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Refugees' (In)dependency Conundrum: Obstructed Social Reproduction Activities and Unpaid Labour in Refugee Camps

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Abstract: This article uses the analytical lens of *(in)dependency conundrum* to highlight how asylum seekers in refugee camps are pushed to be self-reliant while, however, their autonomous social reproduction activities and spaces of liveability are hindered. Focusing on Greece, it intertwines critical migration scholarship with feminist geography literature on unpaid labour to investigate refugees' obstructed social reproduction activities. It moves on by exploring the (in)dependency conundrum that refugees face in Greece from a condition of protracted carcerality enforced beyond detention. In the third section it highlights the continuum between social reproduction activities and other unpaid labours done by asylum seekers in camps, as a result of humanitarianism' s subtle coercion. In the last section it draws attention to refugees' collective mobilisations in Greek refugee camps: raising punctual demands about food and accommodation, they articulated expansive claims about their right to autonomous social reproduction activities and to build infrastructures of liveability.

Keywords: social reproduction, refugee camps, (in)dependency conundrum, collective mobilisations, Greece

Introduction

Hotspot of Lesvos, Greece, August 2022: two policemen at the gate stop and search asylum seekers who re-enter the camp after being out for a few hours, checking if they have dangerous items with them. However, the search is not only about weapons and drugs: the police at times do not allow camp residents to bring in the food they have bought in the supermarket. In fact, cooking meals inside the camp has been forbidden to asylum seekers in Lesvos with the justification that it could provoke blazes, after that hotspot of Moria was set on fire in September 2020. Any autonomous activity in the camp is prohibited or de facto obstructed. Thus, refugees' attempt to re-build their lives and autonomous spaces of liveability are hindered. Most asylum seekers who are confined in refugee camps are entrapped in a protracted waiting time. Yet, such waiting is not constituted by an empty time. To the contrary, asylum seekers are pushed to take care of their livelihood and be self-reliant, which UNHCR (2005:1) defines as "the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet

essential needs in a sustainable manner": they are expected to act *as if* they were autonomous subjects, although their mobility is highly restricted by disciplinary-spatial rules and their daily subsistence relies on humanitarian aid. They are expected to fix their own displacement and the economic-social destitution produced by the exclusionary politics of asylum.

This paper argues that autonomous social reproduction activities are actively obstructed in camps, although asylum seekers are blamed for relying on state and humanitarian support. By mobilising the analytical lens of *(in)dependency conundrum*, it foregrounds such an apparent contradiction: refugees are pushed to be self-reliant, however their autonomous social reproduction activities are hindered. The article builds on feminist geography on social reproduction (Katz 2001; Mitchell et al. 2012), on migration scholarship that discusses biopolitical technologies over refugees' lives (Brankamp 2022; Ilcan and Rygiel 2015; Pinelli 2018), and on camp geographies literature that draws attention to everyday life in camps and social reproduction activities (Bagelman and Gitome 2021; Katz et al. 2018; Ramadan 2013; Weima and Minca 2022). Scholars have foregrounded the continuum between low-paid and unpaid migrant labour (Anderson 2000; Apostolova 2021; Kofman and Raghuram 2015) and the invisible exploitation of migrant domestic workers and care workers (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010; Kofman 2012). Yet, little has been said about how social reproduction activities are disrupted in the field of refugee humanitarianism and, more specifically, how asylum policies choke and impact on migrants also by obstructing their autonomous spaces of liveability (but see Rigo 2022; Silvius 2020).

Dealing with refugee camps and spaces of protracted confinement, the paper intervenes in feminist geography debates on social reproduction and camp geographies by exploring the entanglements between refugees' (in)dependency conundrum, invisible unpaid labour, and the obstruction of autonomous social reproduction activities. Through a focus on refugee humanitarianism, it contributes to these debates by foregrounding the clear-cut power asymmetries between asylum seekers and humanitarian actors. These deeply asymmetric relationships inflect social reproduction activities in the camp, due to the moral economy according to which refugees should prove that they deserve humanitarian aid while, however, they are entrapped in a protracted dependency on humanitarian actors. Feminist political geographers have analysed the geographical unevenness of modes of exploitation, investigating how these take place in multiple spaces, far beyond the household (Hanson and Pratt 1988; MacLeavy et al. 2016).

Inspired by Angela Davis' (1983) criticism of analyses exclusively centred on housewives' unpaid domestic labour, some recent works have stressed the importance of mobilising an intersectional approach to social reproduction (Hopkins 2015; Winders and Smith 2019). Such a point, I suggest, is highly relevant for investigating the unpaid labour activities and the obstructed autonomous social reproduction in refugee camps, done by both women and men asylum seekers. "Camps", Turner and Whyte (2022:2) have remarked, "are at once sites of confinement and junctions that connect and enable mobility". In camps, men, women, and children who seek asylum are stuck in a protracted dependency and, at the same time, are pushed to sort out their needs. Feminist political economists

enable bringing to the fore the unpaid labour that refugees do under the guise of "volunteering" activities; at the same time, it allows highlighting the interconnectedness between social reproduction activities and other unpaid labour activities (LeBaron 2010; Mezzadri 2021).

By speaking of autonomous social reproduction activities, it is key to clarify two points. First, "autonomous" does not hint at activities free from racialised subordination and labour exploitation. To the contrary, asylum seekers' activities in camps are highly constrained by disciplinary rules and mobility restrictions. In fact, it is essential to keep in mind the constitutive ambivalence of migrants' subjective practices and that "new dispositifs of domination and exploitation are forged" in refugee governmentality (Mezzadra 2010:141). However, the condition of obstructed agency does not occlude leeway of relative autonomy: refugees' conducts often exceed or alter the legal-administrative boundaries in which they are expected to act. Second, "autonomous" is not in opposition to "dependent"; rather, a feminist approach leads us to challenge binary oppositions, such as between dependency and autonomy, and to pay attention to the constitutive mutual entanglements between them (Mahmood 2011).

As Cindi Katz (2001:711) points out, "social reproduction encompasses daily and long-term reproduction, both of the means of production and the labour power which make them work". Drawing on Isabella Bakker (2007:541), social reproduction activities involve "the biological reproduction of the species … the reproduction of the labour force which involves subsistence, education and training; and the reproduction and provision of caring needs". Such definition encapsulates the continuities between activities for covering daily needs and subsistence (such as food provisions) and "the training of individual capabilities necessary for interaction in the social context of a particular time and place" (Picchio 2003:2). This speaks to "the temporalities of social reproduction", as remarked by Farris and Lanci (2022), that is, to the development of skills and capabilities over time. The Greek refugee context showcases that mobility restrictions and arbitrary measures apt at disrupting autonomous spaces of liveability shape asylum seekers' daily life in refugee camps. In response to this, asylum seekers have mobilised collectively against the lack of food and financial aid by organising collective protests: refugees raised punctual demands that opened to expansive claims about the right to education and access to public transport. Alongside that, they also engaged in individual and less blatant tactics to navigate the (in)dependency conundrum. Methodologically the paper combines an analysis of state and NGO reports with empirical material I collected during the research fieldwork I have conducted in Greece, between 2018 and 2021, in the refugee camps of Malakasa and Ritsona, near Athens, and on the island of Lesvos.

I interviewed UNHCR officers, NGOs working in refugee camps, officers at the Ministry of Migration and Asylum in Athens, and asylum seekers themselves.[1] The piece focuses on how mobility restrictions and obstructions to social reproduction activities were entangled during and after Covid-19, as in this timeframe refugees' (in)dependency conundrum has become particularly blatant. Yet, what I describe is not narrowed to that period, as it has rather characterised refugees' daily life in camps and hotspots since when these opened in 2015. The article proceeds in

four steps. It starts by intertwining migration scholarship with feminist works on social reproduction and unpaid labour to investigate asylum seekers' social reproduction activities. It moves on by exploring the (in)dependency conundrum that asylum seekers face in Greece, and how mobility restrictions enforced during Covid-19 have further exacerbated it. The third section foregrounds the continuum between obstructed social reproduction activities and unpaid labour done by asylum seekers in camps under the guise of volunteering work. In the last section, the article draws attention to refugees' collective mobilisations in camps for claiming their right to get adequate humanitarian support as well as right to mobility and education.

A Feminist Geography Lens on Refugees' Obstructed Social Reproduction

The lives of women, men, and children who are stuck in refugee camps are disrupted not only through spatial restrictions but also because their asocial reproduction activities are disrupted. Asylum seekers are hampered from building autonomous spaces of liveability while they are pushed to sort out their subsistence within a condition of protracted confinement, due to the withdrawal of humanitarian support. By spaces of liveability, I refer to the building up of infrastructures of life support that enable people both to cope with daily needs and to engage in collective, social activities. A feminist lens flags up the subtle coercion of humanitarianism that asylum seekers are exposed to—as they are waiting for the outcome of their asylum claim—by being encouraged to become self-reliant, and to unfold the invisible labour they are pushed to do for coping with their needs and, at once, to demonstrate their independence. At the same time, such an analytical lens highlights how any collective or individual autonomous activity that asylum seekers engage in is criminalised or de facto hampered.

Early feminist works on unpaid labour focused on the household and on the wagelessness of housework (Dalla Costa and James 1972; Federici 1975), although feminist scholars have stretched that theoretical framework to explore unwaged labour activities in other fields, such as care (Dowling 2016; Hester 2018; Robinson 2006). The analytics of unpaid labour allows connecting modes of subjugation and exploitation that crisscross different spaces and fields of governmentality, by stressing the continuities between social reproduction activities for coping with daily needs and other forms of unpaid labour, "building solidarities between productive and reproductive struggles" (Mezzadri 2019:33).[2] Early feminist literature stressed that "domestic work produces not merely use values, but it is essential to the production of surplus value" (Dalla Costa and James 1972:33; see also Fortunati 1995). If on the one hand it is important to situate the invisible unpaid labour done by asylum seekers within broader processes of capital valorisation, on the other it is key to highlight the specific rationales that underpin refugee humanitarianism. Indeed, the different unwaged activities done by asylum seekers often generate little profit, if anything (Bhattacharyya 2018): what matters is how the invisible exploitation is shaped by subtle coercion

and takes place in a context where people are expected to sort out daily needs while they are kept in a state of protracted dependency.

Feminist scholars who have pointed to the unwaged work and the value production at stake in social reproduction activities have stressed "the collectivisation of social reproduction through the creation of self-managed and alternative social services" (Alessandrini 2014:5). Moreover, as Norton and Katz (2017:5) note, "the domestic work of social reproduction is not just gendered, it is raced and classed, and often involves stretched geographies of care" (see also Davis 1983). Drawing on feminist geography literature, I suggest that social reproduction activities in refugee camps concern both daily subsistence and access to education, welfare, and mobility. In which social reproduction activities do asylum seekers engage in Greek camps? Inside some camps—such as Ritsona—refugees run cafés and shops,[3] while in other sites where it is forbidden—such as in the new camp in Lesvos—they sporadically sell different products outside, in the street. Social reproduction activities in camps also involve schools as well as children's activities self-run by refugees.

A geography lens sheds light on the mutual influences between camp's spatialities and social reproduction activities. The space of the camp(s) is partially reshaped by refugees' social reproduction activities insofar as these illuminate how the boundaries of the camp as a site of confinement and struggle exceed its fences: on the one hand asylum seekers are disrupted in their activities (e.g. through security checks at the entrance of the camp), and on the other in the premises of the camp they put in place activities that they are not allowed to do inside, such as self-run schools near the camp in Lesvos. In turn, social reproduction activities are influenced by the spatiality of the camp: the uneven mobility restrictions in place and the discretionary changes in camps' rules shrink the leeway of manoeuvre for planning activities that are independent from those authorised and regulated by humanitarian actors.

Women and men stuck in refugee camps in a condition of "custodianship" (Collins et al. 2022) are subjected to the moral injunction of showing their partial independence from humanitarian aid, but in part they are de facto forced to engage in autonomous social reproduction activities due to the lack of humanitarian support. Actually, the leeway for building autonomous spaces of liveability is actively occluded by camp authorities and humanitarian actors that collaborate with them. In so doing, the repeated obstructions to autonomous social reproduction activities enhance refugees' carcerality. In this respect, it matters clarifying that carceral mechanisms are not narrowed to detention nor to fixation in space. Indeed, as LeBaron and Roberts (2010:24) have advanced, carcerality consists in a series of spatial-legal mechanisms that lock "people's current and future life choices and possibilities into unequal and unfree capitalist social relations" and limit "their social and physical mobility within these relations".

Highlighting the unpaid labour performed through social reproduction activities confronts us with the question about how not to contribute to capital valorisation. By distinguishing between modes of valorisation and modes of valuation, Dowling (2016:454) interrogates how social reproduction "can develop new social infrastructures and practices of commoning that are not placed at the

service of accumulation". Feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006:60) have advanced "a language of diverse economy", including unpaid labour done in local communities, arguing that "while this work is unremunerated in monetary terms, many would say it does not necessarily go uncompensated" (Gibson-Graham 2006:63). These unpaid works are compensated in non-monetary terms and contribute "to the vast skein of economic relations that make up our societies" (ibid.). Thus, unpaid work is framed as an economic activity without turning into the terrain of terms of capital valorisation. Ultimately, the struggle of radical feminists over unpaid labour was not only to receive compensation but, rather, to "refuse housework as women's work, as work imposed on us" (Dalla Costa and James 1972:41).

How is the (in)dependency conundrum enforced and reiterated in refugee camps? And how are asylum seekers obstructed in their autonomous social reproduction activities? Putting in conversation feminist theories on unpaid labour with migration literature on the intimate economies of mobility (Vogt 2018) which involve relations "not considered economic in the traditional sense" (Achtnich 2022:1378), camps emerge as sites where refugees' lifetime is both stolen and reproduced. Yet, at the same time, refugees try to regain control over their lifetime while they are stuck in camps, by building autonomous infrastructures of liveability and by organising collective struggles to claim their right to mobility, edible food, and education. In fact, Enrica Rigo (2022:12) aptly notes, "the appropriation of time and of the labour needed for the survival of marginalised population is increasingly at the core … of processes of accumulation". Migration literature has shown that the refugee hosting system is characterised by the imbrication of invisible violence and moral control (Kobelinsky 2010; Ticktin 2006). Forms of organised abandonment are intertwined with disciplinary rules that asylum seekers are expected to follow closely.

Here I intertwine these analyses with feminist geographers' works that have investigated social reproduction activities beyond the space of the household. The obstructions to autonomous social reproduction activities reinforce the politics of "organised abandonment" (Gilmore 2020) and the continuum of invisible violence that refugees experience. If "violence operates through an overlapping continuum of forms" (Bourgois 2002:229), the analytical angle of unpaid labour connects the violence of mobility restrictions and spatial confinement with the obstacles to carry on autonomous social reproduction activities in camps. In the sections that follow, I focus on Greece to illustrate how asylum seekers are entrapped in a condition of protracted dependency while they are, however, also deprived of humanitarian, medical, and legal aid, due to a politics of induced scarcity. Asylum seekers are blamed for *being pampered*[4] and relying on humanitarian aid, but they are actively obstructed from carrying on autonomous social reproduction activities.

Reiterated Dependency and Obstructed Social Reproduction in Camps

October 2021: asylum seekers on the Greek mainland stopped receiving food provisions as well as the cash assistance. For about four months, women, men, and

children living in the camps had to cope with their daily needs without receiving food provisions, and at the same time they were subjected to mobility restrictions. NGOs denounced a "hunger crisis" in Greek refugee camps (WION 2022): the combination of lack of food and cash assistance put refugees in a condition of economic and social destitution. Around 40% of the camps' population was estimated to be without food (Tazzioli 2023a, 2023b). This sudden humanitarian withdrawal was the result of the government's decision, adopted in October 2021, to exclude from cash assistance, food, and accommodation, women, men, and children whose asylum application was rejected or who, due to delays and glitches in the asylum system, had not lodged an asylum claim, yet. In so doing, food provisions became conditional upon legal status. Since 2017 the monthly financial aid was delivered by UNHCR and uploaded on prepaid cards. The Cash Assistance Programme had been funded by the European Commission and until August 2021 it was managed by UNHCR, while since then it is run by the Greek government.

For about four months, during the hand over to the Greek authorities, from September 2021 to January 2022, asylum seekers did not receive cash assistance. Even after that the monthly financial support restarted, exclusionary criteria related to food distribution remained in place in some camps. That is, camp residents who obtained refugee status or whose asylum claim has been rejected or who are still waiting for their asylum card are not given food in some camps:

> we have a list with the name of the people who are entitled to get food. However, we need to be flexible, as it is not feasible to exclude, from one day to another, those who received the final outcome of their asylum claim. (Interview, director of Lesvos camp, 5 September 2022)

Even those who have declared their willingness to claim asylum but who are waiting for the appointment at the asylum office are in an ambiguous limbo regarding eligibility to food. Indeed, after receiving a so-called "willingness number"[5] at the police station and while they wait to lodge their asylum claim, some women, men, and children in the camps have been allowed to get food, while in others they have been excluded from food provisions (RSA 2021). More than simply withdrawing humanitarian aid, Greek authorities have seized down the number of people seeking asylum who are eligible for accommodation, food, and cash assistance.

During the Covid-19 peak, asylum seekers have been subjected to a series of protracted and discriminatory lockdowns[6] and some of those mobility restrictions have remained in place for months after the end of the emergency: asylum seekers had been confined in camps and their possibility of becoming economically and socially independent from humanitarian aid has been further shrunken. However, even since when, in 2022, most of the mobility restrictions have been mostly—although not completely[7]—lifted, asylum seekers still feel imprisoned, when they are inside the camps, and, at the same time, they feel unsafe to go out. More than by mobility restrictions per se, asylum seekers' lives in camps are disrupted by the unevenness and arbitrariness of concessions and controls inside the camps and at the gate. "Many asylum seekers stuck in Lesvos report that they

feel like in a prison, although they are allowed to exit during the day", the director of the NGO Diotima stressed to me, adding that "despite that, they paradoxically feel safer inside the camp than out; this is because the camp itself is structured for keeping them inside" (Interview, Lesvos, 6 September 2022).

For instance, in Lesvos since May 2022 children should attend a school located inside the camp, while before they could go to school in the nearest city of Mytilini; what is presented as a service offered to refugees is a way for discouraging them to go out, and for conducting their life separated from the rest of the population on the island. Likewise, basic humanitarian support of different kinds has been moved inside the camp; in so doing, refugees have fewer reasons for leaving the camp during the day. Nevertheless, inside the camp many activities—such as cooking their own meals, storing food, warming up their containers with their own heathers—are forbidden. Asylum seekers in Lesvos are kept in a state of protracted dependency, as they have no choice other than relying on the very minimal support they receive inside the camp; at the same time, they need nonetheless to sort out all their other needs on their own but by being fundamentally hampered in their autonomous activities. Hence, an exclusive focus on mobility restrictions enforced in the camps does not allow capture of the multiple and interlocking hurdles that asylum seekers face.

Moreover, as the case of Lesvos demonstrates, even when mobility restrictions are lifted, asylum seekers feel entrapped and choked due to the control over lives which is exercised through multiple arbitrary rules and the impossibility of building up autonomous spaces of liveability. Indeed, "an attentive gaze cannot limit itself to interpreting the most obvious forms of control and surveillance", as it is key to investigate how "humanitarian rationales operate in a way that is not only ambiguous and ambivalent but also violent in its own right" (Pinelli 2018:742). Autonomous social reproduction activities in refugee camps are systematically hampered in Greek refugee camps. These obstacles are enforced by state authorities through administrative arbitrary measures, as well as by humanitarian agencies through a series of apparently marginal disciplinary rules that regulate people's life in camps. The fact that protracted dependency is recursively reproduced in camps while asylum seekers are blamed for relying on humanitarian and state aid is not an exceptional or paradoxical condition; rather, it is constitutive of humanitarian control.

Asylum seekers are governed and chocked by keeping them in a web of dependencies at the same time that they are expected to sort out their daily needs. They are encouraged to act and work *as if* their lives were not harmed and restrained while, simultaneously, complying with the disciplinary rules and mobility restrictions in refugee camps. The state's attempt to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers entitled to accommodation, food, cash assistance, and rights more broadly should be read in light of the (in)dependency conundrum in refugee humanitarianism. After being identified by state authorities and sent to reception facilities, asylum seekers find themselves entrapped "between dependence on receptive facilities … and exposure to social structures of labour and economic exploitation" (Pinelli 2018:735). In fact, the "humanitarian reason" (Fassin 2011) is predicated on the reproduction of clear-cut asymmetries between humanitarian

actors and asylum seekers, as part of which refugees' struggles and self-determination are not contemplated (Malkki 1995; Tictkin 2016). Nevertheless, this does not mean that refugees are expected to rely on humanitarian aid.

On the contrary, humanitarian discourses and programmes promoting refugees' self-reliance and empowerment have been rife over the last two decades and have shaped humanitarian intervention (Harrell-Bond 1986; Ilcan and Rygiel 2015). As Fraser and Gordon (1994:325) have retraced in their genealogy of dependency, the term historically acquired pejorative connotations in the post-industrial context: "the contention is that poor, dependent people have something more than lack of money wrong with them". Together with the pauper, Fraser and Gordon explain, also the welfare-dependent mother and Black people have been progressively seen through the negative lens of dependency. Ultimately, the blaming of refugees who are not self-sufficient should be put in perspective with the discrediting of the poor's dependency on welfare (Fineman 2004). Asylum seekers are depicted as pampered, scroungers, and lazy: thus, the common perception of asylum seekers, as individuals fully dependent on humanitarian and state aid, stands in opposition to the image of the citizen as active worker. In fact, the injunction for asylum seekers to be self-reliant should be situated within this moral economy of (in)dependency that also serves for justifying the drastic shrinking of humanitarian aid in camps. By framing self-reliance as a way to empower refugees, "the international refugee regime can justify decreasing assistance to protracted refugee populations, and even completely withdrawing assistance" (Easton-Calabria and Omata 2018:1466).

Hence, it is in light of this critique of dependency that we should situate humanitarian moral discourses that push asylum seekers to volunteer in camps and to fix infrastructural gaps is situated in the frame of such underlying critique of dependency: the unpaid labour and invisible exploitation that underpin "voluntary" activities are invisibilised by flagging up how refugees empower themselves and become independent from humanitarian aid. In reality, refugees' protracted dependency is recursively produced by humanitarian and state actors, through the enforcement of disciplinary rules and obstacles that obstruct asylum seekers from planning their future and acting autonomously. The discrediting of asylum seekers' dependency takes place in contexts—the refugee camp and the asylum system at large—where economic and social independency cannot be achieved.

The Unpaid Labour Continuum in Camps

Asylum seekers are incorporated in the labour market when there is a shortage in some sectors, both in the informal economy and as part of states' programmes. Recently, in Greece, state-supported programmes to integrate refugees in the labour market have started due to the shortage in the hospitality and agriculture sectors: "this is mainly due to the fact that Albanians, who started coming to Greece in the early 1990s to be employed as seasonal workers in the countryside, nowadays demand higher salaries as they are more skilled" (Interview, Greek NGO Solidarity Now, 26 August 2021). Since the beginning of 2022, refugees in Greece have been seen as a potential cheap labour force, and in fact job

programmes have been put in place both by UNHCR and by the International Organisation for Migration. Less explored is the invisible and unpaid work that asylum seekers are indirectly encouraged to do in camps. Drawing attention to this enables a foregrounding of the continuum between hampered social reproduction activities and other unpaid or low-paid labour activities in camps. Asylum seekers are nudged to engage in unwaged work under the label of volunteer activities, in the name of their own good—for self-empowerment purposes—and to actively participate to their own governmentality, that is, to their own confinement.

Indeed, the specificity of unpaid labour in refugee governmentality relies on the moral economy of (in)dependency and (un)deservingness at play in humanitarianism, according to which asylum seekers need to prove their gratitude and their willingness to become self-reliant while, however, complying with the disciplinary rules of the camp. For this reason, the unpaid or very low-paid labour activities done by refugees do not fit squarely into the binary oppositions between forced or voluntary labour, between coercion and consent. Drawing on feminist theories and feminist political economy literature, unpaid labour is also extracted from social reproduction activities (Bhattacharyya 2018; Mezzadri 2021). It is precisely such a variety and continuum of unpaid labour activities that shape the ways in which refugees' lives are choked and their lifetime robbed in camps. Analysing the unpaid labour that refugees do on a daily basis in camps because of the withdrawal of humanitarian aid or because they are nudged to volunteer in the name of their own good, enables unfolding the nexus between invisible exploitation, subtle coercion, and moral injunction.

More precisely, the continuum of unpaid (and low-paid) work in refugee camps, formed both by social reproduction activities and "volunteer" jobs, is characterised by the (in)dependency conundrum. The politicisation of asylum seekers' invisible unpaid labour conducted in the name of their strive for independency complicates the binary opposition between dependency and independency and challenges the discrediting of the former. Which unpaid works are asylum seekers pushed to do in camps? The activities that people confined in camps do in Greece are quite heterogenous, ranging from participation in data collection and knowledge production to work as interpreters and cultural mediators (for NGOs and IGOs) to "volunteer" in children's education programmes. The boundaries between unpaid and low-paid works are highly blurred in refugee contexts; indeed, some asylum seekers start "volunteering" and then end up doing very low-paid jobs. Moreover, many refugees are involved in different jobs at the same time, some of which are (low-)paid, others of which are unpaid and promoted by NGOs as volunteering activities that enable asylum seekers to participate to their own governmentality, or as activities that are useful to fix logistical lacks and glitches in the camp.

Among the (low-)paid and precarious jobs, cultural mediators are particularly needed by NGOs and IGOs in Greek hotspots and camps. As Spathopoulou et al. (2021:361) have retraced, "the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) provided emergency funding in 2016 for hiring more cultural mediators and interpreters in Greece" and, overall, in the last few years "cultural mediation has

grown into an integral part of hotspot governance in Greece" (Pan 2016). Refugees who work as cultural mediators are paid—by EASO, as well as by other organisations—and yet, their employment is highly precarious and, as R., an Iranian refugee stressed, "many agencies and NGOs renew the job contract every month, which mean we never know if we will have a job in few weeks' time". Asylum seekers are also often (low-)paid or encouraged to "volunteer" in children's education programmes. In Lesvos, refugees work or "volunteer" in schools for children who are confined in camps, as part of NGO projects. M., an asylum seeker from Pakistan, who when I met him in August 2021 in Lesvos was waiting for the result of the appeal after he received a first rejection, "volunteers" in the school set up by Better Days for Moria, located a few miles from the camp: "I come here two, three times per week, to teach children four hours in the morning, depending whether the police at the gate of the camp allows me to get out". Refugees do unpaid labour under the banner of "volunteering" also outside the camps.

Some NGOs and IGOs have in fact put in place volunteering programmes for asylum seekers, as it is the case with the Hellenic Red Cross, that has set up in Athens "a community volunteering system", as part of which "migrant volunteers help newcomers to navigate the Greek system, including by teaching language lessons … and by carrying out psychosocial support activities … Migrants who are more familiar with the system provide a wide range of services to others who are facing a more uncertain living situation in Greece" (Red Cross EU 2021). The continuum of paid and unpaid labour is visibly at play in the Greek refugee context, where asylum seekers are forced to take care of their livelihoods and, at the same time, are pushed to do a series of "volunteering" activities which range from producing knowledge for humanitarian agencies to fixing infrastructural lacks in the camp. In this respect, it is noteworthy that while on the one side asylum seekers are nudged to participate "voluntarily" and be active, on the other, as I have illustrated in the previous section, social reproduction activities and any attempt to build autonomous spaces of liveability are highly hampered in camp. In fact, in some camps asylum seekers are not allowed to cook their own food, as "this might trigger fires",[8] and multiple restrictions on movement in and out of camps have been implemented since the outbreak of Covid-19 and have since then been maintained (Papatzani et al. 2022). In so doing, refugees' leeway to build autonomous spaces of liveability has shrunk; and this has direct consequences for the way in which social reproduction activities are performed.

As P., an Afghani woman, stressed:

> we are expected to sort out our daily needs and to constantly find solutions to problems and needs that often are not covered by humanitarian actors, such as electricity, internet, and water supply. Yet, this is not only unacceptable; this is simply impossible: we are stuck, restricted in our movements, and the majority cannot find a job. (Interview, P., Afghani asylum seeker, Ritsona camp, 28 August 2021)

Indeed,

> we are told by NGOs that we need to be self-reliant, we need to be as much as independent as possible from humanitarian aid and do not expect this comes

> automatically. But how can you be barely independent and take care of daily needs in this condition? (Interview, R., Iranian asylum seeker, Malakasa camp, 22 August 2021)

The dismantling of refugees' autonomous infrastructures of liveability makes it hard to carry on social reproduction activities. Thus, the amount of labour that asylum seekers do on a daily basis for coping with their daily needs is much higher than in other contexts due to the spatial confinement in camps and the multiple obstacles and restrictions imposed by state and non-state actors. Alongside these unpaid job activities, that disclose a continuum of unpaid and low-paid work, asylum seekers are encouraged to take part in data collection activities in camps, which are conducted by humanitarian organisations for extracting knowledge about their life-coping strategies.

In fact, asylum seekers are pushed to generate knowledge for humanitarian agencies—for instance through surveys and focus groups—and, in so doing, they are incorporated in a sort of "participatory confinement" (Tazzioli 2022). Many, nonetheless, refuse to engage with humanitarian actors, as this would not give anything back, neither in terms of rights nor in terms of economic profit. More precisely, as some camp residents stressed, after months stuck in Greece, they are exhausted and resigned, with no expectations nor trust in humanitarian actors (Interviews, Ritsona and Malakasa camps, July 2021 and August 2022). In Greece, knowledge extraction from asylum seekers happens on a regular basis as part of the post-distribution monitoring activities of the Cash Assistance Programme. Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) is defined as "a mechanism to collect and understand refugees' feedback on the quality, sufficiency, utilization and effectiveness of the assistance provided to them by UNHCR" (UNHCR 2018:5). However, such an evaluation mechanism can be also read as an extractive process (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020), based on the knowledge and data produced by refugees *for free*, in the name of their own good. Indeed, asylum seekers are encouraged to take part in surveys, interviews, and focus groups for actively contributing to the improvement of the refugee system.

In so doing, they are de facto co-opted into their own governmentality and in participating in the enhancement of their own confinement. What characterises participatory confinement in refugee camps is the entanglement of humanitarianism's subtle coercion in the name of asylum seekers' own good and the invisible unpaid labour that these latter do by producing knowledge about their life-coping strategies. Drawing attention to the multiple unpaid labour activities that asylum seekers do and to the continuum between obstructed social reproduction activities and other unwaged works does not only mean claiming for refugees a right to be remunerated. In fact, it is also a matter of challenging the invisible modes of exploitation that are at play in refugee humanitarianism and the subtle coercion which is enforced through the moral injunction for asylum seekers to participate in their own confinement. By making refugees' unpaid labour visible, the goal is not only to raise claims for economic remuneration but also to foreground the subtle coercion at play in refugee humanitarianism and the moral injunction that underpins and justifies the injunction for asylum seekers to work for free as well as for coping with their own displacement, without relying on humanitarian aid.

Relatedly, it pushes us to draw attention to collective and self-organised modes of valuing that exceed capital's valorisation (Alessandrini 2014). As I will illustrate in the next section, at stake is much more than the lack of economic compensation. What emerges through the lens of unpaid labour is the (in)dependency conundrum that asylum seekers experience, by being de facto forced to sort out their daily needs and pushed to do "voluntary", activities, although they are hampered from building autonomous infrastructures of liveability. In fact, the politics of protracted encampment fosters "asylum seekers' dependency on assistance" (Szczepanikova 2013:138), at the same time that they are blamed for being pampered.

Refugees' Expansive Claims Against the (In) dependency Conundrum

The history of unwaged work and social reproduction activities is also a history of collective and individual refusals and resistances. Asylum seekers in Greece have mobilised collectively to protest the lack of food provisions and cash and, more broadly, the multiple obstacles they face to carrying out autonomous social reproduction activities. More specifically, they have raised punctual claims against the dependency conundrum in camps: asylum seekers are hampered from actively building autonomous spaces of liveability and, at the same time, are deprived of humanitarian and financial support. In autumn 2021 a wave of refugees' collective mobilisations took place in Greek refugee camps for claiming the right to get food and cash assistance, but also to access education and public transport. Women, men, and children organised themselves, writing their claims on banners, filming the protest, and blocking the main gates of the camps. During these collective mobilisations, they raised punctual claims and addressed these to the Greek authorities and to the humanitarian agencies.

On 13 December 2021, in the Ritsona camp, refugees marched in a group, demanding that the Greek authorities restore monthly financial support and food provisions. Alongside that, they also protested for the many asylum cases rejected and due to delays in processing their asylum claims. The day after, a group of refugees blocked a van full of food cans and claimed their right to buy and cook their own food. In fact, their claims were not narrowed to get food; they also concerned the bad quality of the food: "we refuse to eat rotten food or canned food all the time; we prefer to cook on our own, but we are not receiving financial support and it is almost impossible to find a job" (Interview, Afghani asylum seeker, outside Ritsona camp, August 2021). In January 2022, children living in Ritsona camp marched to claim their right to go to school. Indeed, with the outbreak of Covid-19 and for about two years, children living in refugee camps were either not welcome in schools—as they were deemed to be vehicles of contagion—or could not go because of mobility restrictions and limited access to public transport.

In this respect, Parwana Amiri, an Afghani woman who received refugee status in Greece, has stressed this point in her book *Letters to the World from Ritsona*, written when she was 17:

> I would never imagine, after reaching Europe from my country, that I would participate in protests, claiming my inviolable right to education … Everyday, I am searching to find the reason we are excluded and the legislation that excludes us from being at school. But, I cannot find any reason for this deprivation. (Amiri 2020)

As reported by the Greek NGO Refugee Support Aegean, in 2021 "regular school buses did not accept children from refugee camps, citing Covid-19 risks. Due to the absence of transport arrangements, many teachers tasked with teaching refugee children were never able to reach them" (RSA 2021). However, far from being a temporary condition, these obstructions to the right to education and movement have remained in place for a long time after the Covid-19 emergency.

Carpi and colleagues have rightly stressed the need of rethinking the notion of "self-reliance" beyond the humanitarian lexicon that conflates it to individual skills and economic autonomy: by "viewing livelihood sustainability as key to rebuilding refugees' social lives and spaces, self-reliance emerges as the result of collective practices" (Carpi et al. 2020:422). Such a twisting of self-reliance through self-organised collective practices can be framed, I suggest, as autonomous social reproduction activities: asylum seekers alter and subvert the humanitarian minimalist biopolitics, which posits that refugees should not be pampered and should rather accept what is given to them. Struggles for better food are in fact widespread in refugee camps and in detention centres and, in this respect, it is key to politicise claims against the moralising criticism according to which "refugees even dare being fussy on what they want to eat".[9] Around struggles over food choice and quality other claims—about the right to education, protection, and movement—coalesced. Building on specific demands (food and cash), refugees in Greece have articulated expansive claims about the right to mobility and to education, laying bare their condition of protracted dependency combined with the obstacles they face for getting access to jobs and rights, as well as for building autonomous spaces of liveability.

Migrants often exceed the established and accepted forms of claim-making practices through their demands or self-definition (McNevin 2013); rights' claims should be seen as punctual, tactical, and situated practices that, however, cannot be contained within nor framed through existing normative legal categories of citizenship and asylum. In a way, refugees "rendered *unintelligible* the state's very categories of distinction and discrimination" (De Genova 2010:106). As R., a Pakistani asylum seeker, fleshed out in the premises of Malakasa camp:

> we had been cut off food and cash assistance; we still struggle to cope with livelihood. We have also been cut off public transports and education, our lives in a way have been cut off in the camp. Any time I plan to do something, I end up being stuck. (Interview, November 2021)

Through their collective protests, refugees confined in Greek camps have brought to the fore the dire conditions in which they live as a result of the state's policies, and, jointly, have staged a refusal to sort out their livelihood while being restrained in their mobility and autonomy as well as refusal to work for free for humanitarian organisations.

Confronted with the active withdrawal of humanitarian organisations and state authorities, refugees confined in Greek camps have engaged in "self-organizing commoning practices" to tackle daily needs (Tsavdaroglou and Kaika 2022). During Covid-19, on the island of Lesvos, groups of asylum seekers organised the distribution of free masks in the camp, given that these were rarely provided. Although in Lesvos since the outbreak of Covid-19 Greek authorities had forbidden cooking inside the camp, refugees often share food that they buy in the city of Mitylene, since exit from the camp has been restricted. Alongside food and hygienic and health measures, refugees' autonomous social reproduction activities consist also in self-organised schools. In Ritsona, refugees have organised classes for children, given the difficulties in reaching schools because of lack of transport and the protracted restrictions that were in place during the peak of Covid-19. In Lesvos, in 2019 an Afghani refugee journalist put in place a self-organised school, called Wave of Hope for the Future,[10] and the school project has been replicated also in the camps of Nea Kavala (northern Greece), Ritsona and Malakasa (Attica region).

By articulating interconnected claims, refugees have politicised and broadened the spectrum of activities that fall under the category of social reproduction: struggles for (better) food and struggles for children's education have been carried out jointly, to resist the robbing of their lifetime (Khosravi 2018). In fact, the "very term social reproduction … is meant to be far broader than notions of care, and encapsulates both the reproduction of life and of capitalist relations *at once*" (Mezzadri 2019:37). Thus, refugees' collective mobilisations shed light on the (in) dependency conundrum and on how they resist and subvert it by claiming socio-economic rights and, at the same time, by engaging in self-organised social reproduction activities. Indeed, refugees in Greek camps have twisted humanitarian discourses on self-reliance and independency by engaging in commoning practices—to cope with social reproduction needs—and, simultaneously, through collective mobilisations they have made visible the dependency conundrum in which they are entrapped.

If the concept of social reproduction encompasses activities which makes possible "the transformation of the time of life into labour power" (Foucault 2016:232),[11] ranging from activities for reproducing the labour force to those for training abilities to engage in social interaction, refugees' mobilisations foreground both their struggle to cope with subsistence and the many unpaid works they are pushed to do in the name of their own good (Picchio 1992). The demands raised by asylum seekers in Greek refugee camps show how interrogations on unpaid labour are by far not narrowed to claims for economic remuneration; on the contrary, refugees have staged the refusal of sorting out their own daily needs from within a condition of protracted confinement and, jointly, have claimed their right to get their lifetime back and to build collective spaces of liveability. Social reproduction in camps is characterised both by multiple obstructions that refugees deal with when they act in an autonomous way, as well as by the fact that they are entrapped in a protracted dependency while, at the same time, are deprived of economic and humanitarian support. Refugees are expected to sort out their displacement while they are debilitated by states' policies in their possibility of being independent (Puar 2017).

The measures adopted in refugee camps—such as curfews at night, restrictions on going out and cooking inside—to get a hold over asylum seekers' lives, can be defined as disciplinary if we take exclusively the first pole of discipline, defined as what "increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (Foucault 1977:138). Indeed, refugees' lives in camps are highly disrupted in the very possibility of building spaces of liveability and, thus, they end up being debilitated and depleted (Rai et al. 2014). Although collective mobilisations clearly bared life refugees' (in)dependency conundrum, women and men stuck in camps also tactically engage with this on an individual level or in a less confrontational and less blatant manner. For instance, some camp residents cook their own food at someone else's place outside of the camp, or they often give hospitality in their containers and tents to friends who have been excluded from the asylum process, although this practice is nowadays increasingly policed by the authorities. In fact, these intermediate tactics for navigating the (in)dependency conundrum lead us to unsettle the dichotomy between obstructed social reproduction activities and articulated collective struggles.

Conclusion

The boundaries between free and unfree labour, paid and unpaid work, as well as between social reproduction activities and other unwaged work, are highly blurred in refugee camps. The assumption that refugees are pampered as they expect to fully rely on humanitarian aid has fuelled humanitarian discourses. In reality, as this paper has shown, refugees are caught in an (in)dependency conundrum: their protracted dependency on humanitarian actors is constantly reproduced while they need to cope with the substantial withdrawal of economic and humanitarian support. Refugees' lives are choked, and their lifetime is robbed through obstructions to their autonomous social reproduction activities. Feminist geography works on social reproduction enable us to analyse how refugees' (in)dependency conundrum is inflected in spatial terms and, more specifically, how it is shaped by the spatiality of the camp (Rodríguez-Rocha 2021). That is, the (in)dependency conundrum takes place in spaces of confinement where asylum seekers are not officially detained and their mobility is not fully restrained; and, yet, their autonomous infrastructures of liveability and social reproduction activities are highly disrupted. In turn, a focus on refugee camps foregrounds some specific traits of social reproduction in humanitarian settings: a subtle coercion, that stems from asymmetric power relations between asylum seekers and humanitarian actors, characterises invisible unpaid labour in camps.

Refugees' collective mobilisations in Greece exposed and challenged the (in)dependency conundrum in which they are entrapped. By raising collective claims for (better) food, education, and mobility, they have pointed to the impossibility of building autonomous spaces of liveability. They have opened "spaces of common life and cooperation" which is a key starting point "to discern the resources for a political struggle capable of nurturing the formation of new coalitions and subjectivities" (Mezzadra 2022:583). A feminist lens on the continuum between

obstructed social reproduction activities and unpaid labour raises the question of how to articulate struggles and claims against exploitation. In turn, a focus on refugee governmentality highlights that the heterogenous bordering mechanisms multiply "hierarchised regimes not only of labour but also of social reproduction" (Rigo 2022:81). An insight on the (in)dependency conundrum enables pushing further articulated claims for "camp abolition" (Brankamp 2022) without focusing exclusively on the carceral dimension enforced through mobility and spatial restrictions. In fact, spatial restrictions in camps are combined with obstructions to refugees' autonomous social reproduction activities. A critique of the persistence of refugee camps should shed light on how migration policies disable and debilitate lives.

Endnotes

[1] I have conducted 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews in total with Afghani, Somali, Pakistani, and Syrian asylum seekers outside the camp in Lesvos (5), in the city of Athens (7), and in the premises of Ritsona and Malakasa (6). Of the 18, 6 were women—from Afghanistan and Syria—and 12 were men. All interviews have been conducted outside the camps in order not to cause trouble for asylum seekers. I have interviewed UNHCR at their headquarters in Athens, in 2018, 2021 and 2022, and UNHCR's coordinator of the Cash Assistance Programme in Lesvos in 2018, 2019 and 2021. In the camps of Ritsona, Malakasa and Lesvos, I interviewed the camp authorities (deputy directors and directors). I conducted interviews with several NGOs: Doctors without Borders, Drop in the Ocean, Diotima (Lesvos), Solidarity Now (Athens).

[2] As Mezzadri (2019:39) has put it, "arguing that labour struggles can articulate with the struggles of the wageless is not quite the same thing as enlarging the social parameters of what is defined as a labour struggle to accommodate all those whose work is subjected and subordinated to the capitalist relation in more hidden ways".

[3] This was also the case in the hotspot of Moria in Lesvos.

[4] The Greek migration ministry's secretary general, Manos Logothetis, blamed refugees for being "pampered" (see Smith 2020).

[5] Those who want to claim asylum on the Greek mainland need to pre-register their asylum application at a police station where they receive a willingness number. The obligation to pre-register at a police station can be seen as a deterrence measure, as many are worried about being detained.

[6] The lockdown or semi-lockdown in the Greek hotspots lasted for many months in a row from March to September 2020. A series of other lockdowns followed until summer 2021.

[7] For instance, in most camps in Greece there is a curfew in the evening.

[8] This is the justification mobilised by the Greek authorities to forbid refugees from cooking their own food after the hotspot in Lesvos was set on fire in September 2020.

[9] Conversation with a Greek citizen, in Malakasa, close to the refugee camp.

[10] See https://waveofhope.org/schools/ (last accessed 2 December 2022).

[11] "Life must be synthesised into labour power", Foucault (2016:232) contended in *The Punitive Society*. However, this does not mean that social reproduction activities are oriented exclusively at the reproduction of labour force. Rather, for life as such to be transformed into potential labour power it is key to engage in activities that enable the person to develop the necessary social skills and education level.

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