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Embodying the intolerable
Refugees' hunger strikes and governing by debasing lives

Abstract: Asylum seekers confined in refugee camps in Greece are targeted by administrative rules, policies and arbitrary measures apt not only at restricting their mobility but also at governing by starving them and by hampering their social reproduction activities. By situating hunger strikes protests within a broader spectrum of struggles in refugee camps and sites of confinement, this article pushes forward a twofold argument. First, it contends that migrants' hunger strikes unsettle the biopolitical hold exercised over them by embodying the intolerable, that is by laying bare a life that has become unliveable. Second, a focus on hunger strikes sheds light on the field of tension between debasement and resistance, that are usually seen in opposition to each other. By taking into account the ten-year period 2015-2025, the article shows that while migrants' hunger strikes that happened during the first years of the so called "refugee crisis" in Greece demanded freedom of movement and struggled for the right to asylum, after the pandemic they have been mainly addressed the unliveable conditions in camps. Indeed, a focus on hunger strike protests reveal that nowadays migrants are increasingly governed and disrupted by debasing their lives and by dismantling their life-support infrastructures.

Introduction:

Ten years after the start of the so called "refugee crisis" in 2015, that in Greece had been intertwined with the austerity politics imposed by the European Commission (Avgeri, 2025; Carasthatis et al. 2018), an active withdrawal of humanitarianism has occurred in the field of refugee governance: the criteria for getting access to food provisions, financial support (the monthly cash assistance) as well as to accommodation have been progressively restricted, excluding from it both people whose asylum claim has been rejected and those who obtained the refugee status. Thus, the active withdrawal of humanitarianism was not enforced on camp residents in a homogenous manner: rather, it worked by multiplying hierarchies among them - between those who are eligible to food and accommodation,[1] and those who are not. In so doing,, the dismantling of humanitarian assistance gave rise to a downward motion – in terms of the support provided to asylum seekers – and, jointly, to a differentiation in the degrees of access to socio-economic rights and to the possibilities of coping with one's own livelihood[2].

[1] At the end of 2021, camp authorities had cut down the food delivery from three to one time a day- delivering all meals at the same time. Moreover, as it has been reported by camp residents to local NGO and what I could also deduce from the conversations I had with some of them in the premises of the refugee camps of Ritsona and Lesvos, both the food quantity and quality got worse and worse.

[2] Three years later, in 2025, similar measures have been announced by the Greek government: people who obtained the refugee status should immediately leave the camp but, in part also as a result of the refugee struggles

Ultimately, the asylum system has become a mechanism for regulating and narrowing down migrants' access to socio-economic rights at large. The shrinking of financial-humanitarian support was thereby only partially entangled with the legal status, given that since 2022 both rejected asylum seekers and those who, instead, became refugees were no longer entitled to food and accommodation in refugee camps, nor to the monthly financial aid.

The attack to life-support infrastructures is not circumscribed to refugee camps: in different border zones across Europe, migrants are forced to stay in insalubrious and harmful "cramped spaces" (Walters, Luthi, 2016), while autonomous and self-made makeshift camps are violently evicted. Yet, putting at the core the deterioration of living conditions should not be confused with critique as the act of documenting misery or the "excess" of border violence. Rather, as this piece argues, it is a matter of coming to grips with the specific biopolitical hold exercised over migrants' lives and to scrutinise how this is negotiated, resisted and twisted by people who seek asylum. Indeed, an insight into collective migrant struggles and hunger strikes reveals that what states and international agencies define as "migration management" is not narrowed mobility controls but it is (also) about governing and choking their lif and their lifetime. This article engages with migrants and refugees' hunger strikes protests in Greece by drawing attention to the transformations that occurred since the start of the so called "refugee crisis" in 2015 in the claims that migrants raised and in the socio-political context in which they took place.

Migrants' struggles at large that took places in the years 2015-2018 had been somehow shaped and boosted by what Sandro Mezzadra has defined as "the Greek Spring", meaning by that the political conjuncture of anti-austerity movements, many of which acted also in solidarity with refugees (Mezzadra, 2018). By situating hunger strikes protests within a broader spectrum of struggles in refugee camps and sites of protracted confinement, the essay pushes forward a twofold argument. First, a focus on hunger strikes sheds light on the field of tension between debasement and struggle, that, likewise vulnerability and resistance, are usually seen in opposition to each other. Debasing incapsulates the socio-economic devaluation of migrants and, jointly, their psycho-physical debilitation: migrants' hunger strikes tactically rely on such debasement for interrupting the hold over their social reproduction activities and, thus, over their life. Second, and relatedly, it contends that migrants' hunger strikes lay bare and, at once, unsettle the biopolitical hold exercised over them by embodying the intolerable. That is,

of previous years, many camp authorities did not fully enforce the measure. That is, refugees are de facto toleared in camps, but they are excluded from food distribution.

refugees' hunger strikes are not only refusals in a negative form: they are embodied practices of marking and, at once, refusing the intolerable of a life that can no longer be lived in such way and at that cost. The intolerability of a debased life is made visible and resisted at the same time, by withdrawing the grip exercised over their body and, more broadly, over social reproduction activities at large.

By taking into account the ten-year period 2015-2025, the article shows that while migrants' hunger strikes that happened during the first years of the so called "refugee crisis" in Greece demanded freedom of movement and struggled for the right to asylum, after the pandemic they have been mainly addressed the unliveable conditions in camps. Indeed, a focus on hunger strike protests reveal that nowadays migrants are increasingly governed and disrupted by debasing their lives and by dismantling their life-support infrastructures. Methodologically, the article combines an analysis of government's policy papers, reports by NGOs, IGOs and grassroot organisations, with empirical data collected during my fieldwork in Greece, that I conducted in different phases between 2016 and 2023 in camps on mainland Greece (Ritsona, Schisto, Thiva and Malakasa) and on the island of Lesvos[3].

Setting the scene:

In order to grasp the transformations that took place in the last decade in the politics of migration containment and in the asylum system in Greece, it is essential to read it in light of broader political-economic shifts that took place in the same time period. Indeed, the deliberate curtailment of life-support infrastructures started in 2019, when the leftist party Syriza was defeated by the right-wing party Neo Demokratia and when the far right in the country gained consensus also by pushing on anti-immigration discourses. Actually, it would be misleading to analyse this clear-cut move to the right in 2019 as a watershed in the Greek politics of migration confinement. in fact, as scholars have observed, during the years that followed the outbreak of what states defined as a "refugee crisis", Greece's political approach and legal interventions in the field of migration were highly inflected by the austerity measures imposed by the European Commission, in conjunction with the EU "emergency funding" provided to Greece for boosting

[3] As part of that research, I have been in conversation with women and men who were living in those camps, and who have witness to hunger strikes carried on by other camp residents or who were informed about those protests. I also interviewed NGOs' officers who worked in refugee camps or who provided legal aid in Athens or in Lesvos, from the following organisations: Doctors without Borders, Greek Refugee Council, HIAS; Legal Center Lesvos, Caritas and Solidarity Now.

the reception and asylum system and, at the same time, with the implementation of the Hotspot Approach in May 2015, to strengthen border control and streamline identification procedures, (Kasparek, 2016). The signature of the EU-Turkey Deal in March 2016 earmarked and strengthen the political subordination of the Greek government, at that time led by Syriza, to the European Commission.

However, the rise of the right wing in Greece in 2019 within a European political conjuncture characterised by the mounting of populist parties driven by anti-immigration priorities, contributed to set the ground for an array of laws and administrative measures apt at governing migration by choking lives. The first clear signal was represented by the government's decision to scale down the Emergency Support to Accommodation and Integration programme (ESTIA I and II), that started in 2015, funded by the European Commission and initially managed by UNHCR: the project came to an end in 2022, leaving many asylum seekers homeless[4]. In 2019 the government also excluded for few months asylum seekers from the national health system, by withdrawing the regulation for delivering the national social security number (AMKA) to non-Greek nationals. Then, by the end of the year, a temporary social security number for asylum seekers, called PAAYPA, was introduced: its validity expires as soon as the person receives the final answer on the asylum claim.

Such a shift towards choking migrant lives as a key political technology of governing migration became visible in particular after the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 and did not concern exclusively Greece. Indeed, both on an EU level and in many EU's member states, the multiple "humanitarian frontiers" (Walters, 2010) that were strengthened in 2015 to tackle the so called "refugee crisis", have been progressively superseded by policies and laws that eroded migrants' access to asylum and their material conditions of liveability. That is, the vocabulary of "humanitarian crisis", adopted in many EU's papers and briefs published in 2015 and 2016 to justify the logistic and economic support provided by the European Commission to Greece, was little by little replaced by a narrative centered on the need of reducing secondary movements from Greece to Northern Europe and to strengthen the deportations to countries of origin: part of the EU funding that were allocated to Greece to tackle the "refugee crisis" since 2022 had been cut and repurposed to tackle what an EUAA officer defined as "other, more serious refugee crises, such as the one at the Belarus-Polish border"[5]. Overall, a shift towards

[4] https://rsaegean.org/en/termination-of-the-estia-ii-for-asylum-applicants/

[5] Interview with EUAA, Athens, June 2023.

a robust "de-humanitarisation" (Heller, Pezzani, 2020; Tazzioli, Stierl, 2021) impacted on the life of women, men and children who seek asylum in Greece and in Europe at large.

Therefore, Greece was confronted with a *twofold EU's grip*: on the one side, a series of obligations and political pressures imposed on the country, including the need of preventing secondary movements and, on the other, an important downscaling in the EU's funding and the handing over to Greek authorities of a series of tasks previously managed by IGOs, such as the Cash Assistance: the Greek government has progressively recentralised the asylum system and the management of refugee camps, many of which until 2022 were run by IOM. The changes that occurred in the Greek refugee context in the last ten years concerned also the political mobilisations of refugees and people acting in solidarity: the "long summer of migration" (Kasparek, Speer, 2015; Hamersak et al. 2020; Mezzadra, 2018), formed by the movement of migrants that, arriving on the Greek shores, in 2015 continued their journey walking along the Balkan Route, and the political experiments of migrant solidarity, among which the City Plaza Hotel, (Lafazani, 2018; Raimondi, 2018), had been violently held back and disrupted from 2018-2019 on.

The increasing obstacles for migrants to move on and the criminalisation of solidarity narrowed down the room of manoeuvre for raising transformative rights claims. Far from being over, struggles have continued in refugee camps: yet, at the same time, the stakes and the demands of refugees' struggles changed over time. Hence, the story of hunger strikes in camps and, more broadly, the cycles of refugee protests in Greece, needs to be situated within such political conjuncture and the transformations that occurred in the last few years: indeed, as the next section illustrates, the partial shift from claims for the right to asylum and freedom of movement towards struggles over unliveable conditions highlights a broader European trend which consists in governing migrants by debasing their lives and by dismantling their life-support infrastructures. More broadly, in particular in the years 2015-2016k, refugee protests across Greece intersected a broader terrain of struggles in Greece against austerity policies,. In fact, refugees and citizens struggles did not simply happen within the same political-economic conjuncture: although they were quite distinct in the claims and goals, they were ultimately both triggered by their protracted unliveability. Yet, it is noteworthy that after the pandemic the temporary convergence between refugees and citizens' struggles against the erosion of life-support infrastructures felt apart.

This was mostly due to the shrinking of media visibility in the public debate about migration and in part because of the socio-economic transformations and some critical events that occurred in the country – first and foremost the Tempi train crash that happened on February

28, 2023, when 57 people died. In fact, the murderous train crash coalesced the public attention and became one of the central stakes of political demonstrations and marches in Greece in the following years.

Embodying the intolerable:

Before zooming into migrants' protests in Greece, it is key to reflect on what hunger strike reveals, as a specific tactic of struggle and resistance and, jointly, what it entails when hunger strike is carried on by people who seek asylum and who are labelled as "migrants". Indeed, on the one side hunger strike is only one of the multiple tactics of migrants' struggles; and, I contend, it needs to be analysed not as a standing alone form of protest but, rather, as part of an array of practices of resistance that people engage in condition of duress. On the other, some scholars have noticed, there is something specific to hunger strike as *a form* of protest, which exceeds the goals pursued and demands raised by the individuals involved. Hunger strikes are seen as practices of embodied refusal that perform "an embrace of the refugees' abjection" (Pfeifer, 2018: 461): that is, abjection is laid bare and appropriated through the hunger strike. In this respect, Banu Bargu has observed that "the corporeal nature and self-direction of violence in hunger striking and lip-sewing practices suggest that there is more to these actions than simply an instrumental striving for rights, improved material conditions and welfare, and legal recognition (Bargu, 2022: 299).

In other words, according to Bargu, hunger strikes are embodied practices of "the refusal to sustain an existence that has become fundamentally compromised, stunted, hallowed" and for this reason they cannot be reduced to their punctual goal (Bargu, 2022: 299): unlike other forms of protests, the argument goes, hunger strikes cannot be analysed in terms of a direct correspondence between means and ends. However, I contend, giving prominence to the form over claims and tactics, there is a risk of hypostatising the hunger strike and of de-historicising it. That is, coming to terms with hunger strikes within the socio-political conjuncture in which migrants act, enables grasping the ways in which struggling *for* reaching something and *against* - a certain condition, hurdle or obligation – are intertwined with each other, and how this has changed over time. Saying that through hunger strikes migrants struggle at the same time for and against their living conditions it does not mean that they are merely reactive: rather, it is a matter of understanding the tactical strugglefield in which practices of resistance take place,. In fact, if the politicality of hunger strikes is not reducible to the goals pursued and the claims raised, this is not because there is something like a specific nature-form of the hunger strike; rather, it is a question of interrogating what such embodied refusal conveys and produces – in

terms of modes of de-subjectivation and subjectivation around and hinging on the depleted condition in which they are living.

More than insulating hunger strike as a form of protest, it is a matter of scrutinizing the ways in which this latter destabilises the opposition between debasement on the one side and resistances and struggles on the other. Indeed, while hunger strike as an embodied refusal exceeds the punctual claims raised and the goals pursued, it is key, I argue, to avoid a twofold insulation: from the other tactics of struggle – in particular considering that migrants who go on hunger strike often engage also in other practices of refusal, such as refusing to eat inedible food-, and from the field of tensions between protracted debasing on the one side on the one side and struggles on the other. This does not involve watering down the ethical-political salience of hunger strike as embodied refusal; rather, it is a matter of highlighting what the refusal to eat reveal about the relationships between debasement, protracted displacement and resistance. In other words, alongside interrogating hunger strike as a form of protest that entails a specific relationship of the individual to her own body, hunger strike foregrounds that migrants' struggles are often enacted in a condition of protracted debasement, turning this into a political leverage.

In fact, modes of governing by debasing (migrant) lives encompasse processes of socio-economic devaluation and, at once, of psycho-physical debilitation. Such twofold biopolitical hold over lives, characterised by socio-economic devaluation and psycho-physical debilitation, is at the core, I suggest, of practices of migration containment. By suggesting that hunger strikes reveal the constitutive relationship and the field of tension between induced debasement and struggles, echoes what Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay have pointed out, concerning the nexus between vulnerability and resistance: in the place of positing one in opposition to each other, they argue, it is a matter conceiving vulnerability "as one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance" (Butler et al. 2016: 1)[6]. That is, migrants' hunger strike protests are not only an embodied practice of refusal. They are also practices of resistance carried on from a position of "obstructed agency" (Ngai, 2005) and of highly constrained freedom. Indeed, migrants who go on hunger strikes are often stuck in camps, detention centers or in hybrid spaces of confinement[7].

[6] The alleged binary opposition between vulnerability and resistance is undermined as long as, following Butler, we take into account that vulnerability "a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment" (Butler, 2016: 22).

[7] Even when they are not confined in camps or detention centers, they are subjected to bureaucratic hindrances and, often, to mobility restrictions as well.

Therefore, a focus on migrants' protests shows us that hunger strikes are grounded on psycho-physical debilitation and, in the place of fighting it directly, migrant persons at times rather rely on it and twisted it as the only bodily resource left at their disposal. Challenging the alleged binary opposition between depletion and resistance means "to "resist" those frameworks that seek to underplay or refuse forms of political agency developed under conditions of duress" (Butler et al. 2016: 6). As far as migration is concerned, what do hunger strikes protests reveal about the relationship between duress and struggles? Despite it is not possible to make a general argument as this would run the risk of rubbing out the heterogeneity of migrant struggles, there are two mutually interrelated aspects that are noteworthy and that emerge in the Greek refugee context. First, if hunger strikes push us to radically revisit the taken-for-granted nexus between debasement and resistance as well as between duress and struggle, this should not be confused with the crafting of migrants as bare life (Pfeifer, 2018). Indeed, governing by debasing lives does not entail the suspension of the law nor the curtailment of disciplinary rules in camps and in sites where migrants are confined: to the contrary, it requires putting in place an array of administrative and spatial measures that end up choking migrant lives.

For this reason, psycho-social debilitation and socio-economic devaluation are not coterminous with the production of bare life: rather, in the politics of migration containment, debilitation is the effect of administrative and spatial tactics that work by injuring migrants – exacerbating underlying illness or mental diseases, and by maiming and diminishing their ability to act.On the one hand, hunger strike "repeats, mimics, and exposes in public the hidden irrational violence of the sovereign state" over racialised populations, on the other it takes such life out from the state's power (Ziarek, 2008: 100). That is, by insisting that struggles and resistances might take place under condition of duress and that are shaped by the protracted debasement, does not mean pointing to a full-fledged depleted subject who cannot but resist only through self-harming, such as by refusing to eat. On the contrary, I want to suggest that migrants' struggles highlight the irreducibility of hunger strike to the refusal to eat, although this is certainly the way in which it is enacted and manifested.

Through hunger strike, it is the whole "body in struggle" (Dorlin, 2017: 127) that re-negotiates the relationship with state authorities, altering the very terms and conditions of the biopolitical hold exercised over migrant lives: by refusing to eat, migrants redefine subvert the conflation between debasement and destitution and lay bare that to be at stake is much more than the punctual claims raised in each struggle. Second, and relatedly, hunger strike protests often aim at subverting the "minimalist biopolitics" (Redfield, 2005: 345) that governs and chokes their lives: as I show in the following pages, migrants at time go on hunger strike refusing the

inedible food they are given: they do not accept to just being fed, they demand edible and good meals. These claims are in fact usually deemed to be morally unacceptable, as long as migrants are not grateful for being fed and sheltered in the hosting country. In other words, while hunger strike protests might appear as, in reality they are often driven by claims and goals that are not contemplated in "the humanitarian reason" (Fassin, 2011): indeed, they do not only protest the unbearable living conditions in camps or in detention centers, they also refuse to be governed "like that and at that cost" (Foucault, 2007: 45).

Refusing to be governed "like that" refers to the non-acceptance of being treated as people whose necessities and aspirations are (and should be) limited to survival and "basic needs". In fact, the insistence by state authorities and humanitarian actors on "basic needs" turns out to be misleading as it conflates the need of life-support infrastructures and collective spaces of liveability with the depiction of asylum seekers as recipients of (minimal) humanitarian aid. Migrant hunger strike protests ultimately displace the dichotomy between affirmative resistance and necroresistance[8], bringing to the fore practices struggles for living – and not only against repressive power-, which are grounded on obstructed agency and carried out in a condition of duress. In fact, refugees' hunger strike protests shed light not only on the co-constitutive nexus between debasement and struggle, as well as vulnerability and resistance: they also mark the production of the intolerable, meaning by that the boundaries and the threshold of what is deemed to be a tolerable suffering.

That is, to be at stake are not only embodied refusals predicated on vulnerability and debasement: by going on hunger strike, migrants do also de-subjectivise themselves as individuals fully defined and shaped by humanitarian deprivation and mobility confinement, and do that by embodying the intolerability of a life that is no longer liveable. Hence, the productive dimension of hunger strike protests does not simply rely on the demands raised and goals pursued: it is also enshrined in the embodied enactment of the intolerable. Although it is possible to trace a continuum between different hunger strike protests, that consists in the commonality of hunger strike as an embodied refusal, migration and, more specifically, refugee humanitarianism, confront us with a distinct feature: by going on hunger strike, asylum seekers alter and refuse the humanitarian-security hold over their life, for instance demanding edible food and decent reception conditions, in the place of merely accepting any shelter and any food

[8] By speaking of necro-resistance to designate "destructive practices that forge life into a weapon", Banu Bargu has suggested "that the reasons for the growing prevalence of human weapons should be sought in the new and contextually specific constellations of the increased biopoliticization of sovereign power" (Bargu, 2014: 27).

(Conlon, 2016). The refusal to eat encapsulates a more generalised refusal of being governed as pure victims, whose desires about where and how to live do not deserve and cannot be taken into account (Malkki, 1996: 378).

The embodied refusal played out by migrants from a condition of obstructed agency and produced protracted debasement echoes what Frantz Fanon has described as the refusal of the colonised "to authenticate, by confessing his act, the social contract proposed to him": this illuminates that the submission to medical and juridical power of the colonised or formerly colonised, "cannot be confounded with an acceptance of this power" (Fanon, 2018: 409). By going on hunger strike, migrants' *action through inaction* earmarks their refusal to participate to the humanitarian moral and physical debasing of their lives: this is predicated on being interpellated as subjects whose aspirations, desires and needs are discredited as non-worthy and unbearable. That is, a "racialised desire" underpin the biopolitical hold over migrant lives (Tazzioli, 2024): migrants refuse not only the violent systematic dismantling of life-support infrastructures but also the terms through which their subjection is enforced.

Hence, hunger strike in the context of migration confinement – in camps, on the islands, or in detention centers -, is not a marker of embodied militancy nor a practice of suffering oriented at enhancing self-mastery. Rather, by going on hunger strike migrant persons confined in camps engage in a struggle from within a condition of obstructed agency: migrants' hunger strike might be seen as a political leverage to lay bare and, at the same time, to partially back out the power's hold over their body and, thus, on their life at large. In fact, is around the body that measures apt at disrupting social reproduction activities coalesce. However, this should not be seen as a full liberation from such biopolitical hold: on the contrary, hunger strike protests unfold that practices of resistance are often grounded in an irreducible protracted duress that cannot be overcome.

From hunger strikes for freedom of movement to struggles for liveability

In the last ten years, migrant and refugee protests had been rife in Greece, and they have been enacted through diverse tactics and ways of struggling: sit-in in public squares, marches, individual or collective flights, occupations of buildings, and hunger strikes. In a way, the scattered but multiple migrant protests have been the other coin of the staged protracted "refugee crisis" in Greece: that is, the story to be retraced about the ten-year period 2015-2025 is not only one of escalating border violence and multiplication of legal-administrative hindrances for hampering migrants from becoming refugees, but it is also about the punctuated geography of struggles for asylum, for freedom of movement and for decent living conditions

Mezzadra, 2018). Although these protests happened across different locations, it might be argued that the geography of protests followed somehow the geography of migration containment: that is, the "hotspot islands" – Lesvos, Chios Samos, Leros and Kos -, Athens and the camps in the Attica region, as well as camps in Northern Greece, near Thessaloniki, and at key border-crossing points. In fact, in those border-zones migrants have been experiencing protracted confinement, dire living conditions, surveillance or organised abandonment in a quite dramatic way.

In March 2016, at the Greek-Macedonian border post close to the Greek town of Eidomeini, dozens of migrants stuck there went on hunger strike: they refused the food provided by NGOs to protest border enforcement and the impediments to move on[9]: indeed, by refusing to eat, the group of migrants protested the fact that they were entrapped in that border area and, at the same time, they stressed that they would have not given up with their plan of reaching Northern European countries and claiming asylum there. The following year, 14 Syrian women and men went on hunger strike in Athens to protest the misfunctioning and the slowness of family reunification procedures to Germany: in this case, Syrian men and women enacted their right to continue their journey and to be rejoin their relatives. Being stuck and fed in a refugee camp was synonymous of being in an open-air prison, as it hindered the possibility of re-building their life and, therefore, foreclosed their future. Hence, the hunger strike was the embodied tactic of "longing for freedom" (Farraj, 2024) – freedom of movement and of choosing where to live – but also against the violent affective tearing off – the forced detachment from relatives and friends – that migration policies enforce.

In 2017, on the island of Lesvos dozens of migrants organised a sit-in of protest in one of the main squares of Mytilene and went on hunger strike due to the protracted waiting to get a result on their asylum claim: the hunger strike was both a demand to speed up the asylum procedure and an embodied manifestation of life being stifled. The resorting to hunger strike in Greece in refugee communities is certainly not a novelty of the refugee crisis: in fact, in the years before a series of hunger strikes took place in the country, in particular in 2011 and in 2013, mostly to protest the slowness of asylum procedures and the fact that, as a result of that, their life is on hold, or to claim residence status and the right to work (Skleparis, 2017; Walsh, Tsilimpounidi, 2012). In 2011, about 280 migrant workers went on hunger strike in Thessaloniki and in Athens demanding state authorities to give them a residence permit: in the two cities the hunger strike lasted for more five weeks, with more than fifty people who ended up at the hospital due to

[9] https://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-trapped-greece-hunger-strike-idomeni/

serious health conditions. At that time, the government refused to proceed to a mass regularisation; instead, they divided the migrants in struggle by granting only to some of them a six-month "tolerance status" that suspended the return decision and enabled them to temporarily regain access to the labour market (Amnesty International, 2011).

Overall, the hunger strike protests reported above were mostly driven by claims for getting asylum and permit to stay or for freedom of movement. Instead, few years later, after the outbreak of Covid-19, migrants' hunger strikes and other forms of migrants' protests in Greece have been mostly focused on (un)liveable conditions in camps and, more broadly, the dismantling of their life-support infrastructures. In fact, the changes that have occurred in migrants' hunger strikes did not concern only the demands raised and the goals pursued; rather, they also mirrored and foregrounded "the power's hold" (Foucault, 2003: 239) exercised on migrants' lives. Indeed, the modes of governing migrants by debasing their lives should be read in light of a specific political convergence in Greece that encompassed the progressive cut of the EU's funds, the implementation of new migration policies and the re-centralisation of the refugee system under the Greek government. The hunger strike protest by 196 residents of Moria camp in April 2020 marked somehow a threshold in migrants' struggles in Greece: the temporary collective formation formed by women, men and children of different nationalities went on hunger strike to protest the abject living conditions in Moria camp, where most of them had been stranded for months.

At the same time, migrant persons who were seeking asylum and who were detained in the pre-removal detention center in Moria (Prokeka), on the island of Lesvos, also went on hunger strike in early April 2020, demanding to be immediately released to avoid the swift spread of Covid-19 in the prison[10]. After the outbreak of Covid-19 and in the following years, migrant hunger strikes took place as part of a broader cycle of migrant struggles over the dismantling of life-support infrastructures and the erosion of collective spaces of liveability: both in detention centers and in refugee camps, migrants protested the unliveable conditions they face – including the lack of food, water, the highly poor hygienic conditions and the lack of adequate shelters. The cycle of protests that happened in refugee camps on mainland Greece in 2021 and 2022 – in particular in the camps of Ritsona, Schisto and Ritsona - illuminates how struggles for food, accommodation are at the same time struggles over the life that some people are (not)expected living (Mobile Info Team, 2024).

[10] https://dm-aegean.bordermonitoring.eu/2020/04/08/we-are-here-to-die-or-to-obtain-freedom-hunger-strike-in-moria-pre-removal-detention-centre-2/

They struggled over the hindering of autonomous social reproduction activities, meaning by that the realm of "life-making activities" (Bhattacharya, 2017), which exceeds biological reproduction and includes "education and training; and the reproduction and provision of caring needs daily and long-term reproduction, both of the means of production and the labour power to make them work" (Bakker, 2007: 541). However, the wearing away of migrants' life-support infrastructures and of the conditions of collective liveability did not happen through blatant manifestations of state's violence: rather, it followed what Elizabeth Povinelli defined as "dispersed suffering" that emerge "a quieter form of abjection, despair, impoverishment, and boredom" (Povinelli, 2011: 4). Indeed, on the one side women, men and children in camps were increasingly deprived of humanitarian and financial support – including the temporary suspension for few months of the cash assistance – and faced obstacles in going to school, while on the other in some camps they were not allowed to carrying on autonomous activities, such as cooking their meals, or opening shops. That, is they were stuck in a condition of depriving dependency. Parwana Amiri, an Afghani citizen who in 2019 was 19 years old, was at the forefront of refugees' mobilisations in Greek camps and, in particular, protests for getting edible food and education for children: "We are demanding our rights to a decent living, to decent jobs, to decent housing, to health care, and to education"[11].

By arguing this, she highlighted how struggles over children education and struggles for food and water and, jointly, edible food, became part of the same protests: they turned out to be mutually interrelated claims, that ultimately concerned the disruption of life-support infrastructures. Hunger strike, that has been at times used as a tactic by camp residents in some of these protests, should be investigated within this partially changed landscape of struggles: more than protests for freedom of movement, family reunification and right to asylum, they all focused on living conditions. Indeed, during the years 2021-2022, NGOs calculated that about 60 per cent of camp residents across Greece was affected by a "hunger crisis"[12], as a result of the government's decision to downsize humanitarian aid. In a way, the biopolitical hold over migrants nowadays is progressively enforced by debasing migrants' lives and making them sick – what from a slightly different perspective Suanders and Al-Om have defined as the "slow violence of asylum" (Saunders, Al-Om, 2022). To put it otherwise, the incorrigible presence of migrant persons in Europe is disrupted through modes of governing by debasing their lives, that is through psycho-physical debilitation and socio-economic devaluation.

[11] http://birdsofimmigrants.jogspace.net/tag/leavenoonebehind/

[12] https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/greeces-starving-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-causing-dangerous-crisis

Importantly, the systematic hindering of asylum seekers' asocial reproduction activities has not been without consequences: the dismantling of life-support infrastructures has progressively eroded migrants' leeway for engaging in collective mobilisations. In other words, one of the effects of debasing migrant lives consists in shrinking the material ground for migrants to act and raise claims. In fact, the increasing incapacitation to mobilise collectively, including struggles that rely on depleted body, such as hunger strikes, should be analysed in light of psycho-physical debilitation that affects migrants' willingness to and conditions for struggling. Indeed, despite refugees' struggles have been happening even in the last few years, it is remarkable that, overall, they have substantially dropped in number after the abovementioned cycle of protests in camps in 2021 and 2022[13].

Conclusion:

Many refugees and migrants' hunger strikes took place in different moments in the last years, in detention centers, refugee camps and in public squares. However, far from being isolated protests, it is noticeable that hunger strikes have been part of wider migrants' struggles over both freedom of movement and living conditions in Greece. In fact, hunger strike cannot be detached from other practices of struggle that, although very different in the tactic mobilised, lay bare in a similar way the biopolitical hold exercised over migrants' lives. More precisely, as this chapter has argued, hunger strikes protests refuse and interrupt such biopolitical hold by embodying the intolerable, that is by highlighting the intolerability of unliveable life, that stems from the systematic debasing of migrants.

Since after Covid-19, that earmarked an exacerbation in the withdrawal of humanitarian and state aid in Greece, migrants and refugees have been struggling over the obstructions to social reproduction activities: migrants' presence is managed not only by disrupting autonomous movements but also by debasing migrants' lives and dismantling their infrastructures of life-support. In fact, migrants' bodies are exhausted and depleted as a result of such infrastructural violence and of the attack to autonomous social reproduction activities. This article has advanced that a conjunctural analysis of migrant hunger strike protests is key - in the place of a formal one, which abstracts hunger strikes from the field of tensions, the making of

[13] Yet, the decrease in number depends also, I suggest, on the diminishing of public attention and media visibility on refugee camps in Greece. Indeed, public visibility and the existence of an actual or potential public are key for both hunger strikes and other collective forms of protest.

subjectivities and the power relations at stake. A conjunctural analysis that focuses on life-support infrastructures, reveals that migrants' hunger strike protests are not a quest for life as such, nor for a higher form of life but, rather, struggles for the spaces and socio-material conditions which enable collective liveability.

At the same time, these are struggles that refuse the moral and physical debasing of lives enforced through humanitarian control and, jointly, through the withdrawal of humanitarianism. Through hunger strikes protests, migrants in Greece have targeted such biopolitical hold over their bodies and lives that works by dismantling their life-support infrastructures and hampering their autonomous social reproduction activities. Indeed, what might be defined as the *hidden abodes of migration management* consists in life-impeding activities that enhance the debilitating logic of racial capitalism (Athanasiou, 2020: Puar, 2017). Hunger strike protests that take place in sites of protracted and racialised confinement constitute a sort of analytical litmus paper for coming to grips with the specific biopolitical hold exercised over migrants' lives and on how this changes over time. Relatedly, they push us to disentangle and undo the allegedly binary opposition between protracted debasement and resistance. More precisely, migrant hunger strike protests confront us with the importance of challenging the widespread "material processes of de-humanisation" (Mezzadra, 2020) of migrants that are not narrowed the blatant manifestations of border violence and that consist instead in the erosion of their lives, without necessarily killing them or letting them die.

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