from southern European countries to northern ones (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010). Greece, as well as Portugal, Spain and Italy, were starting points for many people who wanted to move to countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain. Due to the disastrous consequences of World War II, there was a need for cheap workers for the industrial development of the aforementioned countries. As far as non-European flows are concerned, they were directed toward colonial countries such as Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland. Immigrants coming from former colonies had special rights in these countries and some of them decided to relocate permanently to their new residence (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010 p.15).

Due to the fact that immigrant integration was a huge challenge for the European countries, due to different circumstances for various European countries, the dynamics of immigration in Europe has changed. From the early '70s, countries that previously had been trying to attract immigrants, had now turned to a “zero migration” policy. At the same time, as Greece, Portugal and Spain entered the EEC, they witnessed the creation of new job vacancies, which consequently resulted to less and less people taking the decision to leave their country (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010 p.16).

During the 1980s the situation changed again. The international agreements concluded in relation to the trade market along with the globalization of capital and workforce, the radical development of transportation methods and communication networks, created new types of migration. This time, there were various destinations and types of work in Europe (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010 p.17).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, many people from Central and Eastern Europe came to Western and Northern Europe in search of a better future. Some of the immigrants came

as asylum seekers, others with tourist or student visas, while others came looking to realize their business ideas and became entrepreneurs (Jordan & Duvell, 2002). As a consequence, many European countries had to modify their policies providing opportunities for legal, temporary or permanent migration. Especially the countries of Southern Europe implemented programs for the legalization of immigrants without documentation and, a little later, programs for their economic and cultural integration (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010 p.19).

Until 1991, the Greek Migration Policy was based on laws that were firstly enacted in 1920. The adoption of Law 1975/1991 aimed to control migration flows and not the integration of immigrants, meaning that the Greek authorities focused on repelling migrants approaching the borders and not on providing them with decent living conditions (Glytsos, 2005). This situation made it even harder for the Greek government to properly respond to the arising difficulties, resulting to a huge number of deportations during the 90's (Triantafyllidou, 2009). Moreover, Greece was a highly homogenous country in terms of religion, ethnicity and culture. The contact with diverse cultures and backgrounds soon ended up in xenophobic behavior (Marvakis, Parsanoglou & Pavlou, 2001). Furthermore, in order to find the best way to legalize their residence in the new country, people who tried to avoid political persecutions chose to move to other countries as economic migrants, while economic migrants tried to gain refugee status (Wallace, 2002). The authorities' failure to control "illegal" migration and people's attempts to find the best way to settle in a new country made the distinction between refugees and migrants more and more difficult (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010 p.19). For example, instances have been reported when people were forced to leave their home countries but, facing the possibility not to be able to be granted asylum, they would try to enter Greece on a work permit, or at least work illegally for some time (usually years), so as to be able to obtain a residence permit later.

At the end of the '90s and the beginning of the new century, the rates of unemployment started to increase significantly. In contrast to this new developing reality, Greece accepted almost 1.5 million immigrants mainly working in agriculture, tourism, private health care and in construction. Immigrants, whose vast majority were "illegal", were gradually granted the required legalized documents, through specific programs (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010). Immigration legislation was modified once again, this time emphasizing less on documentation checks immediately upon arrival and border patrol. The 2001 legislation allows immigrants to change employers and to travel within Greece in order to seek employment (Glytsos, 2005). Due to the laws regarding immigrant employment, immigrants have contributed to boosting consumption and investments in Greece, given that they were available as a cheap, go-to pool of labor in various business sectors leading to significantly lowered production costs (Chassamboulli & Palivos, 2013). Worth mentioning is that this law concerns people who want to work in Greece for a short period of time, i.e. for three months only, and do not wish to acquire a permanent residence and/or to be integrated into the Greek society (Glytsos, 2005). The main reason for providing for such a short period is that the vast majority of immigrants would search for jobs as unspecialized workers, in which case their job was expected to be completed within a specific period, spending the rest of the year back in their countries. For example, during sowing or during the winter when occupied in the construction industry, etc.

In 1997 and 2003 respectively, the Dublin Convention and the Dublin II Regulation were signed. According to the Dublin Convention (1997) and the Dublin II Regulation (2003), the first country of entry inside the EU bears the responsibility of examining the application for asylum of a third country national. Greece has been criticized both for inadequacy of asylum procedures and the

insufficient policing of the European borders (Aitima, 2017), not to mention the way asylum seekers are treated during their stay in the country. Due to the yearlong procedures in the asylum recognition and the convictions of Greece by the European Court for Human Rights for the living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees, it was decided that Greece would be exempted from Dublin II. Thus, immigrants weren't sent back to the country of first reception, i.e. Greece, as required by the law, but completed the asylum procedures in the other member states instead. (Guild et al., 2015). More specifically, when the first reception country of an immigrant is Greece and she/he crosses the borders, reaching another European country, she/he can apply there for asylum and is not sent back to Greece. Greece had reportedly the lowest rates of granted asylum in Europe, significant delays in the application handling procedures and human rights violations (Rozakou, 2012).

The beginning of the economic crisis, along with the aftermath of the 11/9 attack in the United States, had as a consequence that almost every poor country Muslim immigrant was considered and treated as a possible terrorist (Triantafyllidou & Maroukis, 2010). Despite this approach, the population of migrants coming from outside of Europe was not affected and a few years later increased dramatically during the refugee crisis. Furthermore, after the beginning of the financial crisis, many young adults began migrating to Northern European countries seeking better educational and professional opportunities. These young adults, seem to be highly skilled (Triantafyllidou & Gropas, 2014 p.2). Greeks who emigrated due to the economic crisis seem to be fewer in number than the immigrants who came to Greece. More particularly, in 2011 the people who immigrated to Greece were 15,000 more, compared to the people who emigrated. People who emigrated from Greece to Northern European countries the same year were 2,500 (Triantafyllidou & Gropas, 2014 p.2). Despite the significant difference between the numbers of people immigrating and emigrating, these data show that during the economic crisis several Greeks decided to leave for wealthier, more robust European countries, searching for a better future. In 2011 the war in Syria began and resulted, as mentioned, in a great number of people departing from Syria and trying to enter Europe. These were the initial stages of the so-called "Greek refugee crisis".

Seeking Asylum in Greece: who is who

As mentioned above, African women and migrants can be classified into three main categories, in terms of legal status: asylum seeker, refugee and ("economic") immigrant. A migrant's legal status affects the provision of services: an asylum seeker, for example, has better access to services than an undocumented migrant. The aforementioned legal categories have also different subcategories. More particularly, asylum seekers can be divided into five subcategories: pre-registered asylum seekers, officially registered asylum seekers, asylum seekers applying for appeal, asylum seekers applying for relocation, and asylum seekers applying for family reunification. An analysis of the requirements to be met in order for asylum seekers to be classified into each of the aforementioned subcategories and how their access to services is affected depending on the category each asylum seeker is classified into are outlined in detail below.

When the asylum seekers pass the Greek borders, they should notify the authorities of the will to apply for asylum in Greece, otherwise they should be deported back to Turkey. The first Reception and Identification Service (RIS) is responsible for the pre-registration of the asylum seekers as soon as they arrive on the islands. If for any reason someone don't go through the first identification process, for example due to heavy workload in RIS they are given a Skype address of the Greek Asylum Services which they should call in order to arrange an appointment for the official registration. Another way of being pre-registered is to be kept in custody due to the lack of legal papers. In custody someone could express their will to apply for asylum and then they were given police note mentioning the asylum seekers' personal information and a willingness number⁷. Being a pre-registered asylum seeker means that the migrant has communicated his/her will to the authorities to apply for asylum but hasn't been officially registered in the Asylum Services. The pre-registered asylum seeker is excluded from the provision of several services, such as accommodation and money, also in the form of state allowances, except for very rare cases, in particular when his/her life is under -immediate- threat. The time between pre-registration and official registration of asylum seekers varies from a few weeks to a few months.

After the asylum seekers' appointment with the Asylum Services for their registration, an asylum interview date is scheduled, the asylum seekers are provided with their papers and, thus, are considered officially registered asylum seekers (transitioning to the second category of the asylum-seeking process). As officially registered, asylum seekers can gain access to NGO services, apply for housing, apply for allowances, have free access to health care and are provided with national health insurance and, more particularly, during the refugee crisis were also provided with the right to work legally in Greece.

Should their application for asylum is refused at first instance, they have the right to apply for an appeal. In case of an appeal, asylum seekers are not interviewed, except if they prove to the authorities that there is a need for doing so and explain the reasons why initial interview does not suffice (a rather rare case in most instances). For an appeal to be examined, a new date is determined as the deadline for the asylum seeker to provide all required proof he/she can get for supporting the application for asylum already submitted. Those who have received a negative answer after concluding their asylum interview and have proceeded to appealing against this decision have the same access to services with the officially registered asylum seekers. In case the appeal is also not in favor of the applicant, then the asylum seeker can request a trial in which the jury examines if the case had been mishandled by the authorities. The NGOs do not provide legal representation services for asylum seekers going to trial, as it is a quite expensive procedure and the possibilities of getting asylum this way are really low. Therefore, the asylum seeker is responsible to hire a lawyer by himself. During this process, the asylum seeker stops receiving financial support and isn't eligible to apply for housing. Due to the unaffordable expenses that need to be covered when hiring a lawyer, the low possibilities of a positive answer and the loss of access to specific services, many asylum seekers choose, after legal consultation, to quit their asylum application, to stay in Greece as undocumented migrants for a while and to re-apply for asylum after a few months. This is a choice provided to asylum seekers whose case was rejected by the authorities, since the (political, economic, social, etc.) conditions in their country of origin *changed* from the first application and do not allow them to return back. This way, there are also

⁷ The willingness number is a number written in the note given to asylum seekers from the police in order to certify that even though a migrant has not been officially registered in the Asylum Services, he/she has expressed the will to apply for asylum.

low possibilities of receiving a positive answer, as the applicant must adequately justify why circumstances in his/her country of origin render him/her unable to go back for the reasons claimed during the initial interview. The main goal in such cases is usually to live a few more years legally in another country, so that asylum seekers can then complete seven years of stay in the country and, therefore, be eligible to apply for a residence permit.

Furthermore, there are two more special categories: relocation and family reunification. These two statuses are different from the aforementioned ones, as the applicant will not stay permanently in Greece, but in both instances he/she will be moving abroad. The reason these are mentioned here is because they provide a significant perspective of the access African women have to other European countries.

Country of origin	Data date		Population
Syrian Arab Rep.	31 Jul 2017	7.1%	7,688
Senegal	31 Jul 2017	5.0%	5,366
Nigeria	31 Jul 2017	15.1%	16,319
Morocco	31 Jul 2017	4.9%	5,262
Mali	31 Jul 2017	5.1%	5,562
Guinea	31 Jul 2017	9.3%	10,065
Gambia	31 Jul 2017	5.8%	6,234
Eritrea	31 Jul 2017	4.9%	5,325
Côte d'Ivoire	31 Jul 2017	8.5%	9,186
Bangladesh	31 Jul 2017	8.0%	8,687

Table 3: Number of asylum seekers by country of origin.

Source: UNHCR

Country	Percentage of asylum recognition
Syria	99.5%
Yemen	96.2%
Palestine	93.5%
Stateless	85.7%
Eritrea	84.6%
Somalia	76.4%
Iraq	73.5%
Afghanistan	64.4%
Sudan	59.1%
Ethiopia	56.2%

Table 4: Countries with the highest rates of asylum recognition.

Source: Greek Asylum Services

Country	Percentage of gaining asylum
Egypt	6.4%
Bangladesh	3.6%
India	3.3%
Pakistan	2.2%
Algeria	2.0%
Ghana	1.3%
Senegal	1.1%
Armenia	0.7%
Albania	0.2%
Georgia	0.0%

Table 5: Countries with the lowest rates of asylum recognition.

Source: Greek Asylum Services

These statistics show that the vast majority of the asylum seekers coming to Greece in 2017 were coming from African countries. Despite this, these countries are not among the countries with the highest percentages of asylum recognition. For example, an important number of asylum seekers seem to come from Senegal. Senegal is also included in the table with the lowest asylum rates. This means, that a great number of people seeking for asylum in Greece are denied the protection they need and are de facto “forced” in the position of informal/illegal immigrants.

Relocation

The Relocation program refers to the transition of very vulnerable asylum seekers that are in clear need of international protection from one EU Member State to another. The program was created in order to support the countries that receive a great number of asylum applications (Greek Asylum Services, n.d.). The number of relocated asylum seekers accepted by a third EU Member State is determined by taking into account various factors, such as each country’s population (weighting 40%), total GDP (also weighting 40%), average number of asylum applicants over the past four years, and unemployment rate (European Commission, 2015). The asylum application will be examined after the successful settlement of the asylum seekers. The application for relocation could be made by Greece and Italy and since 1 January 2017 only by people coming from Eritrea, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bhutan, Qatar, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and stateless people. The above-mentioned countries were chosen due to the high rates of asylum recognition (75% or more). The countries accepting population under relocation process are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden (Greek Asylum Services, 2017). The main partner of the EU responsible for the relocation program according to the decisions no. 2015/1523 and no. 2015/1601 of the European Council is the International Organization for Migration (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). It is evident that only one country of those selected for relocation is an African country and therefore people with other nationalities, except Eritrean, don’t have the choice to ask for asylum in another European country.

The procedure that should be followed is the following: The candidate for relocation should first apply for Asylum in Greece (or Italy); he/she must go through the identification, registration and fingerprint check procedure. Subsequently, he/she can apply for relocation if he/she arrived in Greece after 24 March 2015 and until 20 March 2016, when the EU-Turkey agreement started being implemented. The candidates cannot choose the country that they prefer for relocation. Relocation will be based on criteria, such as relatives living in one of the countries approved for relocation, the knowledge of the language or of the culture, determined by competent authorities (Greek Asylum Services, n.d.). After their application is submitted, they must go through two different interviews, one with representatives of the Greek authorities and another one with competent employees of the embassy of the European country they may be transferred to. In general, the challenges of this particular program are many and of great importance. First of all, it has suffered significant delays. Although the relocation program was supposed to have been completed within two years after it began in 2015, probably due to slow procedures, only 29,596 people had been relocated until the end of 2017. Furthermore, the selection process of the candidates (two interviews conducted with the applicant, one with the Greek authorities and one with the embassy of the third EU Member State) is quite controversial, given that the vulnerability

of an asylum seeker is determined by criteria taking mainly into account health problems, abuse, unaccompanied minors, the living conditions in the country of origin, in such a priority that could be easily disputed. More specifically, several asylum seekers who had applied for relocation in France were asked if they could stop wearing the *bourka* in a European country or if they had a problem if wearing a *bourka* was prohibited. If the applicants answered yes, in several cases they were given a negative answer from the Embassy of France due to fears of national security⁸.

Last but not least, among all migrants from the above stated countries (Eritrea, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bhutan, Qatar, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and stateless people) it is mainly Syrians who appear in great numbers in Greece. In a way, it is as if the rest of the asylum seekers (including African women) may not be refugees but instead immigrants, provided that they don't enjoy such a high percentage of asylum recognition and therefore are not allowed to apply for relocation. This way, refugees are divided between "genuine" and "non-genuine" asylum seekers, meaning those who took advantage of the border opening aiming for a better financial future and professional prospects in Europe (Chtouris, 2017). These people are not welcome and therefore excluded from applying for asylum in another European country, as it is highly possible that they may need to leave sooner than later. This division generally leads to an overall questioning of legitimacy of all asylum seekers and constructs an endemic culture of disbelief which, of course, affects how migrant women are perceived by the authorities, by aid workers and even by Greek citizens.

Family Reunification

Family reunification constitutes one of the main legal procedures of migration to Europe for non-EU citizens (UNHCR, 2008) as 38% of permanent migration is family migration. Beside the fact that it is a legal way of moving from one country to another, the presence of one's family is a crucial factor that can contribute to the integration of immigrants in a foreign society. Every person who lives legally for 2 or more years in a European country and whose family members reside in another country has the right to apply for family reunification (Greek Ministry of Interior, 2013). The applicant should prove that he/she has available space so as to host other family members, that he/she has a certain income and health insurance. The income must be at least equivalent to the minimum legally acceptable salary and is proportional to the size of the family (plus 20% for the wife, and 15 % per child). In cases of polygamy, family reunification between one wife and husband married to one or more wives is not allowed. Furthermore, the reunification of children of one wife with the husband that lives with the other wife is only allowed in the case the father has full custody of the children (Greek Asylum Services, n.d.). Authorities have the right to conduct an interview with the applicants and also the right to carry out investigations, in order to prove that the marriage is real and wasn't contracted for the sole purpose of gaining the right to legally enter and reside in the EU country through the family reunification process (European Migration Network, 2012). This seems to be the case sometimes despite the fact that there is no statistical evidence to justify such argument. Another case that is quite often in Greece is that of fake paternity. Fake paternity is often used for reunification of two spouses, when one of them (usually the wife) is underage and the male spouse claims to be the father (rather than the husband) of the minor woman (European Migration Network, 2012).

⁸ Field notes, 24 March 2017, Athens, Greece.

According to the Greek Asylum Service (2019), the main nationalities applying for family reunification are those coming from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Albania, Iran, Bangladesh, Palestine, Georgia. No African country can be found among the first ten countries that apply for family reunification. This can be happening either because African migrants don't ask for reunification, because they don't apply for asylum or receive negative answer and therefore are not eligible to request reunification, or maybe because their family members are not traced so easily. Regardless of the actual reason for the aforementioned data, there is no doubt that another road to Europe seems to be practically closed for African migrants.

Refugees

In case of a positive answer in any stage of the asylum procedure, the asylum seeker is granted asylum for the following three years. After that period of time, his/her case is reassessed (that is, the degree of danger s/he would expose him/herself by going back is considered once again). The criteria with which someone can be recognized as a refugee have been defined by international institutions despite the fact that the asylum procedure is not completely impartial, as the decision whether asylum is granted is made by a single person and not by a committee. The most important convention is that of Geneva (1951). According to the Geneva convention, refugees can be characterized as people with a valid fear of persecution due to their race, religion, political beliefs, participation in a social group with specific characteristics whose country cannot protect them from this persecution. The persecutor may be the government, groups that control the government or part of the country, or a non-governmental organization.

According to the European Court for Human Rights (2014) during the examination of asylum claims, the European Asylum Services should take into consideration the following:

- (i) in terms of race, both skin color and belonging to a certain national group may be the reason of persecution.
- (ii) The concept of religion also encompasses agnosticism or atheistic beliefs, the participation in ceremonies, the worship of God either individually or with others, as well as other religious acts or expressions of beliefs or behaviors that are not allowed due to authoritatively imposed religious beliefs.
- (iii) Nationality does not coincide with citizenship or lack of citizenship. It also refers to being part of a group with specific cultural, national or language identity, or to having common geographic or political roots or relationship with another part of the population of another country.
- (iv) A group is considered as a special social group when: (1) its constituents share some common and native characteristics or a common past or common belief that are so crucial for the identity of the group that an individual is forced to obey them. (2) The group is identified in the country of origin of the asylum seeker as it bears some notable distinction from the majority of the population. An example of a special social group is a group of people that shares the same sexual orientation that is different from what is considered "right" in their country of origin.
- (v) By the term "political beliefs" is meant the opinion about the persecution body or the policies and practices of the persecution body, independently of the asylum seekers' real beliefs.

During the examination of the asylum claim, the applicant may gain subsidiary protection. This category is constituted by people who are in danger of facing severe harm in their country, death penalty, inhuman or humiliating treatment or punishment (European Court for Human Rights, 2014). It must be noticed that during the examination of the asylum claim the operator of each case should not assess whether the claimant really has some of the above characteristics. In fact, what is examined is whether the persecutors think that the person has the aforementioned characteristics. For example, if people were persecuted in their country due to their sexual orientation, the examiner of each case should not investigate whether they actually belong in the LGBTQI community but if their persecutors believed that they did. In addition, during the process of establishing asylum the authorities should examine whether the persecution would be eliminated if the asylum seeker moves to another part of the applicant's country (Lawrance & Ruffer, 2015). If the applicant is stateless, the last habitual residence is reviewed. In such cases, though, authorities should also take into consideration whether the applicant is capable to move. For instance, women in the Middle East are not able to move alone and be self-sufficient (Lawrance & Ruffer, 2015).

Recognized refugees have the right to work legally in Greece, to send their children to school and to have access to social security and national health services. As soon as a refugee is provided with asylum, he/she has a six-month notice to move out from the apartment he/she has been provided with and at the same time he/she stops receiving cash. Even though this was the official regulation, it wasn't implemented until 2019 and the refugees living in the apartments refused to leave because they had nowhere to go. Humanitarian organizations managing the apartments couldn't call the police for their "beneficiaries" and therefore, the refugees continued to stay in the apartments unofficially. In case a refugee resided in a camp, he/she was able to continue living there and keep receiving cash until 2019 when the gradual exit from the camps was decided. In the beginning of the procedure, the refugees were given a period of six months after they had been granted with asylum before being obliged to leave the camp. After the change of the center-left wing government of SYRIZA and the election of the center-right wing government of New Democracy, refugees were given a period of two months to leave the camps. The vast majority of refugees weren't successfully integrated in the Greek society and ended up living in the camps as unregistered refugees. This means that they didn't comply with the order to leave the site and kept staying in the camp. However, they didn't have access to cash assistance.

Immigration and residence permit in Greece

It is considered that refugees were forced to leave their country while immigrants "chose" to leave it in order to look for a better future. The reasons for immigrating are manifold and complex. In a study conducted in Italy, Malta and Greece, 77% of the participants (91% in Greece) mentioned during their interviews some factors that could be labelled as forced migration. 28% of the respondents answered positively to the question if ISIS is one of the reasons that led them to leave their country (Crawley et al., 2016). On the other hand, if the interviews had been conducted in a more typical manner, 1/3 of them could have been included in the category of immigrant (Crawley et al., 2016). The existing legal categories don't seem able to fit the complex dynamics of migration.

In order to be legally authorized to enter a country and be considered as an immigrant, a visa is required (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Visa is the authorization granted by authorities of the Hellenic Republic for the legal entrance and temporary residence for citizens of countries outside the EU. The temporary residence may vary from 90 days to one year. The visa per se does not guarantee rights to those entering the country (e.g. the right to work) and for this reason the aliens should also apply for a residence permit. An interview is conducted in order to examine the applicant's motives regarding traveling to the country, as well as the submission of the required documents. These documents include the application form, a travel document (e.g. passport), travel insurance, criminal records and medical certificate. A fee of 180 euros must also be paid. The documents should be submitted to the Greek embassy or diplomatic authorities of the country of citizenship of the visa applicant which is not always possible because in some cases they can't be accessed (for example, in case of war or physical disasters). Reasons for denying entrance are connected to incomplete applications, connection with smuggling or being considered as a public threat regardless the criminal record. For example, Muslims were denied access to European countries that faced terrorist attacks. The process is not affected by family relations with citizens of the recipient country. The reasons of denying entrance must be clearly stated in a certificate provided to the applicant while he/she has the right to appeal against the decision. It should also be noted that visa requirements change rapidly along with national security arrangements (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Immigrants with a residence permit can send their children to school, they have access to the national health system, and they can work and visit their country of origin if they want to. On the other hand, as discussed below, most of the services of NGOs were provided to asylum seekers due to the refugee crisis. Immigrants granted with a residence permit were not allowed to apply for housing or cash assistance.

Sans papier

The fourth category of African women are women who have been denied asylum, do not have a residence permit (yet) and live illegally in Greece. As undocumented migrants, they are one of the most invisible parts of Greek society and it is hard to find reliable statistics for this group. According to the Hellenic Police, 5 out of the 15 nationalities that were identified by the police in 2018 were African and more specifically people coming from Algeria, Somalia, Morocco, DRC Congo and Cameroon⁹. In general, studies that try to determine the number of undocumented immigrants face a lot of problems for various reasons such as the sampling methods, the geographical area etc. For example, police statistics may count the same person 2 or 3 times, depending on the times that he/she is checked. As a result, police statistics may be a sign of intense control and not of undocumented immigrants.

This category has the very least access to services, as they do not have the right to apply for housing or cash, they do not have access to medical services (except for in NGOs and in the public system in case of an emergency), they are not allowed to work legally and are under constant threat of being deported back to their country of origin. They have access to NGO services only. But such

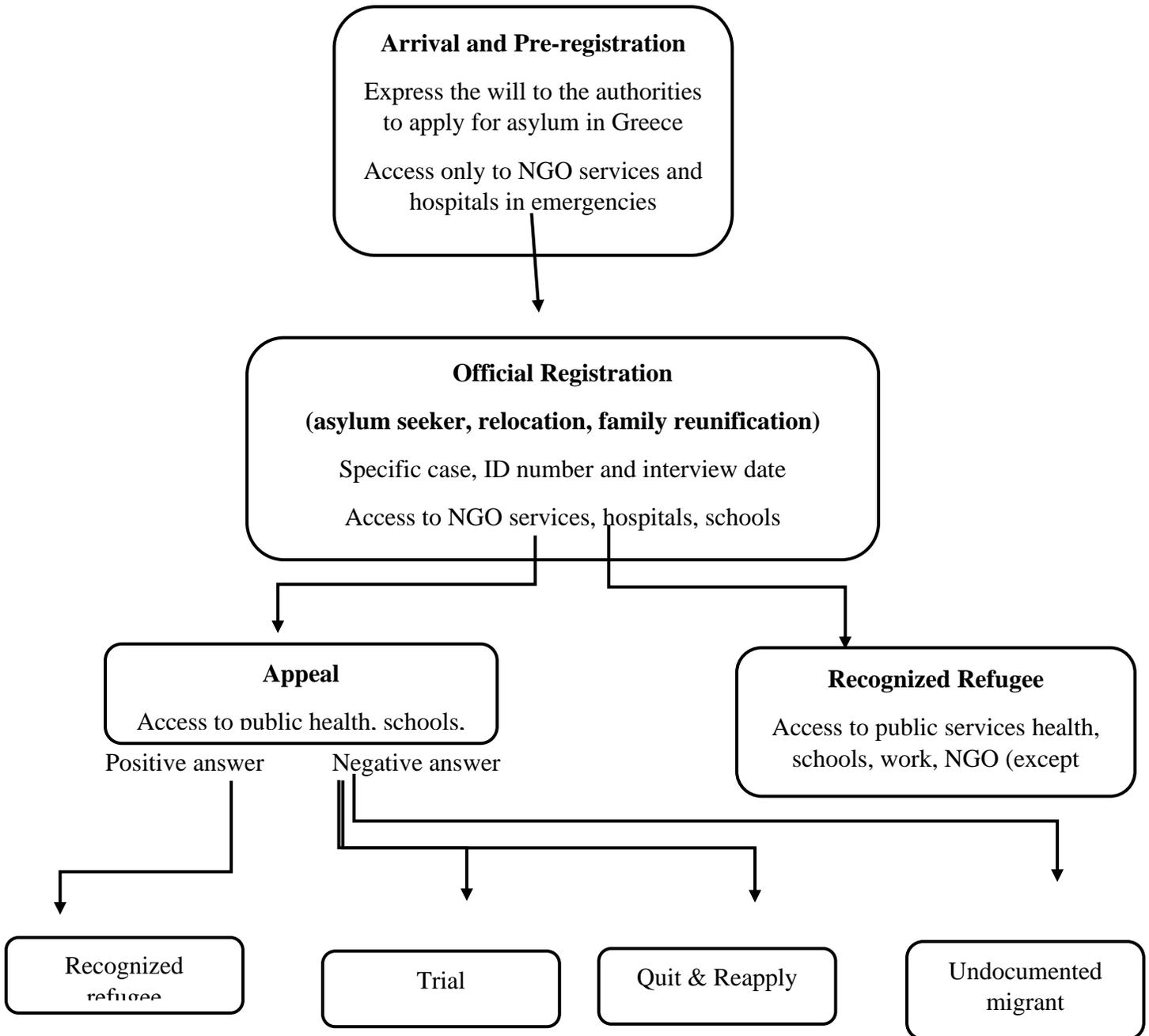
⁹ Hellenic Police (n.d.):

http://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories//2018/statistics18/allodapwn/12_statistics_all_2018_sull_yphkoothta.png
(accessed: 11 October 2019)

services are restricted. For example, medical NGOs are usually responsible for primary health care, namely a first assessment of the symptoms or a follow-up. They cannot conduct medical examinations or treat complex cases which are in need of specialized services. These cases are referred to hospitals where the migrant should pay for the medical services provided to him/her in case he/she doesn't have social insurance.

The above sections described the different legal categories African migrant women fit in, as well as the different rights and access to services they have in each of these categories. During the refugee crisis and right after it, various NGOs began working with asylum seekers in Greece. The services provided by NGOs vary from lessons, legal support, couples' therapy, empowerment groups to accommodation. There are a few NGOs or NGO programs, that target a specific population (e.g. survivors of torture, children or women etc.). Some programs have been developed in order to reach even the most marginalized groups of people, such as the program "Hosting", which is developed by PRAKSIS, whose main target group are LGBTQI asylum seekers. None of these programs focused specifically on the particular needs of people who share the same cultural background (for instance for Syrians, Afghanis and others) but targeted asylum seekers in general. Other programs, like medical NGOs, have a broader target group. The biggest type of intervention with regards to refugees and asylum seekers was that of accommodation provision either in open accommodation facilities or in apartments. Below it is analyzed what it means for African women to live in camps or in apartments and how different options affected their quality of living and migration experience.

The asylum procedure in Greece



Migrant Policies-Accommodation

There are three options for the accommodation of asylum seekers in Greece. Each of them has specific advantages and disadvantages and affects African women's lives in different ways. The first is that they reside in one of the "Long-Term Open Accommodation Centers", widely known as camps. The camps are managed by the Greek authorities, mainly by the Greek Army and with very few exceptions, they are located outside urban centers, usually near small cities such as Thiva or Chalkida. Sometimes, they are almost isolated from public transportation, e.g. Ritsona. There are two ways to be accommodated in a camp. The first is to be transferred from the islands to a camp due to vulnerability. In this case, the Ministry of Migration is informed by the camp managers about the occupancy of each camp and, after taking into consideration the available space, orders the transfer and accommodation of vulnerable population residing on the islands to the camps. The second way is that population from urban centers arrives spontaneously at a camp and asks to be registered there. This way is harder and usually takes some time as the Ministry of Migration does not want to encourage families moving spontaneously from one camp to another. If asylum seekers have some vulnerability, it is more possible to be registered. This procedure may take from a few weeks to a few months. As long as the family remains unregistered in the camp, they have no right to apply for cash or to officially stay in a room or container. They are allowed to sleep in the shared spaces or be hosted by another family residing in the camp. During this period of time, they receive a basket with food every week, which contains usually rice, lentils, bread, milk, sugar, and butter. They may also get clothes, milk formula, diapers, and other products in order to cover their basic needs for as long as they are not registered and receive cash.

When asylum seekers reside in camps, single men or women and families up to 4-member usually share their containers with other single men/women or families. Families consisting of more than five members usually live on their own. In case the container is shared, an effort is made to get together people of the same nationality. The living conditions in the camps in the mainland are much better compared to the living conditions in the hotspots on the islands due to the overpopulation. One of the main advantages of living in a camp is that "beneficiaries" do not pay rent, water or electricity, they are near to NGOs which provide various services depending on each camp. Usually, medical services are provided by army doctors, different NGOs help with site management issues like distribution, while social services are responsible for case management, and lawyers, psychologists and organizations are responsible for child protection. The everyday contact with NGO services was considered one of the most important advantages for "beneficiaries" who quite often denied being transferred in apartments because they thought that they would be forgotten by the authorities in case they live in a big city like Athens or in a small city in the countryside without specialized services¹⁰. Except for this, if a "beneficiary" is officially registered in a camp, he/she is eligible to apply for cash assistance which is 150 euros per adult per month plus 30 euros for every child. African women reside in only 3 out of the 10 camps in or

¹⁰ Field notes, 11 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

near Attica¹¹. Last but not least, being registered in an accommodation center is one of the main requirements in order for someone to be allowed to apply for accommodation in apartment, which is the second reason why African women may come in Greece.

The ESTIA¹² program, implemented by UNHCR as well as several other NGOs as UNHCR's partners, is the biggest program conducted during the refugee crisis in Greece and provides more than 25,200 places for accommodation all over Greece, 15,000 of which are in Attica. In the beginning of the program, eligible for accommodation were individuals who applied for relocation and were going to move to another country a few months after their arrival. After the border closure and the departure of a significant number of asylum seekers in other European countries through the relocation program the target population was reduced significantly. Furthermore, as the applications for relocation stopped as a consequence of the border closure, there weren't new asylum seekers to be accommodated in the apartments. Therefore, the program needed to change and started including people residing in open accommodation centers. Eligible to apply for housing is every individual residing in an open accommodation center that faces any form of vulnerability. The following circumstances, as presented by UNHCR during a workshop for ESTIA¹³, are considered as vulnerability: 1) a child in danger (e.g. illness), 2) a child which is separated from its family, 3) elderly people, 4) a person with disability, 5) a person with severe medical condition, 6) a woman in danger (pregnant or recently given birth), 7) a single-parent family, 8) victims of torture, 9) SGBV survivors (especially those who are currently in danger), 10) people who belong to the LGBTQI community, 11) a person who suffers from PTSD (including survivors of shipwrecks), 12) survivors of trafficking, and 13) people with special legal or other needs. If someone falls under the aforementioned categories, he/she is eligible to apply for housing. The application is submitted to the social services of each camp and is evaluated by UNHCR regarding two factors: 1) the current danger that each applicant faces during his/her stay at the center, and 2) the compatibility with other applicants. The current danger faced is classified into three categories: 1) high danger, when the individual is facing an imminent threat for his life or safety (e.g. "beneficiaries" suffering from cancer), 2) medium level of danger, when it is highly possible that the individual will face a significant danger for his/ her life or safety (e.g. a person who suffers from a medical condition but has access to medication), and 3) low level of danger, when the individual is vulnerable but it is not highly possible to face a danger for his/her life and safety (e.g. a single parent of adolescents with supportive environment in the camp). It is important to mention that due to the limited presence of social workers to the apartments, there are some high-risk cases that are not eligible for this program, as for example cases with self-harming behaviors, severe suicidal thoughts, domestic violence (in case the family wants to be accommodated together) or when there are suspicions that the "beneficiary" is abusing drugs or is involved in prostitution or any other illegal activity. Other factors taken into account for the evaluation of danger are the coping mechanism and the supportive environment that each individual has, the special circumstances of each case (for example, a 5-year old child is more

¹¹ Field notes, 5 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

¹² "Estia" in ancient Greek means "house".

¹³ Field notes, 12 July 2019, Athens, Greece.

vulnerable than a 17-year old child), the sufficiency of the provided services in or near the camp (for instance, a woman with a high-risk pregnancy close to her due date may not be able to be nursed in a small local hospital in case of an emergency), and finally the living conditions (e.g. some camps are considered worse than others). Elefsina, for example, is not a baby-friendly center as it has shared bathrooms. Therefore, a family with a newborn that resides there is more possible to be transferred to an apartment rather than if they were accommodated in another center with separate bathrooms. Except for the conditions of the center, the location of the camp is taken into consideration, too. Therefore, it is very hard for someone to be transferred from Skaramagkas or Lavrio centers, which are located just a few kilometers away from Athens, to where they have access to all the provided services.

As far as the compatibility between “beneficiaries” is concerned, the main factors taken into consideration are nationality, religion, language and the structure of each family. It is highly important to match up nationalities that do not fight with each other, as for example Arabs and Kurds. It is also important that people, especially teenagers, are not matched up with the opposite gender; a 17-year old son shall not share an apartment with a 15-year old daughter. Special traits, like sexual orientation, are also taken into account as people of the LGBTIQI community will be matched up together and, if possible, with people sharing the same sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, people suffering from transmitted diseases are also eligible to apply for the program in case the disease is not transmitted so easily or in case a doctor has confirmed that the disease is not transmitted so easily. Therefore, people diagnosed with HIV or Hepatitis are eligible to apply, while others suffering from tuberculosis are not. In these cases, an effort is made to match up residents with others suffering from the same disease. However, since harmonizing this requirement with language, nationality, etc. is not always possible, people suffering from different transmittable diseases may be matched up together. In such a case, the roommates are not informed about their roommates’ disease. Last but not least, applicants are also asked whether they have any problem sharing their apartment with a specific group of people before they are offered an apartment.

In case a “beneficiary” is offered a house or shelter, he/she continues to receive cash assistance, does not pay rent or other bills, and a social worker, as a focal point, visits his/her apartment in order to follow-up with their cases. The social worker does not visit the apartments on a regular basis and is not responsible for covering their needs, but is responsible to arrange some bureaucratic procedures such as hospital appointments. The advantages of living in an apartment are, of course, the better living conditions compared to those in the camps, better access to hospitals and social services and better chances to integrated into the Greek society as they come in contact with the Greek language and the Greek population on a daily basis. The disadvantages are that, even though someone has easier access to some services, he/she does not have the constant support of the social services, as the social worker visits each apartment every fifteen days or once a month. This means that someone has to find by himself the available organizations and approach them in order to make their requests. Another disadvantage is that in some cases, people who live in an apartment do not meet the beneficiaries’ expectation regarding the location of the apartment or the apartment itself. As it is not necessary that an asylum seeker residing in a camp near Athens will

be offered an apartment in Athens quite often, asylum seekers had been denied a house offered in another city because they had heard that Livadeia, a city near Athens, is very expensive, or because in Ioannina there is a lot of precipitation. In general, one out of three asylum seekers who is offered an apartment rejects the offer¹⁴. In such cases, they are deleted from the program and are not offered a house again unless their vulnerability status changes and they face severe danger. This situation has caused tensions several times inside the camps, as quite often “beneficiaries” decline an apartment and then they regret it.

As far as their stay in the house is concerned, one of the rules that asylum seekers must follow in order to get a house is that prostitution and substance abuse are prohibited. Hosting friends or relatives who have not been given the permission to stay there is also prohibited. The social worker who is responsible for the apartments has the right to visit the apartment anytime he/she wants in order to confirm that the residents are in compliance with the rules. If the requirements are not met, the NGO has the right to ask the residents to leave the apartment.

The third case is that African women live in the urban setting on their own. This population is possibly the most vulnerable one, as the only benefit they have is that they can apply for cash. As the number of “beneficiaries” living in the urban setting on their own is so huge and the cash funding received by NGOs to cover the needs of this population is much fewer compared to the one for people residing in apartments or camps, the waiting lists are long and it is highly possible that they won’t receive any cash at all. Furthermore, it is up to the asylum seekers to look for the available services and get informed about the operation of NGOs in Athens as there is no one to approach them, to inform them about the available services and to follow-up their cases.

The majority of asylum seekers consider as a better option to be transferred to an apartment in the urban setting because they are not isolated in a camp, and, most importantly, the living conditions are much better. Sometimes, though, the provided services and accommodation are not enough to protect African women from violence. Some aid workers have mentioned cases which reveal that African women are not properly protected.

Conclusion

Greece is a country of emigration and migration for more than four decades and migrant policies varied from “zero migration” to “providing residence permit to a large number of migrants”. During the refugee crisis and as several international NGOs started operating in Greece, the services provided to migrants were for the first time enriched with accommodation facilities (apartments, shelters or camps).

It is of significant importance to note that African migrants are underrepresented in statistics regarding the official ways of migrating and getting asylum, while, on the other hand, they are

¹⁴ Field notes, 12 July 2019, Athens, Greece.

overrepresented in statistics regarding undocumented migrants. The way African migrants are treated by authorities (for example, if they are considered primarily as immigrants) may also affect how they are perceived and treated by Greek citizens and by aid workers. Another factor which affects the opinion and attitude towards the African population is mass media. The image of African migrants in the Greek newspapers is examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: The aid workers

Introduction

In this chapter, I will argue that the aid workers' working conditions and position affect their beliefs, representations and the way they provide services to refugees and asylum seekers and, hence, to African women. More specifically, due to the financial crisis in Greece, dim job prospects and an increasingly insecure job market, many young adults started looking for work in NGOs providing services during the refugee crisis. Because of their vulnerability and the scarcity of fallback options, they accepted fixed-term contracts and were willing to represent the views of their employers. Having had no previous engagement with African societies, aid workers first met with African women as "experts" in the framework set out by humanitarian discourses, practices and institutions. This situation, along with the fear of financial and job insecurity, meant that young aid workers felt "forced" to adopt the dominant discourse concerning African women in order to be effective in their job.

We cannot understand how aid workers relate to African women if we don't examine what it means to be an aid worker in Greece during the financial crisis that hit Greece prior to the refugee crisis and the dramatic rise of unemployment. This chapter focuses on the aid workers' working circumstances and perceptions of African women. African women were represented as an undifferentiated whole, without cultural or other differences, and as liars and victims of sexual abuse or trafficking. The vast majority of aid workers seems to be regarding African culture as inferior and constructing them as belonging to a culture in which violence is an integral part of everyday life. They also mentioned education or psychological factors as other explanations for the violence African women experienced in their country of origin or in Greece.

What it means to be an aid worker: a crisis within a crisis

The global economic crisis initially manifested itself as a debt crisis following the collapse of the American giant Lehman Brothers in September 2008 (Greenhill, 2016). The subsequent banking crisis which ensued turned gradually into a fiscal crisis resulting in increasing deficits and skyrocketing debt due to the banking sector's bailout packages. Countries most exposed to the consequences of crises faced the most pressure and were hit the hardest due to a number of reasons: an increased public debt and deficit, an inflated private debt, structural problems and exposure of the financial sector to toxic assets were crucial factors in losing the trust of the markets. In the autumn of 2009, the Greek fiscal crisis broke out after a series of readjustments of the public deficit which resulted in skyrocketing interest rates for the Greek bonds. In the end, on the 23 April 2010 the Greek government concluded a bailout agreement with the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank which would enable future debt repayments through gradual debt imbursements in exchange to implementing structural and fiscal

reforms agreed in a memorandum of understanding (Hardouvelis & Gkionis, 2016). Greece became thus a modern colony to its lenders, as every major fiscal and structural policy was dictated by the creditors' troika in their so-called effort to save the country from bankruptcy and keep Greece in the Eurozone. The Greek government imposed austerity measures including reductions in wages, subsidies and pensions of the public sector in order to decrease public spending which would, in turn, reduce the deficit aiming to restore the trust of the markets. Austerity measures hit a huge portion of the population, affecting particularly many small and medium-sized businesses, public health services and the system of public education leading also to a social and not simply an economic crisis.

The global financial crisis had a profound impact on the economic environment in which businesses operate, dealing an often fatal blow to quite a few of them while threatening the existence of many others destroying their creative potential (Kapitsinis, 2019). The decrease in the demands for goods and services forced businesses to adapt in various ways: by cutting down their cost of production, reevaluate their business plans and investments and restructure their activities (Papadimitriou & Zezza, 2013). Many companies stopped hiring and many employees were fired. Unemployment skyrocketed and wages underwent a significant decrease in an effort to maintain the profitability mainly of larger corporations. Youth unemployment climbed being one of the biggest problems during the years of the economic recession. From the above mentioned it derives that aid workers, who were mainly young and unexperienced employees, were in urgent need of finding and keeping a job, as the constant fear of being the one out of two young citizens who is unemployed was real more than ever before.

The vast majority of the vacancies in the field of humanities and social sciences were being offered by the NGOs dealing with the refugee crisis. In addition to that, the average salary of an NGO worker (approx. 1000 euros/month) is significantly higher than the minimum legal wage which was 580 euros during the crisis. Especially during the period when migrant flows were at their peak and several NGO programs received funding, many young adults, without prior work experience or postgraduate education, were recruited in order to move to islands and provide services there. One of our participants mentions that "it was very difficult in the beginning (in Chios), because most of my colleagues, despite being very willing to help, had no previous working experience – not just with refugees; they hadn't worked in their field at all"¹⁵. So, the question arises: why would an NGO hire such young people with no previous working experience?

Working conditions

Despite the number of vacancies and the high salaries, or maybe because of them, working conditions were difficult and unstable. More specifically, the contracts signed were fixed-term for a short period and most of the times weren't exceeding the minimum three-month duration, as the

¹⁵ Interview, 11 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

programs were under constant evaluation by the donors or were modified depending on the government's policies. For this reason, aid workers were expected to constantly prove their value in order to keep their jobs. G.H., 31 years old, states: "we all left (were fired) because of this; our contracts were over; they weren't renewed, even though we were hoping that they would be. As far as I am concerned, we couldn't secure funding for the project, so our NGO left the island and another one took over. Only one aid worker remained at the camp, until the new NGO started its operations"¹⁶. Another aid worker, also working for a local NGO, said: "I have signed several contracts; indeed, they are fixed-term. My first contract lasted for one year or less. It is difficult for me to change professions and to adapt; however, the refugee issue is a mess and the change of environment is even messier. Generally, from what I hear, I'm not sure that in another organization things would be better"¹⁷. A bit later she continues: "I mean that the programs are very short; there is no long-term planning, there are employment issues with contracts that expire and people leaving and somehow ending up fired. [...] These are precarious working conditions. When something is not planned in the long run and you are at the forefront, you are doing case management and you grow weary more easily, because you get easily frustrated"¹⁸. Except for the fixed-term contracts, aid workers in many cases were hired in positions not directly related to their studies.

Due to the urgent need to hire people, some aid workers were employed in vacancies that didn't necessarily correspond to employees' academic credentials: sociologists were hired as caregivers, political scientists as social workers, psychologists as social workers and all of them were hired as case workers. Being hired to a job that is unrelated to your studies can be quite stressing as employees have to face difficult circumstances and make decisions that they are not adequately trained and prepared for. Besides, this means that competition among young candidates for job positions is extremely high, as professionals from different areas of practice can apply for the same job position. A young psychologist working for a local NGO in Athens mentions about her studies and her job role: "Because I work as a case worker, I would like to be able to work more as a psychologist and that would be a reason for me to change my workplace, but I have not done it so far because I think even the least possible psychological intervention for refugees is a little dreaded. I would do this, if I was sure it would be done in the right way and, from what I've encountered so far, this isn't the case"¹⁹. In addition to the issues related to the contracts and duties assigned per se, working conditions on the field were often difficult to manage.

In the camps, hotspots or even at the hotels, turmoil can occur between asylum seekers or between asylum seekers and aid workers. It is quite common that due to the extreme tension field workers need to leave the camp urgently. Such tensions have in several cases resulted in murder or severe injury of asylum seekers. On 3 August 2018, just a few days after finding out that I was pregnant, a young man was stabbed in front my eyes by one of his compatriots. This incident caused me severe distress and the doctor who was monitoring my pregnancy suggested to start searching for

¹⁶ Interview, 11 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

¹⁷ Interview, 3 March 2019, Athens, Greece

¹⁸ Interview, 3 March 2019, Athens, Greece

¹⁹ Interview, 27 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

another job²⁰. Even though I tried, jobs that had nothing to do with the refugee crisis were very few and my qualifications weren't adequate enough to be selected. A few months later, during the seventh month of my pregnancy, a young Kurd who was regularly involved in several fights, abusing drugs and hurting himself asked me to write a report mentioning that he had stopped abusing drugs, in order to be transferred to an apartment. When I explained why I couldn't do that, he left enraged from my office. Some of my colleagues and I feared he might try to take revenge²¹. These stressful conditions often had as a result for many aid workers to be going through a meltdown. Furthermore, aid workers, in many cases, have to work for many hours during the evening or during the weekend, while those working in the refugee apartments carry an emergency phone with them at all times. An emergency phone is a mobile phone aid workers take in turns for some days of each month and is used in order to respond to emergency calls. In case asylum seekers living in the apartments urgently need something after aid workers' working hours, they can make a call to this mobile and the aid worker responsible for the emergency call that day should respond to their needs. This consequently means that aid workers end up working 24 hours per day, accompanying "beneficiaries" to hospitals or wherever else needed. A colleague of mine told me that four women were delivered in one night, while she was responsible for the emergency phone and stayed up all night long in order to arrange the required procedures for the delivery. The next day she also did her regular shift²². Thus, it becomes evident why someone with significant previous working experience, or someone older or with a family, wouldn't be able or would prefer not to work under such circumstances. Despite hard-working conditions, the humanitarian sector was the only one providing job prospects until the EU-Turkey agreement.

After the EU-Turkey agreement and the subsequent border closure, many international NGOs started leaving Greece as the flows began to gradually subside²³. One after the other, the programs started shutting down or significantly reducing the provided services and available resources. This situation had changed the status of aid workers. Most of the aid workers had now significant work experience, as most of them had worked in several different places, NGOs and positions. Despite this, in fear of remaining jobless and economically insecure, they decided to relocate again, this time to the islands, in order to secure a job, as due to the geographical limitations most of the asylum seekers were confined there, not being allowed to move to the mainland. Furthermore, the available positions were drastically decreased and aid workers should be willing to accept fixed-term positions in places other than their permanent residence. This situation also affected the new incoming social scientists who started working while there were several colleagues more experienced than them and, consequently, they were forced to accept employment terms and conditions they wouldn't otherwise accept. G.H., 31 years old, who had already worked for three different NGOs in three different places, mentions: "I was very stressed when I left Chios. I don't know where you come from, but I felt I couldn't do it again, to move again and live for such a

²⁰ Field notes, 3 August 2018, Athens, Greece.

²¹ Field notes, 12 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

²² Field notes, 26 October 2018, Athens, Greece.

²³ For a timeline of the most important events of the refugee crisis, please see Table no1.

short period on another island”²⁴. This way, aid workers themselves turn into domestic migrants who relocate from time to time in order to keep their jobs. This situation with regard to working conditions was described in almost all of the interviews conducted with the aid workers except for the employees of a small Greek NGO.

The workers in a small local NGO gave different responses to many questions asked throughout the interview, which could be attributed to the working conditions of this organization. This NGO had already been operating several years before the refugee crisis and back then it must probably had been the only organization providing services exclusively to refugees and immigrants. It compensates workers with minimum wage compared to other organizations, whereas it is the only organization employing permanent staff. Moreover, This NGO’s financing varies considerably, as it is supported both by government funds and by foundations, making its funding much steadier and more secure compared to the rest NGOs. This means that the operation of core programs isn’t at stake thanks to such financing resources and there is no continuous risk of them shutting down any time soon. These stable working conditions can foster a sense of security and probably had an impact on the disposition of humanitarian workers.

Financial insecurity along with difficult working conditions and the constant fear of losing their jobs have affected aid workers’ representations of African migrant women and consequently the way they provide them with services. In order to examine the way aid workers represent African women, it is important to examine whose interests are represented by whom and what representations are made (Jacobs - Huey, 2012). Apart from understanding socio-economic conditions in Greece and working conditions in the NGOs, it is also important to interpret our findings and examine what other factors have contributed in shaping aid workers’ representations of African migrant women, which in turn affected service provision.

Shaping representations

A large part of the research conducted on the field of development focuses primarily on institutions rather than on people bringing “development”, possibly due to the self-scarifying narrative which is embedded within the humanitarian sector (Fechter, 2012 p.1387). However, both “personal” and “professional” attitudes are embedded and interrelated, as an aid worker’s relationships, beliefs, systems and values directly affect practice (Fechter, 2012 p.1388). This section has to do with the personality, beliefs, habits, education and socio-economic status of each aid worker affecting the way he/she performed his/her duties as an aid worker. One of the main narratives identified in the interviews was that aid workers weren’t initially interested in working with refugees.

Almost all of the interviewees stated that they weren’t interested in working with the refugee population prior to the refugee crisis in Greece. An aid-worker, working for a local feminist NGO, states: “the truth is that, when I started working, I was more interested in the gender inequality a

²⁴ Interview, 11 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

woman might experience in a relationship. As I came in contact with refugee women, I was intrigued by this other side I came across”²⁵. Another aid worker also working for the same NGO answered: “No, I was never aiming to work with refugees; I began being more interested in it afterwards, but it was not my goal to work here, because I thought things were a bit predetermined by the people working in the field and even more by politics. What interested me in working in this field was the issue of violence against women in their relationship and how a woman can be victimized. This was initially interesting”²⁶. A young psychologist explicitly mentioned she found a job during the refugee crisis not because of her interest in the field but because this was the most popular field with open positions available for social scientists: “Of course it is a job and it was the crisis that urged me to work in this field. The fact that I wasn’t satisfied by my previous jobs, this made me search for some place new to work, and this is how I came in contact with the humanitarian field and the truth is there are many psychologists working in it. It’s a quite popular field nowadays for psychologists, social workers, and what have you”²⁷. A doctor working for an international NGO said that he wasn’t initially interested in working with refugees, but, while waiting for his internship in psychiatry to start, he was motivated by what he was watching on the news and started volunteering while he was a student, and then got hired: “When I began [volunteering] in Thessaloniki, there was a surge in refugee flows; I felt moved by the thousands of people trying to cross the border in Idomeni, so I began [volunteering] immediately. A more practical reason was the suggestion from a friend, who had begun volunteering for the polyclinic, to go and check out their facilities. I said ‘of course’ and this is how I started working there”²⁸. The fact that aid workers were not interested in working with refugees in the first place, as well as that the vast majority had no previous knowledge of specific African countries, means that they first learnt about African women through their practice and NGO training.

Almost all of the aid workers mentioned that they were trained by the NGOs they were working for. A young aid worker vividly described the process a new worker goes through when hired:

“Every newcomer who recently got hired in our organization is advised to go through some books and articles and is also given a written introduction by the team leader or the director. They also arrange some meeting where they have a short discussion regarding the literature they were advised to read and where they can get answer to any questions that may arise. This literature encompasses a variety of issues ranging from guidelines on working with an interpreter, dealing with people who were formerly tortured and/or imprisoned, dealing with people with different cultural backgrounds to instructions of providing first-aid mental health services after a crisis. They cover a wide range of topics and situations and there are a lot of training seminars, workshops and

²⁵ Interview, 22 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

²⁶ Interview, 3 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

²⁷ Interview, 17 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

²⁸ Interview, 15 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

supervision. Every team has a dedicated supervisor with a great deal of expertise, a solid background and years of working experience in the organization”²⁹.

Most of the aid workers answered that they came in contact with African women through this training. When asked about the training, they talked about trafficking. This way, African women are immediately connected to sexual violence, prostitution and prescribed as possible victims. Case workers in asylum services claimed that they weren’t trained in cultural, social or economic issues, but in asylum legislation. In order to decide whether an asylum seeker is granted asylum or not, they consult UN reports. One case worker said: “Yes, there are pieces of information available about the country of origin found on websites provided by the UN and other sources. In fact, one aspect of deciding is taking into consideration such information regarding, for example, a tribe, a religion, customs, etc. However, we did not focus on this during our training. They mostly worked on handling international protection requests in general”³⁰. She continued:

“These are basically reports of international organizations. There are two main sources that we consult. If you want, I could share them with you, so you can take a look and get familiar with it. For example, if someone comes from Iran and is homosexual, we have to find out what the situation is like in Iran and refer to the Iranian constitution, mainly because these countries have different customs and social structures. For example, you can see actual reports and recordings about Iran and how homosexuals are treated there.”³¹

Another case worker in asylum services mentioned: “The training provided is not that specialized. At this moment, I can’t imagine there’s anyone knowing more about Africans than I do, except if they themselves come from Africa, especially regarding marriages, FMG, childhood, trafficking... So, the academic part doesn’t really help in our case, it’s much more general while we need a more hands-on approach. [...] [W]e need a very specific knowledge about, for example, if an Ethiopian woman who had declined to circumcision can live alone in an Ethiopian village.”³² According to the aforementioned parts of the interviews, it is clear that aid workers familiarize themselves with the population they will be in contact with through NGO training and reports, something that may have shaped as well their representations about African women, a process similar to the one described in the case of UK border forces.

Olga Jubany (2011) describes the process of training UK border forces go through for screening new arrivals of asylum seekers. According to Jubany (2011p. 81), immigration officers “establish their own rules” or “adapt the existing ones” and this way they create unwritten rules which become their main tools put to use in their everyday practice. Similarly, aid workers and asylum

²⁹ Interview, 19 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

³⁰ Interview, 14 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

³¹ Interview, 14 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

³² Interview, 17 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

case workers use the knowledge produced by their practice and everyday contact with their colleagues and superiors in order to deal with African women.

Different answers were given from aid workers working in small local NGOs, the one which also had relatively stable funding and working conditions. All of the four employees interviewed had been working at this center for several years and only one was hired at the beginning of the crisis. Another significant point is that they felt closer to refugees through their personal stories. More specifically, one psychiatrist mentions: “It has occurred to me and, as it happens, I have an understanding of what it means to be a refugee. My father, when he was just three years old, had left Greece when the Civil War was taking place and spent the biggest part of his life abroad. So it seemed a bit familiar to me.”³³ The other psychiatrist from the center also identified herself with migrants and asylum seekers:

“I have a personal refugee-related story, because we had gone to Switzerland due to the Junta³⁴. This was when my mother went to prison and after that she could not get a job. My parents were separated, the situation was really bad, and my mother sent us at some point to Switzerland with a large suitcase without us knowing, thinking that we were going to learn French for two weeks during the summer. Finally, she managed to join us there and we all stayed in Switzerland as political refugees, so you did not need to say that, but I finally found out that even though our own situation was relatively light and “neat” when we went to Switzerland, there were many things I could identify with, when you have to abruptly change country and leave everything behind you, not knowing anything about what the future might hold. This feeling more or less”³⁵.

This way, the relationship between the “expert” and the “beneficiary” alters, as the aid workers had been through a similar experience and recognized in the asylum seekers an experience they’ve been through too.

The fact that almost every field worker 1) had never dealt with refugees in the past, 2) didn’t possess any knowledge of the history and culture of the African countries they had been dealing with, 3) started getting familiar with the population they were serving through their work for the NGOs, combined with the overall economic situation in Greece and the job insecurity in the case of most NGOs, led Greek aid workers to become familiar with the African women through their job for NGOs which, in turn, influenced their representations regarding these women.

³³ Interview, 18 January 2020, Athens, Greece.

³⁴ The Greek Junta was a group of militants with far right beliefs who ruled Greece from 1967 until 1974.

³⁵ Interview, 21 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

Being racist and having stereotypes

During the refugee crisis, a lot of vacancies that opened up were covered by aid workers who were already preoccupied or adhered to stereotypes regarding African women. As a result, people working during the refugee crisis were influenced by public opinion and were treating many African women based on stereotypes and racism, something that affected their responses. According to Gill and Good (2019), the case workers' beliefs, daily routine and emotions may determine the outcome of the asylum procedure. In an interview, an asylum case worker described how their beliefs may affect the asylum procedure: "For example, if [you think] a Nigerian is being trafficked, she will get asylum, but if you think that she works as a prostitute, she won't be granted asylum"³⁶. If a case worker believes that African women are immoral and choose to make use of their body in the way previously described, they will be treated differently than those women who are believed to had been forced to prostitution. Again, the same pattern can be detected in such cases: aid workers occupied in big or international organizations and lawyers seem not to notice the stereotypes their colleagues and themselves may be affected by, whereas most of them denied that there is some form of discrimination. For example, a young aid worker working in an international organization mentioned: "I believe there was no deliberate distinction between Africans and these women, and a racist comment was never heard that was targeted against them. There were several racist behaviors that were generalized by the police"³⁷.

On the other hand, aid workers in local NGOs, and especially social scientists, emphasized more the stereotypes existent in the humanitarian field. Political positioning also played a role in detecting stereotypes and racism, as aid workers who seemed more active in social issues brought up the issue of racism. Each aid worker highlighted the stereotypes that were more related to his/her field. For example, interviewees working in feminist NGOs mentioned sexist incidents, doctors mentioned problems concerning access to services, and so on and so forth. V., 35 years old, working in a small feminist NGO, says:

"I believe that many people who work in social services during the refugee crisis are not suitable for this job and that there are several stereotypes (for example, survivors are quite often blamed for being abused). [...] Particularly in the case of African women, there is a narrative that they are prostitutes because this is what they know to do. As sexuality and morality are looser in African women, there is a general stereotype that they are prostitutes, and a feeling that they move and dress differently. [...] I don't know how to express myself, I'm getting angry. [...] [t]hat it is their choice to use their body this way. [...]"³⁸.

Another case worker from the same organization stated:

³⁶ Interview, 14 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

³⁷ Interview, 9 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

³⁸ Interview, 12 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

“I think that there are a lot of unsuitable people working in the field of refugee crisis management and in social services. I also know that there are many stereotypes and preconceptions, blaming, for instance, the survivor or the victim in case of being abused. [...] As far as African women are concerned, there is a narrative that they are prostitutes in general, because this is what they have learnt to do, as their societies may be freer in terms of sexuality and morality, or because of the distinct way they dress or move. I don’t know how to express myself; this is really irritating. In addition, there is a belief that it is their choice to use their body in a certain way in order to get pregnant and to be characterized as vulnerable”³⁹.

Another aid worker who works for an international organization denied at first the existence of stereotypes in the humanitarian field, but then she stated: “I think that men, at least, are more verbal when they see them because they get sexually aroused. Most of the comments someone may hear during a day are about African women, because someone can see their body underneath their clothes”⁴⁰.

A lawyer who works in a large Greek NGO, despite the fact that she didn’t explicitly refer to racism or stereotypes, revealed some information regarding the discrimination that African women go through during their asylum cases, as they are stereotypically considered as immigrants and not as asylum seekers: “I want to say that many times an asylum application or an appeal against a negative verdict would get rejected, surprising us because we all had a strong feeling that everything would end up as expected. It seems that the asylum service is negatively predisposed to African asylum seekers, such as those from Congo or Cameroon, considering them more as immigrants rather than refugees”⁴¹.

A politically active doctor who works in a medical organization narrates an incident of racism against African women:

“One of our colleagues suggested a gynecologist, who she knew, to a woman and she had been visiting that doctor for one year. This woman suffered from uterine prolapse as a result of sexual abuse and should wear a special device which keeps the uterus in the right place. For that reason, she went to that doctor to have it appropriately placed. We were always asking her about her condition and she was always replying positively. After one and a half year, though, we found out that the gynecologist had never examined her and never performed a Pap smear test. Her behavior was unacceptable and unprofessional. We were trying to reach her for 6 months and she never replied our phone calls. So, the woman never made an asylum request, fearing a negative outcome judging from the bad previous experience she had at the gynecologist’s office. All that time she was avoiding to share her negative experience, and she was afraid to make complaints that the doctor didn’t do her job as she should, fearing that she couldn’t find another gynecologist or another person to take care of her and tricking herself to believe that everything was alright. Eventually, she kept nodding positively for a whole year and a half every time she was asked this

³⁹ Interview, 22 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁴⁰ Interview, 3 March, Athens, Greece.

⁴¹ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

question. She made herself believe that. And she replied again in a condescending way when I told her that this behavior was harmful to herself and that we should send her to another gynecologist. All this is quite enlightening about the impact that our experience has on shaping our judgement criteria and the behavior we consider acceptable. [...] We were starting to suspect that something was going wrong, when we began looking into why this woman didn't have a Pap smear test result in her file or why she never brought back any test results to us. We began looking for the gynecologist on the phone and after many failed attempts to reach her, as she wasn't replying to any of our calls, we eventually found out that she never examined the woman at all"⁴².

Stereotypes and racist behaviors were quite common among the medical personnel of the humanitarian sector and quite often it was associated with prostitution. For example, an aid worker from a feminist NGO stated: "Many doctors say that African women spread their legs to earn money, and then come to our clinic and claim that they were raped. [...] In addition, in Lesbos there was a point where some women were prostituting themselves and someone could see the medical staff making some very negative comments about that, just because those women come from Africa. Like they do it in order to come to Moria pretending that they are abused and mistreated. There was overall suspicion regarding those women. These people, though, were the exception; the vast majority were people that didn't judge people based on the country they were born in, their skin color, etc. These comments, also, were , you know, mainly made by men"⁴³.

The interviews presented above prove how African women are stereotypically linked to prostitution. This link has led doctors from medical NGOs to challenge their claims regarding abuse. When women asked for help, aid workers assumed that they had not been raped, but had consented to have sex with customers. Their voice couldn't be heard by aid workers who had already formed an opinion about them.

“Liars”

An important issue that came up during the interviews and is related with aid workers' stereotypes about African women is that some of them believe that African women lie. Regarding this issue, aid workers were divided in two categories. The first contains the aid workers who argued that their colleagues don't believe African women's stories, while the second contains the aid workers who explicitly claimed or implied that they themselves don't believe or have doubts about African women's stories. What we noticed is that the views of aid workers were related to their studies and their professional role and tasks. More specifically, lawyers and aid workers in international organizations were skeptical about the honesty of their “beneficiaries”. In addition, interviewees who were social scientists seemed more likely to believe the stories of those women, while others who worked in examining their asylum case were more suspicious. Another interesting observation

⁴² Interview, 15 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁴³ Interview, 22 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

is that women working in the feminist NGO or in SGBV programs were amongst those who doubted the most the truth of the stories. What they considered about almost every behavior that they couldn't explain was that women lied because they were victims of some form of abuse, mainly trafficking.

The opinion that African women are not believed by the authorities and/or the aid workers when they claim abuse was expressed by a lawyer responsible for the abused women's apartments in one of the largest Greek NGOs. She mentioned to me that she was shocked from the fact that Congolese women were denied asylum. The lawyer stated characteristically: "It's as if they *want* to deny asylum to Congolese women *on purpose*, I don't know why this happens, it's as if they're biased or they follow orders"⁴⁴. When I asked her how the authorities justify the decision of their reports, she answered that they doubt the fact that the children of the African woman come from rape and even the fact that these women were raped. For example, she stated that according to the authorities, an African asylum seeker was imprecise during the narration of her story even though she wasn't. They assume that the rape didn't happen if the woman doesn't burst into tears while talking about her rape. On the other hand, if she cries and delays her answers due to being emotionally upset, they state that she was imprecise and that she couldn't answer their questions. After our short dialogue, I asked the lawyer to give me an interview about her experience in working with African women. In her interview, she mentioned: "There are rumors about the same stories being repeated over and over again. It has been heard that there is a story which is copied and told many times"⁴⁵.

In addition, even though the lawyer said that African women answer in detail her questions, when I asked her how she knows whether they lie to her, she replied:

"There are vague or contradictory claims. Despite their claims that they had left their country due to political beliefs, when they were asked about the political leader that they were supporting, they couldn't give a detailed response. Someone would expect to hear details about the party they were supporting or about notable events that took place, like a demonstration and possible outcomes, such as victims. They may also claim that they have changed their religious beliefs, but when they were asked about basic concepts of their new religion, they failed to give a proper answer. Unanswered questions regarding major religious festivities or important writings of their new religion, suggest that their claims were used to achieve to get asylum"⁴⁶.

Then, I then asked her what she does if a woman comes to her and doesn't have a strong case for her asylum and if she helps her to make a strong case by altering some parts of her story. She gave the following answer: "I don't want to build everything on a lie. A woman may say everything according to our plan and yet the asylum case worker may figure out the false claims, as she almost

⁴⁴ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁴⁵ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁴⁶ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

certainly will be vague at some point. But to be honest, I don't really agree with lying. I don't think that it's ethical. I try to focus on the parts which I think she can get better results from"⁴⁷.

From the aforementioned interview, we can conclude that even if the lawyer seemed to support African women, she provided several examples which indicate that they tend to lie. The most important point, however, is when she stated that she considers unethical to lie in order to get asylum.

Another aid worker, working in a large Greek NGO in a specific program for gender violence mentioned to her colleagues that she had doubts regarding the truth in those women's stories:

"I spoke with some colleagues and they told me that they had heard many women claiming that they were saved from Turkey by a client. However, I tried not to search their claims more thoroughly, because I thought that were desperate to come to Greece and to Europe. In order to achieve that, they would say anything they had to. I will not dwell on it; it is their own choice and it's the asylum responsibility to judge their claims"⁴⁸.

Even though the aid worker mentioned above that she didn't want to doubt African women's stories, the fact that she brought the issue up and she "tried not to doubt their stories" as well as the observation that some stories were repeated and that this might mean that African women lie, imply that she has some concerns, too.

The case worker goes on elaborating how this impacts the provision of services: "There are colleagues who generally believe that the applicants are lying to us. There is a group of people who do not believe the applicants due to their prejudice"⁴⁹.

Another psychologist working in an international organization in an SGBV program comments: "I always believed their stories. I never thought that someone wanted to trick me or tell a false story"⁵⁰, but after a while she continued: "I think that the stories are true and there were reasons why they wanted to leave their country, but from one point onwards the stories began to be the same. There was always someone who brought them to Turkey and from there to Moria. Thus, I started being suspicious. I believe that the stories of those women were not fake, but, for some reason, they did not want to say what actually happened to them. I'm not a police officer or an agent, but I do not believe there is such a good world, neither in Greece nor wherever, where someone finds a woman who is vulnerable and says 'I will save you now'"⁵¹.

As an SGBV expert, the psychologist couldn't explicitly say that she doesn't believe African women because it would affect negatively her identity as humanitarian worker. Instead, she mentioned that it is African women who don't reveal what has really happened.

⁴⁷ Interview, January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁴⁸ Interview, 2 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁴⁹ Interview, 2 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁵⁰ Interview, 27 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁵¹ Interview, 27 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

Another crucial case handled by our mobile unit was an underage girl (around 18) from Eastern Africa who approached our mobile unit to ask our lawyer about her application of relocation. She was living in an apartment for vulnerable women with her daughter. In her initial conversation with our social scientist, she revealed that she was being raped by a close relative father during her early childhood, from whom she got pregnant and gave birth to her daughter when she was 12 years old. Then, she was sold to another family where she was being tortured by her master and his wife, and left to die tied up in a trash bag, in a rubbish dump. A man saw her and helped her cross the borders and get to Greece. During her effort to cross the borders again in order to arrive in Germany, she was raped by the smugglers in front of her daughter. She returned back to Athens, she realized that she was pregnant again and managed to have an abortion. She also complained about the social worker who was responsible for her, for not really helping her.

The members of our team were initially shocked as this was possibly the worst case that we had so far been handling. Speaking with the social scientist who had interviewed her, she mentioned not being sure about the validity of every claim of Maria, as there was, according to her, no substantial possibility to have such a traumatic past and yet not receive appropriate support. She then contacted the social scientist for Maria's apartment, claiming that he mentioned that various NGOs had called him for Maria, as she had been reaching everyone for help. He claimed attempting to arrange appointments with a lawyer and a psychologist for her, while eventually she never showed up. Finally, he questioned the fact of her having an abortion as well as other parts of her story which has, as he claimed, a lot of versions and consequently some of its parts were in her imagination. A few days later, I discussed with the social scientist of our mobile unit the possibility to approach of Maria. "No" she answered, "there is a social worker responsible for her. "Yes, but she is not satisfied with his work and this may be because he is a man". "There is no possibility that these allegations are true and that she didn't receive any help". So, Maria's case, the worst case of abuse our mobile unit had to deal with, was closed and dismissed and T. didn't receive any kind of help. The incidents stated above indicate, in my opinion, that despite the legal achievements, despite our clear guidelines to believe abused women, African women seem to struggle in their attempts to persuade authorities and NGOs to provide them the protection they need.

As I tried to understand what happened with their asylum cases in order to help them, I started thinking about their asylum when listening to their stories as well as reading their decisions. I vividly remember two similar cases about women who left their country (in central Africa) mainly because they were lesbians. Both of them had suffered abuse due to their sexual orientation in their country of origin. The first woman had a negative answer from the asylum services because they doubted the fact that she was a lesbian. During our sessions I asked her if she had any proof of being a lesbian. I asked if she exchanged any emails, messages, or photos with her partner when she was in Africa. She told me that she had a lot of proofs on her cell phone but that she lost it in sea. On the other hand, the other woman from same country didn't lose her cell phone in the sea

and had several proofs for her allegations. She could show to the asylum services photos, emails and messages proving that she was a lesbian in her country of origin⁵².

The most important thing, though, is that I noticed that such asylum cases are judged on the basis of Western standards. When I read the decision of this woman's case, I understood that the case worker asked his/her questions having in mind what it means to be a lesbian woman in Greece or in the Western world. More specifically, he/she stated that the woman didn't always feel that she was a lesbian but she understood it when she was 28 years old. She didn't describe it as something inevitable, something that she couldn't change but she described it more as a way of living and dealing with the continuous abuse of men. She also didn't say that she was in love with her first girlfriend but she described their relationship more like a friendship. Last but not least, her answer to the question of the aid worker when she and her girlfriend first had sex was vague. Understanding your sexuality as something that always existed in your life this way, having intense loving feelings and sexual relationship with your partner is how Western people understand the term "gay" and "lesbian". When I talked to this woman, I felt sure that she was a lesbian and that she had been punished for it, but I also understood that she described to me what it meant to be a lesbian in Africa and not in Greece. When she narrated her story to me and how she became a lesbian she told me that she met a girl that "introduced" her to lesbianism and that she explained to her that women can be well without men abusing them and without having children to raise. That women can hang around together and have fun. This same word (introduced) was also used by other African women when they narrated their story describing being lesbians as something that wasn't in their nature as it is described in Western societies. Also, the term "lesbianism" implies a philosophy or a lifestyle, and not a characteristic that someone has since their birth. These incidents describe what aid workers think about African women and it also indicates that African women's voices are not heard or are blatantly ignored. This woman attempted to describe her experience of being a lesbian, whatever this means to her and her co-patriots in her country of origin. However, the aid worker thought that she just lied to get asylum.

The lack of interpreters has proven to be critical in several cases. In November 2019, the asylum application of 28 Africans was rejected due to the lack of available interpreters, mainly for sub-Saharan African languages. Even though the announcement of the asylum services mentioned that there were constant efforts to find an interpreter, this wasn't possible and resulted to the rejection of asylum requests by the Asylum Services without conducting an interview required as part of the asylum process. METAdrasi, a Greek NGO, is responsible for providing interpreting services to the Greek authorities, including interviews for asylum applications. As most Africans are not interviewed in their mother tongue, but in English or French, it is highly possible that METAdrasi couldn't provide interpreting services for specific rare languages. Furthermore, it is not clarified whether there had been other attempts to find an interpreter or the asylum seekers' application was rejected because the single NGO providing interpreting services to the Greek authorities didn't have an interpreter speaking their languages. Another important point that shows that the efforts to find an interpreter were very few is that one of the applicants spoke Portuguese. As Portuguese

⁵² Field notes, 12 November 2019, Athens, Greece.

is an official EU language, it is highly possible that a Portuguese interpreter is available in Greece. In addition, all 28 Africans had arrived in Lesbos a few days before the announcement of the rejection of their application, which was only briefly processed. Therefore, the efforts for finding an interpreter weren't "intensive". The applicants also received the decision and justification for the rejection of their applications in a language they didn't understand and couldn't be informed about their right to a lawyer provided by the Greek Asylum Services in order to appeal. In addition, as applicants came from countries with low asylum approval rates, they were held in custody and their appeal was scheduled shortly after their first-degree decision, meaning that after receiving a second negative answer they would be sent back to Turkey. Another interesting point with regard to this case is that all rejecting decisions are signed by the same Superior Officer in the Asylum Offices. The fact that the decision for skipping interviews for 28 applicants was taken by a single person makes it quite possible that this was a result of personal bias and prejudice. The fact that the Asylum Services gave a negative answer to asylum seekers without knowing the reasons they left their country, or without even giving them the chance to defend their application, means that the Greek authorities think that African asylum seekers are first and foremost liars. They lie in order to get asylum and only if they persuade the authorities that they don't lying, that they are genuine refugees, they receive a positive answer. This incident is of utmost importance as it proves the argument of the present thesis argument, i.e. that Africans' voices are muted.

Victims of violence

On one of my very first working days in a Greek NGO, I met one of my colleagues, who was the second psychologist in our mobile unit and provided Greek interpreting services from French. She told me that she was interpreting for the lawyer in some cases involving Congolese women. When I asked her if they were granted asylum she answered: "They don't get asylum. *Every* Congolese woman says she has been raped. Asylum Services don't believe them, so they don't grant them asylum"⁵³.

The representation of African women as victims of SGBV were present in every interview except for the ones given by the aid workers in the local NGO which had stable working conditions. More specifically, the vast majority of aid workers believed that African women had suffered some form of violence. For example, an aid worker from an international organization mentions: "I think 90% or even 100%, of the population I've worked with had been raped, even men"⁵⁴. Another aid worker from a different international organization says: "All women were victims of rape, sexual assault and other sort of abuse"⁵⁵. Of course, the way the rest of the aid workers talked about women who had suffered abuse differentiated depending again on the type of organization. More specifically, aid workers in international organizations spoke as if African women needed saving.

⁵³ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁵⁴ Interview, 22 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁵⁵ Interview, 19 December, Athens, Greece.

The main target of the interviewees was to make African women confess they are victims of sexual violence in order to be able to intervene. For example, a psychologist in an international organization confessed that she even provided her personal phone number to African women in order to be sure that they are safe in Athens: “I felt the need, knowing that I was a little over the limits of my job, to give out my professional phone number to the women's team that went to Athens and we kept communicating, because we told them that we would like to let us know that everything will be fine, and about 3-4 months of constant communication, they told us everything was good”⁵⁶. On the other hand, aid workers in organizations emphasizing more on social issues, such as the feminist NGO, or on cultural issues, or other small local NGOs emphasized on the social conditions that led these women to abuse and didn't link the abuse to their main identity. For example, an aid worker from the feminist NGO comments on abuse: “Yes, I think that these are the reasons. They have lived in areas of great conflict, where female body and existence have been violated in multiple ways. But while they seem so courageous, as they embark, usually alone, on a very risky journey to reach the place they dream of –something very remarkable and laudable–, they unfortunately quite often end up being exploited, probably also due to their skin color, faith in people's intentions, and positive outlook on life. I reckon that the life of African women is so downgraded as no other woman's life on Earth. As poor black immigrants they are in this situation; as already mentioned before, given that in Athens trafficking networks are strong and were established many years ago, they cannot easily get out of them”⁵⁷.

Another main theme that repeatedly came up during every interview, either intentionally or unintentionally, was the roots of sexual and gender-based violence. Aid workers gave different answers depending mainly on their studies and the NGOs they worked for. The reasons there are so many cases of sexual violence among the African population were traced back to a culture of violence, to psychological reasons, to gender roles, to educational reasons and to colonialism. The fact that many aid workers mentioned that they don't know why there is so much violence in Africa is also very interesting, in my opinion, and indicative of the interaction of aid workers with African women. Some of them took a long time to think in order to answer the question and, despite they had all noticed the high percentages of SGBV, they mentioned that they had never thought about this question.

The aid workers who provided a psychological explanation to the question why violence is being repeated in the case of those women here in Greece were a psychologist and a psychiatrist. Except for their studies, which might had affected them, they both worked for the small Greek NGO, which provides mental health services to those women and was the only NGO for refugees and asylum seekers they had been working for. More specifically, these psychologists thought that the reason African women continued their abuse was based on the theory that people tend to relive traumatic events: “That exactly, reliving these experiences. I think it's traumatic that this is actually something quite common happening when an invasion takes place. They have grown somewhat accustomed to such a climate of fear and insecurity and their position does depend very much on

⁵⁶ Interview, 3 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁵⁷ Interview, 22 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

their own needs and wants. And it is not very clear in their minds that they can define what will happen”⁵⁸. According to this explanation, the psychological discourse is evident in defining the reliving of trauma as the main cause of continuous violence. Childhood experiences were also mentioned and an individual solution was proposed: those women should be aware that they can define their lives and respond to their needs and wants. The second psychologist stated: “All this was a rather bizarre situation where she was drunk, lost in her thoughts, [she] was reliving traumatic events, although she was not psychotic. It is like after all this repeated violation and abuse, she somehow distanced herself from her body, viewing it as an object, using it as a tool. It was like there was a great distance separating the identity of the self and that of the body, a great splitting so that a body can exist separately with the mind with you feeling distant from all of this while happening”⁵⁹. With these words the psychologist describes one of the main psychological defense mechanisms of separating the mind from the body, in order to describe the situation she was facing during her repeated rapes while she was living on the streets. A bit latter, commenting on the violence that is repeated here in Greece, she mentioned: “The common ground is the unconscious search for a man who will serve as a guard and may possibly be as aggressive and violent, or sometimes the attempt to make a family. As far as I can see, without extrapolating to every woman who has been abused, there is a tendency for the need of a strong male figure or even a subconscious wish for reenacting the traumatic abuse of the past, entering in a vicious cycle where they are perpetually abused. It is the job of the therapist, not from a moral standpoint or acting as a preacher, to try to listen and to break the vicious cycle of reliving abuse”⁶⁰. It is also indicative of how much the NGO culture affects the representations of aid workers, something that psychologists who worked in other NGOs, which didn’t focus on mental health services, gave different answers when asked about women’s violence.

Lawyers emphasized on education and expressed their opinion that the roots of violence lie in that women are not generally educated, or not properly informed about their rights. Both lawyers were working in large aid organizations (an international NGO and a Greek-based one) and mentioned: “I consider that education plays a valuable role in many aspects of life. It is also related to the social status. In a society where women are supposed to stay at home, obey their husband and are forbidden to receive education at school, they can hardly realize their own potential and reconsider their capabilities. Helping someone to realize their abilities and the abundance of choices they could really make despite what they have learned thinking during their upbringing is a matter of education”⁶¹. The other lawyer said: “There is lack of civility, education and no campaign on human rights. It’s like some countries are detached, trapped in a different era than ours. There is no education, as they consider that what is happening is completely normal and things should be this way”⁶². When I asked her, if she really thought education can help and how this could be done, she replied: “It would be difficult. There could be some positive outcome after intensive effort and

⁵⁸ Interview, 12 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁵⁹ Interview, 19 December 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁶⁰ Interview, 19 December 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁶¹ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁶² Interview, 23 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

difficulties. It could be carried out by international organizations. I will tell you why I say so. There is a case of an African woman trying to campaign in favor of some particular populations in her country who was thought to have the support of the local governor, but she ended up being abducted and raped. It is not easy”⁶³. She then told a story of a woman activist who got raped and was tortured because of her work, presenting this way every local attempt as inferior to ours and doomed to fail, and continues: “Things could turn out to be better, if frequent interventions, campaigns and other activities were to take place along with volunteering to disseminate information and educate local people; they could see that there is a working system of prevention and rehabilitation. Most of them are clueless about such prospects”⁶⁴. In this case, education is viewed as both the source of violence and the solution to it.

One of the lawyers working in one of the largest international organizations also linked violence to biological factors, such as DNA: “For me, there are also genetic factors that come into play (regarding violence). It is maybe written in the DNA of populations or nationalities. They are people who have gone through great repression during their lives, so in theory, their behavior could be much more aggressive. I think it is in their nature. I have observed this from people who have received minimal education”⁶⁵. This is probably the most obvious example in the interviews held, of aid workers having stereotypical and even racist opinions about the African population without considering themselves as racist but as people who help them. Quite indicative of how aid workers don’t realize treat African women based on standard stereotypes is the way I first came in contact this interviewee. She was introduced to me by a colleague when I told her I was looking for people who have worked with African population. Both my colleague and she in the beginning of the interview mentioned that they loved African people.

Very few aid workers stated that this situation isn’t traced back to the African countries, but European colonialism. Two doctors, both coming from the same organization, were those who connected the current situation of women in Africa with colonialism. A., mentions: “I don’t think this phenomenon has its roots in the country of origin itself, rather than in postcolonial times. [...] I’m speaking from a personal standpoint. The previous experience of colonial years has been formative in their perception of self-determination and has had a lasting impact on the beliefs of many generations around their sense of belonging and control of the reality around them”⁶⁶. This may be related to the NGO’s attitude against Europe. More specifically, during the refugee crisis and after several reports criticizing European migrant policies, the NGO decided to deny European funding for their programs. As they announced, European Union’s policies focus on preventing asylum seekers from coming to Europe rather than offering the help needed.

Last but not least, some aid workers attempted to explain the repeated abuse implied or even mentioned clearly that rape is considered normal for African women. It is very interesting that this

⁶³ Interview, 23 January 2019, Athens, Greece

⁶⁴ Interview, 23 January 2019, Athens, Greece

⁶⁵ Interview, 17 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁶⁶ Interview, 15 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

claim was made by people who work in feminist NGOs or programs specialized in SGBV, or from people who are politically active. For example, a doctor mentions:

“This influences their perception of rape, rendering it perfectly normal and expected for a woman to succumb to sexual suggestions during her journey from Congo to Athens, something inconceivable for a Greek woman travelling from Athens to London. Actually “perfectly normal” would be an exaggeration, but certainly it is more normalized compared to other population group. [...] The way women narrate their stories is often very typical, something which is obviously influenced by many factors. The way you tell a story, you recall a traumatic event and how it is biologically and psychologically stored in memory has a profound influence on the creation of memory, but nevertheless it is impressive how easily and naturally narrations flow out of them and how much expected this is regarded by them when they are asked to describe what has happened to them. Their ease and comfort to talk to us is certainly also culturally-driven. It would be very hard for a woman from Syria to consent to a medical examination by a male doctor, especially without another woman or her husband present at the same room. On the other hand, an African woman can very comfortably take off her clothes and her bra immediately, complaining about a problem and an area of concern. So, there is this dimension of feeling comfortable with showing your body”⁶⁷.

A midwife working in the same organization commented on why African women used to give birth to babies from rape: “Look, in these countries, the women don’t even understand what sexual violence is. It happens so often. Either for punishment or for tradition. Or that being gay and they marry you in order to become straight, or they marry you because your husband died, I don’t know. For them it’s normal. So, I don’t know if it’s so shocking for them as it is for us. Maybe it’s a small part of their everyday life”⁶⁸.

In the section of SGBV, prostitution and trafficking was included as well. In very few interviews, African women weren’t connected directly to trafficking. In most cases, it was seen by all of the aid workers interviewed as a necessary way in order for African women to earn some money or to find a place to stay. In all interviews, women were constructed as victims of a trafficking network which is constituted by men who exploit them. V.K. working in a feminist NGO says: “Look, I consider that the trafficking network of African women is way greater and established long before the outbreak of migration flows. It is something which I also know from the women, who approached the employability service, even if they didn’t disclose something like that because of the service’s nature. They wouldn’t reveal something, but a woman who has no food, no money, no place to stay and uses a very expensive smartphone and high-priced accessories, is a warning sign for what is going on behind the scenes. Unfortunately, women in Africa have experienced the worst forms of gender-based violence, abuse of other forms and torture one only can imagine. This is real. Their body has been objectified in such a way, as it had been repeatedly raped throughout

⁶⁷ Interview, 28 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁶⁸ Interview, 13 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

this journey, that I honestly regard that it is very easy for this exploitation and abuse to continue also in Greece. It isn't a matter of choice"⁶⁹.

Another psychologist working in a program for SGBV says about prostitution: "From those women's department (in Moria) there were always two or three African men who approached the containers and spoke with them, and a question that we were asking to the groups was if this was someone they knew, the number of women speaking with these men never revealed that they knew them, while it was obvious they did. Something strange was happening, something strange was in the air. It may sound like bias, because these women were marked as being trafficked"⁷⁰. This quote is important as it shows that the aid worker couldn't justify her claims that African women had been trafficked. Her answer is vague and refers to an opinion she had while she worked. This discourse about trafficking was one of the very few reasons that made aid workers pay attention to African women. If African women matched this discourse, they would then be provided services.

On 10 January 2020, an African woman asked for help from the organization where I worked, as she had recently delivered a baby but was homeless. I decided to meet her in order to assess her condition and decide whether the organization could provide services or not. When I visited her she told me that she was living in an apartment in Athens, but she didn't want to return there, as the man who officially rented her the apartment asked for more money than she could afford if she wanted to keep the baby in the apartment. The woman was a recognized refugee who had left from a Greek island willingly, as the conditions in the camp were not good enough for her pregnancy. The fact that she left on her own as well as that she was a recognized refugee made it extremely difficult for her to be accepted in any accommodation program. I had already noticed that African women were not easily accepted for accommodation and I knew that even though she was very vulnerable, she wouldn't be able to find a place to stay. I also knew that the only chance she had to be accepted for accommodation was to highlight the fact that she was exploited by someone. When I mentioned the details of her case to my supervisor, she told me that the woman was not eligible for accommodation, but when I mentioned that the woman was exploited by a man who was asking her to pay an amount of money she couldn't afford for an apartment with extremely bad conditions, my supervisor told me that she had earned a place in the accommodation center. She also told me that she would send a request for approval to our superiors in order for the woman to be accommodated. When I checked my emails to see the request, I saw that the woman was described as a possible victim of trafficking, even though I never thought or mentioned that she might had been trafficked. One of our colleagues mentioned that we could not assist her to find accommodation as she didn't match the required criteria, but then a much senior colleague told us that because of the fact that she was possibly a victim of trafficking, we should skip the usual procedure and provide her with accommodation in order to examine her case closely. When I met my superiors in person, I was asked if I thought that that woman was a victim of trafficking. Despite the fact that I didn't think so, I tried to give a rather vague answer mentioning that she had

⁶⁹ Interview, 22 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁷⁰ Interview, 27 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

been exploited and might have been trafficked. In the end, the woman was indeed provided with accommodation, not because she was vulnerable or could possibly end up on the streets with a newborn, but because she was described in a way that matched the criteria for those categories assisted by the NGOs.

No place to call home

One of the main issues that arises both in the interviews and in the field is the issue of housing, especially for African women who had suffered sexual violence in the past. At a first reading, the matching up requirements (analyzed in Chapter 1) were introduced to ensure the peaceful coexistence of women in the apartments. However, if we examine them more thoroughly, we will come to the conclusion that African women are excluded from accommodation. As the Syrian and Afghani women population is significantly more numerous than the African one, it is much easier for women in those two groups to meet the requirements and consequently get a house than it is for African women, especially when the latter come from countries which generate only small flows of migrants seeking asylum in Greece.

This discrimination regarding the housing in apartments was noticed by some NGO workers, too. An aid worker, who has studied sociology and works for a Greek NGO stated:

“They are not as satisfied as they would wish. Many of those who are relocated in some apartments are vulnerable. It has happened for some beneficiaries not to be able to find housing due to the constant arrival of new immigrants on the island, including some cases of vulnerable people. There are roughly 200 people residing in the apartments. Some come from African countries, but they have to meet some requirements in order to be placed in an apartment. There have to be people speaking the same language and have the same abilities to fit well together. Eventually, they find a house, but probably not what they initially hoped for”⁷¹.

During the first years of the refugee crisis there were also other accommodation schemes, except for ESTIA, like apartments for abused women. For example, in the NGO I worked for, 40 out of the 70 women in apartments for abused women came from Africa. This information as well as the fact that the flows of African migrants weren't so high shows us the urgent need to accommodate African women. Despite these restrictions and the reducing refugee flows, African women seem to be those who need protection the most. The majority of women that live in protected apartments come from DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana and Cameroon.

Another interesting point emerged from a question I asked to one of the aid workers in the apartments. I asked her how so many African women ended up living in the apartments despite the fact that they had not approached our mobile unit, even in cases of abuse. She answered that

⁷¹ Interview, 12 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

the vast majority of those women were sent to them by NGOs that operate on the islands, or from apartments of NGOs for underage girls⁷². The so-called hotspots are places of restricted access where asylum seekers reside until their claim is examined. NGOs work at the same place. On the one hand, this means that women have no other facilities, while on the other hand, every potential problem that arises is restricted to that specific area and thus, it can be identified and resolved easier. For vulnerable cases, like that of a single-parent family or abused women, the restrictions imposed on the transportation of immigrants were lifted. Such immigrants are able to travel to Athens where their claim can be examined. It is likely that it could be an important motivation for African women. On the other hand, underage girls who reside in shelters in Athens and come of age have usually been sent to our unit. This implies that it is rare for adult women to approach an NGO and make an accommodation request unless they live in a restricted area where NGO workers can meet them on a daily basis.

Many social workers have told me that they are very suspicious about African women, as according to their opinion they usually work as prostitutes and sometimes they are also victims of trafficking. For example, a colleague of mine told me a story about one of the apartments she was responsible for. She told me that she visited without warning an apartment where women from Ghana resided and when she went in, she saw two men. She told me that it was obvious that one of them was the trafficker and the other the client. Then, she called the police who arrested the two men.

In Foucault's (2012) *Panoptikon*, the measures that were taken during the 17th century in a town that suffered from famine are similar to those that social workers implement in order to "guard" the apartments. According to this, the whole town is divided in neighborhoods and each neighborhood has a guard. The militia is constituted by virtuous citizens that aim to prevent robbery and riots. A supervisor visits the neighborhoods that he/she is responsible for in a daily basis in order to see if the rules are met, if people in the houses need something as well as if sick people or dead bodies are hidden in the houses. The constant control of the apartments, which becomes even stricter for African women and requires the collaboration between the social workers, their supervisors as well as the donors, aims mainly to ensure their compliance. Every time a social worker visits an apartment, the woman living in it presents herself, and the worker judges whether she can continue living there or not. A woman who has worked as an interpreter in several NGOs and is a refugee herself mentions regarding the apartments: "They are hosted in shelters where the living conditions are not always good. Most of them share their room with four or five other women. In addition, when someone lives in a shelter has a very strict program regarding the food, the rules, the outing; in general, what is allowed to do and what is prohibited. They have a very strict schedule that makes them look like they live in a prison, they are checked about the time they come back and the time they go to the shelter"⁷³. The intention of social workers to check African women's behavior in the apartments was obvious for one of the interviewees. An aid worker, who worked as a lawyer in apartments for abused women stated: "We were visiting the apartments quite often. I remember a house where Ethiopian women lived.

⁷² Field notes, 27 April 2017, Athens, Greece.

⁷³ Interview, 21 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

It was always so clean. On the other hand, the apartments of Cameroonian and Congolese women were very dirty, and I couldn't understand how they could live there. They didn't wash the dishes; their stuff was thrown all over the place"⁷⁴. In this case, we conclude that despite African women were provided with a house, they didn't have a place to feel like home. Aid workers visited them in the apartments and in some cases, they came to conclusions about their hygiene, their culture (as it is implied in the case of the Ethiopian women in contrast with the Cameroonian and Congolese ones) as well as their relationship with men.

A special group

From the interviews with field workers, one could presume that African refugees, and especially African women, seem to constitute a distinct group of the refugee population. This can be deduced from many factors, ranging from the reason they chose to leave their countries to their current standard of living here in Greece and their access to services. It should be noted that refugees from African countries are those who explicitly raised their concerns about discrimination against African immigrants. The reason of this differentiation of African women may lie in their intersectionality and, more specifically, on the fact that they are usually poorer, of different skin color and sometimes inadequately educated in comparison to Syrian, Iraqi or Afghani women. Very few of the interviewees clearly mentioned that there are factors which render them a special group compared to other asylum seekers, even though this could be deduced from what they said. This differentiation of African women can also be seen from being kept isolated in a specific ward in Moria, one of the Greek camps associated with the worst living conditions. According to the interviewees, they were housed in a ward made exclusively for them near the place where refugees under eighteen were accommodated. A possible reason for this is that they were considered as more vulnerable than the rest of the women in the camp for various reasons.

For example, many of the women from Cameroon that I met had left their country because they weren't heterosexual – an important parameter, if we take into consideration that the vast majority of the asylum seekers are Muslim and consider being homosexual as a sin. For this reason, they are often bullied by the rest of the residents. In addition, the majority of the asylum seekers from other nationalities were travelling with their families or relatives. The cases of single women travelling alone were very few. Women who travel with their husbands or are generally accompanied by men are less affected by their gender during migration, as they have some form of protection. On the other hand, African women travel alone quite often. In addition to this, the hotspots on the islands are overpopulated, with the majority of the asylum seekers living in nearby areas in tents. This renders African women more vulnerable as anyone can enter their tents if they wish to or attack them, if they walk alone at night. This lack of security has forced several women to leave from the islands on their own, even when geographical limitation still applies.

⁷⁴ Interview, 7 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

When they are granted asylum, even though they are typically allowed to travel to the mainland, in fact they remain trapped on the islands. According to the regulations, if an asylum seeker is officially registered in a camp and leaves on his/her own will, he/she is excluded from the cash program and is not allowed to be registered anywhere else and to be assigned to an apartment or a camp. Therefore, African women are trapped in hotspots that are not safe for them and in being unable to travel to the mainland, since they won't be eligible for any available program. Despite this, several African women chose to come to Athens either because they can't continue living in the camps or because they think that, if they throw away their papers, they can be re-registered in Athens. The fact that African women constitute a special group among other refugees is evident from interventions other than their access to accommodation facilities.

An interpreter I interviewed happened to have worked for the aforementioned cash transfer program. During the interview, he mentioned that even though every asylum seeker had the right to apply for cash, the instructions given by his superiors were that priority should be given to asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan. As he revealed, despite many African women applied for cash, the waiting time for the approval of cash assistance was incredibly long – if it was provided at all. An asylum case worker mentions:

“We have clearly seen people getting help after returning from the Syrian war for example and, thus, being of highest priority. Moroccan and Algerian applicants, mostly men, do not receive any help from NGOs, but a Syrian will. [...] Africans are neglected compared to other immigrants. Their treatment by the asylum services and by NGOs obviously has to do with their nationality. [...] These applicants, for example, who come from Middle East and who are part of the so-called “*avante-garde*” of the immigrant scale are always hosted in an NGO house, hotel or some other structure. On the other hand, all of my applicants from Northern Africa have either rented a home on their own, or they are homeless living out on the streets. The adjustment factor, which comes actually first, is considered vital, yet they do not receive any financial support. That can also be seen from their lack of access to any related provisions. In particular, there is the “cash” program of UNHCR, for instance, which they are entitled to, but they aren't even aware of it and I had to inform them during the interviews about it, so they could make a call and find out what they could do to get it. On the other hand, an Iraqi or a Syrian will come and this framework will exist, which is the first framework of protection. This will yield, I presume, some aftermath”⁷⁵.

Another interpreter who has been working in many NGOs for several years explicitly mentions: “I think they give priority to Syrians and Iraqis, since they are considered war countries, and they don't even examine asylum seekers. This means that they are granted with asylum immediately. 90% of them are recognized refugees from the moment they submit their application. [...] I think these programs were designed for Syrians”⁷⁶. It is worth mentioning that the interviewees who clearly mentioned that African women are being discriminated are refugees themselves. A psychologist working in a small Greek NGO seems to have a different opinion arguing that aid workers are not familiar with the situation in Africa and for this reason they exclude African

⁷⁵ Interview, 15 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁷⁶ Interview, 2 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

women: “I have the feeling that the African people are less known to the services. And it is somewhat less discernible to the services who are immigrants or which African countries are under ongoing war or totalitarian regimes”⁷⁷. That was also supported by the doctor working in an international medical NGO, but this time regarding discrimination in asylum specifically:

“Having read negative verdicts of Africans’ asylum having been rejected, I would say that their perception of who needs asylum is a cause of concern. Many times, an application is evaluated by performing a Google search. For instance, they just read the first two pages of the Google search results to get informed about the situation in Burundi. This reveals ignorance and indifference from Europeans towards the situation in Africa. Yes, it must suck to be there, but not so much, not like in Syria where people are being bombed. I say it simply and in a slightly ironic way to emphasize on what I previously mentioned. The current situation in sub-Saharan Africa is a result of the European interventionist policy, something that Europe chooses to conveniently overlook.”⁷⁸

As far as their journey and the reasons behind such a decision are concerned, despite the observation of field workers that African women had been travelling alone, they failed to provide any particular explanation for doing so when asked, with the exception of an interpreter who – being a refugee himself – suggested that violence exerted by some family member was a common reason. He also thought that they were leaving their children behind due to their preference to travel with visa and their inability to issue one for their kids. I had encountered the same claims many times before as a justification for leaving their families behind.

One issue not often raised, is that, unlike other asylum seekers, many African women wish to remain in Greece rather than cross the borders and go to another country, e.g. Germany. When NGO workers were asked to provide an explanation, they didn’t manage to come up with a specific reply, except for one who said that we share a common cultural background: “Most Africans, I believe, would like to continue living here in Greece; they don’t seem to have in mind to go somewhere else like Germany, as other groups want [...]. They may find Greece a hospitable country, despite probably living detached in a camp and I think their way of thinking resembles ours. They can see it in our behavior, in our dress code, in the way that we hug or kiss. I think they are very close to our expressions. Very few of them have mentioned that they want to go somewhere else. Ideally they would like to find a job to make a living and create their own life here”⁷⁹. An interpreter, however, who was himself a refugee, pointed to a possible lack of resources compared to fellow Syrian, Iraqi or Iranian immigrants, which hindered them from paying smugglers to carry on with their journey.

Aid workers who had worked on the islands mentioned that one of the women’s main requests was to allow them to leave the island and travel to Athens, while workers in Athens revealed that quite often African women, after their request of lifting their ban on travel gets declined, relocate illegally to Athens, and, as a result, are being denied of all of our services. This way, it is suggested

⁷⁷ Interview, 19 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁷⁸ Interview, 15 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁷⁹ Interview, 3 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

that their requests for lifting travel limitations are met with rejection more often than those of immigrants from other nationalities. It could also suggest that living conditions on the islands are unbearable for this particular subgroup.

G. H. working for a feminist NGO mentions:

“She was raped by an Arab speaking man. She asked for help from a particular organization and eventually left as there was no department of social service in this organization. Being desperate and out of fear, she accepted the offer of some random guy who calmed her down and promised her a place she could live, yet she ended up being sexually abused every night by different men. As a result, something should be found urgently. What was really striking, was that the organization where she initially asked for help, admitted to her that she was exactly the kind of person they were mainly aiming to aid. Yet there was no interpretation in French and many girls with similar stories ended up receiving no help from this organization. Also, when she came in contact with my EKA, I was informed that they couldn’t accommodate people on a Friday. I want to make clear that the response of the society is somewhat slow”⁸⁰.

A midwife in a medical organization for SGBV mentions: “Usually, those who get raped are homeless, and they are not raped by African population. Usually, it’s a group of three people, Arabs, Pakistanis, Afghanis... they don’t understand the language... and they drag her to a dark corner... two of them hold her and the other one [...]”⁸¹.

These narratives from aid workers in specialized programs of SGBV are important because the fact that African women are a special category of refugees is presented. It is evident that one reason they get abused in Greece is the fact that they experience racism even from other asylum seekers.

Except for the apartments, our mobile unit visited also Kypseli, a neighborhood densely populated with African women, only once per week, while the other mobile unit didn’t visit Kypseli at all. After two months, we stopped visiting this area, as African migrants weren’t approaching us at all. We ended up waiting for hours in vain during our shift. We moved to another area near Kypseli, Patisia, but the same thing happened again. This implies not only that NGOs don’t quite include the African population in their interventions, but also that African people themselves avoid approaching the same organisations for covering their basic needs. The fact that only one unit out of two visiting their neighborhoods once a week shows negligence from the side of NGOs (only 1 out of the totally 8 shifts). Beyond that, having seen the difficulties which were arising during our intervention, we never really questioned their attitude of not approaching us, nor did we make any meaningful adaptations to our strategy of approaching them. On the contrary, both areas were soon neglected from our part.

⁸⁰ Interview, 11 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁸¹ Interview, 13 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

Conclusion

Many aid workers, especially lawyers and those who work in international organizations or for the Greek authorities denied that African women are discriminated. Yet, this is not what the material presented in this chapter suggests. The interaction of African migrant women with each other, with the authorities and with aid workers have shown that they have more complex personalities and lives than the “victims of SGBV” or the “prostitutes”. However, these stereotypical classifications often prevail and the assessment of their cases are based on those identities. In order for refugees to be integrated into Greece and to be provided with the protection they ask for, it is essential that we critically examine all institutions and practices and use the insights gained to foster hospitable living conditions and promote social justice.

Chapter 3: African women

Introduction

How did African women migrants perceive the services provided by the NGOs? Are they helpful to them or not? If not, how do they cope with their everyday difficulties? What is their opinion about aid workers? Do they have stereotypes about aid workers?

As already mentioned, in the camps aid workers are working mainly with refugees coming from Middle Eastern countries, and fail to take into consideration the particular circumstances of African women. This leads to inadequate services toward this population stemming from a distorted view of their conditions, perceptions, and needs. This doesn't mean that African women are left helpless. They are provided with basic security and services. They understand that the different actors they interact with won't make any changes in service provision beyond basic assistance. Therefore, they take action so as to protect themselves and build a viable life. On the other hand, women in the urban setting are facing severe difficulties and it is almost impossible to find a way out. African women seem to have realized their position and options both in the Greek society and in the specific context of the programs developed to deal with the refugee crisis by various humanitarian organizations. Many of them try to find solutions for their problems through other networks such as community members, churches, or NGOs created and staffed by other migrants like them.

Isolated within the isolated – African women living in camps

On one of the coldest days of the year, a few days after New Year's Eve, I visited the camp for my scheduled appointments. The first of my interviewees came into the container. He was wearing sandals and told me that it was freezing in his room. I asked him whether the air conditioning system was working and he answered negatively. Then, I asked him if he had reported the problem to our service, but he also said no. I asked him why and he responded that he had noticed that the handymen had a lot of work to do. I told him that it's their job to fix his air conditioning system and that it should be prioritized because it was snowing. I then asked him why he was wearing sandals and told him that not only he would freeze to death, but he could slip on the snow and get hurt. I asked him to request proper shoes from the distribution service. He responded that clothes and shoes were scheduled to be distributed on January 15 and he intended to wait until then. I encouraged him not to wait. Later, I met him in the camp and he told me that he was provided with warm shoes and socks. The strange thing was that I had the same conversation with four other beneficiaries that day, all coming from African countries.

That exact day, our team was forced to evacuate the camp as a young Iranian man attacked us and broke our offices. The reason of the attack was that his air conditioning system was leaking water and his mattress got wet. As we were leaving the camp, I couldn't stop wondering why those people had so different reactions.

Tensions in the camps were caused or supported by refugees who had influence on the rest of the community members and were recognized both by asylum seekers and humanitarian organizations as "community leaders". Every time humanitarian organization workers were forced to leave the camp due to tensions, the rest of the community members weren't able to access services whether they agreed or disagreed with what caused the heated situation. The consequences might be critical for some asylum seekers. For example, someone facing an issue with their debit card, might not receive any benefits unless they couldn't solve the issue on time. Similarly, an asylum seeker who had scheduled his/her asylum interview and missed his/her appointment with the legal counselor to prepare for it, could fail the interview or be extremely anxious for the procedure if he/she appeared to be inadequately prepared. In addition, if members of the community with high influence participated in the tensions, then those asylum seekers who were against them or were afraid to express themselves due to the absence of the organization workers from the camp would not express their disagreement. On the other hand, in cases where tensions were orchestrated by "beneficiaries" who weren't "respected" by the refugee communities, they were quite often beaten up or threatened by other asylum seekers, whose access to services was affected by people they didn't care about. As African people constitute a minority group in most camps and usually face racism by other nationalities, they don't have the power to confront the rest of the asylum seekers. Therefore, they have no other choice but to accept living conditions as they are.

This feeling of lack of power and isolation was described during our sessions with an English-speaking woman from Central Africa residing in the camp where I was working. In a session she told me that her mother was arrested and tortured during conflicts between English-speaking and French-speaking people in her home country. As she was also a political activist, she explained that it was very difficult for her to be surrounded by French-speaking people from her country of origin as they reminded her of her mother's torture and death⁸². I realized that she was feeling isolated and discriminated when NGOs made announcements in Arabic, Kurdi and French, but not in English. According to her, this means that, NGOs do not care about her because she doesn't belong to a larger national group⁸³.

Another African woman expressed her distress because she was constantly fighting against her roommates. She complained to me that the other women in the same container were gossiping about her because she hadn't disclosed whether she had a child or not. Other women were mocking her by saying that she wasn't able to have a child⁸⁴, something that is very important in their

⁸² Field notes, 18 September 2018, Athens, Greece

⁸³ Field notes, 26 October 2018, Athens Greece

⁸⁴ Field notes, 29 October 2018, Athens, Greece

culture. This situation made her desperate, as she felt that no one cared about her, but also reminded her of her son who was left back in the country of her origin.

As isolated even from her own community described herself a lesbian African woman who was sharing her container with her partner and with other straight women from the same country. She told me that the other women in the container were constantly bullying her because of her sexual orientation. She also mentioned that they sometimes refused to talk to her and even when they did, they offended her by telling that what she was doing was immoral and that she would be punished by God⁸⁵. In addition to the problems faced by African women and caused by members of their community, they also felt discriminated by asylum seekers coming from Middle Eastern countries.

Except for the aforementioned problems, African women felt discriminated by other nationalities, too. On 15 November, 2018, an African woman approached me and asked me to provide her with a certificate that would help her to move from the camp to an apartment. She seemed very upset and almost cried during our meeting. When I asked her what kind of problems she was facing in the camp, she hesitated to answer. Later, she told me that she was feeling embarrassed. She described that there are several men from other nationalities, such as Arabs and Kurds, who made sexual comments about her while she was making alone in the camp. Then, she told me that she had never slept with a man and that she found their behavior insulting. She also told me that she approached UNHCR's aid workers and explained the reasons why she was upset and why she wanted to move to an apartment. However, they answered that the situation she described was not enough in order to be transferred in an apartment and suggested her to visit a psychologist⁸⁶.

Another woman from Central Africa complained that she was afraid of going out of her container as she was feeling that Arabs and Kurds insulted African women. Then, she told me that even children from the camp threw stones at their doors and their windows. One of those children broke her window. Despite feeling so distressed about this situation, she never reported anything to anyone else but me⁸⁷.

The aforementioned examples prove the discrimination and isolation experienced by African women who live in the camps. Several factors have contributed to this situation, such as the location, the structure of the camps as well as the way asylum seekers were given their apartments. The fact that they constitute a minority and are discriminated from people of other nationalities, even from children, make them feel helpless.

⁸⁵ Field notes, 5 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁸⁶ Field notes, 15 October 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁸⁷ Field note, 29 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

Forgotten - African women living in the city center

African women that live in Athens faced severe problems even in finding a place to sleep. According to a study conducted by the Greek feminist NGO *Diotima* (2020), there is a significant number of homeless female asylum seekers. Most of them come from African countries. From June to November 2019, *Diotima* was offering services to 134 women who had been suffering from some form of SGBV, 99 of whom were homeless. Furthermore, 1 out of 3 homeless female “beneficiaries” in *Diotima* had been suffering from some form of SGBV, which was associated with homelessness. Lack of accommodation or unsuitable living conditions seem to perpetuate the existing violence or even create new forms thereof.

A woman from Eastern Africa was sharing a flat with another African woman working as a prostitute and addicted to alcohol. She was also pressuring her to work as a prostitute, too. The woman was feeling stressed, as she thought that her roommate’s behavior was immoral and that such actions were against her faith in God⁸⁸. On the one hand, she wanted to be accommodated in an apartment but she didn’t have enough money to rent one on her own. On the other hand, what she was going through wasn’t considered a form of abuse and, therefore, couldn’t be accommodated in a shelter. There was no evidence indicating that she was a victim of trafficking. As she couldn’t be classified into any of the existing categories of vulnerability in order to be transferred to an apartment, she kept staying with her roommate and her request was rejected. In addition to the “beneficiaries” who do not meet the vulnerability requirements, there are others who are extremely vulnerable but are not offered accommodation.

Another serious case regarding living conditions of women was the case of two women from another African country. Those women were lesbians and were gang-raped by other asylum seekers in Greece. They both got pregnant and gave birth to their children who they raised all alone living in a very small basement apartment in Athens. The apartment was cold, smelled badly and had no heating. Both women were alcoholic because, as they told me, they wanted to forget their problems. They used to get so drunk that they usually fainted next to their 5-month-old infant babies. As their case was very urgent, they were offered a house within two days after submitting their request, even though the waiting time for approval was considerably longer. They were offered housing on condition that they would immediately quit drinking. However, they refused to stay there and returned to their basement apartment⁸⁹. The two women weren’t assigned an apartment, because they couldn’t comply with the organization’s rules. Despite the fact that there are several important reasons for not allowing abusing drugs or alcohol consumption or prostitution in the apartments, this behavior revealed that the services provided weren’t enough. In order to quit drinking, they would need support and guidance by professionals specialized in addictions. The lack of such support excluded them from protection and left them helpless. It seems that those who needed protection the most were in fact those unable to access it. The more they

⁸⁸ Field notes, 15 March 2017, Athens, Greece.

⁸⁹ Field notes, 20 February 2017, Athens, Greece.

needed “protection”, the more they were left in danger. Some of the colleagues who were aware of those women’s living conditions suggested calling the prosecutor in order to take their children away. This suggestion reveals that aid workers were blaming those women instead of the policy programs, for choosing to continue drinking instead of being accommodated in an apartment. These cases illustrate that African women living in Athens have limited access to protection and support by NGOs. These women struggle to survive on their own.

Negotiating legal status

While discussing with an African woman living in Greece for many years, she mentioned that Greece never provided asylum to African women. Most of them live in Greece under a residence permit and not as refugees. Apart from not being granted asylum, they also mentioned that the delivery of their papers was delayed. Another woman claimed that she was aware of cases where the residence permit was delivered after they died.

Sometimes, people of other nationalities didn’t even get the chance to meet our lawyer and we had to explain to them the importance of the asylum interview and how helpful a meeting with a lawyer could be. On the other hand, African population, and especially African women, was very involved in their asylum procedures. They always showed up to their appointments, attended meetings and info sessions about asylum and Greek laws in the camps, while most of the times they started collecting the required documentation many months before their interview. During our sessions, they mentioned they were nervous about their asylum interview (something I hadn’t heard from other populations) and asked me several questions regarding the procedure, their options, should they receive a negative answer, etc. As they knew that their chances to be granted asylum weren’t as high as those of other nationalities, they started collecting evidence of their persecution in their countries of origin.

A young man from a west Africa country came to visit me in my office and had brought with him a card proving he had joined the opposition party in his country as well as a photo of a poster mentioning that he was wanted⁹⁰. An African woman who was very nervous for her asylum interview asked me several times why some African women get their asylum cases rejected⁹¹. The anxiety these women experienced regarding their asylum procedures was also obvious in another case I handled in a camp near Athens. On 3 January, another African woman came into my office and told me she was thinking of looking for a job in Athens like her friends and leaving the camp. She then told me how stressed she felt about her asylum interview, which was scheduled seven months later, mid-July. She told me that she was thinking to quit her job one or two months before her interview and to return to the camp, in order to have her prepared for the interview. It seems that her asylum case was so important to her that she would even leave her job only to be at the camp preparing for it⁹². In another session, again talking about her asylum case and her anxiety,

⁹⁰ Field notes, 25 October 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁹¹ Field notes, 3 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁹² Field notes, 20 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

she asked why so many lesbian African women's applications are declined and if it's not known in Greece that it's illegal to be a lesbian in African countries⁹³. When her asylum interview took place, I had already stopped working at the camp. However, I received a call by the asylum services telling me that she collapsed right before the interview due to severe stress and she was transferred to the on-duty hospital⁹⁴.

Another case was a Central African woman who was battling with depression. In her trip to Greece, she had been raped multiple times. However, her asylum case was rejected. She had appealed. I asked her if she had explained to the asylum case worker what she had been through and she told me that she didn't want to disclose this information to male asylum case worker. She then showed me the transcript of her interview where she complained to the case worker that she had intense back and abdominal pain and that she faced several gynecological issues. The case worker asked her if she felt comfortable discussing these issues with a man and she responded positively. Later in her interview, she mentioned the harassment she had experienced during her journey with forty men, and, when the case worker asked if she felt comfortable discussing about these things with a man, she again replied positively. The case worker asked the woman if those men tried to hurt her and she said that some of them tried, but others stopped them. When I asked why she didn't tell the case worker that she had been raped multiple times, she told me she had lied because he was a man. This woman, in her own way, had attempted to disclose certain aspects of the ordeals she had been through to the aid worker, but her story was filled with inconsistencies and, as far as I could tell, based on what she told me, she chose to lie on several occasions. It is possible that the case worker could have realized that this woman had a problem discussing what happened to her with a man and this was exactly what made her deny having a problem. The case worker was unable or didn't care to understand the difference in the position between him and that young migrant woman, treating her as equal to him, as if her word had the same gravity as his. In her own way, at least in my opinion, that girl did reveal her rape to the case worker and did make clear that she had a problem discussing it with him but he wasn't willing to listen⁹⁵.

Struggling to make a living

According to Benedetta Rossi (2017 p.7), development projects allowed both colonial and African governments to hire unpaid or poorly-paid workers. Colonial governments adopted a developmentalist stance in order to increase their power in the colonies and presented the developmental projects as beneficial activities. The development discourse renamed forced labor "voluntary work", "participation" and "self-help". After the abolition of forced labor, a part of African workers would have to be paid. However, they were reclassified as "development participants" and "volunteer workers" and became invisible as workers. Due to the economic crisis, Greece couldn't provide jobs to asylum seekers and official refugees. The NGOs renamed

⁹³ Field notes, 8 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁹⁴ Field notes, 12 July 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁹⁵ Field notes, 27 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

their interventions “employability” programs and offered services like “job counseling”. These programs didn’t actually support asylum seekers and refugees in finding a job in a society affected so much by the economic crisis. On the contrary, by offering “job counseling” NGOs managed, intentionally or not, to reproduce themselves.

The NGO programs haven’t been focusing on addressing the employment needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Their main target was to manage an “emergency” case and not to assist asylum seekers and refugees to be integrated into the Greek society. The lack of interventions for integration perpetuated asylum seekers’ dependence on the NGO services. If asylum seekers can’t find a job, they can’t acquire an income, and hence they can’t pay for accommodation and basic needs. The lack of a job entails the continuation of at least three types of NGO programs: the “employability” program, the cash transfer program and the accommodation program. Both the accommodation program and the cash transfer program are provided to asylum seekers as long as they are not able to live on their own. Therefore, if an important number of asylum seekers found a job, two of the most important interventions during the “refugee crisis” would have significantly less “beneficiaries”. And fewer “beneficiaries” means that there is no reason to continue funding the program. On the contrary, with the existing “employability” programs the interventions can continue.

“Employability” programs aimed at aiding beneficiaries in creating their CV and facilitating their contact with potential employers by posting their CV in relevant websites or by creating a pool of CVs sent to collaborating businesses. These interventions are probably regarded as inadequate, dealing with refugees in the same way as Greek workers. More specifically, in refugee camps, social services focused on creating CVs, even though the majority of refugees were occupied as handworkers, usually paid under the table, not officially documented to the competent authorities, which probably meant that there was no need for a CV in order to get employed. Another example of how NGOs fail to assist asylum seekers in finding a job were the workshops regarding job search taking place in several camps. For example, a social worker made a presentation and referred to some Greek and English websites with job offers, even though the participants didn’t speak those languages. Moreover, the social worker told the asylum seekers that they should call the phone number provided and ask the employer some questions⁹⁶! Furthermore, the lawyers made several presentations regarding labor law and rights in Greece, informing “beneficiaries” about the minimum salary, insurance, taxes, etc., as well as about filing a lawsuit against their employer should their rights are violated⁹⁷. This information is, of course, very important and every worker in Greece should know their rights. However, the majority of asylum seekers would not work in legal conditions and pressing charges against their employer would not be an option. As a result, the fact that NGOs kept making presentations about labor rights meant that they fail to understand the position and the priorities of those people and, consequently, fail to meet their needs.

⁹⁶ Field notes, 7 July 2019, Athens, Greece.

⁹⁷ Field notes, 21 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

In addition, NGOs aren't allowed to suggest beneficiaries to certain employers unless a formally approved program is designed (like the one described before). For instance, on 21 December 2018, while I was working in a camp, I saw a social worker talking to someone I had never seen before. When I got closer, I realized that the man was a farmer from the surrounding area looking for people to work at his fields. After seeing the refugees, he was moved by their condition and decided to offer them a job. The social worker explained to him that she wasn't allowed to choose or propose any person to him for recruitment since it was prohibited by the organization. In addition, it would probably cause turmoil among the population, too⁹⁸. Besides the NGO structures and intervention programs, the location of the camps and the requirements for being officially registered, there is also a factor that makes it impossible to find a job. Very few camps hosting African women were located near Athens, while the majority of them was far from Athens or other cities with limited access to public transportation. For example, Ritsona camp is near Chalkida, a small city near Athens with no transportation available. This means that if African women wanted to find a job in Chalkida, they would have to take a taxi and pay 30 euros in total (15 euros for each route). On the other hand, a job in Athens was also an impossible option, because transportation to Athens was available only every Wednesday. On 13 November 2019, an African man told me that he managed to find a job in a garage as car cleaner. He was referred to that job by another African man who had been living in Greece for several years. His job was illegal and part-time, but according to him money was good enough and he needed it to support his family and his children in his home country. His life in the camp, combined with his new job, worsened his living conditions. There was no bus for his return to the camp from Athens and he was forced to sleep in an abandoned building on workdays and return to the camp on weekends to take a shower and stay home⁹⁹.

But living in the camp and working far from it was difficult to bear. There was no bus route for his return to the camp from Athens, forcing him to sleep in an abandoned building on workdays and return to the camp on weekends to shower and see his family¹⁰⁰. If an asylum seeker was absent more than five days without the permission of the NGO managing the camp, he/she was deleted from the official camp residents, his/her room was given to other asylum seekers and s/he stopped receiving cash. Constant fear of being excluded from services if they weren't present in the camp discouraged them from finding a job. The money they might have earned in the occasional job they usually had wasn't adequate to cover their basic expenses and, therefore, remaining in the accommodation facility was of utmost importance. This is also the case for women who lived in the city center on their own.

⁹⁸ Field notes, 21 December 2018, Athens, Greece.

⁹⁹ Field notes, 13 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

¹⁰⁰ Field notes, 13 November 2018, Athens, Greece.

The Help

Finding a job while living in the city center is surely easier compared to residing in camps, despite the immense difficulties African women face, in part because of Greek laws and bureaucratic procedures. One of the legal paradoxes concerning the migrant population is the requirement of a specific number of working stamps for the renewal of the residence permit. In case a person hasn't managed to reach the required number of working stamps, they lose the right to remain in the country. The paradox in this case lies in the contradiction between the long working hours of most of the immigrants in Greece and their number of working stamps, which is often close to zero, as usually their employment isn't declared to public authorities and, thus, no working time is officially registered. Therefore, due to the absence of the required working time, they run the risk of losing their residence permit. Even if they didn't work under these conditions, high levels of unemployment urged job seekers to compromise on working under the table. The situation is even harsher, since many African women have been working regularly for many years in Greece, yet belonging to one of the most invisible and marginalized groups.

In case a migrant hasn't collected the required stamps for renewing their residence permit, they are given the option to pay for the stamps themselves. This gives them the opportunity to prolong their stay in Greece, but it is, of course, an extra cost out of their already low salaries. A woman from Kenya mentioned that in the majority of the jobs she took up, employers weren't paying the required contributions, having to often borrow money to pay for the renewal of her residence permit. The same happened to her husband who, despite working full-time, was registered by his employer as part-time and lost his residence permit. When I asked how much money she has to pay in order to collect the stamps needed for her insurance and residence permit, she said that one time she had to pay 2,000 euros. This would be a significant amount of money even for a Greek citizen.

Maria (a pseudonym) was unemployed when I first met her for our interview and she was receiving help from other women from her community. She told me that she had been working as a housemaid in houses in the suburbs. In general, this was the main job of African women in Greece. Another African woman, who has been living in Greece for more than 20 years, also worked as a cleaner in houses in the suburbs. It took her two hours to get to her work in the morning and two hours to get back. This means that she worked for almost 12 hours per day. Her children were alone for many hours in their house and they tried to take care of each other. Due to the crisis and the working conditions in Greece, her husband decided to travel illegally to Germany in order to find a job and take his family there. Until then, she was raising her children on her own trying to make ends meet. In order to better understand her working conditions, I asked her if she could tell me how much money she was earning from her job. She told me that she was paid 650 euros, while she paid 200 euros for rent¹⁰¹.

¹⁰¹ Interview, 9 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

I also asked her whether her employers treated her nicely. She said that when she was pregnant her boss didn't let her stay out of work for more than two months. She had a C-section and two older children so she couldn't continue working and was forced to leave her job. She also told me that for many years she had been working for a very rich family, which had a store selling wedding dresses. Her boss told her that their family wanted to go to her wedding, but they made her pay for her wedding dress from their store. They also told her that they would give her as present very expensive silk bed sheets from their store. However, the bed sheets that they actually gave her were very cheap and couldn't be used as bed sheets so she made curtains out of them. "They think that I don't know what silk is", she told me and showed me the curtains that obviously were made from a very cheap fabric. Then, she told me that some of her bosses didn't let her eat with them or even have a break during her work. "They never let me eat from the food I cook, I always bring my own. They only let me eat when they have lentils. Because their children never eat them and they will throw them away [...] What else can you do? You have to accept it and live with it. If I don't accept it and get angry all the time, if I tell them exactly what I think, I will lose my job"¹⁰².

The world beyond aid

Asef Bayat (1997 p. 58) describes how people belonging in marginalized groups, such as refugees and asylum seekers, driven by "necessity", engage themselves in silent, everyday political acts in order to improve their lives and resist their oppression. These political acts may not be intentional and that's why they are different from social movements (Bayat, 2012). Despite the fact that African women seem to be even more vulnerable than other women in the refugee crisis, this doesn't mean they are just passive victims of discrimination. African women indeed try to resist both the Greek authorities and the NGOs and find the better life they seek in Greece. This thesis attempts to shed light on the everyday strategies African women develop in order to deal with the problems they're facing.

Beyond the national and international NGOs that operate in various cities and camps across Greece, there is another NGO that is different: United African Women Organization, founded by African women themselves in order to address the needs of their constituency. According to its website, the founder, was wrongfully dismissed after 11 years of employment without compensation. She therefore decided to fight for her rights. She arranged meetings with other women and organizations for refugees and asylum seekers. Based on her personal experience, she decided to help other African women become aware of their rights in Greece. She realized that African Women lack the ability to express their problems. That's when she decided to call on African women to unite and defend their rights. On 27 February 2005, the African Women Organization held its 1st meeting in Athens.

Their main aims and objectives were: to raise awareness about the problems affecting African women and their children living in Greece; to support second generation immigrants; to create

¹⁰² Interview, 9 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

mutual bonds of solidarity between Africans and their Greek hosts; to develop their African heritage (especially as women) and make a contribution to Greek heritage; and to work together with NGOs and other organizations that stand up for justice and a tolerant, non-racist society.

I contacted United African Women in Greece and asked for help with my project and, for this reason, I met with one of the founders of the organization. I had already met her some years ago, while visiting a feminist group I had joined in order to ask us to co-organize a party in order to cover the expenses of a lawyer for an African woman who killed her partner here in Greece due to the severe violence she was facing. The woman comes from Western Africa and has been living in Greece for more than 25 years. In our meeting she mentioned that the reason she left her country of origin was due to the dictatorship and the living conditions. More specifically, she mentioned that her family and the village they were living in was very poor and many people died because of inadequate access to medical services. Her house was opposite a cemetery and she watched people die every day. She told me that sometimes she didn't even have something to eat and that each time she fell asleep she was afraid she wouldn't wake up. She also mentioned that she travelled all alone with a visa. She remembered that in her country of origin, there were many people from Germany, France and Greece, but Greeks were better integrated into the Western African society than Germans and French. Some Greek expatriates she had become acquainted with helped her acquire a visa and come to Greece. She was just 18 years old, when she left. She joked: "When I came here, there weren't even many channels on TV, there were just two. I think I have been here even before you were born. I have lived here since 1982". She described how things had changed during those years: "I remember when I came here that, when I was walking on the streets, people were yelling to one another "come and see a black woman". There weren't so many foreigners then. [...] There wasn't xenophobia at all. When I went to see a house I wanted to rent, people came to me and told me 'don't go there, I have a nice house to show you'. [...] they were begging you to rent their house. [...] now you can't find one at all. There wasn't fear back then. I remember sometimes we even slept outside. We weren't afraid at all! Now, things have changed so much"¹⁰³.

Despite the offer for houses and the absence of far-right groups, discrimination was still present in the Greek society.

"I asked for asylum but they didn't give it to me. They told me "why don't you go back to your country"? [...] they didn't interview me at all, they just denied the asylum, they didn't know we had a dictatorship"¹⁰⁴. She mentioned that African people don't gain asylum because the asylum case workers don't really know the circumstances in their countries of origin.

She then stated the reasons which made her decide to found an organization for African migrant women. "As I couldn't leave freely, I started working. I took care of elderly people, I worked as a cleaner. [...] I was afraid. Sometimes I worked, but they didn't want to pay me, so they told me they would call the police. So, I left without the money. [...] many women do this. Also, if you don't like where you work and you decide to leave, they also call the police. Once they deported

¹⁰³ Interview, 15 March 2019, Athens, Greece

¹⁰⁴ Interview, 15 March 2019, Athens, Greece

a woman with a child this way. The child was born here and died in their country (once they got back). [...] I continued like this until 1998, when I got a residence permit. In 2004, I lost my sister, I lost my job, I was fired, I was trying to find a new job, and one day I said “why don’t we create an organization? For 17 years I was hiding, because I didn’t have a residence permit. We will found an organization, which I’ve earned so much from”¹⁰⁵.

When I asked her to mention the main problems African women face, she mentioned: “[t]he main problem African women face is racism. Racism and that they can’t find proper housing.”

During our interview, she mentioned that NGOs do help African women, however not to live independently. This way African women will always be dependent on NGOs and won’t be able to make a life for themselves here in Greece. She mentioned that the main factor for living an independent life is to have papers and a job. I tried to examine how women in the Union help other African women. “In which areas do you help these women?” “Wherever they need help. Anything they want they can ask for it. Even if a woman has problems in her marriage and she fights with her husband, we talk to her, try to understand what the problem is, then we talk to her husband and try to make their relationship better”¹⁰⁶. In her work, she has faced several difficulties, such as that organizations like this don’t get sufficient funding. They don’t have offices, a place to meet, enough money to support women reaching out to them. Despite this situation, she carries on, as she strongly believes the work, they’re doing is essential for African women and they stay strong when they stay together.

This emphasis on being together was also obvious to me, when I asked women at the church how they find a job, it’s usually from other women in their community. A woman told me that when she stopped working due to her pregnancy, she informed a friend, who continued working in her place. Another woman mentioned that their employers ask them to refer someone to work for a friend of theirs and to bring them in contact¹⁰⁷.

Their communities function as a supportive network that promotes these women’s integration in the Greek society, but with their own terms and conditions. This sometimes includes strategies that should go under the authorities’ radar.

During my work in the camps I met a woman whose experiences were related to the situation described by the interviewee. During the session, the woman revealed that she had some friends who had found a job in Athens. I then asked her how can they live in the camp and work in Athens simultaneously. She revealed to me that they didn’t live in the camp anymore. They had locked their containers, so if an aid worker visited them, they would think they were in Athens or Chalkida for work. They found a job as 24/7 carers of elderly women, so that they wouldn’t have to pay for rent. According to the rules, when the cash actor visits the site, twice per month, each beneficiary has to sign in order to be confirmed that they still live at the camp. In case a beneficiary doesn’t sign for a month, they are deleted from the list and stop receiving cash. It is important to mention

¹⁰⁵ Interview, 15 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, 15 March 2019, Athens, Greece.

¹⁰⁷ Field notes, 25 February 2019, Athens, Greece.

that the dates of the visits are not announced to the beneficiaries in advance. According to the African lady, when cash actors visit the site, women who haven't found a job yet sign for being present and kindly ask aid workers when to expect their next visit, as some of their friends are in Athens for a scheduled medical examination and they should be present for the second round of sign-ins, in order not to lose the provision of cash. Aid workers reveal in such case the expected date, as they understand what it would mean to lose the second round of sign-ins due to another appointment. African women still residing in the camp, inform their compatriots about the date that cash actors will be visiting the site, in order to be present during the verification process¹⁰⁸.

This specific example shows us that the aid provided by NGOs and what they earn from their work is not enough to cover African women's needs. On the one hand, they work illegally, without stability and with a low salary which is not enough to cover costs for a house in Athens and this is the reason they prefer this kind of jobs. On the other hand, the house provided by NGOs is temporary, the living conditions are bad, and they are isolated, while the cash they receive doesn't suffice to cover their needs, even when residing at the camps. As both ways of surviving are partially effective for them, some African women seem to have found a way to combine and diversify their source of income and, consequently, are able to survive in Athens. With the help and solidarity of their community members, they keep receiving cash assistance and a salary through their job. I had just arrived at the camp on 15 January 2019, when the team leader approached me and asked me whether I was using an African man who spoke English perfectly, Arabic and Tigrinya, as an interpreter during my sessions. Ethiopian women who spoke neither English nor Arabic were residing at the camp and we didn't have a Tigrinya interpreter, therefore the only way of communicating with them was this beneficiary. I responded that I hadn't used him as an interpreter, but I asked him why he was asking. He then told me that some beneficiaries had approached our team and disclosed that the interpreter received money from beneficiaries who didn't speak the languages of our interpreters in order for him to provide interpretation for their requests. The team leader decided that we should never use this beneficiary as an interpreter again. Even though I understand why the team leader decided not to continue using the beneficiary as an interpreter, as his behavior may be interpreted as exploitation of the Ethiopian women on the site, especially as the interpreter was a man and the beneficiaries were mainly women, there is also another way of interpreting this incident. As NGOs couldn't find an effective way to communicate with the groups of beneficiaries residing on site, Ethiopian women found a way for their voice to be heard despite difficult circumstances. Even though another way of expressing their requests to the authorities of the camp should have been available, maybe this wasn't a form of exploitation but an attempt to make sure that they would reach out to the authorities and that their requests would be heard by those responsible. It is also not clear, if the beneficiary asked for money in order to interpret or if the women offered him money in order to provide them with interpretation¹⁰⁹. It is as if the community decided to "hire" or tolerated his demand for cash in order to make sure that their voice would be heard¹¹⁰. There may be also some cases where

¹⁰⁸ Field notes, 23 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

¹⁰⁹ Field notes, 15 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

¹¹⁰ Field notes, 15 January 2019, Athens, Greece.

developing such strategies is not possible and African women have to build their lives on what they have.

I also remembered another “beneficiary” who, despite the many difficulties he went through, was very active in the community, was taking English and Greek lessons and was also participating in other activities on site. When I asked him how he could be so active despite living in such hard conditions, he explicitly told me: “this camp is my new home”. I was taken aback upon hearing his answer, as never before in my life had I thought that someone might view camps as their *home*. I thought everyone viewed them as a transition point. Even more, while I was working there, I had heard several times the handymen complaining that they were fixing damages that shouldn’t be occurring in the first place, as most of them were caused by bad treatment. While most of my colleagues attributed this behavior to either lack of proper education on using them or poor hygiene standards due to their culture, I was thinking that the way they treat their devices, containers and everything we provide them depends on whether they feel this place as their home. If they don’t see it as their own place to live, maybe they won’t care much about it. On the other hand, it has been mentioned several times that African women’s houses are the cleanest of all. Of course, this opinion can’t be generalized for the entire population, but it’s an incident that indicates that as African migrants understood they’re not going to solve their problems by relying on NGOs nor will they have the means to ask for a better future in another European country like other groups of refugees, they started relying on their own means to make their lives in Greece.

Conclusion

African women face significant difficulties as soon as they arrive in Greece. These difficulties are related to their legal residence in Greece, their access to work and accommodation. With regard to access to services, African women in camps and cities are affected differently, even though they are not given the opportunity to start a new life in Greece. Nevertheless, African women struggle to overcome such difficulties. To achieve this, those residing in camps try to maintain close relationships with groups of the same nationality, while those residing in the cities choose to get together with people of the same religion, or with similar experiences of exploitation or abuse. Beyond the support of their community, they individually find ways to combine the insufficient support provided to them and live below the authorities’ radar.

Conclusion

Extensive literature on asylum seekers shows that they are often equated to economic migrants and treated according to their nationality (McMahon & Sigona, 2016); they struggle to persuade the authorities that they need protection (Lawrance, 2017); they suffer normative violence (Oelgemoller, 2017); and they are marginalized by European laws (Taliani, 2012). EU policy toward extra-European migrants and refugees has been criticized for placing European interests above the needs of migrants (Stumpf, 2007). This thesis attempts to shed light on the understudied complexities of the Greek asylum system and policy programs that were developed during the economic crisis. More particularly, it looks at how the Greek aid structures and aid workers deal with African female asylum seekers.

In this thesis, women from Africa despite coming from different countries of origin, share a common experience - that of immigration to Greece during the economic and refugee crisis. Focusing on the specific positionality of African women and not on asylum seekers in general contributes to understanding how gender and race intersect and largely shape the experience of African migrant women. In Greece, this is an understudied subject – indeed, it is not studied at all. In addition to focusing on African women, this thesis mainly concerns asylum seekers who can stay legally in Greece, but who are highly vulnerable: if their asylum application is rejected, they may be forced to leave Greece. Greek authorities and bureaucrats have the power to determine whether or not African women meet the criteria to be classified as refugees - that is, people who deserve protection from Greece. Beyond European policies, such as the closure of the borders or the creation of the relocation program, which clearly affect the lives of African women, the institutions as well as all the services provided are made up of people. And the decisions asylum caseworkers make about African women's asylum are influenced by the beliefs and dispositions of aid workers and bureaucrats dealing with migrants and refugees.

This work is important because it outlines how caseworkers' everyday practices are related to normative categories: whether they reproduce them or fail to follow them in everyday practice. These categories are not only based on relevant policies and legislation. They also reflect the informal views of experts and aid workers about who is a refugee and who is a migrant. A Syrian woman for example is most of the times classified as a refugee. On the other hand, a Cameroonian woman is usually classified as a migrant. Case workers decide who will have access to services, and they either marginalize African women by denying them protection or confine them to partial and conditional protection. They could believe their claims and support their efforts to gain asylum, but this happens very rarely.

Based on the evidence analyzed in this thesis, it can be concluded that those who are particularly vulnerable suffer the most. African women are being perceived as unworthy of protection and therefore have unequal access to support. These attitudes towards African asylum seekers influence many aspects of their lives, asylum aspirations, accommodation arrangements, and generally access to official protection from further abuse. African women constitute a distinct

group within the broader group of refugees and asylum seekers facing racial discrimination by the authorities. They are disadvantaged in relation to other national groups mainly due to lack of knowledge about African societies and, sometimes, racist or sexist views held consciously or unconsciously. African women are perceived and treated as people who left their country in search of a better life, not because they were forced to leave. In other words, the power that caseworkers have is used to marginalize and trap African women and not to provide protection, even though they may be even more vulnerable compared to other groups of asylum seekers. On the whole, this thesis argues that these decisions are not taken because aid workers are not willing to “help” African women, but because they are negatively affected by the economic and political situation in Greece.

The Greek workers who experienced the financial crisis saw the dozens of NGOs which started operating in Greece as opening up badly needed employment opportunities that offered better salaries but precarious conditions. Labor precarity and its consequences for southern European workers is not a new phenomenon (Van der Linden, 2014 p. 12). The aid workers discussed here worked for several different organizations, both national and international, in extremely difficult conditions due to high unemployment in Greece. Their financial vulnerability forced them to accept harsh terms and conditions of employment. They reproduced the NGOs’ dominant discourse about African women in order to safeguard their jobs and be appreciated by their superiors. This thesis does not argue that aid workers do not care for refugees or that they would accept all conditions uncritically or passively reproduce every discourse of their employer. It argues, though, that their vulnerability shaped the way they related to African women and that it may have pushed them to put aside some of their beliefs in order to get, or keep, a job. One of this thesis’ main contributions has been to describe the circumstances under which aid-workers perform their tasks in relation to migrants and NGOs. Another contribution consisted in shedding light on African women’s struggles and the livelihoods they were able to carve out in Greece for themselves, and sometimes their children.

The fact that African women face serious difficulties in their everyday lives and at the same time are not provided with the support they need, does not mean that they’re only victims. They develop coping strategies, often with the support of others in the Greek African diaspora. According to AbdouMaliq Simone (2001) African urban residents, despite the profound difficulties they face by living in a changing and precarious society, are not just passive viewers of the society’s transformation. On the contrary, they form cooperative communities and make significant efforts to pursue their livelihoods that are viable and meaningful to them. The everyday practices of ordinary people which do not have an explicitly political content but aim to improve people’s lives have implications for social change. Although in his work Asef Bayat (2013) focuses on the Middle East and not Greece or Europe, he shows how in an authoritarian and restrictive environment people do not completely lose their agency. Despite discrimination, many of the African women discussed in this thesis are able to combine different forms of inadequate support in order to survive. In addition to this, they organize in communities, such as churches and some politically engaged and emancipatory groups. More specifically, the African Women's Union advocates for women’s rights and - unlike other organizations –aims to help African women to

build their lives in Greece. Even the fact that most of the African women refused to be interviewed by me is a form of agency. Such agency is surely not the same as that of a Greek woman. However, it is not inexistent. Some of them engage in activism and mobilize politically. Others “encroach” in Greek urban spaces and are able to remain in the country informally/illegally below the radar of immigration authorities.

In Greece asylum procedures can be very lengthy and decisions can be appealed at different stages. Therefore, in years of work in this field, I never met women who were residing illegally in the country. The vast majority of women I refer to in my research are asylum seekers, some in the early stages of their application, while others may already have received a first negative response. The number of women who were recognized as refugees was small. Since this study has not been able to discuss illegal African women migrants, this is a group whose specific circumstances will hopefully be examined in future research (although gaining ethical approval to carry out such research will undoubtedly prove difficult). Another limitation of this research has been the small number of African women I was able to interview. And yet another limitation is that the research focuses generically on “African” women and not on migrants from a particular African country. It is very likely that women from Libya and Congo, for example, do not have the same migration experience. Future research would benefit from focusing on migrants from specific African nations in Greece.

In conclusion, this thesis has not attempted to propose policy solutions. How to integrate (or not) African migrant women in Greek society is a multilayered political question. However, it aimed to improve our understanding of the dynamics of the “refugee crisis” in Greece and its consequences for African migrant women and Greek aid workers. Understanding the ways in which different groups are affected by the economic and refugee crises can form a basis for the revision of policy programs, or for the development of better approaches toward migrants and asylum seekers in the future.

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