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On not staying put where they have put you: mobilities disrupting the socio-spatial figurations of displacement in Greece

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ABSTRACT

The reception and protection system in Greece in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis produces a geography of specific mobility restrictions and accommodation types for migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. These restrictions create a multi-layered landscape of displacement, dominated by three socio-spatial figurations: the forced containment of displaced people in 'hotspots' on eastern Aegean islands; staying in isolated and segregated camps in the mainland; and the accommodation of the most vulnerable in urban centres. At the same time, the mobility practices of displaced people often disrupt the above figurations, stemming from their survival practices and life aspirations, and largely relating to their translocal social connections. These mobilities include, but are not limited to, unregistered movements from hotspots to the mainland, mobilities from camp to camp, mobility negotiations between camp and city. This paper explores the figurations of displacement related to the impact of governance regimes on the livelihoods and mobility of displaced people in Greece. Within this frame, it focuses on the ways through which migrants and asylum-seekers negotiate, resist or transcend the geography of multiple restrictions, through translocal mobility practices that intervene and therefore reshape dominant socio-spatial figurations.

KEYWORDS
Socio-spatial figurations; protracted displacement; reception system; translocal mobilities; Greece

Introduction

The reception and protection system in Greece, as developed in the context and aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis and its management at both EU and national levels, has produced 'a multifaceted labyrinth' (Tsitselikis 2019), entailing – among others – multiple mobility restrictions within the country itself, which are largely linked to specific accommodation types for migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. These restrictions create a multi-layered landscape of displacement within Greek

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territory, dominated by three main *socio-spatial figurations*: the forced containment of displaced people in 'hotspots' on eastern Aegean islands, the isolated and segregated living in mainland camps, and the accommodation of the most vulnerable in urban apartments. In this paper, we discuss these aspects of displacement in Greece and the ways through which they are transcended by displaced people's mobility practices, by drawing on the concept of 'translocal figurations of displacement' (Etzold et al. 2019), and by situating the Greek case in the broader perspective of the Special Issue.

With the concept of *figurations* Norbert Elias (1978) aimed to highlight people's social settings, networks and interdependencies. Social figurations are produced in and through interactions and transactions and are shaped by unequal power relations; they may range in scale and type, converge at distinct places and at the same time extend beyond the local level or the borders of a nation-state (Etzold et al. 2019). Space is crucial in the concept of figurations, which are embedded in places, operate through networks and are shaped by territorialisation (Etzold et al. 2019). This, resonates with an open and relational perspective of space, as developed by geographer Doreen Massey (1994; 2005), among others. Rather than associated with stasis and immobilisation, space is constituted through social relations and practices at all scales, and thus place is also 'formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location' (Massey 1994, 167). Such an approach to space as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories and power geometries (Massey 2005) allows us to think of social figurations as produced in, by and through interlinked places.

Protracted displacement, as appears in policy and humanitarian discourses or conceptualised in scholarly accounts, refers to people who are stuck 'out-of-place' and yet often placed in specific locations or facilities, sometimes against their will. Protracted displacement emerges as the outcome of displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces, reproduced in multiple scales and unfolding in countries of origin, transit or (temporary?) stay, or even in preferred destinations (Etzold et al. 2019). These set of forces shape situations of displacement also during experiences of reception, which may end up being protracted while waiting for asylum procedures in EU member states, for entitlement to provisions, for relocation schemes or for family reunification. Especially since 2015, an emergent set of studies focus on how asylum systems in Europe reproduce immobilisation. Some highlight the hotspot approach as a control and containment regime (Dimitriadi 2017; Papoutsi et al. 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), while others explore different types of reception facilities, such as camps, asylum centres or forms of (temporary) accommodation (Campesi 2018; Fontanari 2015; Thorshaug 2019). This proliferation of immobilisation in later 'stages' of reception within national states, through 'infrastructures of containment' (Esposito et al. 2020), create a multiplication of 'border places', 'thresholds' (Fontanari 2015), and stepping stones within national territory that has not received until now extensive attention.

Protracted displacement, however, does not only entail stasis and passive immobilisation. As Gill, Caletrío, and Mason (2011, 302) have convincingly argued, displacement is 'best understood not as a one-off event, but as a process' in which a range of mobilities intersect, reminding us that 'the tension between fixity and motion is already inherent in the "forced migration" couplet'. Mobility, reconceptualised especially since the so-called mobility turn or mobility paradigm debates (Sheller and Urry 2006; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Cresswell 2010; Faist 2013) is nevertheless a rather puzzled notion in (forced) migration studies. Cresswell, for instance, while acknowledging that 'if

nothing else, the "mobilities" approach brings together a diverse array of forms of movement across scales ranging from the body … to the globe' (Cresswell 2010, 18), called for (analysing) a *politics* of mobility looking not simply at movement as such, but crucially at its entanglement with mobility representations and practices, as well as its various facets. Critical scholarship of the 'mobilities paradigm' (e.g. Gill, Caletrío, and Mason 2011; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Kalir 2013) has thus proposed to shift the focus on 'mobility regimes' to highlight mobility inequalities and address the relationships between mobility and immobility, 'by examining not only movement as connection but also as an aspect of new confinements and modes of exploitation' (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 190), as well as 'an-event-to-come' (Bissell 2007). Just as space should not be perceived as static and immobilising, mobility also is not inherently connected to liberty; in fact among the two lies an 'uneasy relationship' (Gill 2013, 22). What is more, migration research has tended to consider as mobile only those who cross transnational borders, something that derives from methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) and misleadingly reproduces the state 'as a prime unit of analysis' (Kalir 2013). Instead, as we would argue, the need to 'study human mobility holistically' (Kalir 2013, 325) requires paying attention to seemingly unimportant moves of people also translocally, crossing the less visible borders produced at the intersections of state policies, asylum systems and EU or international forces.

Within this frame, displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces are confronted with displaced people's 'agency-in-waiting' (Brun 2015), through which they may navigate within, in-between, or out of (protracted) displacement situations. Mobility itself, may be a 'last-ditch attempt to exercise agency' for forced migrants in particular (Gill, Caletrío, and Mason 2011, 303), or 'a resource and tactic' for migrants with precarious legal status (Wyss 2019) and may thus be seen as a 'political act' (Monsutti 2018). Displaced people's strategies and tactics include transnational and translocal mobilities, relationships and connectivities, communications, transactions of resources, and networks of knowledge (Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos 2016, 1041; Etzold 2017). Mobility negotiations are central in such strategies and tactics as they permit displaced people to 'navigate' the 'migration archipelago' (Triandafyllidou 2019, 7). Navigating through mobility, on the one hand, may permit them to transcend obstacles, restrictions, policy arrangements, and thus to contest, circumvent or even subvert migration controls (Mainwaring 2016; Triandafyllidou 2019). On the other hand, though, mobility may also produce entrapments, as in some cases it may be 'antithetical to liberty' or 'used by states in order to deliver punishments' (Gill 2013, 21; see also Dunn and Cons 2014; Tazzioli 2020). Moreover, much of the recent literature on the question of migrant agency through mobility has been primarily concerned with (unauthorised) crossings of state borders. Even when recognised or accounted for (e.g. Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos 2016; Wyss 2019; Schwarz 2020), (trans)local mobilities negotiating internal and often invisible borders have scarcely been the prime scope of analysis. It is only recently that researchers have started focusing on asylum-seekers' and refugees' daily mobility practices within asylum (and reception) systems and within national territories, how they react through mobility against containment and confinement and how this may produce different 'geographies of asylum' (Campesi 2018; Della Puppa and Sanò 2021).

In this paper, we aim to contribute to this recently growing scholarship, by discussing the wide range of translocal mobilities of asylum-seekers within Greece. More

specifically, the paper explores mobility practices through which displaced people navigate the complex reception and protection system in Greece, and how, through such practices, they cope with, negotiate and resist the multiple mobility barriers and limitations they face. Such mobilities relate to the spatialities and temporalities of the asylum system and its restrictions, but also to the displaced people's survival practices and life aspirations, often linked to their network connections that range from local to translocal or transnational. Thus, the contribution of this article is threefold: (a) it focuses on the underexplored issue of how migration control, confinement and borders proliferate inside the national territory through the socio-spatial figurations of the asylum system and reception facilities (and not only at the border areas e.g. through the Hotspots as the recent literature has indicated); (b) it explores a range of translocal mobilities of displaced people within Greece, as a (first) reception country (and not only transnational movements and border crossings which the literature on migrants' agency has already examined; (c) it analyses how such translocal mobilities within and in-between the (spatialities of the) reception system, sometimes interrelated to mobilities in other scales, intervene in the socio-spatial figurations dominating the displacement landscape, their geographies, and the imposed immobilisation these imply. By doing so, it shows how such mobilities may at the same time transcend and disrupt those figurations, even if they may lead to entrapments in-between; yet in both cases how they transform and reshape them.

The article is based on research conducted in Greater Athens in the context of the TRAFIG project combining qualitative and ethnographic methods. It primarily draws on 51 qualitative interviews conducted from November 2019 until May 2021. These comprised of 14 interviews with representatives of national and local authorities, International Organisations and NGOs, 28 semi-structured interviews and nine (9) biographical interviews with migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, as well as interviews with local Greek residents, a focus-group discussion, and ethnographic methods involving observation, transect walks and informal discussions in reception facilities in Attica and urban spaces in Athens. The paper is also informed by another 16 expert interviews, 43 semi-structured and 11 biographical interviews mainly with displaced people, which took place in the city of Thessaloniki and the islands of Lesvos and Chios.[1]

The article begins with an overview of what we conceptualise as the *socio-spatial figurations* of displacement in Greece. The core of the paper draws on empirical material, discussing mobility practices within the country that transcend the immobilisation that the dominant socio-spatial figurations imply: namely, unauthorised movements from hotspots to the mainland, from camp to camp, between camp and city, or camp and country. In conclusion, we situate such mobilities in the broader landscape of migration controls in and beyond Greece, arguing for the fluid and transformative character of emergent figurations of displacement.

The landscape of protracted displacement in Greece: socio-spatial figurations of immobilisation and control

Until the recent past, the Greek asylum system suffered from chronic and structural deficiencies, characterised by extremely low recognition rates of the few asylum applications it received, limited compliance with EU directives, limited absorption of

respective EU funds, few and scattered provisions for protection, excessive use of detention, substandard living conditions in reception and detention facilities, among others (Black 1994; Sitaropoulos 2000; Papadopoulou 2004; Papageorgiou 2013; Cabot 2014). Over the past decade, but especially since 2015, a comprehensive reception and protection system has consolidated in Greece, in the context of what became known as the 'refugee crisis' of 2015–2016 and its EU and domestic management. As part of conforming to and implementing its obligations as a guardian of EU borders at the Union's southeastern corner, particularly in the frame of the hotspot approach and the EU-Turkey common Statement of March 2016, Greece has established a complex system, constantly shifting, and adapting with mushrooming legislation (Tsitselikis 2019; AIDA 2020).

This system is both legally and spatially stratified, giving shape to three main sociospatial figurations that dominate the displacement landscape in the country and relate to: the forced containment of displaced people in the five 'hotspots' on eastern Aegean islands; staying in isolated and segregated camps in the mainland; and the accommodation of the most vulnerable in urban apartments. Each of these figurations is determined by specific sets of displacing, marginalising and immobilising forces, deriving from the intermingling of protection and reception with a highly fluid legal framework subject to constant amendments, and a complex web of policies, practices and activities (some of which evolving ad-hoc), as well as diverse modes of implementation across different localities. These involve a range of differentiated actors operating at different levels, including civil society and humanitarian ones (Rozakou 2017; Pallister-Wilkins 2020; Papada et al. 2020; Parsanoglou 2020), and have distinct geographies, intertwining at different scales, yet interacting with and transforming particular locations, shaping displaced people's livelihoods and mobility opportunities and (re)producing their immobilisation. Socio-spatial figurations of displacement are thus constituted through a web of power relations, interdependencies, relationships and networks intertwined in specific places, but also interrelated with multiple other scales, national or transnational.

The first such figuration is shaped around the five island-based 'hotspots', formally called 'Reception and Identification Centers' (RICs), which were functional by summer 2016 on Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. Law 4375/2016, voted shortly after the EU-Turkey Statement, provided for the operation of RICs, while decisions that followed imposed a 'geographical restriction' on all refugees and migrants arriving at these five islands, who need to remain there until their asylum case is examined, or until they are referred to different asylum procedures (AIDA 2020). Implementing the hotspot approach under the premises of the EU-Turkey Statement involved an apparatus of control procedures, infrastructures, technologies – as well as physical and social spaces – essentially aiming at filtering and containing (Dimitriadi 2017; Papoutsi et al. 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020). The islands became an internal buffer-zone 'hosting' thousands of displaced people in appalling conditions, and a range of humanitarian actors, civil society groups and volunteers – a situation that incited escalating tensions with local communities (Afouxenidis et al. 2017; Papataxiarchis 2020). Indicatively, the numbers of asylum-seekers stranded on the islands reached their peak in late February 2020, exceeding 42,000 people. By May 2021, amidst enhanced restrictions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but especially after the wildfire that destroyed the infamous Moria hotspot on Lesvos, the number of people in RICs was reduced to

nearly 10,300[2], as a result of the government's focus on 'decongesting' the islands, employing dubious procedures.

A second socio-spatial figuration revolves around the (open) Temporary Reception and Accommodation facilities for asylum-seekers and other legal 'categories' of displaced people, established and operating mainly since 2016. The UNHCR, initially assisting the Greek government in setting them up, was in autumn 2018 replaced by the IOM in providing 'site management support', while a number of NGOs operate specific services within. Like island hotspots, most of these facilities are essentially camps. Originally built to respond to a situation labelled as 'emergency', hence their official designation as 'temporary', they are still in place five years on, even though their numbers have been fluctuating, as have those of their residents. In late May 2021, a population of 23,652 (with over 41 per cent children) was dispersed in 31 camps across the mainland country. Conditions vary greatly, but they are generally characterised by segregation, marginalisation and deprivation (Kandylis 2019; Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis 2020; AIDA 2020). Indicatively, about 12.6 per cent of camp residents reside in tents, rub halls, common areas or makeshift shelters, whilst 28 per cent did not have a shower in their accommodation unit, that being in most cases a container. Despite significant differences, most are located in isolated rural areas or at the outskirts of major urban centres (Pechlidou, Frangopoulos, and Hatziprokopiou 2020; Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis 2020). The average distance of all sites from the nearest health facility is about 9, 4.4 km from a pharmacy, 12.6 km from a tax office and 6.4 km from a cash machine.[3]

A third figuration emerges in relation to the urban accommodation scheme ESTIA, implemented in Greek cities and towns. Back in the fall of 2015, the UNHCR started an accommodation scheme in urban apartments originally addressed to international protection applicants eligible for relocation in other EU member states. This soon attracted funds from the European Commission and since late 2017, it evolved as an urban accommodation programme for asylum-seekers classified as vulnerable, combined with cash assistance – known as ESTIA (Emergency Support To Integration and Accommodation). From its very conception, ESTIA has been locally implemented by partners, such as civil society actors and local authorities. Since the summer of 2020, the programme was renewed (ESTIA II), with the accommodation component gradually handed over to the Greek government while the UNHCR remained in charge of the cash scheme. Despite its merits as an alternative to sheltering asylum-seekers in camps, the programme suffered from inadequate planning, lack of systematic integration actions, and lack of a strategy for beneficiaries' smooth and gradual exit of beneficiaries (Kourachanis 2019), while it was also characterised by the extensive control of asylum-seekers' everyday habitation (Papatzani et al. 2022). Our fieldwork has also brought to the fore hierarchies of vulnerability and relevant practices developed on the ground to gain access, as well as a considerable degree of welfare dependence. The overall number of persons who benefited from ESTIA accommodation between November 2015 and December 2020 approaches 73,000 people (AIDA 2020, 167). At the end of 2020, about 21,220 beneficiaries, more than two-thirds of whom asylum-seekers and 32 per cent recognised refugees, resided in ESTIA apartments.

The above socio-spatial figurations[4] dominate the displacement landscape in Greece and play an essential role in the displaced people's immobilisation and control. A person's placement to a specific facility is attached to his/her asylum claim and is strictly

regulated. Specifically, accommodation in mainland camps or ESTIA apartments is provided through an official decision and referral by the relevant authorities, the RIS, and until recently, the UNHCR. On the one hand, these referrals concern the transfer of asylum-seekers from the island-based RICs to mainland Greece if they are vulnerable and take place after a decision to lift of the geographical restriction. On the other hand, referrals and official transfers to mainland camps or urban apartments may also concern asylum-seekers found anywhere in the country, outside the official reception system, a broad category labelled as ‘urban’.[5] The choice of the mainland reception facilities where asylum-seekers should be referred and transferred to is determined by the availability of places and a number of selection criteria, including language, nationality, family composition, and a range of vulnerability categories. After this ‘matching’ procedure between the asylum-seekers and their accommodation place, as the authorities call it, they are transferred to and get registered in the respective facility, and an accommodation place is provided to them. Even more crucially, mobilities between reception facilities, out of them, or beyond them are formally prohibited unless the asylum procedure is terminated, a person is officially transferred to another facility, or has been granted official permission to move for specific reasons. More specifically, mobilities from the hotspots and the islands are generally forbidden due to the geographical restriction, while unauthorised mobilities and absences from mainland camps or ESTIA apartments may result in the loss or limitation of reception and protection provisions. The 2019 International Protection Act (Law 4636) has, among others, included clauses specifically aiming at enforcing such prohibitions, since it determines that material reception provisions may be limited or terminated in cases of ‘violating’ the geographical restriction on the islands, leaving accommodation places without informing, or hiding sources of income other than the cash assistance (Article 57). Policy makers, state services, international organisations, humanitarian or other actors may assume that displaced people will conform to their ‘placements’ and ‘transfers’. And yet they move, in several ways and for various reasons, as we explain below.

The immobilisation produced through these socio-spatial figurations was further exaggerated in the context and conjuncture of the pandemic. The need to curve the spread of the virus has put the general population in unprecedented immobilisation and at a social distance. But the ‘staying at home’ slogan that epitomised the plea to adhere to mobility restrictions and lockdown measures takes different meanings and is differently experienced in an overcrowded island hotspot or an isolated camp in the mainland. So, much of the narratives and experiences informing our analysis refer to mobilities before the pandemic, or in-between its various waves, and the associated measures with their variations over time. What is more, some of the mobility restrictions remained in place for people residing in RICs or certain mainland camps, even when they were lifted for the general population (e.g. in early autumn 2020), whilst new fears led to renewed scapegoating of displaced people on the grounds of public health concerns.

Negotiations and disruptions: mobilities intervening in socio-spatial figurations of displacement

In this immobilising context, displaced people may choose not to stay put, consciously decide not to conform to the official accommodation options, may refuse to passively

accept their conditions as given, even if such choices and practices may have negative consequences on different aspects of their protection and reception status and rights. In contrast to the neat picture of stable geographies and immobilisation sketched by a reading of the legal framework, our fieldwork uncovered a wide range of mobility practices asylum-seekers may employ to cope with protracted displacement, limbo, and waiting, meet their specific needs, be close to their networks, seek means to survive, and overall improve their livelihoods. In what follows, we discuss examples of such informal and unauthorised practices of moving in-between or at the margins of the above socio-spatial figurations, practices that intervene, reshape and transform the landscape of protracted displacement in Greece.

Disrupting first reception and beyond: 'violating' the 'hell of Europe', bypassing formal pathways, resisting 'matching' procedures

From arrival and registration to the asylum interview and decision, the prolonged stay in the hotspots is marked by material deprivation, overcrowding, inadequate facilities, provisions, and services that threaten human dignity in such first reception spaces. Long before it was burned to the ground by a fire on September 9th 2020, the hotspot of Moria on Lesvos, which in January – February 2020 reached its peak of about 20,000 people (with a 2,840 people capacity), was labelled 'the hell of Europe'. Similar conditions of overcrowding were the case in the hotspots of VIAL and Vathy in the islands of Chios and Samos, respectively. As mentioned, except for asylum-seekers who are subjected to different asylum procedures (e.g. based on vulnerability criteria), the geographical restriction is only lifted for those whose application has been examined, whether they have been granted some form of protection or their asylum claim rejected. Thus, the socio-spatial figuration revolving around hotspots extends beyond their 'first reception' function and entails prolonged and undefined stay in such facilities. Facing such situations of protracted immobilisation, a mobility practice of asylum-seekers waiting for their asylum interview in RICs is to unofficially leave the islands towards mainland Greece, frequently to Athens. The majority of those escaping the island would not classify as 'vulnerable', and thus they did not expect a lift of the geographical restriction before their asylum case was examined. This practice, commonly referred to by interviewees representing key policy actors as a 'violation' of the geographical restriction, is framed by displaced people as an escape from the inhuman living conditions of the hotspots. As phrased by an Afghan activist:

> It is the human nature to leave from hell. And it is very difficult. In Mytilene, two, three people have died in their efforts to get illegally inside the ship. Or they have tried to get inside a luggage, there are photos with a mother and two kids. Irrational logics .... (24/06/2020)

As an irregular practice, if discovered, such mobility may have consequences on a persons' asylum claim and associated provisions for protection and reception. However, moving from the islands to the mainland may also take place legally, yet followed by opting out of an official placement in a camp or apartment. A common such category is that of asylum-seekers classified as 'vulnerable', for whom the geographical restriction has been lifted, yet their transfer to a mainland accommodation place may

be pending. When the official transfer takes too long, some may not wait for it to materialise but move on to leave the islands on their own, directed mostly towards Greek cities on the mainland. Such movements, even authorised, transcend official mobility pathways and circumvent formal procedures, in efforts to escape the islands as soon as possible and seek better opportunities on their own. Athens, in particular, is a point of attraction, as a city where multiple networks converge, where people may find their own housing and further mobility pathways.

Official referrals and transfers to mainland camps (but also urban apartments), signal a next step of the reception process, but at the same time, they may also provide possibilities of new (informal) mobility paths. (The prospect of) Living in a camp, in segregated areas in mainland Greece, in conditions of overcrowding and deprivation, quite often far from family networks, are some of the reasons why asylum-seekers seek to escape the geography of dispersal. It is not rare for asylum-seekers who have been offered such an accommodation place to immediately refuse to stay and decide to move further on their own right after their official transfer. Others may stay for a while in the camp but later seek 'better' accommodation places in different camps in Greece, frequently closer to Athens. Rajan[6], a young Kurd from Syria, narrates:

> After Moria, they transferred us to a camp in Giannena. I didn't stayed there for long, just for an hour, because I didn't like it, I had problems with the Arabs there. I bought a ticket, went to Thessaloniki, and then I came in Athens. I went to Oinofita camp, because when I was on Lesvos, I met some families that were later transferred in Oinofita. We talked over the phone and they told me to come to Oinofita because – as they said – the conditions were good, and everyone was a Kurd there. (06/02/2020)

As evinced in Rajan's account, such mobility decisions are usually based on the need to be close to networks of relatives or friends or avoid tensions between different ethnic groups that may prevail in some camps. However, according to expert interviews, refusal of an accommodation place in a camp or apartment may also occur when this is located far from the place the persons concerned may have been already living and established social connections, or in cases of camp residents eligible for referral to an urban apartment, or simply reflecting expectations of better living conditions elsewhere, based on (mis?)information from family or friends. Thus, refusing to be placed in a specific facility may be seen as a practice that questions the obligatory mobility pathways between different socio-spatial figurations of control, contesting the 'matching' procedures implemented by the authorities, and possibly transforming aspects of the figurations between which such negotiations unfold.

Negotiating presence through mobility: remaining unregistered at the margins

When asylum-seekers move to a facility other than the one they are officially 'matched' with, they may find themselves at the margins of the reception system. Arriving and seeking to stay in a mainland camp unofficially (i.e. without a formal referral) constitutes a mobility practice for people who either escape geographical restriction, or move to a camp other than the one they are registered in, but also those arriving from the land or sea borders without a hotspot. In the latter case, people may either have not applied for asylum yet even if that was their intention, or their plans to leave Greece without authorisation failed and appeared at a camp to register an asylum claim and

ask for accommodation. Their stay at the margins of the registered population and provisions in a camp, without being 'matched' with a specific accommodation place there, results to their labelling as 'unregistered' in the specific facility.

A common reason why asylum-seekers prefer specific facilities is – apart from the presence of social networks – related to the distances of most camps from the cities. As most mainland sites are located in isolated, remote areas, camps around Athens appear to be more preferable. The camp at Elaionas, located at the fringes of Athens Municipality yet very close to the city centre, is frequently one of the first options. Nevertheless, official referrals to Elaionas from the authorities mainly concern asylum-seekers with specific health issues that need to be close to Athens' specialised health care system. Thus, the wish of the 'unregistered' to be officially registered in the particular facility faces the limitations of place availability and the authorities' policies of accommodating specific categories of asylum-seekers. As a representative of the camp management explained:

> They arrive in Elaionas through social networks. We cannot register this person – these cases are the so-called 'unregistered' – because there is a need here for accommodation places for the most vulnerable. […] They usually have an accommodation place in the camp in Grevena, they don't like Grevena, and they come here. During the summer there were families here shouting that I am a racist! Yes, when we have proposed you to go to Grevena, and you don't want for some reason, and you want to stay in Elaionas, no! No, because, there is another family who may be much more vulnerable than you! (03/03/2020).

Even though the Law excludes 'unregistered' camp residents from material reception provisions in the respective facilities, they may in practice be allowed an official accommodation place or other provisions depending on a variety of factors. As an official has said:

> If they are vulnerable we offer them help. For example, if someone lives [informally] in a site for six months, his children go to school, and he has been integrated into the community [of the camp], we try to register him to the specific site in which he already stays, especially if he is the head of the family or if he is vulnerable. (03/02/2020)

Thus, displaced people's mobility practices may in some cases result in the informal or ad-hoc actions from the part of actors engaged in the management of specific facilities, permitting mobility and accommodation options not strictly defined in legislation. They hence intervene and transform aspects of the socio-spatial figuration taking shape around the camps. During the last year, the numbers of the 'unregistered' increased significantly, with over 4,100 recorded with this status in May 2021, nearly 17.5 per cent of the entire camp population. What is more, the unregistered are mainly concentrated in camps in or around Athens, making over half (53 per cent) of the residents of Elaionas, 47.2 per cent of Malakasa, and more than one out of four in Schisto and Ritsona. These numbers should include a good share of recognised refugees, driven to Attica camps by the government's strategy to reduce population on the islands. The absence of integration policies or provisions after a positive decision leave international protection beneficiaries with the only option to temporarily remain at the margins of the reception system. This may be seen as another dimension of how the socio-spatial figuration of camps is transforming and adapting, through asylum-seekers' practices but also the survival

strategies of refugees responding to temporary arrangements resulting from political intentions.

Translocal negotiations between official placement and preferred stay and survival mobilities

'Officially, I live in Malakasa camp now', replied Ali, an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, when he was asked about his current place of accommodation. The word 'officially' he used refers to the procedure earlier described. Ali arrived in Greece in February 2016, one month before the EU-Turkey Statement. He thus avoided geographical restriction on the islands and only stayed in a hotspot in Chios for four days. He was then allowed to board a boat to Piraeus, and after staying for a few days in Athens, he and his companions, whom he had met in Turkey, bought a ticket to Eidomeni at the Macedonian border (Figure 1). However, only Syrians and Iraqis were allowed to cross by the time they got there, as the route had been closed for other nationalities. Then, Ali and his friends returned to Athens and went to the camp of Elliniko, where they stayed for about two years until it was closed. They were then moved to Malakasa camp. However, as continues explaining 'officially':

> But in reality, I live in an apartment in Athens, because in Malakasa things are difficult, there are fights every night. I live with two other friends from Afghanistan. […] Malakasa is close to my work, but I don't like the situation there. I prefer staying in Athens, even if I have to travel every day to work. Once a month, I have to be in the camp to sign, but they don't

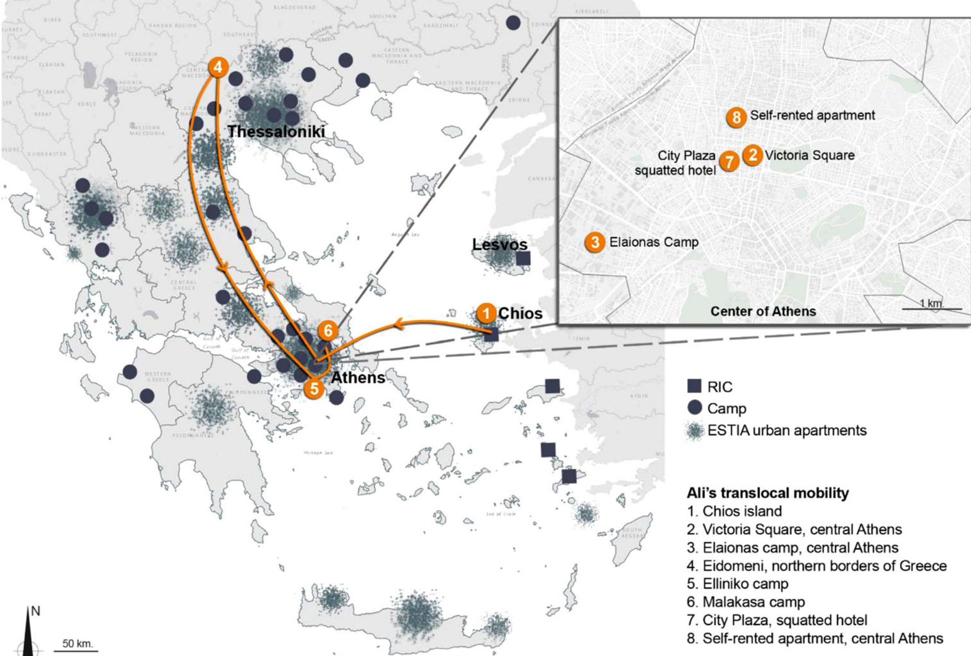

Figure 1. The geography of the socio-spatial figurations of displacement in Greece and the example of Ali's translocal mobilities. Source: IOM 2021; Ministry of Migration and Asylum 2021; and Authors' editing.

> know that I live in an apartment in Athens and that I have a job. If they knew, they would kick me out of the camp … . (24/11/2019)

Before renting that apartment, he lived in the City Plaza refugee squat in central Athens, as illustrated in the Map above together with Ali's other trajectories and stays within Greece. Residing in the city despite being entitled to an official accommodation place in a camp, is another practice transcending the socio-spatial figurations of immobilisation and control, deriving from people's longing for an everyday life related not simply to survival or employment but also leisure or education. For example, Ali chose to cohabitate with co-ethnics in downtown Athens, where he attends Greek language courses and participates in a theatre group set up by an NGO, despite working in a factory in Oinofita, an area much closer to the remote camp of Malakasa where he is officially registered. However, he has to keep his real residence secret and return regularly to the camp to declare his presence and maintain his official accommodation place. If he is not present, he would lose reception provisions and probably be excluded from the asylum procedure.

Such translocal negotiations of mobility between camps and the proximate cities are more than frequent. Particularly for those residing in camps in Attica, central Athens constitutes a point of attraction on the grounds of a range of daily needs that the urban space offers: from healthcare provisions in public hospitals, services related to asylum procedures, buying groceries and other goods, and crucially, social connections. Moving from a remote camp in Attica to central Athens may be lengthy, tiring, and costly, due to distance and ticket costs. In cases of visits that demand time, people may stay overnight or for a few days, hosted informally by friends living in the city, or in self-organised initiatives offering temporary accommodation, as mentioned by an activist, refugee from Iran:

> We have many refugees that come here who live in camps, for example […] in Malakasa camp, but now you know […] the bus ticket to move isn't free anymore, so they have to pay 6 euros for the ticket and they have no money, and if they don't pay how can they follow the asylum process, and there isn't a hospital near Malakasa camp, it's far from the city, if they want to buy food, if they want to go to a doctor, or if they […] go for their papers, for all these reasons they have to come to Athens. So when these people have to stay in Athens, […] we give them a shelter for a few days, maybe 5–6 days, for women and children, not for men … . (25/02/2020)

Others, however, need to move to other parts of the country to make an income, e.g. through seasonal work in agriculture. As phrased by an expert interviewee:

> There are also movements inside the country. People are going to Crete for seasonal work … Or a young Pakistani will go to Rhodes, he will come back and he will [then] go to Northern Greece. Or the ones from Thessaloniki will come to Athens. (24/01/2020)

These forms of interrelated habitation and movements between the camp and the city or other parts of the country, either temporary or for longer, are becoming more and more restricted and disciplined. A so-called population verification is implemented regularly in camps by counting those present and absent. The latter, after a relevant notification by the camp management, may lose their accommodation places, which will be made

again available to accommodate new 'referrals' and 'transfers' from the islands or elsewhere. In the words of Faadi, an asylum-seeker living in Schisto camp:

> Yes, if you're not in your accommodation (container) there are 90% of chances to lose it, people who were in Thessaloniki to visit families and friends already lost their living spaces, the camp manager gave them to the refugees living under the tents. Those who came back the management didn't allowed them at first, but later provided shared container with [other] families, it was unfortunate that they couldn't get their old spaces back. (26/11/2020)

Such mechanisms do not only concern restrictions applied to those absent from reception facilities, but also apply to the wide range of translocal mobilities previously discussed, which the recently introduced legal measures mentioned (Law 4636/2019) aim to reduce and restrict by imposing 'penalties' on provisions. Even travelling for seasonal work entails the risk to lose these provisions (including financial assistance), in case asylum-seekers are found hiding their (usually informal) employment. Furthermore, unauthorised mobilities may also have an impact on the asylum procedure, as people who 'violate' geographical restriction are commonly asked to return to the island where their asylum case is registered, in order to remain in the system. Counter-reacting to the displaced people's efforts to overcome immobilisation and circumvent control, these ever-restrictive measures may further limit the space for negotiating mobility, reproducing protracted displacement in Greece and reshaping its dominant socio-spatial figurations.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we focused on the mobilities through, in-between and at the margins, of what we conceptualised as the three key socio-spatial figurations of displacement in Greece. In doing so, we have argued that the Greek reception and protection system reproduces protracted displacement by forcedly placing asylum-seekers in specific reception facilities, by linking such placement to various steps of the asylum process, and by imposing a growing set of restrictions on movements through, or out of, different accommodation types. Hence, the emerging figurations of displacement are characterised by specific timeframes and distinct geographies that impact displaced people's everyday lives and determine their marginalisation and immobilisation while affecting their mobility aspirations and migration journeys. These geographies and multiple spatialities, at various scales and overlapping layers, may be seen as the core of what Tsitselikis (2019) has called the 'multifaceted labyrinth' that displaced people in Greece are faced with: the interplay between the Greek reception system, asylum procedures, accommodation provisions and mobility possibilities. Through these, displacement is reproduced and prolonged on European soil, within the country of asylum (Kandylis 2019). To understand these displacement figurations, one needs to situate them within the consolidating European migration regime, involving the multiplication of borders and externalisation of controls (e.g. Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Hess and Kasparek 2017). If the EU-Turkey Statement redeclared Turkey's role as an external guardian of the EU's borders and formalised Greece's position as internal frontier, the hotspot approach – domestically implemented through the geographical

restriction – and the dispersal of asylum-seekers in mainland camps or ESTIA apartments, gave way to various steppingstones and waiting rooms within the country itself.

Nevertheless, as shown in the paper, these steppingstones and waiting rooms impede movement only temporarily, as recently argued by Turner and White noting the paradox of camps as 'at once sites of confinement and junctions […] where migrants navigate, evade and negotiate these enactments to reach other destinations' (Turner and Whyte 2022, 3). Our analysis highlighted a range of informal, unauthorised mobilities that displaced people actively engage in at various (trans)local scales: disrupting first reception; refusing to stay where they are 'matched' and transferred; moving on their own and remaining unregistered; negotiating translocal movements between camp and city; moving for seasonal work or other survival needs. These mobility practices, and possibly others too, permit them to navigate the complex asylum system and to cope with displacement and limbo in everyday life, intervening in the forces immobilising them within the country. At the first level emerges a form of agency instituting mobility as a means and resource (e.g. see also Wyss 2019). Yet, such agency appears to be 'burdened', in that it stems from 'a mixture of choice and coercion' and 'combines opportunity and constraint' (Dunn and Cons 2014, 99). The types of mobility hereby analysed do not always lead to the desired pathways and life courses; instead they may result in new entrapments in-between or at the margins of the Greek asylum system, in marginal legal or social positions and spaces.

In parallel, however, mobility within the country of asylum is closely interrelated with (and may be followed by) transnational mobilities, also unauthorised. Besides, the boundaries between different mobility types are blurred and porous, as are the sequences of 'legal' or 'irregular' statuses to which they lead and with which they closely interrelate.

> And after nine months, the [family] reunification was rejected, by Germany. And after that we decided to move on and leave Greece by ourselves. […] No, I don't want to wait for that [asylum interview]. I have a plan to go, informally. […] There is no other choice. […] As a European country I couldn't move, I can't move. Why? I am also a human, accept me as a human, why I can't move? (16/09/2020)

The words above are Aaila's. She is a young woman from Afghanistan residing in an ESTIA apartment in Athens. She came to Greece with her family in 2016, spent some time in Lesvos, and has lived in a camp in Attica for more than a year. After two rejections on their application to reunite with her sister in Germany, one by one, her parents and siblings have gradually left Greece informally. Aaila has applied for asylum, but she had not yet given her interview, by the time she narrated her story. Despite the fact that, after so many years, she is integrated into the social life of Athens, she has decided not to wait anymore, abandon the lengthy asylum procedure, and leave informally for Germany.

What her story eloquently highlights, reveals the broader picture of what we discuss in this paper: if 'legality' – that is, going through the Greek asylum system – entails multiple layers of immobilisation, then moving at the margins, bypassing restrictions, or opting out of the system may facilitate mobility in multiple scales, local or transnational, albeit unauthorised. This mobility 'paradox' may also take other forms. Some (attempt to) skip entirely the system from the very beginning, for example, by crossing the land border at Evros and trying to avoid being arrested and fingerprinted. Both practices

indicate the porosity of borders that the apparatus of control seemingly targets to eliminate, despite growing restrictions making journeys ever more perilous, as other studies have documented (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Mainwaring 2016; Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos 2016; Wyss 2019; Schwarz 2020). Others, currently, complete the asylum process and attempt to reach their desired destinations once they receive international protection status in Greece.[7] In all cases, the multiple mobilities through which displaced people negotiate, contest, transcend or circumvent the socio-spatial figurations of immobilisation and control within Greece are interrelated and sometimes intersect with mobilities that also extend beyond the country.

If displacement, as mentioned in our Introduction, refers to situations of being stuck out-of-place, our analysis showed that it is reproduced and rendered protracted also through governance regimes forcibly placing migrants in specific constrained spaces and restricting their mobility. The recent political and policy transformations in the case of Greece – even if not always explicit or widely visible – are indicative of the above. They include, among others, legislative amendments leading to the criminalisation of a number of translocal mobilities, the emergence of facilities the function of which remain obscure at the margins of reception, identification, and detention, the recent construction of concrete walls around camps formerly considered as 'open' facilities, and the recent start of the operation of 'closed camps'. Such developments may transform existing figurations of displacement within the country, and as a consequence, they may reshape and redirect both authorised and informal mobilities. After all, (unauthorised) migrant mobilities unfold within relations of power and are always ambivalent and limited by various constraints while highlighting them risks slipping 'into the legitimisation of wider assumptions about the culpability and/or victimhood of people on the move' (Squire 2016, 16). In addition, some may emerge as moves responding to restrictive policies at multiple scales, and thus have repercussions and downsides, entrapping displaced people in a vicious circle of precarity and life instability (Wyss 2019). What is more, they may not only be an object of control, but also a political technology 'enacted by directly or indirectly keeping migrants on the move' (Tazzioli 2020, 4). With such concerns in mind, however, this paper unveiled a range of multiscalar mobilities, arguing that migrants' acts and strategies to cope, adapt, resist, utilise or bypass the apparatus of immobilisation and control intervene in established figurations of displacement, disrupt, and reshape them – even if such reshaping may have repercussions. In other words, the figurations of displacement in Greece remain fluid and transforming, taking shape not only linearly through the immobilising forces, policies and spaces, but also through the practices, relationships, mobilities and aspirations of the displaced people themselves, which intervene and transform them at multiple scales, questioning the seemingly neatly ordered geography of the migration regime.

Notes

1. For further details on the employed methods, the study sites and respondents as well as the ethical concerns in conducting this research see Roman et al. (2021).

2. Data on the hotspot population derive from the statistics' section on the Ministry of Migration and Asylum website (latest entry May 2021): https://migration.gov.gr/en/statistika.
3. Data on the population, conditions and distances of mainland camps are from the IOM's Site Management Support factsheets (May 2021): https://greece.iom.int/en/sms-factsheets.
4. We chose to limit our analysis to these three types as they form essentially part of the Greek reception system and are linked to some sort of housing, which – despite being designed as temporary – often lasts for relatively prolonged periods of time. We, therefore, have not included the short-lived schemes of 'emergency' shelter of asylum-seekers in rented hotels, which has been abandoned since the end of 2020, neither detention centres.
5. As explained by an expert interviewee, by the term "urban" both UNHCR and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum refer to a broad category of people who do not stay in any official accommodation facility, including those self-accommodated, people who are temporarily hosted by relatives, friends or acquaintances, people who live in squats, the unregistered of the camps, as well as the homeless.
6. To safeguard the anonymity of research participants in this paper, we chose not to refer to them using their real names; when a name is used this is a pseudonym.
7. Despite legal restrictions (allowing for three-month visits only), there still exist institutional practices that permit refugees recognised in Greece to settle in other EU countries, on the grounds of harsh living conditions and limited integration prospects; these include a number of courts' decisions in line with the 2011 judgment M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece that did not permit refugees recognised in Greece to be returned, e.g. https://www.courthousenews.com/refugees-cannot-be-returned-to-greece-german-court-rules. This practice silently encouraged by the Greek government, has been generated to the extent that six Schengen countries formally complained to the EC: https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-greece-migration-leaked-letter/?fbclid=IwAR2rRv8lYKmImmf_rPMXHhiTjtZW4qVA9Picr4pUmqOIosC47JfECyIhwS8.

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