

walking together

collection of short stories on the refugees' right to the city



edited by

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Introduction

The manual for the refugees' right to the city, attempts to listen and highlight the everyday reality, the concerns and struggles of refugees by focusing on their personal stories. It aims to give space to those who the dominant policies render invisible and undesirable. To those who faced thousand obstacles to cross the borders, to those who have no access to the city centres, to those who are not allowed to speak about their reality, to those that met and in solidarity struggled together but also to those that faced disappointment, rage, and exhaustion yet still continued to walk.

During the recent refugee crisis between 2015 and 2019, more than 1.5 million people crossed Greek sovereign space in their journey towards North Europe. Nevertheless the closing of the borders, the hot spots and outside the cities state camps accommodation, the endless waiting for asylum applications, the racist threats and fascist attacks as well as state policies of marginalisation, criminalization and stigmatization, are ever so present and visible. What is not visible are the small everyday practices of solidarity and struggle of the people in motion. A hidden treasure of gestures, emotions, and practices of mutual assistance, self-organisation, mutual care and constant struggle, that doubts and undermines

the multiple geographical, social and political borders.

The present document attempts to contribute to the circulation of experiences and knowledges of populations in movement. Of those invisible people without rights that traced the possibility to dispute the statist housing structures, that occupied abandoned buildings at the centres of the cities and transformed them to collective housing initiatives. Those that invented forms of coexistence, cohabitation and communication beyond national, gendered and religious divisions and organised a number of protests, such as marches against refugee detention centres, and who ultimately claimed the right to the city, to visibility and to spatial justice.

This text circulates in four languages (Greek, English, Arabic and Farsi) due to our belief that the sharing process of these simple daily stories breaks the isolation of trajectories and routes and collectivises the experiences and struggles.

Mostly we would like to thank all those that participated in this research and to wish them to continue walking with dignity.

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Story no1 Mytilene

I come from a country that fascism dominates. I am from Iran and was living with my family near the borders with Azerbaijan. I am Turkish- Azeri and when about 15 years ago the Guards of the Revolution arrested my father and brother due to their political values, I had to move to Teheran. Overall, I have been arrested and imprisoned five times, four of these they put me in solitary confinement, with my first imprisonment at the age of 18. I have been tortured and beaten extensively, bearing up until now the signs of torture in my body, yet I still continue.

In the last years in Iran I was a human rights activist and actively participated in actions mainly assisting immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan, though I was also in solidarity with other repressed minorities. We delivered food, we helped people find employment and we tried to give them a voice and to attract media attention in order to talk about their plight. Meantime we not solely faced the control and repression of the state but also attacks from fascist elements of the society. The state itself of course wanted to punish me and as such they arrested me many times with

three of those being put under the torture practice of virtual execution. The last time I stayed in prison for two years, but upon my release I continued to be politically active and got rearrested and convicted to 19 years this time. As such I could no longer survive in Iran and having become a very dangerous country for me, thus, I decided to leave, escaped prison and started my journey.

I first went to Turkey where I stayed for 8 months, got networked by meeting people and started to work with human rights organisation, mainly in organisations that dealt with Syrian refugees. The situation in Turkey is extremely difficult, there are millions of refugees and I eventually realised that racism and discrimination are not characteristics solely of Iran and that in Turkey also the situation is inhumane.

When I eventually left from Turkey to come to Greece, in September 2016, I had the impression and expectation that in Europe human rights are respected, that there are values at place which will make the treatment of refugees different. I characteristically remember that when I passed by boat -together with 45 other refugees- in Lesbos there was a sense of coming to a safe and peaceful place. We all had an intense and sweet internal feeling of relief. Yet, this feeling did not last for more than two hours. Because when we eventually reached the camp in Moria and we came across the conditions there, all the expectations and dreams we had were shattered. The authorities treated us like animals without any provision for accommodation. We were all very tired and psychologically exhausted so when we reached Moria, they requested from us, without informing us about our rights, to sign that we seek asylum in Greece otherwise they will deport us back to Turkey.

They interrogated us all like we were criminals and then they closed us all in a tent, almost 100 people in the same space and prohibited us to go out for 28 days, we were thus prisoners, because Moria is a prison. We also waited in line to eat with 3000 people, though nowadays Moria is triple this number. The police mistreated us; they swore at us, they beat us with their clubs because we wouldn't stand silent in the queue for the food, very inhumane situations. It is obvious that in Moria all human rights are systematically infringed, there is no following of international protection guidelines for refugees, and it is hell. Also asylum processes progress extremely slow, there is endless waiting time, interviews upon interviews and after many months you are informed on the decision. As such myself like many others

have done, I attempted suicide and I slit my wrists to get noticed. That period was the worse in my life. Then in this hell of Moria, a very heavy winter came and within a month 10 people died of cold in the camp. I saw with my very own eyes a woman and her young daughter dead, burned by fire in their own tent. Also, it was a very common phenomenon for the authorities to categorise and divide refugees according to nationality, religion, vulnerability status etc. So, they are trying to tell us that in some sort of way the bombs, rapes, imprisonments and tortures that happen in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan differ. In reality they are mocking us right in front of our very eyes but it seems that this is the best way to administer refugees, the well-known “divide and conquer”. As such, a lot of conflicts between nationalities break out that actually benefit the authorities. Consequently, the main result of these politics of separation is that there is no space left for all refugees to unite together, self-organise and fight for their rights together. For example there is now a struggle in Sappho square at the centre of Lesbos, from a particular group of refugees that is not supported by other refugees as they are obliged every day to stand in front of the asylum office in case there is a decision, or any kind of response to their asylum claim.

So Moria is at the same time a hell and a prison. To put it better, refugees are forced to self-imprisonment in Moria, to self-entrapment amidst despair, because nobody informs them when exactly the asylum process moves forward. Instead they have them there waiting, knowing that if they miss their turn they will have to wait from the beginning again, and this way they have them trapped inside Moria’s hell. This is how states of despair and resignation are shaped, losing hope for fighting in their daily lives. Characteristically we have organised demonstrations in Moria, but very few people joined us. There is an underlying assumption that the Arabs are against the Afghans, the Africans against the Asians, the Syrians against the Kurds and so on and so on. This is very sad.

Within such a social reality I started a hunger strike a few days ago, in solidarity to the hunger strike that some young Afghani girls commenced. At 1st of November 2017, four young women started a hunger strike and after 6 days I followed them purely out of solidarity. However recently in the summer I made another hunger strike, so my body is not very strong. Yet I decided to unite with them because

they are 4 girls aged between 15 and 21 years old. My conscience did not allow me not to support them, not to help them. So I started a hunger strike too. These young women are two weeks in Moria but nobody has given them the slightest of attention. They are young women, some of them minors and nobody is taking care of them. So they decided to put their health at risk for other people to acknowledge that they exist, to give voice to their simple demand to have asylum services take notice. To acquire the necessary papers and tickets so they can continue with their boat journey to Athens. At the beginning the strike started in Moria but then with a demonstration protest rally we marched to the central square of Mytilene, Sappho square. This was very important because it gave visibility to our struggle. The police came to throw us out and a lot of refugees got afraid and went back to Moria. But a few of us remained in the central square. My opinion was that the hunger strike had to be done in the middle of the central square, at the centre of the city, otherwise nothing would change. And so it happened, but most importantly a relationship of trust between us has been established, we became like a family. This hunger strike had a great effect on me. It is a very difficult story but it teaches me to control my anger, how to remain calm. The key point in hunger strike is not to despair, not to collapse. This is my own role in this hunger strike, to control the situations, to encourage emotionally those at hunger strike. We continually have meetings and assemblies with other people in solidarity, we give interviews, and we meet with various other institutions, doctors, lawyers, the police. It requires thus great inner strength in trying to cope and stay lucid to continue the struggle. I do have to note here though that the women who started the hunger strike are unique examples of power and struggle, they have a tremendous bond between them, they are extremely resilient in the sense that even in the hardest times they support each other and never quit. Their strength is not just physical; it is emotional, mental, spiritual and foremostly collective. They work as a collective body. I have learned so much from them, they constantly energise me, and they are a source and force of life, they inspire me.

For example sometimes between them they joke that they are the female Che Guevara's. But in reality what these young Afghani women do, is incomparably far greater because they are just 15 and 16 year old with very diverse historical,

social and political standing. They are situated in a set of conditions with no apparent hope and yet they continue fighting. Another example, the other day they were having a small celebration when they reached 20th day of hunger strike and had lost 7 kilos. So they were celebrating by saying that they have become thin and beautiful like a Barbie doll. They were entertaining their weakness by transforming universal figures-dolls to become toys in their struggle. Seeing all this passion, I feel very little in front of their power and I certainly have a lot more to learn by their struggle. The struggle of these women resembles in some way a box that gets squeezed from all sides, from the police, from immigration authorities, from patriarchy, from racism. At this point the box can sustain the pressure no longer and it erupts on all sides. Independently of how this struggle will turn out, my conclusion is that the next revolution is the one of women.

Story no2 Mytilene

I came from Afghanistan to Greece about three years ago when I was 18. I stayed in Moria for 12 months, and then I was sent in a hotel in Thermi and then in Kara-Tepe for 18 months. They sent me to PIKPA for 7 months, then to Athens and after one month I returned here and since then I live in this squat, in this building. They already told me that if I leave PIKPA I would never be able to return to it. So, I returned to Lesbos and now I live in this squat. I have a friend in Athens that knew about this building from before (people used to squat here before us) and he told me to come here, that it is abandoned, to break the lock and go in. I call this space “مناخ” “chane” (house in Farsi)... I consider it my house. In this building Syrian, Kurds, Arabs and Afghanis live together.

When I arrived in Greece, I told the services that I am older, an adult. I didn't tell them that I was a minor because I heard that they had a special place for minors in Moria. I came with my family, my fiancé and her mother. Three months ago they

gave me an open card without geographical restrictions. After Lesbos we went to Athens and they both left illegally to go to Belgium. Of course they cannot apply for refugee status in Belgium. I want to go to Belgium too because I don't have anything to do here, I am a car mechanic, but I cannot work here even if I am willing to do any job. Here I just sleep. I don't know what to do. If you cannot work, then what is left to do?

I have already given my asylum interview and my application was rejected. Then the services found a free lawyer, but in the next few days he asked 250 euros in order to help me. If I had money I would have chosen my own lawyer. He didn't even respond to my messages. So, I stopped having any help. I go to the services and tell them that my wife is in Belgium but they don't seem to take notice.

I returned from Athens because I had nothing to do there, and without any money I couldn't travel to Belgium. I have no money so I have to wait. I contact my wife every day. She is tired too. She is 19.

From all the places I have stayed, PIKPA and Kara-Tepe were good. PIKPA was a quiet place without much fuss, a safe place. I like places that are not too noisy. I like being alone. I don't like places where they fight or places that don't offer some peace. In Athens I went to the Malakasa camp and I talked to the UNHR, but they had no space to offer me. They told me to go to their offices in Athens, which I did and they told me to pass again in 2 months. I had no money, no job, nowhere to stay; I didn't know anyone that could help me stay there. So what to do in Athens for two months? Here is better than Athens. In Athens it is easier to fall into dangerous situations and I think that Athens is not a good place for me. Here, the conditions are a little bit better. In the building we have water even if it is cold. Here I have some money assistance from the cash card they give us. I get 90 euros per month although it's not much money. What to buy with 90 Euros? If I go once to Mytilene they finish. Cigarettes, food, shampoo, cleaninggone. And Kara-Tepe is beautiful. It is very relaxed, a lot better than Moria. In Moria it is extremely difficult. People fight there all the time, the Arabs with the Afghans, the Afghans with the Arabs, and the Arabs with the Kurds. Outside of Moria is more relaxed. Outside of Moria there are rules. If there is a fight in Kara-Tepe people will be obliged to leave. In Moria there are no rules, in 2016 we had fights every 10 days.

In Kara-Tepe it is a lot better than Moria. There is a kitchen so people can cook, there is shower where you can clean yourself, the kids can take lessons, there are spaces for women, there is security, whereas in Moria none of these exist. In this building here we have no rules either yet there are no brawls and fights, everyone is chilled, they sleep, go out and return and people don't fight although we have no rules, because here you do what you like, because here they are all friends, even if they have different nationalities. Here too we have Afghanis, Arabs, Syrians, and Kurds but nobody is fighting like in Moria. In Moria there is tension: "Are You African? I will kill you!", "Are you Arab? I'll kill you" and so on and so on. I don't like these things. Here there is respect. In Kara-Tepe and in PIKPA is good. Maybe PIKPA is even better, freer, the kitchen is public and you can go whenever you like, it is quieter and more chilled than Kara-Tepe.

I started learning Greek In Kara-Tepe, I like it, I was going to lessons for two months but then I got tired and stopped. I don't want to continue at the moment, I feel very tired. Some times I might go for a martial arts training or to the gym.

Story no3 Mytilene

I am 32 years old, a Kurd living in Iraq, in Kirkuk. When I came to Europe first time about three years ago, I left my wife and my kids behind because I was scared for them passing through the sea. When I entered Europe I searched for friends and asked them where can I stay, where is better. I had a nephew in Denmark, but he told me it was very difficult there. I asked other friends and acquaintances but realised that things were quite hard everywhere. Then, friends that lived in Finland told me that for the people that come from Kirkuk Finland is the best place because the authorities know what happens in Kirkuk and are helping people, they give them asylum status very fast. So I reached Finland and stayed there for two years and three months. I returned to Kirkuk, to bring my family over, my wife, my children and my mother. Now, the second time I entered Europe through Greece, so I wait to see whether my asylum claim will be assessed by Greek or Finish authorities. If Greece gives me asylum I will stay here because I like it more here and because in Finland it is very cold.

Moria is a difficult place and I don't like it. People fight there very much and I had problems there that troubled me a lot. After the pogrom that happened in Moria against the Kurds we found protection in PIKPA. We stayed there for three weeks but they couldn't keep us any longer. So, the authorities started sending some of us in Kara-Tepe but most of us were sent in Moria. People that returned to Moria faced various safety and security issues so many decided to leave on their own and find a different place to sleep. In Kara-Tepe only families reside so things are peaceful and quiet. Every day I go to One Happy Family and help the people there voluntarily, I like it very much there; I cut the hair of people that come, both men and women. I also go to other places and give haircuts when my friends ask me to. I like this work and usually I stay there until late evening. Then I go to my room in Kara-Tepe. I am in the UNHR programme of "cash card". The difficulty is that where we stay is very cold. We have electricity but we don't have any heating bodies so it is imperative that we use many blankets. In the room we used to be 13 people but now most departed to Athens so I am left in the room with some Arabs. We have a very good relationship, and no problems with each other. At this moment I wait from the authorities to decide which state will handle my asylum process. My future is very uncertain. I have trouble sleeping and if I don't use pills I might stay many days without sleep. While I was in Moria, I was diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder due to the conditions in the camp, and the doctor in the camp advised to be removed from there.

Story no4 Mytilene

I am from Pakistan, and grew up in a privileged family. When I was 13 my dad died. I am an only son so I need to take care of my sisters. I left because I couldn't stand the torture and the realisation that the cost of human life is less than a dollar. Every time my sister was going to the university I didn't know if she would return. They can kill you everywhere. There are suicide bombers everywhere. They kill innocent people just because they can. I was studying to become a lawyer. They turned me away because I did not want to be a liar for the rest of my life. I am not religious. Most of my friends left. Nobody can withstand it so they leave. The economic situation is only part of the problem. The other is the European Union and the states of the west that operate in our country in various ways. They want to make us like Iraq and Afghanistan. We are attacked daily. Nobody knows about this and nobody cares for Pakistan, but it is not safe to live there. In my country I participated in a left-wing party. I went to demonstrations, but in Pakistan if you are a leftist then you are considered an atheist which means they can attack you, arrest

you, and erase you. They had me for 6 months in a cell and my mother could not find me during this time. For a year I could not walk from the tortures. So I decided to leave. We have no rights and no free speech.

To arrive in Lesbos I paid 6000 Euro to the trafficker. I passed through Iran and Turkey. The journey lasted for a whole month. I didn't want to get on the boat, I was afraid, but I had to do it. It was scary; we were on the boat for three hours. They were families there. Most of them afraid, because they didn't know how to swim.

When I arrived, I went to Moria and saw all these people who did not know the language, nothing about the future or about the continuation of their journey. I decided to stay for a week, but after three days they closed the border. It was the wrong decision to stay put here. Then I went to Athens. I had nowhere to stay and I heard about the squat in Themistokleous. I went there and participated in some protests. I met people and made contacts in Exarcheia. But it was difficult in the assemblies because we seemed to talk for hours on end and sometimes there was no solution.

Then I came back and heard about the No Border Kitchen. I felt I found the place that suits me. We make assemblies to co-decide who does what. It is of course difficult to communicate with so many people, but at the end of the day things work out. In Moria things are difficult. We are a lot of people from different places. Sometimes it is chaotic; other times its quite funny. There are often conflicts over food. Also, during the day is quite boring. At night time also a lot of people drink and then fight. There are also these nights that we light fires and sing and dance. But the people who live in Moria are very afraid, disappointed and suffering from depression. They feel that they are isolated that they are not humans. I hear people every day going on about their intentions to commit suicide. Many do not even have the desire to go to the city.

When I began my journey I expected that in Greece I would find equality. But I haven't found it apart from a few places. I believed that I would be in a better society, where people would respect each other, but I guess my expectations were too great.

Here, the people that help refugees, I don't want to call them volunteers, are offering a lot. You learn a lot. And I see that the refugees are starting slowly to

shift their perceptions now that they see how other societies function. Of course it takes time, but it is important that they do it. However here I haven't got a trace of sympathy from the locals. They look at you with animosity. They feel that we have affected tourism. In Athens it was even worse. They wouldn't give me directions. It would be very difficult for the refugees to self-organise because they feel that nothing happens. That there is no resolution.

What I have to say to the next people who want to come here is to stay strong and that everything will go fine in the end. Europe is no utopia. I would like to go everywhere. I'd like to travel. I would also like to study sociology or anthropology.

Story no5 Mytilene

I was born and raised in Iraq. In my family I am the only girl. When I was a baby I was seriously sick with polio and was left almost paralysed. My life was very difficult because everyone was making fun of me, even my family. They wouldn't let me get out of the house so I never went to school. They used to tell me that I was a weight in the family and that they were ashamed of me. I never had a choice on how to live my life. They told me "you are disabled, you will do as you are told." I remember my whole life being sad. Only my dad was good to me. I had some treatments in Iraq but with no serious results. I could walk with a cane but it was very painful. The journey to leave when Isis came was extremely difficult.

We left from Iraq altogether, my parents and my two brothers with their families. When we reached Turkey and got on the boat I was seriously afraid that I would drown. I didn't know how to swim and one of my legs is paralysed. I will never forget the moment we reached shore. I felt great joy and hope! I believed that I reached a place where people would respect me. That there were human rights here

and I would find care and treatment. I was constantly banging on my family that since now I am in Greece the UN will take care of me, that I 'll improve and study.

When they took me to Moria and I saw the place I thought that there was some mistake made. It couldn't be possible for such a place to exist in reality. My brothers started taking the piss of me again. "Where is your UN now to take care of you?" they usually told me. I fell into deep depression for one more time. In the camp as we were waiting for the asylum interview they told us that we had to wait in the island and that we cannot go to the mainland. I kept asking to be seen by a doctor, but they told me that there was no staff and I need to wait.

One day some neighbours told me about an organisation that women go and spend their time taking English lessons. So I decided to go. I learned good English in three months. I can speak and I can understand but I cannot write yet because I don't know any writing not even in my language. But I do help the organisation some times when they need a woman interpreter of Arabic. Over there nobody makes fun of me or my disability. This has given me great hope. I feel that at last I started educating myself and I like very much that I can help other people. Now that I know English if my asylum application is successful I would be able to go to another country and find work.

When I left Iraq, I didn't care in which country I would end up, as long as it was in

Europe. As far as beauty goes, I love Greece, Mytilene is very beautiful. But Moria is the ugliest place there is. If I did not live in Moria but in a flat I wouldn't like to leave this place, this island.

Story no6 Thessaloniki

I am from Syria, I came to Greece in February 2016 and actively participated in the residential occupation of Orfanotrofeio. I had never been in a squat before in my whole life, it was an abandoned building, and if we were honest we would say it was an illegal occupation of a building but it became my home, and I will explain further how important that is. To start with, I want to talk about my first impressions. When I first reached its entrance there were 3-4 anarchists present that told me I am welcome, they talked to me very politely and I had a positive impression because that was the first time that somebody welcomed me in Greece. I stayed in the squat of Orfanotrofeio for 6 months and it was a very important experience for me. The people that supported it were very good and very caring and I made some very good anarchist friends. We co-designed certain rules of operation that were imbued with a logic of respect for one another, without discrimination based on gender or nationality. We agreed to refrain from stealing, smoking drugs, being rude to each other or dishonest and to respect times of eating and sleeping. The

daily concerns of the squat were to distribute the work that needed to be done each day, to make a shifts schedule for cleaning, cooking and securing the space while having many assemblies and organising various political actions.

Political actions were focused on equality and the rights of refugees, primarily through an imperative to become visible in the city and not hidden and tossed away like garbage in the camps that the state has set up in the fringes of the city. Orfanotrofeio was an abandoned by state and church building inside the city, so it was a very good idea to occupy it and provide food and shelter to refugees. I, like many other refugees –occupants of Orfanotrofeio could be in the centre of the city very easily and have experiences from the city and the lives of its inhabitants. For example we could go to parties and to concerts in the universities, to make friends, learn the Greek language and to know and feel that we are part of this city. My opinion is that keeping refugees out of the city in isolated camps is a grave mistake.

Likewise, in the squat processes we all talked between us, there was no leader and nobody was seen as superior to the rest. I have never met such a way to function collectively before and most importantly, this way of functioning never made you feel that you are foreign. It was instead trying to break the perceptions that some were local Greek citizens or Europeans with privileges and the rest refugees from other continents. Yes, it's true that the experiment of Orfanotrofeio attempted to break national and social borders and brought us closer. It became my home because I felt safe and at ease there. Most importantly it was rejecting the concept of private property. Usually when we say home, we mean either a space where we have a rent contract or that belongs to us because we bought it or that was given to us by our parents. Orfanotrofeio became our home because it gave birth to relationships of comradeship, relationships of trust, relationships of responsibility without having to obey someone, without having to pay rent in order not to get evicted. It was not a closed house controlled by an owner. Instead all refugees had access to it as the entire neighbourhood had access to it. It was very touching to see people from the neighbourhood daily offering us food, medicine, and clothes while all the shops and individuals around the street respected us and helped us.

A very important event that took place during my stay in Thessaloniki was the No Border Camp in the summer of 2016. It was of primary and significant importance

because I met people from all over the world, Germany, England, Greece, Arabs, Kurds. It looked like a multinational gathering. Everybody talked with everyone, laughing and making jokes and in general created a great condition to meet people and participate in various activities, in the kitchen, at the party or in concerts. It was a unique experience to gain knowledge from all these people gathered in solidarity. Every day we were transferring refugees by bus, from the camps in the outskirts of the city to the University at the centre of the city where the no border camp was situated. For some people maybe it was the first time at the centre of Thessaloniki and what they were seeing was nothing less than the fantastic community of the No Border Camp. For these people it was a very important event, they felt that their life mattered, that people from all over the world came to support them. I as a refugee, but also as a resident of Thessaloniki I talked with them and I explained them what is the No Border Camp. Slowly the refugees organised their own assemblies, they organised dances and celebrations, they were offered food, clothes, support, and legal assistance and started sharing their problems and their needs. A lot of the refugees met people in solidarity who offered them a home in the centre of the city and left the horrible camps.

I mostly though want to highlight the issues around the psychology of the refugees. Most of them are people traumatised by war, they have lost their homes, their belongings, and have done a massive and extremely hard journey to reach Greece. As they arrived here, they found closed borders, and survived the horrid conditions of Idomeni only to be thrown in the camps outside the city. Even the luckiest ones that got given a flat in the city are totally psychologically damaged. They sit all day and stare at a wall for 24 hours a day, they have no friends and they wait, they wait while feeling lost in the bureaucracy of the interviews for asylum or relocation. All of them suffer from depression so I would like to say the following: When you have depression –and I have passed long time depressed- you shouldn't live alone, you should get out, go to the centre of the city, walk, look at the sun, the sea, meet people and talk, acquire social experiences, make friends and show the best of you. Otherwise it is all wrong, you need to open conversations, to be active and polite, only this way you improve your life.

Story no7 Thessaloniki

I reached Greece in November 2015 and stayed in Idomeni for a month at the time when the borders were closed and only refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan were allowed to pass through. They didn't let me pass. I did not have a specific destination to reach, I just wanted to reach a place where I would feel safe and able to live and create the life that I desire without problems. After Idomeni, I went to Thessaloniki at the squat Orfanotrofeio for refugees and migrants. In fact I was the second refugee that entered the squat. At that time it was full of people in solidarity though none of them spoke as political teams which I considered a good thing. So we started altogether, migrants and solidarity people to repair the building. At the beginning we did not have hot water, the showers did not work and the kitchen did not exist. We repaired everything from scratch and with the assistance of mechanical engineers in solidarity we did some more work in the building. The refugees were of various nationalities and most of them wanted to go to Germany. At some moment in Orfanotrofeio there were around 100 people which means that we sur-

passed optimum capacity of the building. People were sleeping everywhere, it was very hard.

More specifically I consider the Orfanotrofeio squat as a prime example of refugee living squats because it was based in active solidarity. Whoever participated did it out of genuine interest and not due to political or personal gain. There were people of solidarity that stayed for 24 hours a day, who slept by our side, giving with an open heart. If we needed anything they would bring it from the outside, paying it out of their own pockets, and I know very well that here in Greece there is an economic crisis and that the solidarity people have economic problems too. Yet whoever was going out to get a coffee was always bringing one more for us. Whoever came to support us for their micro political benefit did not stay long. There is an important difference between petty political investment and real solidarity. It is different to be asked “hello, how are you doing?” in an offhand manner and to be asked “hello, how are you doing?” wholeheartedly. Later, the borders closed for everybody and the people started to think more on what to do, so life at Orfanotrofeio acquired a more permanent basis.

As for the evacuation of Orfanotrofeio, that day there were a few solidarity people that got arrested. The police that evacuated the building destroyed everything, even the personal items of immigrants. So, people lost their money, their papers, their passports even their few clothes. Think how important it is for a refugee to lose her/his phone, yet the cops deliberately did not allow the refugees to take their mobiles so that we wouldn't contact other people. But the mobile phone is the only way the refugees can be in contact with their own families and people far away, with their own country. The building was destroyed instantly by order of the church who owns it. The church and the state tended to accuse and blame Orfanotrofeio for everything bad happening in the city.

As for the internal processes of Orfanotrofeio, it was working as an assembly that we all (men and women) participated and talked in various languages such as Greek, English, or Arabic through translators. We build two assemblies, the political assembly and the housing assembly. The housing assembly was run by migrants, that is by the occupants of the squat and organised around daily issues, whereas the political assembly was mainly dealing with political issues and was

open to all, refugees /immigrants and solidarity people. With time relations of trust started to develop and we organised many demonstrations and other actions. At this point I would like to repeat that we sensed which kind of people participated out of real interest or out of micro political motivation. The migrants are people who left from countries that are at war, they left for political, economic or other reasons and as such, each one thinks and understands, has a political view, and by time acquires the knowledge on who to trust and who not to. This way we were able to create some form of unity between us, and ultimately to function together, migrants and solidarity people as one collective person. Characteristic of this process is that every week we co-decided the programme of the operation of the building. Each of the dwellers had the responsibility to clean on certain days, to cook or care for the building. In collaboration with solidary Greeks and internationals that had the necessary knowledge we repaired anything that needed to, the plumbing, the toilets, the showers. Of course, sometimes whoever had an expertise on a field tended to be occupied more by the task at hand, like with cooking or some technical jobs. But overall I can say that most of us were trying to learn from one another and to participate equally to our obligations. Some might wonder how we all communicate with each other being from different countries. But I have to say that most of us come from Arab countries and we share common cultural codes, and as such we know how to communicate between us. We respect each other's culture. The few times that there were some problems such as a violent event for example, we all talked about it in the assembly, because the non-exercise of violence was one of the basic values in Orfanotrofeio.

As far as the personal goes, from my own experience, I have to say that we shouldn't look solely for the negative but neither to applaud. I come from a country where the only thing allowed is to applaud the dictator, but it's important to recognise both positives and negatives. So these few months, I can say with certainty that I met some of the kindest people, I can't find words to describe it, also as I said before I met people with political motivation but I also met ordinary people that helped because they were philanthropists, but they all come I have to say from the one same family that is called human race.

On the other hand it is a usual perception that if you meet one person from a

specific country you tend to see everyone from that country behaving the same way. So at the beginning I thought that all Greeks, Spanish and Germans were like the solidarity people I met in Orfanotrofeio, however, after going out and meeting more people I realised things are more complex. Without going very far let's pay attention to the Orfanotrofeio neighbourhood. Some people were truly in solidarity, others were negative and accused us that we make noise, others that I wouldn't call fascists but are against immigrants kept asking us why should this building be for refugees only and not for poor homeless Greeks. Some of the solidarity people told us that these are racist and fascists, others didn't pay much attention. Some of the neighbours were coming over to eat together with us, I won't forget last New Year's Eve where many of our neighbours came and you could see people that were with us or others that did not like us. Though to be honest the Orfanotrofeio was sustained to a great degree because the neighbourhood helped, people kept coming and bringing food, clothes, money for the hospital and medicine.

Closing I could summarise my experience in the motto "the lonely fish can easily be consumed" and would like to suggest that we shouldn't consider the Orfanotrofeio as a paradise, instead we should learn from its problems so not to repeat the same mistakes. If I am doing something wrong my friends should come and tell me that I am wrong, because if they don't and they are tolerant, then I will keep making the same mistake my whole life. Specifically the most important mistake from which we can learn is to stop thinking that if you are not with me you are against me, so if you tell me that you don't want to drink coffee I shouldn't pressure you because you might have some reason, and I should hear it. Finally something for those at the camps, don't think only of food, sleep and your journey to Germany. The world is bigger than the camp, exercise your abilities.

Story no8 Thessaloniki

I am from Baghdad, Iraq and I left in January 2016. The reason was that the situation was extremely dangerous. There is ISIS, Para statist units, and in reality there is an on-going war. Everyone is in danger either from bombs blowing up or somebody killing you. So at the beginning we travelled together with my sister to north Iraq in the area of Kurdistan where my story with the smugglers started. You have to know that although the Kurdish area belongs to Iraq, I myself as an Arab cannot move freely. So, only by paying smugglers I could move inside my country. After 15 days I managed to reach Turkey and from there I paid other smugglers to come to Greece, to Lesbos. Altogether my journey cost me 3.500 dollars. From Lesbos I went to Piraeus and from there the police took us by buses first in Larisa and then at the EKO petrol station near the borders at Idomeni. I stayed in this camp for three months and at some point in May the police took us to the camp in Vasilika, outside Thessaloniki.

The camp in Vasilika is in some distance from the village. Though this place is

not for human beings, because it is far from the city and because the neighbouring villages were against refugees, organising racist gatherings and we were very afraid there. The camp itself was a terrible space. It was a deserted poultry meat processing factory where they piled up 1500 people like chickens. At the beginning for all these people there were only three toilets, the food was totally inedible, if you gave it to your dog he wouldn't eat it. Every day we were eating the same food, either beans or potatoes. We never had any meat and always extremely small portions. There was no care for infants and babies or small children didn't have milk for days. The situation started improving in small steps, though in reality each step took a month. Also the summer was extremely difficult because there was a heat wave and inside the cement building it was terribly hot. Now that it is winter it is again terribly difficult but cold. In reality our life is like one of constant prison. From the borders with the fences they took us to Vasilika camp which is a place like prison. From Vasilika we can't go anywhere, if you want to buy something you have to walk quite a long time to the nearest petrol station. If you want to go to Thessaloniki you need to take two buses and you still reach the city after 2 hours. Also solidarity people, volunteers and NGOs were not allowed on site. I can certainly say that the EKO petrol station in the borders looked like paradise in comparison to what we lived in Vasilika. At least at the petrol station camp there was a school, a kitchen; there were many volunteers, there was almost everything, in contrast, in Vasilika there was nothing. I am a cinematographer and I would like to make a documentary movie about the life at the camp but the police and the authorities did not let me to. They don't allow you to record video or take pictures because they don't want people from the outside to see what the situation inside the camp is. They want us to be invisible, in the dark, without voice, forgotten people.

Then we found out about the No Border Camp from actions that people were doing in the camp. I liked the idea and I came to the No Border Camp by the buses that the organisers set up daily. It was very important because it was a space where our voices could be heard, do many activities, meet people from all around Europe. I was impressed with solidarity people because they came from various faraway places to assist us, and many of them as much as before as much as after the No Border Camp stayed with us, and sincerely supported us. They are not like the

NGO's who care only how they will make money. I personally participated in a media group with photographers, directors and media activists from many countries; it was a very good experience. I also participated in the refugee assemblies that took place each day, it was very good because we were refugees from different camps, from different countries with different cultures and we all met, talked and shared our problems. It was extremely important that so many people, refugees and people in solidarity met and talked about their rights while organising demonstrations and actions to claim them.

After that summer an NGO took me and my sister in a house provided by the accommodation programme for refugees. We stayed there three months, but the house was in a very bad condition, it was in Kordelio, that is very far from the centre of the city and bus tickets were not provided. Also, they did not provide food, the house had no water, only electricity. The ceiling was rotten, there were holes in it and water was coming through. It was horrible and refugees coming need to know that the NGO houses are no heaven. Only walls, nothing else. My sister also has psychological problems and nobody cared for her, she is not seen by a doctor, the NGO did not care for her but instead just got given a house and nothing else. I am very disappointed and that makes me feel lost, I lost my hope. My life is very boring, I live in a house with my sister, and there are no friends around. Yet I do have to note that all these experiences and all these people that I met during my journey changed me. I met people with different views, different cultures, different languages, different way of life, and with some I became friends.

Story no9 Thessaloniki

I am from Afghanistan and came from Idomeni camp to the housing squat of Orfanotrofeio at December 2016, right before the evacuation of the camp. I was lucky that I left before the cop's buses arrived in Idomeni and I was one of the first residents of Orfanotrofeio. At the beginning it was hard, the building needed a lot of work, but it was much better than living in a tent in Idomeni. In the Orfanotrofeio squat I had my own room and that was important because there were many men and I was the only girl there completely alone and although other women were there they were with their families. The first night I must have slept for 12 hours, I haven't slept peacefully for more than three months; in reality I was sleepless for many days in the camp. That was the first important element of Orfanotrofeio. Most of the time before I felt psychologically pressured and extremely stressed and in Orfanotrofeio I felt instantly safe and I liked that very much. The most important to me at that time was to feel safe. Although I did not speak English and needed a translator all the time and even despite being alone I instantly felt very safe.

The people in Orfanotrofeio came from many countries, with different languages, different cultures, many were sick and exhausted. It was hard at the beginning and it's important to stress this, tasks and shifts should be taken in common by different people and should not be based on nationality and language, and that was something that we realised in Orfanotrofeio. In general terms we could say that it was a worthwhile attempt to all live together, and to a certain degree we achieved that. For example I did not feel discriminated or repressed, all of us had our problems but nobody pressured me, nobody held me accountable of why I left my country and I am in Orfanotrofeio. From the moment I was there and obeyed the rules, communal rules that we all set up together, they all trusted me and I trusted them all. I want to stress this point, there was nobody telling you what you had to do, you could do whatever you liked, I felt free, only if somebody did something negative were they hold accountable. Generally the central characteristic of Orfanotrofeio was mutual help, without knowing who the other was you were coming closer to them because one helped another, we shared the housing, the food, the clothes, and this brought as closer and we all became friends. Every day somebody had the responsibility to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner, some people were playing football or basketball, I was taking care of young children while others cared for the cleaning or did English and Greek language lessons. There were a lot of assemblies, too many I would say. This was our daily reality, and it was a lively one, it was not just survival or an ordinary life, it was a lot more interesting and a lot happier than the life of a regular person. Primarily we did not have a boss, we did not have to go to work in the morning and listen to directions from someone superior. Nobody telling us what or not to do, nobody repressed us it was all free and collectively decided. There was no space for leaders, each one of us was developing a conscience on what one should and shouldn't do.

I think we were having a better time than a normal family that lived in any building next to Orfanotrofeio. Our life was interesting and there was meaning, no boring routine. Before I came to Greece I worked for a year in Dubai, for a year I did not stop working, my life was twelve hours work then sleep and nothing else. In reality I was not living; I did not hear a song for a whole year. So when I came to Orfanotrofeio squat I said that this is the life I want to live, I will never go back

again. Today that I speak to you I can tell you that Orfanotrofeio made me human again, gave me energy; I have it deep in my heart.

When we got evacuated I cried a lot and it was the first time I cried in Greece. It's a matter of feelings; there were so many memories there and when I saw it getting demolished with all the personal items and belongings of its residents in it, I was shocked. It was like they wanted to kill all these memories and the little stories of all the people that passed from the building. Orfanotrofeio was not just a house, it was a lot more. When we say house, we mean a place where a family or somebody alone lives, for me the house is like a little prison, usually there is some sadness. In contrast in Orfanotrofeio there was joy, there were so many activities. So I felt great rage for the cops, why they did that, why did they demolished a building with refugees when they cannot house them? It was an empty building that hosted immigrants, there are so many empty buildings in the city that refugees could stay, and they leave them empty.

Story no10 Thessaloniki

I left my country on October 2015. The situation for my country that is in Central Africa is extremely grim because there is no free speech and human rights are almost non-existent due to having a dictatorship and having to obey the dictator. A lot of people have disappeared, tortured and murdered without any explanation. I took part in political actions of leftist groups and put myself in danger many times. I was assaulted various times, imprisoned, tortured and condemned to 15 years in prison. The secret services took my laptop and all my personal belongings and then jailed me, tortured me with electric shocks and even made me drink a poison that left me paralysed and sick for many days.

I finally achieved my escape and then went to Senegal. But in Senegal the situation is also difficult, there is a dictatorship and they cooperate with my country so they had my details. Regardless, I managed to acquire a fake passport and fly to Istanbul in Turkey. I found a smuggler there and paid him 1000 euros and that is how I went to Samos. I stayed for about 10 days in Samos and then took a boat to Athens

and from there I reached Idomeni at the border with North Macedonia. Meanwhile the borders were already closed for those of us coming from zones not registered as war torn, allowing only Syrian, Iraqis and Afghans. So I was left stranded and isolated in Idomeni for around two weeks. The situation was extremely hard. It was very cold. It was raining constantly there were no tents for people to stay and of course no toilets. I stayed many nights in the cold without tent and without a blanket. Finally by the time it was certain that the borders would not open again, some solidary people gave me the address of the squat Orfanotrofeio at Thessaloniki.

I stayed at Orfanotrofeio for 6 months and my life changed radically. I could never imagine the solidarity and care that I met at the squat. The whole journey up to Orfanotrofeio was a hell, pure suffering and full of disappointments.

Orfanotrofeio is one of the best squats that I've seen and visited in Greece. The people that participate and support the squat are truly dedicated to the cause of equality and solidarity. They organise and take care of the squat but also make several political actions. The care and concern can be seen primarily in their help towards the refugees, if someone gets arrested then instantly demonstrations get organised, if someone needs help with asylum issues then lawyers are found. But I think the most important is that many nationalities and people live in common spaces trying to get to know each other and learn from each other. We organise communal cleaning and cooking shifts. We also claim our right to free movement and organise demonstrations so that our voice is heard in the city. So Orfanotrofeio was good because all of us were pressured both mentally and physically by the journey. When I came to it I instantly felt a hug, the solidarity people supported me, even if you have psychological problems they are very supportive and caring, so much so that they are trying to relieve you. Also, a lot of political groups participate at Orfanotrofeio, there are always assemblies and meetings. I am very impressed of how dedicated the people that support the Orfanotrofeio are. I can really repeat with ease how Orfanotrofeio has changed the way I look at life. Until I reached Orfanotrofeio all I knew was smugglers asking me for money and hiding from cops and border police that chased me. At Orfanotrofeio I found my lost dignity and I felt safe and free. That was really important because the laws of states and their borders consider me as illegal, as a crook. In comparison, at the Orfanotrofeio squat

I feel free and creative.

I would say that what I liked very much was the democratic and self-organised way that Orfanotrofeio functions. If I was to find a phrase expressing what happens at Orfanotrofeio that would be “Learning to Walk Together”. This learning in mutual care starts from simple daily functions of the squat, like the full participation of all for cooking and cleaning, and extends to self-organised decisions for political actions like demonstrations, interventions and other events. Nobody pushes another to do something, and all the decisions and events are based in dialogue, respect towards others and consent. This way we all learn to be active together, to care for one another and to function as a team. So this team is one of care and political struggle, on one side arguing for equality between us and on the other raising our voice in the city centre with protests and actions. I believe that political actions need to intensify, more immigrants/refugees should participate and solidarity networks to strengthen.

Story no11 Athens

I was a student of political science at the University of Damascus when the war in Syria started. I decided to leave because I was left with two choices. Either to follow military service and kill some or killed by some. So the only alternative was to live the country. I came to Greece although the borders were already closed. I arrived at 8th of March 2016, just prior to the treaty between EU –Turkey, and stayed in Mytilene for five days in the horrid camp of Moria. Then I took my papers and bought a ticket to Piraeus. When I reached Piraeus I was put with all the other refugees in 7 buses that took us to an ex-military base very far away from Athens, almost 7 hours away. Whoever was in the buses, upon reaching our destination and seeing that we were in the middle of nowhere, decided collectively not to get down of the bus. Finally after some negotiations they took us back to Piraeus. There I lived for a month in a little tent inside the port of Piraeus. Then I heard from a friend about City Plaza, about a new squat which opened to house refugees. So I came to City Plaza and offered my help as an interpreter/ translator. Basically I am in City Plaza

since the first days it opened. I liked the idea very much and I participated actively.

I stayed in City Plaza for almost a year. I gained great experience and it helped me a lot since the squat was situated in the centre of Athens, in a neighbourhood with a unique atmosphere. It was a lot better than the state camps but also from other places managed by various NGOs. Everyday passing in City Plaza we all learned of something new. In the beginning we learned how to communicate with each other and how to organise such a big squat. So we learned how to self-organise, making small teams, teams for translating, for cooking, for cleaning and for welcoming. Then all these teams had assemblies on how to manage the responsibilities undertaken. As a translator I participated in many of the teams since I was useful in assisting the communication between the different members of the teams. In City Plaza people came from many countries, Afghans, Kurds, Pakistanis, and Syrians among others, so translating was vital to their function. I believe that the concept of self-organisation is unique. Of course as in everywhere there were problems and issues to be resolved. But the participation, the assistance, the solidarity and the support that we received in our time to City Plaza was exemplary. As much as from Greeks, as from people coming from other European countries and places. Most important of course was the fact that all these people without knowing any other language apart from their mother tongues, participated and offered their strength and energy to create and sustain this space. For example, some offered to cook for 3-4 days a week. Here we cook for 400 people daily, and that is a great responsibility, because eventually you come out of the kitchen exhausted. But you take this responsibility because you see other people like the Greeks or the solidarity people offering their help without any reward whatsoever. Some came from Germany, others from France and from many other countries, they paid their tickets, and they came here to live with us, just in order to help, to teach us languages that would be useful if we relocated in Germany, England, or France. As such there is team of teachers that give lessons everyday freely to everyone without expecting anything in return whatsoever and this cannot be but a good thing.

I don't think that there is another place like City Plaza. It's not just the best, it's the best of the best. The reason for that is self-organisation. You don't have many things but what you have are yours, you manage them according to will and you

feel them yours. I don't just talk about people here; I talk about the effort that each one of us has made, because without our effort there wouldn't be a space like that. There are more than 100 rooms that need cleaning, there is a kitchen, training sessions, different cultures constantly mingling, and of course plenty of further work. For example the reception is open 18 hours a day and security is 24 hours a day. Security is not only for the safety and protection of the building but for any event that can occur during the night. Somebody might need an ambulance, so there are always people awake to take care of you.

I deeply believe that the reason why this space is so deep in our heart is because there is no private property in this place, there is no boss to order you, but instead we are all responsible for this building and as such we felt it in a personal but mostly collective way as our own. In here we felt what it means sharing and collective responsibility. If there was a problem, then a collective assembly in which we all participate took place. We set the matters that come up on the table and we listen patiently to what everybody has to say and then a decision appears on its own, because the people speak in a rational way knowing that their word matters, that they are being respected and that eventually it will not be a decision among a few but through consensus we will all reach a commonly accepted decision. There are principles, i.e. when two people fight then both of them need to leave the building instantly. If they are fighting at night then both have to leave in the middle of the night. This place is for promoting dialogue, not quarrelling. Of course each one of us could have our opinions and arguments but it is not allowed to fight between us or exert physical force. So the primary principle is one of "non-violence". All and any kind of violence. If there is an accusation of violence in a couple or for any domestic abuse whatsoever, it's not accepted. Alcohol is also not allowed partly because we respect religious people and partly to reduce the probabilities of fighting, after all if you want you can access freely any of the bars that are outside. Children are also not allowed out of doors of city plaza without their parents. The reason is that they need someone to cross the street safely. These are basic rules of operation and respect. These rules make the City Plaza community to be better and as such we insist on these rules.

Story no12 Athens

I am from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan and was born to a semi religious family that had the privilege to possess an exemplary social status in the religious structure of the country, so most people treated us with respect, and generally we were privileged with access to anything we wanted. Later when I became an adult I had some problems of survival because I was persecuted and eventually had to leave. So now I am an asylum claimant. I still find that I have some privileges here, since I found good employment, I am being paid, I have family and friends safe around me and my children go to school. Yet there are many challenges on how a refugee survives here in Athens. Working everyday as a humanitarian actor in the refugee camps I bear witness on how life unfolds in the camps. I can say that people in the camps face a grave lack of human rights, in reality there is constant infringement of the rights of refugees, and in actuality they have deprived them of rights.

Since I was very young, I liked to discover things, explore different aspects and now I am in a city that is full of things to explore. First of all I am among people

I never thought I'll meet. The people that I deal with, the refugees, come from Maghreb countries up to Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is an exciting meeting, I find it so challenging and I like being in such a multicultural and multinational environment because every day I learn new things from different people.

I am here since February 2016 and I am very familiar with the situation at the camps. I would like to start with an apparently paradoxical situation. There are many cases when a family of refugees that resides in the camp is given the right to live in a proper flat in the city. Yet, when transported there in less than 2-3 months they cannot stand life in the flat and they want to return to the camps. At the beginning, it was incomprehensible to me how could this happen. But then, I realised that the real reason that people request to return to the camp was because all this time in the flat, the people felt marginalised. Moreover after all these months or years in the camp people have their friends and neighbourhoods, and third there are forms of vulnerability, some suffer from chronic medical conditions and thus they need to be able to access various services that in the flat were not directly available. In the camp there are social workers and doctors from various NGOs that can be of assistance at any moment, whereas in a random neighbourhood without knowing anyone the isolation is detrimental. Instead they need to call to request for a social worker to reach them, and when one becomes available to visit them. They don't have friends or acquaintances around; they are foreigners in a foreign neighbourhood so they are afraid and feel insecure in the flat. For those who do have children it is paradoxically a lot harder to send them to school. They feel awkward to take their kids in school and social workers are not enough to care for each family. In contrast, at the camp a school bus together with the appropriate social workers picks up and delivers the kids with safety. Daily contact with public services is also harder. Again, whoever lives in the camp and needs to access a public/civil service is usually accompanied by a social worker. If you live in the city, in a flat, although supposedly you are more flexible to choose when to go, for example for your AMKA (social security number), social workers are not available anytime. Thus the refugees visit the social services on their own and consequently do not get served and instead they face a range of bad behaviours from state employees.

However, progressively the situation in the camps deteriorates due to funds be-

ing cut and consequently available services become scarcer. Of course I do believe that if someone wants to find their way, they will do it independently of whether they live in the camp or in a flat. For example there are various people which are situated in the camp but spend all day in the city because they have jobs and they just want to sleep in the camps. Since these people stay there and work in the city and return at night only to sleep, sometimes even their neighbours think they left because they see the container locked all day.

Anyway I believe that the argument that people need to leave the camps and live in flats is not that simple. Every situation is different and depended upon a complex set of factors. For example, I am considered privileged living in a flat with my family in Kypseli. Nevertheless I have to confront the micro racism of the neighbours on a daily basis. Every day when I leave the house to go to work, my downstairs neighbours keep telling me to watch out my children because they make noise, or because they litter, or that clothes fell from the drying rag and that I should learn to buy pegs. All of these are petty reasons but they do constitute a racist atmosphere that eventually has an effect both on me and my children. Where I live I don't have any Afghani neighbours to share similar mentalities. For example last night that was the longest of the year we have a special event, a celebration called YOLO. People usually gather and celebrate yet my family did not because we are alone in the neighbourhood. In contrast at the camp they organised a great celebration, this is especially important for the way a refugee feels in a foreign land. Generally one could say that there is a community feeling in the camps which is greatly missed if you live in a flat. It is so also so much easier to participate in lessons of languages, art and sports. There is an allocated space for the little children, a football field, special reserves of clothes, shoes and various small things that are of particular necessity, especially for children. The camp in a sense is the full package and if you live in a flat you don't have these amenities. Mind you, what I describe is relevant to the camps that are relatively close to Athens. For the rest of them that are more distant like the Malakasa or the Thiva, the Lavrio and the Elefsina ones, the situation is extremely dramatic. Refugees are afraid during the night, there is a lack of security and if there is a need to go to the hospital you have to pay a fortune for the taxi. They are isolated places in the middle of nowhere. So, when we talk about

camps you have to know that not all are the same. For example in Larisa, refugees feel so pressured and trapped that suicide attempts are common. So I will insist arguing that not all camps are the same. I would not suggest to any refugee to live in the Malakasa camp, Lavrio or Elefsina. From what I've seen I believe the best camps are in Schisto, Skaramaga and Eleonas.

Story no13 Athens

I am Afghani. However I lived with my parents not in Afghanistan but in Iran. I was born in Teheran and never lived in Afghanistan, so I was treated always as a foreigner. At the end of February 2016 I decided to leave and start the great journey towards Europe. I travelled with my husband and our two little children. The journey was long and hard, we crossed the borders of Iran with Turkey, went to Istanbul, then Izmir, then Chios and now are in Athens. The journey had many dangers, first and foremost the various smugglers because for each passage we had to find a smuggler, so in total we used 10. We constantly had to hide in order to cross the border and even in Turkey it was extremely hard. Even if we didn't have any food or water we had to stay hidden and quiet so the authorities would not find us. Another great difficulty was the distance itself, a lot of the times we had to walk in the snow in the middle of the winter at night so it was very cold. We had to walk during the night and not the day so we were afraid because we couldn't see the trail and we constantly feared that someone from the team might get lost in the way.

When we reached Athens, they took us to the camp at Elliniko. There were three camps there; we were in “Arrivals” at the first space. This space was huge and we lived there with 2500 refugees. It was horrible. There was no sense of security. I stayed there for 2 months. We lived inside the building and although that sounds a lot better than living outside in the tent, within the building there were no walls or anything to separate us so we all stayed together with no privacy whatsoever. In reality I did not sleep for two months because I was afraid that someone might come to steal our belongings or even our children. The hygienic conditions were terrible; everywhere it was dirty with excrements. Also there was no hot food. Not to mention that there were no interpreters or cultural mediators. There was nobody responsible to hear us, to listen to what our basic needs were. After many days they just brought us some basic medication. Most kids were sick because the quality of the food was extremely bad and in reality there was no hot food so consequently most of them were weak. Even the water was dirty. Eventually kids developed fever and diarrhoea but only the most severe cases were being treated and that was done in the following way. In the morning they concentrated the worse cases, they kept them on the side all together and at night an ambulance was coming to get them to the hospital. So a kid could die just waiting for the duration of the day until the ambulance come at night. The only thing they kept telling us was to give water to the children but we did not have any clean water. They were taking the piss right in front of our very eyes. We had no boiler to boil the dirty water and kill the germs.

Two months after, a team came from Germany. We had no information whatsoever what the situation was in Serbia or the rest of the countries that were part of our journey and we believed or hoped that soon we would be able to leave Athens and continue our journey. The German team had social workers and legal advisors with them and informed us that the only choice we had was to claim asylum in Greece or to request reunification if we had any other members of our family somewhere else in Europe. So, I thought I have no money, nobody that I know in Europe and no papers to stay in Greece since the temporary one month permit had just expired. We were in a dead end.

At that point we heard from some solidary people that the City Plaza squat opened, and I was eventually one of the first that came here. I remember that first

day I went as the last day in fear because I was with people, the solidarity people that were trying to open the door of the building and there was commotion. So I said to myself that if this doesn't work and the police comes, the only think I can do is to hug my children. But everything went well and we entered the building. Instantly I felt a sense of security for myself and care from the solidarity network people. It was the first time I felt welcomed since the beginning of my journey.

I am here for two and a half years. At the beginning things were more difficult. We had no water and no electricity. I remember for two nights we had no power whatsoever. But I also remember how the solidarity people brought us great lunches and breakfast. Also the rooms were brilliant, the best rooms I stayed so far in our journey and for the first time clean spaces. Here we also have a great kitchen that we build slowly but that functions perfectly. Families from all over the world live here and that is great, because you meet people and learn things about so many countries that you would never had a chance to otherwise. In City Plaza, the residents speak all the languages and all the religions in the world. I feel truly lucky to be here. The most important thing is that we share everything and care for one another here. We cook together, we eat together, we make so many common actions, we go out together and of course we fight together. We all agreed on some rules. First rule was that we respect one another, that we are all responsible for what's happening here collectively and that we are in solidarity between us. We built spaces like a kids' space, a women's space and a small medical room. We made everything collectively and we share everything collectively. It is also important that all of us participate in everything. Not only in cleaning, cooking, and washing, the shifts and the security, in short, the basic functions of the building. But also participate in the political process, in the assemblies, in the events and the demonstrations. We also set up language lessons and childcare so that mothers could leave them and go out. Another primary rule is that no fighting is allowed. If such a matter arises then a particular team in the reception is responsible for conflict resolution. That is very good for us.

Certainly at the beginning things were quite hard because we did not know if we stay or leave from Greece, if the squat makes it or not, while it took us time to build relationships of trust between us. But what we wanted was to have a quiet and

peaceful space to relax from the psychological pressures of the journey. Besides I was under great pressure from the family of my husband that kept telling me that I am a failure and that I failed to reach a good country in Europe. They accused me that I quit everything in Tehran and eventually failed and that it would be best if I head back. We will send you money to come back, they said. Of course I did not accept the offer, and kept repeating to myself that I am responsible for myself and that I will eventually make it. So I needed time to see what I could do. What I did know was that I was alone, I had no help from anyone and constantly faced questions on where do I go next, what will I do in the future, what would I do with my children. You left for a better life and you lost everything, you have no choices and no money left. Really for the first six months my brain had stopped working. I could answer nothing; I could think of nothing, I was so confused with what would happen to me, I wanted only to save my children. I think of all these now and my heart hurts. I needed psychological support and City Plaza provided it. Every week I talked to a psychologist that told me to rely on my strengths and that eventually I'll make it. I believe that finally due to the support and solidarity of the people in City Plaza I made it.

Story no14 Athens

I live half the time in City Plaza and the other half in the camp of Skaramagga. I am from Afghanistan but grew up in Iran. More specifically my parents are from Afghanistan and two months after I was born we went to Iran. So I spent all my life in Teheran, in Iran. My heart belongs to Iran; I was brought up and spend all my childhood there. But when I grew up, I realised that the state does not accept me, that if you are the child of immigrants they will throw you in the bin, that you don't exist, you understand. I felt it at school, I felt it at college I felt it all around. I have no passport and no ID because the state of Iran gave us none. When you are a child you don't understand these things because you play with other children. But as I started to grow up I felt more and more that I was treated as a stranger. I saw it in my father who worked in Iran all his life and had nothing. I started thinking of my future and seriously contemplated that if I was to get married and have children I did not want them to feel like I did. Obviously we couldn't go back to Afghanistan because they didn't accept us either, so the only solution was to leave for the West.

Before I cross to Turkey, I tried three times to go to Afghanistan, three times they arrested me and sent me back. One of those they sent me to Pakistan but with a smuggler I came back to Iran. Meanwhile my father had sold everything we had for the smugglers to take me to Afghanistan. Finally, he decided to quit his job and with whatever money left to make the journey. But his boss wouldn't leave him and kept telling him that he shouldn't go because there was nothing for him to do in Afghanistan, stay where you have a job. Of course, he needed him because he was giving him half a salary, he was exploiting him. Finally we sold everything we had and together with my sisters and my father we passed to Turkey. In Turkey we stayed only for four days and then we crossed to Mytilene by boat, it was the 1st of February 2016. We stayed a day in Lesbos and then we took the boat to Piraeus. But the borders for Afghanis were now closed, only some Syrians were allowed until they closed for everyone. So we didn't go to Idomeni, but instead stayed in the port of Piraeus.

I'd say that my port days were the best of my life. I met and made many friends there. I lived with my family in a tent outside the central warehouse. But I was going around other peoples' tents to help them with things, so I knew all the tents and the people in the end, it was like a big house like we were all one tent. We all got to know each other help each other talked with each other. This started when some solidarity people offering medical assistance to whoever needed realised when they came to our tent that I also spoke English so they took me with them to help them with the translation. That was how I started. Then I helped the people that offered the food. I stayed in the port for three months and I saw many things. I saw the people being rushed into busses, only to be taken to camps that they did not like. They could see that they were being taken into some horrible isolated places far away from everything. So people left the camp and kept coming back to the port.

My family and I did go to Skaramaga camp but the manager there told us that there is no space for us. Finally we bought a container for 500 euros because that is the business of the camp now. If a family is in need of staying in a container then it can buy one. So my family and I bought one, cleaned it and repaired it to stay there. But the next three months I kept fighting with the director of the camp because he could not have us. Finally I found a smuggler and paid him to transfer my father

and one of my sisters to Germany. So I am here with my other sister for about a year and a half.

Some time ago through a friend of mine I found City Plaza. Seeing the situation with the refugees and the solidarity people and how they work together in City Plaza reminded me of my time in Piraeus port 3 years ago. As I said, life at the port was the best time of my life so when I found it again I was very happy. Due to a number of reasons I don't want to live in the camp anymore. I have a younger sister of 12 years old, I registered her at the school there and so she has to go with the school bus, she really likes to play music and take music lessons there. This is the major reason that we continue to live in the camp. If eventually she goes to my father in Germany then I wouldn't spend a minute more in the camp and instead go straight to City Plaza. Of course we could stay in the City Plaza but she wouldn't like that as she has many friends in the camp. At the moment during the weekends we are in City Plaza because she takes some German and music lessons here. But Sunday night we have to go back to the camp because she has school first thing Monday morning. We are currently having an Iranian family in our container in Skaramaga. Since the container has two rooms, we don't need the second one and seeing this Iranian family seeking some shelter I told them that they can stay with us. Obviously I am not asking them for rent, and I am only saying that because it is common these days. Skaramaga camp is a big market, everything can be bought and sold, it is quite tragic. The only thing I told them was to follow the camp rules, be clean and water the plants. During the week we live all together and on the weekends I stay in City Plaza with my sister. I want to repeat again that I am not asking them for money. Because I lived through this myself, and I know how it is to be exploited by people I didn't want to do the same to other people. I have suffered a lot from exploitation and it is inhumane to ask money from people that you know very well that they don't have any. Also I felt in awe from the support that I was given freely by so many people when I arrived in Greece. It is here that for the first time I realised what solidarity is and what to make of it, what to learn. This solidarity, this lively solidarity I rediscovered in City Plaza.

Story no15 Athens

I reached Greece three months ago. I already knew about the Lavrio camp. We know the history of Lavrio because it is an important part of our struggle. Only Kurds live here. Somebody else from another country can live of course but we'd have a problem with language and communication. There are always problems in other camps where people of different nationalities and languages mix. Here money is not an issue. If someone does not have money I can give him food. Somebody else might not get that. Friends come before money. So it is very difficult for someone from another culture to live here.

Here there are people responsible for different things in the camp. There are committees of course, like the committee of education or the committee of food. Our organisation here is like a tree. We don't receive any assistance from the Greek state to run the camp. Some organisations come here and help. We know that they can't give money but they give us food and clothes or even toys for the children. Their work is voluntary and we appreciate that because it is very important.

Here in the camp I follow the ideas of PKK that I was brought up with. For example I want to be a good person and to try to reach people out, to talk and to build relationships. This is the culture that we know and this is what we live here. PKK itself tells us to respect and to live according to our values. So wherever we are we try not to separate or distance ourselves from each other but instead to live together and assist one another. For example when I was in prison my mother did not know any families in Diyarbakir, but our own people there helped her to find me and communicate with me. It is in our culture to be close to our people because we don't have a country. Our country is being destroyed by the Turkish, Syrian, Iranian and Iraqi governments. So that's why we fight for our country and our people. In Rojava for example the female Kurd soldiers that are so widely known for their actions, are primarily fighting for the rights of every woman.

Of course in the camp we do have some problems between us also, but we solve them fast because we have to live together. It is not uncommon for 8 people to live in the same room because we have to. But I prefer to live here than in a flat. Here we are free, and we have spaces to talk and pass time. If you go to a flat you lose communal life. Here if a problem arises we all solve it together. We eat three times a day, usually each room catering for its own people. But we also have a massive kitchen where some times we all sit together and take our breakfast. Of course the camp is far away from Athens and you need transportation to go and see a friend in Athens. We don't mingle much with the locals in Lavrio. We meet in the market and the cafeterias. Because people don't stay long in the camp and leave for other countries, it is not easy to make relations with the locals. Sometimes though, some locals do come around here.

I would like to return to my country very much but it is not safe. If I don't stay in Greece I would like to go somewhere where it is safe for the members of our organisation.

