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Refugees' Narratives: Liminality and Home Construction

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19th Diversity Conference, Patras - Border Crossing Narratives: Learning from the Refugee Experience

At the crossroads of globalization

- Transnational mass movements led to
 - **physical separation** of people from their homelands
 - “**reterritorialization**” of their relationship with places
 - “a profound sense of **loss of territorial roots**” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:9).
- Compulsive and mandatory coexistence of diverse identities - *Cosmopolitanization* (Beck, 2009)
 - The **loud presence** of the **other** in our daily routines
 - **Mix** of ‘natives’ and ‘foreigners’ create **new narratives** of inclusiveness
 - New challenges and possibilities for new **global civility/awareness.**

Victimhood vs agency

Refugees' presence reflects an inherent tension between:

<u>victimhood</u>	<u>agency</u>
<p>the status of refugees characterized by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• compulsion• absence of choice• circumstances beyond their control• forceful relocation• liminal/exilic status of ongoing restrictions and ambiguity	<p>those who take flight are often those</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• with access to social networks and resources• able to make coherent decisions about their lives <p><u>social agents</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• take the risk to pursuit a new life• maintain a strong vision of rebuilding their homes elsewhere.
<p>passive subjects or solely victims who have fled from their homes in order to survive.</p>	<p>Their loss is “countermanded by actions” (Jackson 2006: 79)</p>

Narrative inquiry

- **Narratives** are subjective accounts of lived experiences reconstructed and based in socio-cultural contexts where there is no absolute truth to be found (Clandinin 2013, cited in Haydon et al. 2018: 126).
- **Narrative inquiry** is ‘a method of investigation into a problem’, ‘a way of knowing by telling and reflecting’ and ‘a way of understanding experience’ (Garvis 2015: 3).
- Their experiences have reconstructed in the three dimensions: **spatiality, temporality and sociality** (Connelly and Clandinin 2006).

Methodology

We explored

- the pursuit for a new home of five young Syrians aged 11-15 living at the LM refugee center, Greece
 - Narratives of displacement/ former lives / routes
 - Life in liminal space
 - Attachment to home(s)
 - Destination/ Future
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Data - RQ

- Fieldwork at the LM refugee center
 - Researcher reflections
 - Narratives recorded on video diaries
 - Video ethnographies
 - Interviews (in English / Arabic)
 - Research questions
 - How do the refugees reconcile their challenges in a time of strife?
 - How do refugees describe their flight and arrival in this place?
 - What conceptualizations of 'home' do they have?
 - What are their future aspirations?
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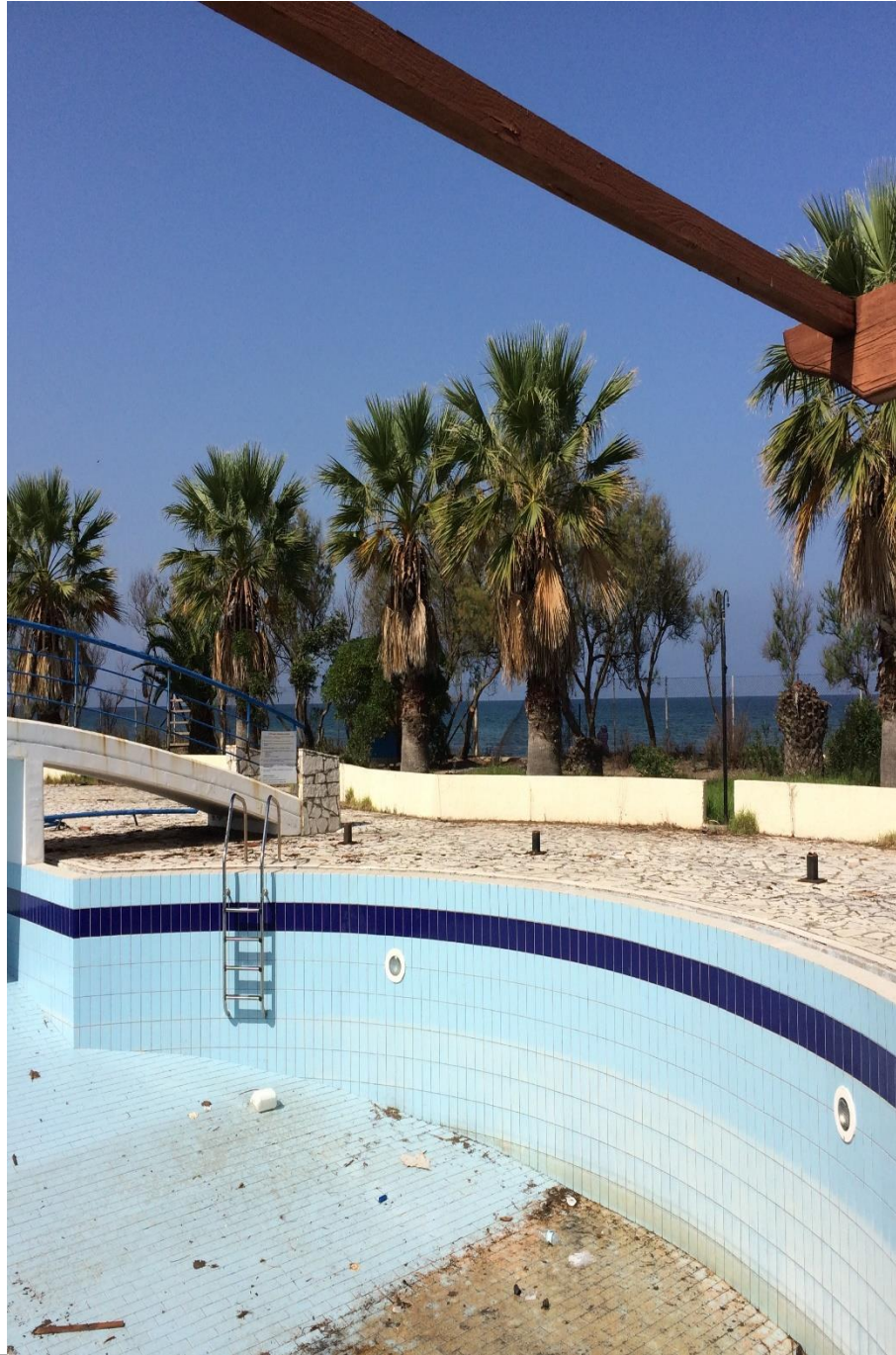
The LM Refugee Camp, Lechaina-Myrsini, Ileia, Greece

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2019 Diversity Conference
delegates
visiting the LM Refugee Camp
4th of June 2019





Liminal spaces

- The first asylum entrance points form:
- an **indeterminate third space**, where **mutation, reflection, translation, and negotiation** occurs (Arvanitis, 2014; Bhabha, 1994).
- ‘Liminal’ /in-between space is characterized by disruptive inbetweenness and ‘hybridity’ (Bhabha 2004).
- It is full of **contradictions and ambiguities**
- It blurs the **limitations of existing boundaries**
 - New temporal and spatial borders
 - New rules and regulations

Liminal spaces

- productive space that engenders
 - **Negotiation and development** of new social relations,
 - it challenges the idea that **cultural meaning** and representation have “**primordial unity or fixity**” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37).
 - Reflection/ **production** of cultural meanings
 - Forging of **new identities** / status (Bhabha 1996).
 - **New possibilities of change and novel configurations** (Turner 1970: 97).

Liminal spaces

For inhabitants

- Indeterminacy
- Ambiguity
- Disruption and displacement
- Hybridity
 - negotiate their identities
 - Cultural
 - boundaries are always fluid
 - cultural meaning is constantly (re)created
- potential for subversion and change.

liminal stage is structurally, if not physically, **invisible** (Turner, 1970)

For outsiders

- the threshold is characterized by
- a potential for disorder
 - asymmetry
 - instability (Aguirre, 2007, 31).
 - “alien territory”:
 - disrupts and subverts established entities.
 - threatens established social relations.
 - potentially dangerous

Spatial-temporal-relational home

(Taylor, 2009)

- Spatial:
 - **Unrooted** (natural link with tangible physical space)
 - Lost place - **mythic place of desire**- symbolic/distant
- Temporal:
 - **Not linear progression** from past to present
 - **Exilic presence** – destabilization of routines –
 - **Liminality** – contradiction of living bw 2-more countries/cultures
 - **Myth of return**
- Relational:
 - **Loss of lived experiences of locality**
 - Loss of social networks and habitus
 - Social disarticulation” -“dismantling” of community life (Cernea 1996: 22).

Making the decision: The journey of displacement and liminality

Making the decision/passing the Aegean - War, No future, Separation of family

J: From Syria to Turkey we went by a car. We crossed the borders. And then we went inside Turkey and stayed there four years. The trip was a bit scary. In Turkey, I was going to school and I was meeting new friends and I spoke with them. Now I call them on the phone. I left friends in Syria and in Turkey, but I have friends in Germany too.

R: If you want to go to Greece, there are a lot of people who can move you from Turkey to Greece. You can find them easily, for example from Facebook. We tried two times. The first time was from Bodrum and the second was from Izmir. The trip was not dangerous. But the first time the machine was damaged. The Turkish police took us and said to us you have to pay them if you want to go.

Life at LM centre

Temporal stay

*H: I want to go to Germany but the borders are closed. I feel sad, but we can't do anything. **We must wait.** I like to stay here but I want to go to Germany. I have a lot of friends there. Greece is an amazing country, but **just for visiting.***

Conditions

*H: The conditions at the camp are not sufficient for the winter **it's very cold and rough for us.** Hopefully we'll move from here she says.*

*N: **It's the best camp!** even there is a big problem with food and people have to buy groceries and cook their food. I am very happy because here **we have home, electric, water, a lot of things...***

Life at LM center

LM Routines & volunteers

*N: There are 40 homes here and **we are all friends**. We are **going to school**, we tell a lot of jokes... In the summer we **were playing football with the volunteers**. We have around 50 volunteers. We were playing volleyball, basketball, football and we made competitions.*

A: Volunteers are amazing. I'm studying all the time. I got new skills. Here I study English, history, geography and maths. I study with two teachers. Miriam and Dan.

Making plans for the future: Reaching Ithaca

J: I want to learn a lot of languages because I want to be a business woman in the future in Hospitality. I am not pessimistic. It's a good year to go to Germany. Maybe this year or the second year, I'll go to Germany and I will go to the school because I can.

F: I wish to have all the verifications done at least in six months. I just want to have my family and after that, I am gonna study German. After that, I want to study in a university in Germany. I like studying languages. I want to be a doctor, but also I like electrical engineer. My mom told me all the time if you become a doctor, I'll be happier. But I said it is my future not yours. I want to make everything for her, but it's my future. I like to do that!

Meaning of home - Syria

Strong and intimate attachment to lost homes in Syria (familiar daily routines, schooling, extended networks of family and friends, and the desire of return).

F: Life in Syria was amazing! I was enjoying playing with my friends. I was happy! I do miss my country now! When the war is over in the Idlib I want come back.

H: In Syria I was very happy because I was in my country and I was going to school and I could go anywhere. I had a bike. Every weekend we were going to restaurants and for shopping. In summer we were going to the beach in Tartus. I was dreaming of my house in Syria. My house is in Syria and we are in Europe so we can't see it again. Maybe when the war finishes. Maybe it's hard, maybe we can't... I don't know.

Meaning of home - Syria

N: I don't know. We don't have a home now. Just in Syria and maybe our new home is Germany! I am Syrian. But I feel all the nationalities Syrian, Greek and German.

A: 'Home' (منزل) is a sacred word. It means everything to me! Aleppo is my second mother. We have to be strong. It's difficult to go back in Aleppo because everything is destroyed. After twenty years maybe, if it was rebuilt. Initially I was watching the news from the war in Syria. I have done it, but I'm very tired to do that now. It's really horrible to imagine what is happening. I just talk with my friends on the social media and they tell me their news... My friends didn't go to the school for one month but now they carry on.

Meaning of home - Present

Refuge, temporality, in limbo

H: They were very good, because when we arrived in Greece the police helped us and gave us waters, food, shoes, clothes. Not like the Turkish police. Yes, I feel safe here. I thought when I will arrive to Greece I can go anywhere because Greece is in Europe, but Turkey belongs to Asia. I feel Europe as being my new home.

N: Greece is something that I am going to remember. It's my favorite place of my life! It's very good here, but I think it is a temporary place. I am not very happy here because I have to wait. It's a very hard feeling. You don't know anything about the trip from here to Germany. You don't know when you will go to Germany... You just have to wait and wait! I am so and so connected to this place. I feel in transit. We have to wait! We must stay some months here and we will go to our father, to our friends.

Meaning of home - Future

New home

N: *If we go to Germany, I will be very happy because my mother will make everything for us in order to be happy. I feel that Germany is my new home. Yes! In Germany there are a lot of Syrians and we can speak with them. We feel better among our own people. We share common things. Maybe they hate Syrians, but there are many Turkish people in Germany. It will be a big challenge to learn the German ways. But, I think that we will have a very good life. You can study, you can do everything. I want to be a circus dancer in the future.*

A: *after ten years my home will be in Germany. Aleppo will be ok, but now my home will be Germany forever. I think that I will stay in Germany. I want to go to Aleppo to see what happened there... but like a holiday. Maybe I am gonna live to a country in the Middle East Egypt, like Lebanon.*

Conclusion

Rima, Jamal, Yara, Farid and Saad are:

- **Refugees** dwelling in liminal spaces
- **Modern travelers** seeking their Ithaca
- **Global learners** envisaging future

Giving voice to 'the speechless emissaries' (Malkki 1996)

The intrinsic value of Narratives

Refugees at the **epicenter** of the action - **social agents**.

- young children are empowered to:
 - **voice / reflect on / verbalize**, their troubling refugee experiences that caused the loss of their (home)lands.
 - provide **powerful testimonies** of the refugee predicament, which rebuttal the prevailing discourse of suspicion and hostility.
 - **exert some control** over their circumstances/**gain some agency**.
 - reclaim their humanity – **resilience and hope** in a liminal space
 - understand the **evolution of identity** and its constant state of flux
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Thank you!



References

All references are included in the following articles:

- Arvanitis, E., Yelland, N. & Kiprianos, P. (2019). Liminal spaces of temporary dwellings: Transitioning to new lives in times of crisis. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 33, 1, 134-144, DOI: 10.1080/02568543.2018.1531451.
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