Marica Rombou-Levidi

The Municipal 'Triplet': Mediation in the *Covid-void*

In this paper[1] I discuss mediation in humanitarian governance by focusing on asylum seeker settlement in the city of Athens as part of the EU funded ESTIA (Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation) program.[2] ESTIA was launched by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (henceforth UNHCR) in November 2015, during the peak of the so called "refugee crisis."[3] From its launch until its termination in December 2022, ESTIA was run consecutively by the UNHCR and then the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum

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Most interviews quoted in this paper were recorded and transcribed by the researcher; they were then included in the Archive of the Observatory of the Refugee and Migration Crisis in the Aegean (AORMCA). However, this did not apply to interviews that were not recorded, either because they consisted in informal discussions that formed part of the researcher's ethnographic notes, or because interlocutors did not give the researcher their consent.

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This well-chosen acronym corresponds phonetically to the Greek term *Εστία*, which is the name of the ancient Greek Goddess Hestia, the virgin goddess of the hearth, the correct ordering of domesticity, the family, home, and tate. In Greek, the noun *εστία*, with a lower-case *e*, is synonymous with the words home and hearth. It is therefore clear that the acronym was chosen to underline the act of settling in a home, even if temporarily. It was given to the program by the UNHCR's Greek team and their interlocutors in DG-HOME –the Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs– (Interview with D.K., 23/03/2021, Archive of the Observatory of the Refugee and Migration Crisis in the Aegean -AORMCA, http://archive-refugeeobservatory.ekt.gr/refugeeobservatory/?locale=en.). According to the Head of the Support Directorate, which operated under the MoMA's Reception and Identification Service (E.K., 15/04/21, AORMCA), following ESTIA's transition from the UNHCR to the MoMA, ESTIA was no longer considered to be an acronym. Instead, it functioned as a noun with strong symbolism, and was retained because of its power.

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The term is widely used to refer to the increased movement of displaced people from Asia and Africa into Greece and Europe caused by wars and other adverse circumstances, particularly after 2015. Here, it is used with reservation, because the characterization of "crisis" refers to circumstances of exception, whereas, in the present time, displacement cannot be considered exceptional.

(MoMA) in cooperation with several implementing partners.[4] Here, I study the operation of humanitarian governance "from below" by focusing on the practice of one of these partners, the Municipality of Athens (MoA). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between June 2020 and July 2021, I discuss an operational model of humanitarian governance employed by the MoA that relied on small working teams of three −a social scientist, an accommodation officer, and an interpreter− which was called the "triplet." To my knowledge, this tripartite model of humanitarian governance, which constitutes an ethnographically stimulating system of relations and roles, has not been employed in its full configuration by other ESTIA implementing partners in Athens.[5] The study of its dynamics can contribute our understanding of the production of mediation in humanitarian governance, both in this specific context and at a broader level.

Mediation in the framework of asylum seekers' settlement involves interaction between different parties. This interplay consists of initiatives and actions that are taken by all sides to connect the disparate social worlds of asylum seekers and Greek society. Therefore, mediation also refers to agency. Connection, however, goes hand in hand with distance. This is because asylum seekers' encounters with local society involve the bridging of divergent world views, cultural systems, value frames, social groups, and levels of political and social inclusion. In the case of the ESTIA program, the parties being connected were the asylum seekers on the one hand, and the UNHCR or the state on the other. The mediators who facilitated this connection were people working for the MoA who, as a third party, stood between the other two. Therefore, to a large extent, in the case of official policies on asylum seekers' settlement in Athens, mediation acquired an institutional character. Here, I approach mediation as a bundle of social practices, social roles, social relations, encounters, and ethical engagements (Bierschenk 2021, 423; Cabot 2014, 19). Furthermore, I consider the work of the MoA and the implementation of the triplet system as an instance of biopolitics, in the sense that it constitutes a technique for the management of populations (Fassin 2012, 226).

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Papataxiarchis (2017, 79-81) describes the ESTIA accommodation program as the transcendence of the model of the camp, inscribed in what he calls the emergence of the "humanitarian city." For an account of the historical and political context in which the UNHCR undertook to transfer or introduce humanitarian sector know-how on camp interventions-in which it showed considerable competence−into an apartment housing program within the urban fabric, see Rombou-Levidi 2022, 33-48.

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As Lindquist (2012, 15) has pointed out, although mediation in migration is often transnational or even global in operation, at the same time, it is highly local, because the patterns of operation are specific to local societies. This is indeed an instance of a specific mode.

The ESTIA *accommodation scheme*[6] was undoubtedly effective in providing temporary accommodation to asylum seekers in line with Greece's fundamental obligations towards them as dictated by the Geneva Convention. In this context, mediation also concerned the relation of its "beneficiaries"[7] to local society. Evidently, this dimension of mediation brings to the fore the issue of what is referred to as "integration," which is difficult to define. The term can acquire different meanings that correspond to different forms, processes, stages, and levels of inclusion. Among the many processes that integration can refer to are: acquisition of the legal status of asylum seeker; spatial dispersion into the urban fabric; acquisition of language skills; participation in the national education system; access to employment and medical or legal protection; social relations and everyday life. Moreover, integration can be intensely political, depending on governmental stances and the shaping of policies on migration, housing, education, health, etc. As I will argue, throughout its existence, the ESTIA program had an ambiguous relation to integration. Significantly, as already stated, the term formed part of the acronym initially used for the program's name. However, as my interlocutor from the Greek department of the UNHCR, who was a key figure in the shaping of the program,[8] pointed out, ESTIA program resources came from the emergency funding budget line for the reception of asylum seekers, and the DG-HOME committee that approved the program each year did not allow "integration" actions to be included. They argued that ESTIA was purely a reception and an emergency accommodation program that "*facilitated* integration."[9] Therefore, ESTIA never was an integration program, either in terms of design or of implementation.[10] The greatest challenge for the UNHCR's Greek

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6 The emphasis is mine.

7 This is the term the UNHCR, MoMA, and MoA employed to refer to the asylum seekers who participated in the ESTIA program. Evidently, its connotations are of relations of power instead of rights.

8 D.K., 23/03/21, AORMCA.

9 This expression is also used in the official ESTIA discourse under MoMA management. For example, see ESTIA Fact Sheet 2021, https://migration.gov.gr/en/fact-sheet-estia/.

10 This was confirmed by the MoA's ESTIA Project Manager (C.K. 11/03/2021, AORMCA), who underlined that ESTIA was a reception, temporary accommodation, and "mild pre-integration" scheme, and explained that by "pre-integration" she meant that people had to be prepared before deciding whether they would make the next step of settling in Greece. This next step was the HELIOS project

department was to shape a system that would *facilitate* this aim, given that asylum seekers differed from local citizens in both social and cultural terms, and with their awareness of the fact that a supportive network would be necessary.

Interestingly, from 2016 until 2019, that is during the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition government and for half of ESTIA's duration, the program's operation was not defined formally. The first institutional framework for ESTIA was issued in 2019 by the New Democracy government which promoted the systematic retrenchment of humanitarian governance and protection (Pallister-Wilkins et al. 2021). As the MoMA's Head of the Support Directorate—which operates under the Reception and Identification Service—noted in our discussion in April 2021, during the first three years of ESTIA's operation, there was considerable flexibility for ESTIA partners in terms of implementing the UNHCR's guidelines. In its first casting, the program offered asylum seekers an initial six-month right of stay and the possibility of another six-month prolongation following the acquisition of refugee status. It therefore provided a relatively reasonable timeframe for implementing partners to promote integration initiatives. Nevertheless, even under these relatively flexible circumstances, working in terms of integration was extremely difficult – indeed, "almost impossible," – because the population being accommodated by the program was highly vulnerable[11] and, to a large extent, not able to make an independent living in Greece. Moreover, most of this population did not wish to remain in Greece after the assessment of their asylum status. [12]

From 2019 onwards, ESTIA's provisions steadily shrunk and so did the few aspects of them related to integration. This was aggravated even further after the program's transfer to the MoMA at the end of 2020. ESTIA Internal Operating Regulations (IORs)[13] as defined by the Ministerial Decision issued by the Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarakis, on April 9, 2020,[14] do not include

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(https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/programma-helios/).

11 The definition of vulnerability and its use in humanitarian governance is also a key issue in discussions of ESTIA. Unfortunately, however, an examination of it is beyond the scope of this paper.

12 E.K., 15/04/2021, AORMCA.

13 Internal Operating Regulations, aiming to guarantee a smooth settlement process for all parties involved in ESTIA, were periodically issued by the UNHCR and MoMA. Among other things, they described the professional requirements for members of the triplet, their mediatory roles, and the terms of the entire mediatory process. At the time of my research, the most updated IORs were those issued on November 30, 2020, https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/pdf, (pages 58665-6).

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integration among the program's main aims. Instead, they refer only to the need for services that "*accompany*"[15] accommodation, which are meant to support social inclusion. According to Article 2 of the IORs, "[t]he aim of the program is the provision of secure accommodation and the accompanying services to seekers of international protection, according to their needs and in line with the complete provision of material conditions of reception as defined by EU law." Article 5 describes the "accompanying services" as, among others, "… the beneficiary's ... registration in public education structures and the processing of procedures associated with health care, registration with tax authorities, the opening of a bank account, social security, and registration with organizations that promote employment or social protection." In other words, by 2019, ESTIA's "integration" or "pre-integration" initiatives corresponded to what in humanitarian governance terms was described as the carrying out of "formalities."[16]

In July 2020, Philippe Leclerc, the UNHCR Representative in Greece described the relation of the ESTIA "*accommodation scheme,"*as he called it, to the process of "integration" quite clearly. This he did during an official meeting with Notis Mitarakis, which took place at the end of the UNCHR's management of the program and in view of its hand over to the MoMA. He stated that ESTIA was an "exemplary programme…. that has proven to *enable a successful 'living together'* between refugees and local communities across Greece … It has shown in practice that *peaceful co-existence and interaction* between locals and refugees can work and benefit *social cohesion*. It has also managed to strike a balance between cost-efficiency and quality, while serving as a *first bridge to integration*… ."[17] In comparison with the humanitarian workers' statements cited above, and considered in the light of policies implemented by ESTIA partners, this piece of formal humanitarian discourse appears to be biased. Among the several terms used by Leclerc in his attempt to describe the rapprochement of asylum seekers and local society, the most striking was the "first bridge to integration."

My research led me to the understanding that ESTIA's policies did not give priority to the issue of integration. Neither did the New Democracy government which never supported the inclusion of refugees in Greek society. Significantly, and as I

Ministerial Decision 13221/2020, Government Bulletin 1223/Β/9-4-2020. https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/prosphuges-politiko-asulo/upourgike-apophase-oik-13221-2020.html

15 The emphasis is mine.

16 MoA ESTIA Project Manager, C.K., 11/03/2021, AORMCA.

17 https://www.unhcr.org/gr/en/15985-towards-estia-ii-unhcr-welcomes-greeces-commitment-to-ensure-the-continuation-of-flagship-reception-programme-for-asylum-seekers.html. The emphasis is mine.

will argue later, these two factors defined a different degree of plasticity and flexibility in the implementation of ESTIA by the various partners and by the MoA triplet after 2019, the year New Democracy came to power. Therefore, it is important to note that, to some extent, the circumstances I witnessed in 2020-2021 differed from those that prevailed during the first years of ESTIA's operation.

However, the ESTIA program has been criticized by researchers for not promoting integration throughout its course. As Nikos Kourachanis (2018) has noted, despite its merits as an alternative to accommodating asylum seekers in camps, ESTIA did not have any provisions for integration –for example, Greek language lessons, legal aid, empowerment, or support in finding employment. Consequently, a significant number of asylum seekers were over time transformed into passive recipients of help. Kourachanis (2019) has also criticized ESTIA for suffering from inadequate planning, and a lack of systematic integration actions and strategy for the smooth and gradual exit of residents. Eva Papatzani (Papatzani et al. 2022, 4388), on the other hand, has noted that the program was characterized by the extensive control of asylum seekers' day to day experiences in accommodation. In addition, in article written with Timokleia Psallidaki (Papatzani and Psallidaki, 2022, 195), she has pointed out that even though the program offered supplementary services and activities, none of them offered systematic integration pathways. As Lefteris Papagiannakis and Melina Daskalaki,[18] both responsible for migration in the MoA during two consecutive and politically divergent municipal administrations stated during our communication,[19] "ESTIA has always been playing catch up with realities on the ground."

In this paper, my aim is not to assess ESTIA as a program, but rather to explore the interpretations, refractions, and re-conceptualizations of the normative orientations of the program in its realization through the triplet. Before switching the discussion to the actual functioning of the MoA triplet on the field, I will give a brief account of the historical and political context in which the UNHCR undertook the transfer or introduction of humanitarian sector know-how related to camp interventions –in which it had shown considerable competence– into an apartment housing program within the urban fabric, while considering the circumstances under which the MoA got involved in asylum seekers' accommodation.

- *A Brief Overview of the Historical and Political Context of the Creation of the ESTIA Program*

18 Papagiannakis and Daskalaki worked respectively with Mayors George Kaminis and Kostas Bakoyannis.

19 L.P. 24/09/2020 (unregistered discussion) and M.D. 01/03/2021, AORMCA.

When the vast migration flows of 2015 reached Europe through Greece, European leaders realized that closing the Balkan road to the European North would result in the confinement of a large number of displaced people within Greek territory. Therefore, at the Brussels Summit Meeting of October 2015, European leaders decided to provide Greece with financial support to develop accommodation for fifty thousand people. This was the first time in history that the European Community activated the resources of DG-ECHO (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid) humanitarian aid, which is a department responsible for *overseas* humanitarian aid and civil protection.[20]

Until 2020, ESTIA was coordinated by the UNHCR in cooperation with the MoMA. In September 2020, the UNHCR withdrew from the management of the program and the MoMA took over, renaming the program ESTIA II:[21] Rental Accommodation Scheme for Asylum Seekers. In February 2022, the MoMA announced that ESTIA II would be terminated in December 2022.[22] The decision was executed as planned.

By participating in the European consultations in Brussels, the UNHCR committed to contributing to the project by creating twenty out of the fifty thousand accommodation places in apartments in Greece.[23] This of course required a host of actions: the shaping of new policies and practices in coordination with the Greek state, the expansion of professional humanitarianism within the area of the Greek capital, core training of staff, and the challenge of bridging cultural difference among people living within the urban fabric—asylum seekers and locals included. In other words, the project involved a tremendous amount of mediation, which ranged from the highest institutional level to everyday implementation on the ground.

Significantly, ESTIA was the first ever community diaspora program the UNHCR implemented worldwide.[24] In addition, it was the first accommodation program of

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20 D.K., 23/03/2021; K.P., 17/11/2020; E.T. 08/09/2020.

21 Henceforth, unless it is necessary to specify, I will use the term ESTIA to refer to both the initial project (ESTIA) and the revised one (ESTIA II).

22 "The accommodation program ESTIA II to be concluded in 2022," 22 February 2022, available in Greek at: https://bit.ly/35m5UXW.

23 D.K., 23/03/2021; E.K., 15/04/2021.

24 K.P., 17/11/2020.

its kind implemented by the UNHCR in Europe.[25] ESTIA was a vehicle through which a leading international humanitarian organization (UNHCR) was asked by the European Commission to assist a member state (Greece) to respond to its fundamental obligations toward asylum seekers as dictated by the Geneva Convention.

The UNHCR consciously and persistently promoted the local government's involvement in the program. Like other international organizations, since the 1990s, it had followed the movement toward "decentralized aid" in overseas aid policy. In practice, this meant that it commissioned intermediaries, such as local government or civil society bodies, to implement aid projects funded by donors, rather than dealing with local communities directly (Fechter 2019, 5). Within this context, it believed that even if municipalities were not ready to enter the program, their involvement, even if it involved only a few accommodation places, would firstly add value to ESTIA and, secondly, would be significant in terms of its sustainability. Therefore, the UNHCR's mediating power extended not only to the field of central government but also influenced the politics of local authorities.

The MoA was the first local authority to engage with the ESTIA program. This took place in 2017. Its motives for doing so were social, political, and financial. While political responsibility for the program lay with the mayor, administrative oversight went to an intermediary body called the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA), which mediated between the municipality and ESTIA's sponsors in receiving funding and hiring staff. ADDMA employed officers from the Management Organization Unit of the Ministry of Development and worked closely with the private sector via an extended network of associates. Gradually, more local authorities joined the ESTIA program.

The UNHCR knew that it would at some point withdraw from the program because its operational role in Greece was, at any rate, temporary.[26] From 2016 onwards, it organized large training projects for ESTIA staff, who numbered about one thousand five hundred people in Athens and who, due to the rapid pace at which the program had to operate, had been hired following very summary procedures. Because recruits had no previous experience, some training, which was largely technocratic, was provided by the UNHCR. This consisted mainly in training on legal issues concerning asylum seekers, so that humanitarian actors could monitor the latter's basic needs. "Social workers had to become asylum literate;"[27] that is, they needed to acquire basic knowledge of the asylum process to be able to support each organization's beneficiaries. Then they also needed training on the

25 D.K., 23/03/2021.

26 Conversation with D.K., 23/03/2021.

27 Conversation with D.K. as above.

institutional framework of reception; that is, on the obligations of the country, etc. The expansion of ESTIA and the intensification of staff hiring and training procedures generated considerable ambiguity among humanitarian actors involved in the field at the time.[28] According to several of my interlocutors' testimonies, humanitarian actors' training did not accomplish its stated aims;[29] unfortunately, the discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this paper.

- *Methodological Considerations*

The fieldwork coincided with consecutive anti-pandemic lockdowns. This conjuncture significantly impacted the research, necessitating a switch from on the ground fieldwork to online ethnographic research. This paper draws on two kinds of ethnographic material; first, twenty online or live interviews with people working for ESTIA and with asylum seekers taking part in the program. Second, short-term on the ground fieldwork that took place following the relaxation of anti-Covid measures – that is, during June and July 2021. This last part of the fieldwork, which was based on participant observation, also included some informal and unsystematic communication with locals who lived or worked in the asylum seekers' apartment buildings and neighborhoods. The displaced people who participated in the research as MoA beneficiaries came from Syria, Iraq and several African countries – Congo, the DRC, Cameroon, Nigeria, Libya, and Morocco. Communication with asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq was facilitated—and therefore, in a sense, mediated—by interpreters who, either on the ground or online, translated discussions with interlocutors from Arabic into Greek. In the case of African asylum seekers, who were mostly French speaking, online communication, live interviews and informal discussions on the ground were carried out without the mediation of interpreters. However, during the triplet visits to ESTIA apartments, communication with residents, who were mostly African, was always mediated by an interpreter, a French speaking Greek person.

As was to be expected, given the pandemic, the ethnographic data largely concerns extra-ordinary circumstances—if, that is, one considers the circumstances associated with the management of the emergency caused by the refugee crisis to be "ordinary". Moreover, fieldwork coincided with another set of difficult circumstances associated with the transition of the management of ESTIA from the UNHCR to the MoMA during the last quarter of 2020, into the beginning of 2021. As I argue here, both the pandemic and the transition caused considerable unrest in the national field of humanitarian governance during the period I was studying

28 Unregistered private conversations with N.L., 27/05/2020; F.V., 23/05/2020; E.K., 07/06/2020; E.S., 22/03/2022.

29 For a more detailed discussion of the historical and political framework of the creation of ESTIA, see Rombou-Levidi 2022.

the implementation of ESTIA in Athens.[30] They almost nullified the process of mediation for all parties involved, while dramatically exacerbating the experience of waiting for asylum seekers (Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2020; Khosravi 2018, 2020a, 2020b; Machinya 2020; Musso 2020; Rozakou 2020; Seppälä, T. et al. 2020).[31] I conceptualize this period of numbness as a *mediation void* which, I name the *Covid-void*. Here, I explore the shrinking of mediation for asylum seekers and humanitarian workers in the context of this void, while unpacking aspects of its impact on the former's minds and bodies. Thus, while this paper concerns mediation in the context of asylum seekers' settlement, it deals largely with the gap left by the freezing of mediation caused by the very particular circumstances of 2020-2021. Ethnographically, to consider the decline or the pausing of a process may be as important as examining its growth.

However, the data collected also, if indirectly, concerns the pre-pandemic period. On the one hand, many of the asylum seekers who became my interlocutors during the *Covid-void* had experienced the mediating practices of the triplet before the standstill. This was because they had applied to the Greek authorities for asylum and had been accommodated by the MoA before the outbreak of the pandemic. The slowing down of all asylum procedures that characterized the *Covid-void* period prolonged their stay in ESTIA apartments. Also, some of them were living in ESTIA apartments even though their application for asylum had been rejected and they were, therefore, considered by the MoA to be "non-compliant". This was a consequence of both the intense inertia that characterized the period under study and the suspension of the clause that concerned "non-compliance" by the MoMA because of the pandemic.[32] Evictions were pending; nevertheless, these constituted a very difficult step for implementing partners and humanitarian actors, while producing additional precarity for asylum seekers. On the other hand, humanitarian actors who worked for the municipal ESTIA program and participated in the research often compared the stalemate of the pandemic and transition period to the more promising pre-pandemic and pre-transition circumstances. They did so while expressing concern about the shrinking of mediation mentioned above and its consequent impact both on their own career prospects and on asylum seekers' opportunities for settlement in Athens. Significantly, the data analyzed here suggests that the instability in humanitarian governance highlighted the divisions and boundaries both between and within the

30 For a discussion of the repercussions of the pandemic on humanitarian governance in Athens, and on the field of asylum seekers' accommodation, see Pallister-Wilkins et al. 2021, 29-30, 87-88, and 102-103.

31 Also useful for explorations of waiting is O' Neil's 2017 insightful work on homeless people in Bucharest, which focuses on boredom.

32 At the time of fieldwork and according to the MoA ESTIA Project Manager, "non-compliant" residents were more than 20% of the total number of beneficiaries (C.K, 11/03/2021, AORMCA).

parties involved in the process of mediation, before and during the *Covid-void*. In other words, the instability brought to the fore differences, contradictions, and tensions which had, in the past, been more easily handled and had therefore been less visible. For these reasons, my discussion of the triplet's functioning also includes an exploration of this disjuncture.

My analysis of the municipal triplet's implementation of ESTIA principles and policies during the doubly adverse period for humanitarian governance described above proceeds in the following way. First, I describe the triplet's work over the course of a day following the relaxation of the lockdowns in three ESTIA apartments. Here I also describe the space which, I argue, is important for understanding the conditions shaping asylum seekers' everyday lives. Second, still drawing on my experience with the municipal triplets, I consider the forms of communication and relations which humanitarian workers developed, both among themselves and with asylum seekers during mediation. In moving to the concluding comments on the dynamics of the triplet as a mechanism of humanitarian governance of migration, I critically consider some dimensions of its members' roles. I do so first by associating these roles with the IOR terms of the MoA, the UNHCR, and the MoMA and, second, by drawing on information provided by my interlocutors during private communication. My central argument is that the triplet was marked by tensions and contradictions that undermined programmatic intentions, while further shaping both the meaning and the practice of mediation in the context of migration governance. This occurred despite ESTIA's effective contribution to providing an alternative mode of settlement to camps. In addition, neither the formal regulations and safeguards defined by the UNHCR and the MoMA nor the intensive efforts of the MoA to apply these regulations in practice were able to avert these problems.

- *The Triplet at Work*

  A) The Space

It is a hot June morning in 2021, and I am following an MoA triplet at work in a residential neighborhood of Athens. They are visiting French-speaking asylum seekers from various African countries who have settled in ESTIA program apartments. The triplet, one out of nineteen operating in the municipality at the time,[33] comprises a social scientist, a forty-year-old sociologist and PhD candidate I call Timos,[34]an accommodation officer I refer to as Spyros who is an unskilled man

33 In 2020, each triplet was responsible for seventeen apartments, which corresponded to a maximum of ninety asylum seekers. After the transition, these numbers changed dramatically for the worse. The members of the triplet became responsible for two hundred and fifty asylum seekers each (Rombou-Levidi 2022, 44).

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in his fifties who came to the appointment pulling a shopping cart full of packages, and finally an interpreter in her early thirties who I call Elevtheria, who was French speaking and formally qualified as a primary school teacher. All three members of the team are Greek citizens. Anti-pandemic measures have been just relaxed, and all humanitarian organizations and actors are striving to catch up on their work. The team's schedule for the day includes visits to three apartments in two adjacent neighborhoods, Pangrati and Vyronas, in south-eastern Athens in the 2nd Municipal District, between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. It is estimated that each visit will last from one to one and a half hours. The triplet has not been working in the field for a long time and therefore needs to cover a lot of ground. Timos, Spyros, and Elevtheria are stressed because of their workload this morning and because of the limitations imposed by the IORs on their roles. Timos has given advance notice of our visit to the tenants of all three apartments. In his view, they too are looking forward to this meeting because many issues are at stake for them - their asylum status, health, their children's education, their work prospects, and right to accommodation in Greece.

Both neighborhoods we are visiting are densely populated middle-class districts. During the last few years, they have hosted a relatively small number of displaced people compared to other parts of Athens.[35] Small open-air spaces, peek out between the streets but there is not much green space in the area, except for one park, which is about one and a half kilometers away. Considering the pandemic's presence, the streets are lively and busy as are the local markets. There are large or small supermarkets every two or three blocks and bakeries, green-grocers, hardware stores, toy shops, hairdressers, drugstores, and small cafes complete the picture in both neighborhoods. ESTIA residents can visit these shops and share the city with the other residents of the buildings they live in.

All names are pseudonyms.

35 According to Papatzani (2020a), who provides a map of the dispersion of ESTIA apartments in the Municipal Districts of Athens in 2016, the planning principles of ESTIA aimed at the dispersal of apartments for asylum seekers in different neighborhoods, to avoid their "over-concentration" in neighborhoods where displaced people were already settled. In 2016, ESTIA apartments in the 2nd Municipal District made up 6.48% of the total number of ESTIA apartments in the MoA. The percentage of apartments in the 6th Municipal District, where most of those in Athens were located, was 57,43%. In general, the Central, North, Northeastern and Northwestern parts of Athens hosted more ESTIA apartments than the Southern regions. These numbers did not change significantly in the following years. Despite ESTIA's dispersal principle, the main supply of apartments for rent was found in the lower-income neighborhoods of central Athens, where small property owners made their apartments available because of the financial security provided by ESTIA. Darling (2017, 183), rightly argues that "dispersal represents a desire to 'accommodate', rather than a starting point for integration; this is because the city often becomes a container for individuals whose lives are placed on hold by the classification processes of sovereign attempts to 'manage migration.' As a result, cities and their inhabitants are denied the agency to shape the dispersal process, and asylum seekers are denied the agency to shape the city."

Most of the buildings where ESTIA apartments are located are ordinary Athenian six to seven-story blocks of flats built in the 1960s, 1970s, or a little later. However, they are among the oldest and most neglected blocks in both neighborhoods. The maximum monthly rent approved by ESTIA is 450 euros, which is low considering market prices. Therefore, ESTIA apartments are usually located on the lower stories of the buildings. The top stories are more exclusive, more expensive, and reserved for proprietors' own use or for letting to better off tenants.[36] At the main entrance at street level, the apartments' buzzers do not have people's names on them, but just the word ESTIA.

ESTIA apartments vary in size and number of inhabitants. According to UNHCR or MoMA regulations, they must be from sixty to ninety square meters large and have a maximum capacity of six people – single men, single women, or families. They comprise one or two bedrooms, a kitchen and bathroom. Living rooms are usually turned into bedrooms to increase capacity. Therefore, there is no common space in any of them. This reflects the fact that to some extent, accommodation in ESTIA apartments draws on domesticity principles that do not differ from those of the camp. Rooms are treated as though they were tents made of concrete. People are "stored" in them, deprived of their privacy and, at the same time, of the communal life and the administrative support that the camp offers. Even families share apartments by occupying one room each and using auxiliary spaces in turns. Nevertheless, as people's testimonies confirm, living conditions are incomparably safer than in the camp—not to mention the street—and access to bathroom and cooking facilities far easier. The larger apartments have a hallway which is often turned into a makeshift sitting or storage area. Finally, some apartments have small balconies which constitute an additional, open-air sitting space and which are very useful all year round, but especially in the summer. The balconies may overlook the main street or the building's inner courtyard, an enclosed space formed by the backs of neighboring blocks of flats. In Athens, as in other big cities, inner courtyards are a place where the everyday life of a buildings' inhabitants can be observed and felt in various ways; voices and noise can be heard throughout the day, laundry can be seen hanging from balcony railings and cooking odors detected day and night.[37] A sense of domestic order is present. Living in an

36 For similar findings on the vertical ethnic differentiation of blocks of flats in Omonia, central Athens, see Maloutas and Karadimitriou (2001) as well as Papatzani and Knappers (2020).

37 Interestingly, already in 2009, Manos Katsaris —a visual artist and currently associate professor at the University of Ioannina— and Christina Marathou —a social anthropologist, at the time a post-graduate student at the NTUA, produced a short film that dealt with how the different cuisines and smells in a multicultural apartment building in Athens became an occasion for residents to communicate with each other and talk about diversity. The film was made for a project called "Moving Image" that was part of a collaboration between the Michael Cacoyannis Foundation and a post-graduate course at the Athens School of Fine Arts. (https://movingimage09.wordpress.com).

apartment that shares urban space with locals on an equal or almost equal basis certainly constitutes a bridge to inclusion, though not necessarily to integration.

In all three apartments we visit—as in most other ESTIA apartments I saw for myself during fieldwork—the rooms are quite small considering the number of people they are supposed to host. The wooden parquet floor is rather worn and dull and the sparse furniture provided barely fits in the space. IOR terms demand the provision of one bed, a bunk or single bed, per person, a kitchen table and some chairs. Electrical cookers and refrigerators are provided by the municipality, as are some cooking utensils, dishes, cups, and cutlery. One set of linen, one pillow, and one blanket are given to every person upon arrival. In addition, a bucket, mop, and some other cleaning supplies are provided. Curtains and carpets are not supplied.

In all flats the auxiliary spaces are also quite small; the tiles on kitchen and bathroom walls and floor are old and occasionally chipped or cracked. Their design and color reveal the buildings' age, while their condition testifies to the apartments' tired state. Sinks and toilets are also old and worn. Nevertheless, in all three flats bathrooms are kept clean. Kitchens are a little less well looked after.

UNHCR, and later the MoMA match ESTIA apartment residents on the strict basis of vulnerability criteria. In other words, priority for settlement is given through a categorization of displaced people who have managed to reach the country and have the right to be accommodated: pregnant women, elderly people, single mothers or fathers with their children, people who are in serious need of medical treatment, victims of rape, mentally ill people, and some other categories of displaced people. In addition to these criteria, others, like nationality, ethnicity, religion, and gender are also considered by the UNHCR. People who find themselves sharing a “home” have no relation to each other before settling in an apartment. They are obliged to find ways to cohabitate, even if this is often difficult. Some residents have been living in an apartment for a long time, often for more than a year. Others are newcomers who arrived in Athens from the islands or have been sent there through UNHCR or MoMA referrals.

I will name the three apartments described here by using pseudonyms for fictional names of roads. The first apartment we visit, which I will call Simonidou, hosts six young single women from the Congo (DRC) and Cameroon, who are in their twenties and thirties. The second, Filimonos, is a two-bedroom flat with bunkbeds and hosts two single mothers from the Congo with one and two children respectively. One of them is twenty years old and has a girl toddler. The other is in her late thirties and has an adolescent boy and a girl toddler. Both have only recently been offered accommodation by ESTIA. Each family occupies a separate room. The adolescent boy sleeps on a single bed; his mother and sister on the bottom level of a double bunk bed. The top bed is used as a storage space for the

family's clothes and blankets. The third apartment, which I call Iokastis, hosts five single men of different ages and origins: Nigeria, Congo (DRC), Cameroon, Libya, and Morocco. Three of them are in their twenties or thirties and the other two are older. In both cases of single people apartments, the residents are accommodated in two bedrooms of three beds each. The beds are so close together that there is barely any space to move around in the rooms.[38]

In two out of the three flats we are visiting there is a noticeable shortage of tables and chairs. Only Filimonos has a proper table in the kitchen with just two chairs by its side – which means either that the apartment was originally planned for two people or that the residents of each room were supposed to take turns dining. However, the table seems to serve as a storage space for packages of food, bottles, and dishes. In the other two apartments, despite the IORs, no dinner or kitchen table can be seen, only small side tables. The one in Simonidou is in the hallway next to some old, mismatched chairs. The dark entrance seems to serve as a sitting, and probably also dining space. The side table in Iokastis, together with a folding armchair, has been reserved by the eldest person in the flat—a seventy year old partially sighted Moroccan man—which he uses as a bedside table. According to his flat-mates, the man, who is a "non-compliant beneficiary" of ESTIA and therefore formally has no right to continue living in the apartment, spends his days sitting on the armchair, facing the light which comes in through the balcony window. Apparently, and as fieldwork information suggests, chairs, the symbol of relaxation in Western culture, is not considered by the hosting authorities to be essential for the everyday life of the temporary residents of the apartments. Or, sometimes, proper dining tables and chairs are missing from the apartments because in practice they have proved to be of little or no use to people who come from the East; most asylum seekers prefer dining while sitting on the floor or on a carpet and sharing food from common dishes. Therefore, despite the IORs, tables and chairs may not be fully provided by the implementing partners or may have been removed by the residents themselves and, as noted above, used for storing purposes. In this case, their absence should be explained in terms of cultural difference and asylum seekers' agency.

All three apartments we visit have built-in wardrobes in the rooms that were initially designed to serve as bedrooms; these are meant to be shared by everybody. Nevertheless, I notice that most residents do not use the wardrobes at all. They prefer to keep their personal belongings in suitcases or bags that are kept under their beds or next to them. Whenever Timos and Elevtheria ask people to show them their papers, they go and fetch them from these bags. Once the suitcase is opened, clothes and various other items peep out, proving how each resident's life

38 As Seppälä (2020, 94) points out in relation to displaced people's accommodation in Northern Finland in 2015-2016, usually eight to ten asylum-seekers shared a small two-room apartment. Although living together did not necessarily result in conflicts and might have generated positive experiences, often the lack of space was considered distressing.

is accommodated inside a suitcase stored under her or his most intimate piece of "home" —the bed. In the Filimonos flat, in the three-member family's bedroom, a folding canvas wardrobe hosts an untidy assortment of clothes, blankets, toys, and colorful fabrics. Spyros takes a large package out of his cart which he assembles into a second folding wardrobe. Given the shortage of space in the women's bedroom, he puts it at the entrance of the apartment, right behind the main door, which as a result can no longer be fully opened. Then he also fixes some lighting problems in the bathroom, and replaces a couple of missing shelves in the refrigerator.

In all three cases, the walls bear the signs of the apartments' heavy use and are completely blank; decoration is totally absent. So are television sets and other electrical appliances apart from the very basic ones in the kitchen. Only in some cases are a few personal items like a hair ribbon, purse, or small ornament placed next to people's beds; these usually stand on top of a second suitcase, a cardboard box or bundle of clothes. It is more than evident that the apartments are perceived by their inhabitants as places of temporary accommodation; people do not attempt to turn these temporary shelters into homes. Trying to feel "at home" is an essentially cultural process: an attempt to give meaning to experience (Duddley 2011, 743 and Kiddey 2019, 6000). However, the *Covid-void* has shrunk the sphere of meaning making in the asylum seekers' lives. Moreover, this cultural process can be both comforting and painful at the same time.

I arrange to have private follow up meetings with most of the people I meet on that day. The following account derives from both on the ground observation and private interviews.

B) *Forms of Communication - Relations*

One of the things that attracts my attention during visits to the apartments is that people spend most of their time inside their temporary homes, in their bedroom and on their bed. They use their bed or mattress to sit on. In fact, when we arrive, most people are lying down on their beds, even those on bunkbeds, whether they are asleep or awake. There is a feeling of stillness, silence, numbness, and emptiness in the air which, as other researchers have noted (Khosravi 2018, 2020; Machinya 2020; Musso 2020; O' Neil 2017, Rozakou 2020), characterizes life in refugee camps and other settlements. Nevertheless, during the *Covid-void,* circumstances have deteriorated. The main means asylum seekers have for bridging distances and keeping in touch with friends and relatives in Greece, in their home country, and all over the world is the internet. However, ESTIA does not provide an internet connection in the apartments, so most residents communicate by buying credit for their mobile phones to use on Whatsapp.

In all the apartments, Timos and Elevtheria are the ones who engage in conversation with the residents; they are interested in checking the latter's asylum

status and finding out what their immediate needs are. In the Simonidou flat, those women who are sleeping when we arrive are woken up by their flat mates or by Timos and Elevtheria's voices, loudly demanding that everybody join the meeting. Communication is restricted to checking residents' papers, discussing appointments with the asylum authorities and hospitals, and finally, discussing the timeframes for everyone's accommodation by ESTIA. Timos is the one who starts the conversation; Elevtheria translates, but gradually takes greater initiative. Spyros' contribution to the discussion is restricted to material needs concerning the apartment. However, to me, all three members of the triplet seem to share a common language of mediation; they know what they want to check and therefore move quickly from one issue to the next, while trying to be firm in giving information and instructions to the asylum seekers. Elevtheria is the loudest and strictest of the three and in my view, behaves in an authoritarian way. She takes the initiative to enter the women's bedrooms and address the residents in French in a very firm tone: "Allez les filles," she says to the six young women who share the Simonidou apartment, "venez vite et apportez vos papiers. Vite, vite, Caroline, tu dormes encore? Réveille-toi et viens t'assoir avec nous."[39] Timos, who does not speak any French, mechanically repeats the following with less conviction than Elevtheria: "Vite, vite, come, ελάτε, θέλω να σας μιλήσω."[40] Little by little, the women gather in the hallway, where there aren't enough chairs for all of us to sit. One or two join with noticeable delay. In general, the women's body language does not express any haste. To the contrary, they move and talk in what could be perceived by Western standards a very lazy manner. Elevtheria, who is on her feet, keeps pushing them to get more energetic and join the group. Timos sits next to the side-table and asks all the women to show him their papers; he then tries to explain to them the delay in the assessment of their asylum cases. Elevtheria translates Timos' words, while taking the initiative to add her own. After a short while, she takes over his role. She places herself in the middle of the hallway and squats deeply, arranging her colorful, pleated dress between her legs. She looks at the women who sit around her, and addresses them as if they were kindergarten pupils, while making vivid gestures. I am struck by her imperious tone. The women listen to her carefully; as soon as she stops talking, they start asking questions about contacting the Asylum Service and about their rights in relation to ESTIA accommodation. They also ask Elevtheria to tell Spyros to fix some electrical appliances in the kitchen and a water tap in the bathroom. Elevtheria translates their conversation into Greek, Timos and Spyros respond immediately, but the interpreter takes over again. The procedure seems to move on, but the nature of the communication is problematic. As I will explain in the section on roles, in this instance, we are witnessing a reversal of roles and an expression of paternalistic

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39 "Come on girls, quickly, come and bring your papers. Quick, quick, Caroline, are you still asleep? Wake up and come and join us."

40 "Quick, quick (in French), come (in English), come, I want to talk to you (in Greek)."

humanitarianism. This behavior goes on throughout our visit and is to an extent repeated at the other two apartments.

When we arrive at the Filimonos apartment, the two families are sitting in the two different rooms. Only the toddlers are moving around restlessly, climbing bunk beds or mattresses, making noise, and trying, quite successfully, to attract the visitors' attention. The adolescent boy is lying on his bed; he is totally absorbed by his mobile phone and does not even lift his eyes to look at the visitors who have walked into his room. Throughout our visit, he looks embarrassed and shy. It is clear that while we are present—and most probably throughout the day—his mobile serves as a medium for escaping the hostile circumstances he has been experiencing, and for communicating with the outside world. Only when Timos informs him about the existence of a male youth football team in his neighborhood does he look at him with a lively expression on his face. The two single mothers look tired and very fed up of being shut up in their rooms, day after day, together with their children, doing nothing. They barely react to their toddlers' demands and to what is happening around them, including our arrival. Timos has to invite one of them to join the triplet in the room of the other. He does so via Elevtheria, but also by improvising and combining some simple Greek words with expressive body language. He wants to talk with both about their asylum status, their obligations in relation to the program, and finally, their needs in terms of medical aid. But even when both join the team in the room, they sit on the two beds and look around without seeing; their body language is an embodied expression of displacement, tiredness, and resignation. Even though they share a small apartment, they do not seem to have any communication between themselves and neither do the two little girls. A kind of immaterial border demarcates the apartment into two "households" or "homes" located in the two separate bedrooms. From what I was told in my private communication with the two women, the kitchen also was used in turns; it did not constitute a space of shared living. Moreover, the two families did not share food, nor help each other in everyday life; they functioned as two separate households obliged to live under the same roof. When the conversation is eventually started by Timos and Elevtheria, both women join in what, to the outsider, looks to be a reluctant or hesitant way. They state briefly that they are very concerned about the measures against the pandemic, which have made them experience home confinement intensively. Clearly the anti-pandemic plea to stay at home takes on a different meaning in circumstances of vulnerability and isolated living. The team tries to encourage both to start going out in the neighborhood and moving around the city; they suggest places like parks or playgrounds where the two mothers can take their children for a walk and meet other people. However, both women say that they are afraid to do so. They explain that after many months of exposure to the risks of traveling and living in camps or in the street, they are very happy to have a roof over their heads. They mention that they leave the apartment only to go shopping in the neighborhood, and that they take the bus downtown only when they have an appointment for legal or medical aid, or when they need to get free

supplies of nappies for their toddlers from specific NGOs. As the information from private communication with ESTIA residents shows, and as I will argue shortly in relation to the Iokastis apartment, this sense of fear is prevalent among both women and men.

Before leaving from the single mothers' flat, the older woman asks the triplet for permission to dismantle the bunk bed and use its mattresses on the floor, so that she can have more sleeping space. Spyros, the accommodation officer, does not, however, consent. With the help of Elevtheria, he reminds the woman of the regulations she signed up to when she moved into the apartment, which require that mattresses are kept clean and in good condition. The team makes various suggestions to try and help her rearrange the beds in the room, but after moving them around several times, everybody agrees that they fit better in their original place. The balcony door overlooking the building's inner courtyard is wide open and there is no curtain to prevent the strong light from getting into the room. Although the sun is high and the midday heat intense, I choose to stand there and observe the fruitless furniture re-arrangement efforts from the threshold. So does Elevtheria, who gives directions in French in a loud voice. The room hosts a crowd of nine people, including residents and us. For me, and I imagine for the other adults too, there is a fear of Covid. Reacquiring the ethos of human contact after so many months of physical distance is a challenge.

Although we arrive at the Iokastis apartment early in the afternoon, we see that here too, two out of the five male residents are asleep. Two of the others are sitting or lying on their beds contemplating, and one is preparing his meal in the kitchen. Timos and Elevtheria ask him to wake the others up. The conversation takes place in the narrow corridor outside the two bedrooms and the kitchen. The apartment has no common space at all. I see that the two bedrooms are not equal in size. The small one, which is the original bedroom, hosts three men, while the other, the living-room that has been turned into a bedroom, is much more spacious and brighter and hosts only two: the partially sighted Moroccan man and a fifty-year-old Cameroonian; there is therefore a spare bed in it. Timos asks all five men to get their papers and tell him about their asylum status. Then he asks Elevtheria to inform them that a sixth person, a young Congolese man, will join them in a couple of days and will, evidently, settle in the room with the spare bed. The Moroccan man—who, as already stated is a non-compliant beneficiary—reacts strongly to the news. He does not want to share his room with yet another person who, moreover, as I understand from his dialogue with Elevtheria in French, he considers a "stranger." Eventually he becomes very upset, and starts trying to negotiate with Timos, via Elevtheria, who tries to translate the intense conversation from French into Greek. A young English-speaking Nigerian[41] who lives in the next room offers to move to the Moroccan man's room and give his own bed to the newcomer. From the discussion I had with him the following day, I learned that he too is a non-

41 Interview with I.O., 26/06/2021, AORMCA.

compliant beneficiary as well as being a victim of torture, and a former guerrilla recruited by Boko Haram at the age of twelve. He does not wish to talk about his past. To soothe his remorse for what he terms the "unspeakable" crimes he has committed and the trauma the experience caused him, he became a devoted member of an Orthodox church in Athens. His affinity with Christianity is made evident by the light blue beaded necklace with a large cross that hangs at his chest, and by the fact that in his speech he constantly invokes Jesus. He says that although he suffers from intense nightmares and is depressed and receiving psychiatric treatment, with Jesus' help, he will manage the change of room. His roommates do not object. In this way, the old man is calmed down and the issue settled. Communication between the two men and the triplet takes place in English and French. Timos speaks directly in English though somewhat haltingly; Elevtheria mediates by translating from French into Greek and vice versa. Once more, she takes a good deal of initiative and the role she assumes goes beyond the strict duties of an interpreter as described by the IORs. Some of the other men ask Timos for assistance in fixing medical appointments. He explains to them that the circumstances created by the pandemic have made this very difficult. As he told me afterwards, he was overwhelmed by these kinds of requests from asylum seekers and knew that very little could be done to help them. Nevertheless, he was obliged to do his best as this was part of his job.

Finally, the discussion shifts to the issue of people's fear about leaving the apartment and moving around the city. This issue was also very prominent during my private interviews with people in the days that followed. Both men and women told me that beyond keeping away from the police and having their papers checked, staying at home also helped them avoid encounters with compatriots. Many experienced inter-ethnic or political strife as a very serious threat, and any information about their current location sent back to their homeland could have serious repercussions on their lives. Additionally, some (but not many) men and women mentioned that they had experienced racism in Greece, though not necessarily in the form of an attack. In such a context, if the final decisions on their asylum applications were still pending, they preferred to keep out of sight.[42] Nevertheless, I was told by several asylum seekers that they frequently took initiative over their lives in Athens; which is to say actions that express agency. In their own words, "we want to take our lives into our own hands."[43] These statements were made in the course of discussions with them around their "politics of living" (Feldman 2012, 157), that is, the dynamics of being−surviving, claiming, and acting−within a humanitarian setting. Some asylum seekers, like the young Nigerian man, go to church, where, according to his testimony and that of others, an inclusive community awaits them. These people are usually affiliated with one of

42 On this issue, see also Papatzani 2020b, 72-73; Vaiou et al. 2007 and Swertz 2017.

43 M.A., 24/06/21, AORMCA; I.O., 26/06/2021, AORMCA; T.D., 21/06/21, informal discussion.

the some Christian churches which include the Pentecostal Church and Christ's Church. Some of these churches are in suburbian neighborhoods like Maroussi, Galatsi, Tourkovounia and Koropi. And yet their followers are undeterred, nothing will keep them from the churches, not even having to walk for several hours or take three different buses. Faith and religious networks seem to play an extremely important role in many of the asylum seekers' lives, thus the church acts as a sanctuary for them.

Two of the single young women in Simonidou flat told me that their only escape from the desperate feeling of waiting for their papers was to spend time together with their girlfriends. Therefore, whenever they had the chance, they went to spend a few days at friends' apartments in other neighborhoods. They that these friends were women they had met during their journeys to Greece or while living in the streets or camps. ESTIA does not allow them to be housed in the same apartment because, as stated above, the matching of apartment residents follows inflexible vulnerability criteria. As "vulnerable beneficiaries" the women might experience mental or other health problems, they may be victims of rape or torture living completely by themselves in Greece. However, when they needed their friends, they were obliged to travel across the city to meet them. Moreover, there was no way to spend time with them without breaking ESTIA accommodation regulations, especially during the *Covid-void*. One woman said that before Covid she had found seasonal work in Aghistri, a small island in the Saronic Gulf, as well as in Corfu. As a consequence, she had been absent from the apartment the UNHCR had placed her in for considerable periods of time; nevertheless, she had managed to keep her "placement." Interestingly, Papatzani et al (2022, 4396) also discuss unauthorized mobilities which displaced people actively engage in at various (trans)local scales. Their study of migrant mobility in Athens, Thessaloniki, Lesvos, and Chios was carried out from November 2019 until May 2021, almost at the same time as my fieldwork. They discuss cases of people disrupting first reception, refusing to stay where the UNHCR or MoMA have "matched" and transferred them, moving on their own and remaining unregistered, and finally, moving for seasonal work. Furthermore, the authors argue that through these kinds of (trans)local mobility practices, which intervene in and therefore reshape dominant socio-spatial figurations, asylum seekers negotiate, resist, question, or transcend the geography of multiple restrictions. My research also corroborated this finding.

As Timos and Elevtheria try to explain to the residents of the ESTIA apartments we are visiting, beyond restricting sociality, anti-pandemic measures prevent the operation of numerous programs usually run by humanitarian organizations, which asylum seekers are encouraged to join. These include language classes,[44] the

44 Interestingly, an MoA ESTIA Project Manager, during a private conversation, pointed out that language learning should be made compulsory and should be provided by the state and not through the private initiative of NGOs and other organizations (C.K.,

provision of legal or medical advice, empowerment activities, schooling for children, and many more. People listen to the ESTIA representatives, while complaining about the stalemate they find themselves in.

C) Roles

As already stated, the UNHCR and MoMA forged a framework for the functioning of ESTIA; this developed along the axes of emergency accommodation and promotion of asylum seekers' autonomation, while giving low priority to integration. The ESTIA scheme's programmatic orientation was described in detail in the IORs. Among other things, these defined the partners' leading role and function in the program's implementation. They also separately described the roles and qualifications for each of the categories of humanitarian worker who would work on the ground. As the ethnographic research on the triplet shows, through the ADDMA, the MoA set up a network of humanitarian governance for the implementation of the ESTIA regulations. Responsibility for the entire project lay with the person who led on migration issues in the municipality. Next came the ESTIA project manager, an administration team, and several project coordinators, who were responsible for shaping the policies for the implementation of the program on the ground, and for renting and furnishing apartments, receiving UNHCR and MoMA referrals, supervising the triplets, and assessing their practices.

From my discussions with people who held different positions in the hierarchy described above I understood that the municipal ESTIA team made a concerted and systematic effort to follow the IORs closely and to implement the program in a consistent manner. And yet in practice, both during the *Covid-void* as well as before and after it, things did not run exactly as described in the IORs. Overall, the program was open to interpretation and resignification, which fact created a degree of disjuncture and tension both within the triplet and between members of the latter and ESTIA residents. These tensions were further sharpened by the pandemic.

In the final section of the paper, I focus on the disjuncture between the official roles and actual behavior of the different members of the triplet. I do so through an examination of tensions and contradictions associated with alternative interpretations of care and integration. In addition, drawing on my research on the operation of the triplets, I also discuss resignifications of certain aspects of mediation. In order to provide more data on which to base my discussion of the role of humanitarian workers, I now introduce three further interlocutors from another MoA triplet. These are Veronica, a psychologist who was employed as a social scientist, Anna, another psychologist employed by the MoA as an accommodation officer, and finally Margarita, an Arabic-Greek interpreter. In addition, I also include Christina, the MoA ESTIA project manager.

11/03/2021, AORMCA). She considered this to be a fundamental step towards integration —had integration been of central importance for the UNHCR or the MoMA.

I start by exploring triplet members' roles first in relation to the framework provided by the IORs and then, in the context of the actual functioning of the triplet during the process of mediation.

To quote the IORs:[45]

> *Social scientists* manage living conditions for beneficiaries and connect them with specialized organizations or institutions. They prepare an individual integration plan for each beneficiary,[46] welcome beneficiaries to the program, explain to them the terms of the accommodation provided by ESTIA, and comprehensively inform them of their obligations and the conditions of residence in the apartments. Depending on the special needs of beneficiaries, they accompany them to public services or hospitals and, if necessary, make referrals to specialized social or health care providers. Finally, they are responsible for updating the data on beneficiaries in the Data Protection Authority information system. All social service staff are required to have a university degree in social science, at least one year of experience in a similar program, and good knowledge of English.
>
> *Accommodation officers* are present when beneficiaries arrive at the apartment, they explain the use of the property and equipment, inspect the apartments regularly and record damage. In addition, they monitor compliance with program rules regarding use of the property and equipment within it, as well as beneficiaries' occupation of the apartment. If they have the appropriate skills, they may also deal with the maintenance of the apartments or repair damage. Finally, they draft on the spot inspection reports after

45 This description of the roles of the members of the triplet is a concise version of the description provided by the Government Bulletin B 5269/30.11.202: 58665. https://migration.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/%CE%95%CE%A3%CE%A9%CE%A4%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%A3-%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%9D%CE%9F%CE%9D%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%9C%CE%9F%CE%A3-%CE%9B%CE%95%CE%99%CE%A4%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%A1%CE%93%CE%99%CE%91%CE%A3-ESTIA_%CE%A6%CE%95%CE%9A.pdf. The text is reproduced almost in its entirety; therefore, terms usually put in inverted commas in this paper, here are presented without them. Translation into English by the author.

46 This is one of the few cases in which official discourse refers directly to integration as part of the process of mediation. As I will argue, during the *Covid-void*, this regulation was not implemented. This is because the possibility of interacting with the triplet, moving within the city, visiting state offices, and finally, following an individual integration plan had been restricted to the minimum.

> visiting the apartments; in case of misuse of the apartment, they submit a report to the social service of the implementing partner for further action. Accommodation officers are not required to have academic qualifications.
>
> *Interpreters and / or cultural mediators* assist social service staff in all contact and communication with beneficiaries to ensure that the latter are informed in a language they understand and that support services are provided effectively. In addition, they accompany beneficiaries in their interactions with public services to facilitate communication. They must have the *right* training and be aware of the program's regulations.

Significantly, the IORs do not provide any definition of what the right training is and, as my fieldwork suggests, interpreters tend to have very little to no training.

Without stating it explicitly, the regulations implied an informal internal hierarchy for the triplet which inevitably caused tensions between its members. Social scientists who, by definition, had academic qualifications, were assigned the top role because they were responsible for the reception and settlement of asylum seekers within the program as well as for setting individual plans for their integration into local society. They addressed apartment residents and guided them via the interpreter's words. However, the MoA network did not provide them with effective training and support throughout the project. Their capital consisted in their personal networks with individuals and institutions (Boissevain 1974, 158). Most social scientists drew on the framework of support they were able to build for themselves. Some simply carried out their formal obligations while trying to protect themselves from emotional engagement and burn-out. Accommodation officers, who were not required to have academic qualifications, were next in the hierarchy, because they were responsible for the more material aspects of asylum seekers' lives as well as for explaining to them the practical terms of their settlement in the property. In practice, those accommodation officers who happened to have academic qualifications envisaged taking a social scientist post in their next contract with the municipality. Interpreters occupied the bottom position in this internal hierarchy, because even though their presence was indispensable for the functioning of the triplet, they were considered both by the IORs and by their colleagues to be the persons with the least amount of responsibility in the team: they simply *assisted*. This was because they were perceived as go-betweens, intermediaries or people who simply connected asylum seekers with the ESTIA program and the state by transmitting messages communicated to them by their two other colleagues from one language to another. However, translation is the practice of creating continuity at a singular point of discontinuity (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 289 quoting Sakai 1997, 13). Thus the act of bridging is not merely the transfer of meaning, but itself produces new meanings, new realities, and new relations (Hönke and Müller 2018, 6).

Fieldwork data suggests that the MoA triplet produced at least two different levels of resignification. These concerned first, the process by which triplet members perceived and reproduced the ESTIA program's ideas and meanings, and second, the process by which interpreters translated these meanings and transferred them into a different linguistic and cultural context.

As both humanitarian actors and asylum seekers stated in our private conversations, during the *Covid-void* almost nothing worked as described above. Communication between the triplet and asylum seekers living in ESTIA apartments was minimal. There were no medical or administrative appointments, no home visits, and no contact with the MoA or NGOs which were supposed to provide support to asylum seekers. All three members of the triplet stated that even before the *Covid-void*, they found themselves in a mediating position between asylum seekers and the state with very limited scope for action. They referred to the need to manage a vast amount of information, physically and emotionally stressful working conditions, and a very poor and rigid governance framework aimed almost exclusively at the provision of emergency housing. These conditions created acute moral dilemmas for members of the triplet. In addition, all three categories of humanitarian worker in the triplet had to deal with frequent changes to the IORs that disrupted the operation of the teams. Further, following the transition of ESTIA from the UNHCR to the MoMA, the program steadily shrank, and the employment conditions deteriorated. Humanitarian workers' contracts were for six or nine-months, thus they themselves experienced precarity. Their motives for engaging in this work ranged from personal profit—whether financial, emotional, reciprocal, or symbolic capital—to a sense of social duty, moral values, or political activism. However, many of them had no previous experience in the field of migration and moreover, had not received any special training before engaging in practice. The pandemic-related measures dealt the system its final blow.

Undoubtedly, the functioning of the triplet and its members' interpretations of their roles as assigned by ESTIA and the MoA also depended on the personalities of each triplet member, as well as on the work done within each group around understanding and cohesion. There were triplets which both before and during the *Covid-void* took the initiative to thoroughly organize their work as a team, even extending their hours beyond their formal work schedule. And there were individual humanitarian actors who were involved in self-education groups, other group processes and even psychotherapy. As one of the psychologists working in the second triplet under study pointed out, supervision and counseling were very important for the functioning of the triplet because humanitarian actors who worked on the ground "carried the trauma of the displaced."[47] However, this approach to self-improvement and group cohesion was not shared by everyone.

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Asylum seekers also influenced the triplet's work because they responded to the services offered to them in different ways. Some responded positively and tried to benefit from the support the MoA offered while at the same time struggling to build their independence. Fieldwork information suggests that migrant agency consists in people's ability to find useful mediators in order to connect with them and gain the support and protection they can offer.[48] Others became very dependent to the program. Others still, as Veronica the psychologist testified,[49] were not interested in receiving any assistance or engaging in any process of integration. They thought that they had the right to be housed—which of course is true—and didn't believe that they were obliged to "offer anything in return" or prove that they were "good asylum seekers" whose goal was integration. Instead, they just wanted to use the short period of accommodation offered to them to rest and recover from their exhausting and traumatic experience of migration.[50] On this question of integration, Veronica made a very significant point in critiquing integration as "a form of eugenics."[51] She explained that ESTIA demanded from beneficiaries that they comply with the IORs, take some steps toward integration and become "good asylum seekers" or good potential refugees. In other words, she said, the program was fully in line with the "hospitality" model that promotes the reception of asylum seekers by the host society based on very specific terms. This was because ESTIA, like many asylum seeker hostels, aimed to cultivate refugees who would eventually be able to coexist with locals on the latter's terms. By contrast, in Veronica's opinion, which was also shared by Anna, Timos, and humanitarian workers in other organizations,[52] processes promoting integration should be offered to asylum seekers without the expectation of any reciprocal

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V.P., 26/03/2021; A.D., 29/03/2021. Several psychologists I met during fieldwork underlined the importance of dealing with the well-known phenomena of vicarious trauma and burnout. In Greece, the Athens-based organization *Babel* provides systematic support to professionals acting in the humanitarian field (https://babeldc.gr/en/support-professionals/).

48 Discussions with S.R., 11/11/2020; N.A., 30/01/2021; K.G., 24/02/2021.

49 V.P, 26/03/2021, AORMCA. The same statement was made by a psychologist working for an Athenian NGO that formed part of my research, O.K., 26/02/2021, AORMCA.

50 Interestingly, this information was confirmed by those asylum seekers who acted as my interlocutors. See, discussions with Z.M., 19/06/2021; G.G., 19/06/2021; C.V., 19/06/2021; T.D., 21/06/2021; A.T., 16/06/2021; K.M., 15/06/2021. All the above discussions were registered with AORMCA.

51 V.P., 26/03/2021.

52 For example, unregistered conversation with social scientist (sociology) T.G., 15/09/2021 and registered conversation with social scientist (psychology/anthropology) O.K., 26/02/2021, AORMCA.

moral obligations. This was a view confirmed by some asylum seekers[53] and was also quite widespread within activist milieus. Such an approach is congruent with Derrida's idea of "unconditional hospitality"[54] which does not entail any conditions or restrictions.[55] These significant differences in perceptions of hospitality caused some strain and contention among individual actors as they navigated ESTIA official instructions and their personal beliefs and intentions. Triplet members, who considered themselves professional humanitarian workers, felt obliged to follow ESTIA instructions, yet at the same time, they also felt frustrated at not being able to approach asylum seekers without asking for some kind of reciprocity.

The IORs made a clear distinction between social scientists and social workers, who were the only ones allowed to record the beneficiaries' social history. This was because social work, as a practice-based profession, gave social workers a very significant professional privilege that went beyond their academic qualifications. This was their license to exercise their profession and right to sign off on reports. Several social scientists at ESTIA felt that this fact rendered their own role in the program totally administrative and procedural. As Timos put it during our private discussion, "this regulation turns us into secretaries of the 'beneficiaries'."[56] He also reminded me of the conditions in which he had to try and arrange medical appointments for the people living in the three apartments we had visited together. A statement such as his clearly suggests tension, while highlighting problems associated with both conceptualizations of hospitality and integration, and with more administrative issues, such as the hierarchical nature of the triplet as a mediating body.

Tensions between interpreters and the other members of the triplet, or between the former and asylum seekers or Greek citizens were created because the interpreters experienced in-between-ness more than anyone else. They were the ones who communicated with asylum seekers in their own language and transmitted all kinds of messages in all directions. They might be Greek citizens who spoke the displaced person's language or recognized refugees who, having lived in similar circumstances as the asylum seekers, were familiar with what the latter were going through. And yet as professionals, they needed to respect the terms of their engagement with the program and the organization that gave them work. This frequently produced internal contradictions and moral dilemmas which, as noted, were managed in different ways by different people.

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53 A.A. 25/06/2021, AORMCA; unregistered conversation with asylum seeker A.T., 16/06/2021.

54 Derrida, J., Dufourmantelle, A., and Bowlby, R. 2000, 25, 77.

55 For a discussion of hospitality and "inhospitality" see also Felder et al. 2020.

56 Unregistered conversation with social scientist (sociology) T.G., 15/09/2021.

Interpreters often argued that their aim was to stick to their professional role, while avoiding making friendships with asylum seekers. Elevtheria was one of those who made this point. When we discussed her views on the initiatives interpreters needed to take on the ground and the role she played in the three apartment visits I described above, she told me that:

> many asylum seekers are totally illiterate and very vulnerable, so they seem lost in the European context. They need to be guided and educated about how 'Western' political and social culture work. And we don't have the time to do that softly. We have to make them understand by pushing the limits. Particularly when we're negotiating between, on the one hand, a local social worker, a social scientist, civil servant, or psychologist and, on the other, an asylum seeker. Their mindset is totally different. We need to make them understand and at the same time translate meanings.

In relation to her use of "les filles" when addressing the young women in one of the apartments we visited, she said that "I do it to push them to respond to the actual hierarchical relationship the project creates, while at the same time conjuring a relationship of intimacy and simultaneously keeping the required distance."[57] Her arguments are correct as far as cultural difference and the translation of meaning are concerned. However, they also show how mediation can at times be turned into power. And such power is once again associated with conditional hospitality. As compared with the other two members of the triplet, interpreters undoubtedly availed themselves of the tremendous power of language. Although the IORs envisaged them as messengers, they were in fact the ones who defined the game on the ground. They frequently took initiatives that were not prescribed by the IORs and, as other researchers who have worked with asylum seekers in Greece have noted (Cabot 2014, 106, Rozakou 2009, 87), they managed to destabilize the hierarchies produced by the law and regulations.

57 Interview with Z.E. , 31/05/2022. This document was not registered with the AORMCA because the interlocutor did not give their consent for this.

In addition, interpreters were also perceived by some asylum seekers as their own" people, who would take their side and promote their interests more effectively than the rest of the team. From my discussions with Timos, Elevtheria, and Veronica,[58] it emerged that this perception was often associated with the nationality of the asylum seeker. For example, in Veronica's narrative, Afghan people were more "trained" as refugees and therefore trusted humanitarian governance structures. By contrast, Arab people tended to give more trust to the interpreter, because he/she was "one of them."[59] This question of trust raises the issue of where mediators' loyalties lie, a question that has been explored extensively in relation to brokerage (Walther 2021, 317, De Jong 2018, 621, Peeples and Randall Haas 2013, 234).

It must be noted that most MoA ESTIA interpreters were not trained mediators. As Alexandra Androusou (2021) and Thalia Dragonas (2021) point out drawing on their experience with a project called Curing the Limbo: From Apathy to Active Citizenship,[60] ESTIA interpreters did not have practice in relaying meaning across languages and were not even qualified or certified interpreters. This meant first that they were self-taught individuals who had acquired translation and mediation skills through experience, and second, that they were not allowed to sign official procedure documents (e.g. police station statements, etc.). However, as most of the interpreters I met during my fieldwork, whether from the MoA or other organizations argued, there was a tremendous need for decodifying and understanding differences in behavior between nationalities and ethnicities in relation to major issues like death, the experience of pain, fear, gender, and so on.[61] This deficiency of the system was confronted in an arbitrary manner on the ground, either by social scientists or by interpreters, which fact generated greater tensions between them.

Another type of strain stemmed from the different perceptions members of the triplet had about the meaning of care in humanitarian governance. This was related to perceptions of hospitality, but also to the training and moulding of asylum seekers. There were people who felt that their role was closely associated

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58 Informal and unregistered discussions with E.Z.31/05/2022 and T.G. 15/09/2021. Registered interview with V.P. 26/03/2021, AORMCA.

59 V.P. 26/03/2021, AORMCA.

59 This project was funded by Urban Innovative Actions, that is, an initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges (Dragonas 2021,1).

61 For example, see conversation with O.K. from NGO Arsis, 24/02/2021.

with care, and that the system did not allow them to take the necessary steps to provide the care which in their view asylum seekers needed.[62] Others felt that in order to protect themselves from burnout, they ought to restrict themselves to doing the minimum. Thus they ought not to fight too much with the system, and instead go by the book and seeing how far they could get.[63] Anne-Meike Fechter (2019, 3) says that mediatory care is offered because of an "anthropological impulse," that is, the desire for an intimate connection with a social, and I would add cultural, Other. She also underlines the relation of care to control, by arguing that mediatory care makes room for intervention, and therefore, the exertion of power over the life of an other (Fechter 2019, 20). On this issue, Veronica pointed out that care had no place in advocacy. She stressed that asylum seekers did not need humanitarian actors' help at all, and explained that people had great power; all they asked of humanitarian actors was that they do their part in line with the receiving country's obligations, nothing more.[64] In practice, all these views coexisted within the various triplets and, in order for the work to be carried out, the tensions they created needed to be addressed and managed.

More strain was caused by the fatigue and disappointment of asylum seekers, who were not really interested in building a life in Greece, given that opportunities were very limited. They were feeling entrapped and all they wanted to do was get their papers and leave. Most of my interlocutors ended up sharing this view despite initially considering settling in Greece.

This last comment on waiting for one's papers brings us to the question of temporality in migration and the difficulties caused by it. In my view, this was the most important issue for all the parties engaged in mediation during the *Covid-void*. My argument is that mediation in relation to asylum seeker settlement in ESTIA apartments took place in a very fluid context and in a state of liminal space and time. ESTIA residents were experiencing circumstances of temporal irregularity (Machinya 2021, 97), which disrupted people's sense of orderliness while exacerbating the sense of uncertainty. This was especially the case during the pandemic and the transition of the management of the program from the UNHCR to MoMA. Home visits by the triplets to the apartments stopped and asylum seeker visits to municipal offices also decreased significantly. Communication was restricted to the minimum and was carried out largely through WhatsApp, Viber, and so on, or online − if ESTIA residents had access to the internet. The Asylum Service accepted applications only online, and their platform, when in operation, was overloaded. As a result, the period of waiting for asylum decisions was prolonged indefinitely, pre-arranged appointments for

62 Conversation with E.K., 23/08/2020; O.K. from NGO Arsis, 24/02/2021.

63 Conversation with A.M. and I.M. from Arsis, 26/01/2021.

64 Conversation with V.P., 26/03/2021.

interviews were cancelled, and the feeling of precarity, fluidity, and "legal limbo" (Cabot 2012, 12) sharpened.

Thus people stayed in their ESTIA apartments without knowing when they would be able to take the next step. Confined in small and crowded spaces that offered only the most basic facilities and clearly reflected the temporary nature of settlement, they created what Andersson (2014, 235) has called "an arbitrary landscape of time." Many of them seemed to be experiencing what Sandrina Musso (2020, 165), describing age assessment procedures in France, has called "temporal violence." This is also what Johannes Machinya (2020, 106), commenting on migration control in South Africa and on time borrowed from people's futures, has named "borrowed time," and finally, what Shahram Khosravi (2018, 40), in relation to the age of mass deportation we are living in, has termed "stolen time." Evidently, different individuals conceptualized waiting in different ways. However, in all the discussions I had with ESTIA residents over the course of the difficult period during which I conducted my research, it was evident that waiting, inactivity, and boredom had become the dominant patterns in their lives. Social exclusion, unmet desires, and ultimately social death corroded all that had once animated people's sense of personhood (Bruce O' Neill 2017, 120 – talking about boredom among the homeless in Bucharest).

As described in the first section of this paper, many of the people I met during my visits to ESTIA apartments remained seated or lying down on their beds day and night, which extended the state of anxiety, precarity, and boredom they had experienced in the camp or on the street. They fell asleep and woke up arbitrarily, thereby disturbing their sleep patterns, if indeed they had any such patterns. Sleeping for asylum seekers, like walking for the homeless (O'Neil 2017, 108), served not simply as a form of "passing time" but as an embodied expression of displacement. One of the most serious repercussions of waiting and the stalemate in mediation for asylum seekers was insomnia. Several people mentioned that they were so anxious and uncertain[65] about their status that they could not sleep at night. Spending all day at home and mostly in bed made the situation even more difficult because having gone through a sleepless night, they often slept lightly and intermittently during the day, thereby reproducing a vicious circle. Moreover, during the night they couldn't help but reflect on their traumatic experiences related to circumstances in their country of origin, their journey to Greece, and life in the camps.[66] Therefore, their mental health deteriorated, and they desperately

65 Horst and Grabska (2015, 7-8) discuss how displaced people navigate situations of radical and protracted uncertainty; furthermore, they comment on the impact of "permanent impermanence" on migrants' lives and on the creation of an expectation of temporariness in situations that can be described as chronic.

66 As Khosravi (2020, 205) argues, "… it is no accident that, etymologically, the origins of the word 'wait' indicate 'to watch' and to 'be awake.' Border waiting engenders

needed psychological or even psychiatric support. I understand the slow movements of some asylum seekers as both an expression of cultural difference (which constituted a challenge for humanitarian workers) and of emotional problems associated with the accumulated lack of sleep. For some people, the connection with real life had become loose. Under these circumstances mediation could have offered significant assistance to asylum seekers by connecting them to medical and legal services while supporting their efforts to find employment. But the state's ambiguous migration policies matched by the Covid-void had left no room for effective intervention of the humanitarian structures.

- *Conclusion*

The temporary relief asylum seekers felt when they found a roof through ESTIA faded away during the *Covid-void*. The pandemic turned it into an ever more indefinite, unbearable, and lonely waiting that eliminated the possibility of mediation. As an ethnographer and different kind of mediator, I had the opportunity to observe, study, and write about these people precisely because they were immobile (Andersson 2014, 235) and because their time could be freely taken and used. And yet despite their despair, the presence of anyone interested in their lives still gave them a glimmer of hope.

To conclude, from the moment the program passed into the hands of the MoMA, which in theory was a necessary step, it became an awkward and self-abolishing endeavor. Moreover, dealing with cultural difference was not a priority for the government, and as a consequence, nor was it for the implementing partners. It became clear that the 2019-2023 New Democracy government had no intention of including displaced people in Greek society. Despite their claims to the contrary, they pushed them back while building camps in which to put them away. A program of urban accommodation was thus out of the question. The MoMA's decision to close the program at the end of 2022, and at the same time shut down the main camp in Athens, Eleonas, spoke for itself. However, the municipality did not wish to have asylum seekers living in the streets and squares of the city. Therefore, it exhausted every possibility offered up by the government for accommodating them within the urban fabric. But this environment had a negative impact on mediation. For more than two years, the ESTIA program was in a state of decline. Asylum seekers experienced disappointment and the work of humanitarian actors was systematically annulled. Many professional humanitarian workers walked out of the program of their own accord because they refused to compromise with the shrinking mandate. They refused to evict asylum seekers or

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wakefulness and vigilance. Waiting is being in a state of consciousness. The person in a state of waiting constantly thinks about her or his waiting." He goes on to state that "[w]akefulness makes border waiting similar to insomnia, that is a compulsion to be vigilant and pay attention to what is happing around oneself. Similar to the one who waits, the insomniac thinks about the reasons for her insomnia and seeks salvage from it."

chose to invest their experience in other jobs. Even more people were fired due to personnel cuts. As Kiddey (2019, 601-602) put it, Athens is a landscape of reluctant refugee shelter[67] because it is "fragmented, hesitant and ambivalent." Her own study focused on alternative refugee shelters like City Plaza, Soho Hotel, and Chora. In the final instance and despite the MoA's rhetoric, I too conceive of ESTIA as a reluctant shelter and mediation field.

However, despite the contradictions and tensions described above, the work that was delivered in the context of the municipal ESTIA program was not negligible and should be improved upon and used as a starting point for future projects. Moreover, it should be combined with a centralized social housing policy. Without the latter, any attempt to settle asylum seekers in the urban milieu will be in vain.[68]

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67 A decade earlier, Rozakou (2009) wrote about censorship in the process of interpreting by focusing on what she called the *reluctant* interpreter.

68 I base this concluding argument both on my study of the ESTIA program and on an opinion expressed by Lefteris Papagiannakis. Papagiannakis oversaw the settlement of asylum seekers in the MoA during the mayorship of George Kaminis, which preceded that of Kostas Bakoyannis, which I have been discussing here. I had the opportunity to speak with him twice; however, these discussions were informal and were not registered with AORMCA.

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