

# **Migrants in Greece in times of crisis**

## Opportunities and dangers

Master thesis  
Human Geography

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Master thesis  
MSc Human Geography  
International Migration, Globalization & Development  
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*“...Give me your tired, your poor,  
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless,  
tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door...”*

*(The New Colossus, Emma Lazarus, written on the base of the statue of Liberty)*

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# Contents

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<b>Preface</b> .....	1
<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
 <b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	5
1.1 Research goal and research questions .....	8
1.2 Societal relevance .....	11
1.3 Scientific relevance .....	13
1.4 Structure of the thesis .....	16
 <b>Chapter 2: Greek policy towards migration and asylum</b> .....	17
2.1 Introduction .....	17
2.2 EU responses to irregular migration and the role of Greece .....	18
2.3 Evolution of the Greek migration policy .....	21
2.4 Asylum policy .....	24
2.5 Practices of the Greek authorities .....	27
2.6 The Greek political scene towards migration .....	31
2.7 Conclusion .....	34
 <b>Chapter 3: Research methodology and research methods</b> .....	35
3.1 Introduction .....	35
3.2 Research methodology .....	35
3.3 Research methods .....	37
3.4 Description of the research .....	39
3.5 Limitations- Difficulties .....	42
3.6 Research population .....	43
 <b>Chapter 4: Entering Greece</b> .....	47
4.1 Introduction .....	47
4.2 Places and ways of entrance in Greece .....	47
4.3 Why Greece is a choice for the migrants? .....	50
4.4 Living in detention camps .....	52
4.5 Conclusion .....	55

## **Chapter 5: Living in Greek cities. Opportunities and dangers in times of crisis 57**

5.1 Introduction .....	57
5.1.1 Accommodation .....	58
5.1.2 Working conditions and the impact of the economic crisis .....	60
5.1.3 Migrants' mobility inside Greece .....	64
5.2 Relations and dangers in Modern Greek society .....	65
5.2.1 Relationships inside Greek society .....	65
5.2.2 The role of the Media .....	67
5.2.3 Greek society towards migrants .....	69
5.2.4 Rise of the racist violence: Neo-Nazi and police violence against migrants.....	72
5.2.5 Opinions for the 'Greek' experience. What are the migrants' desires? ..	78
5.3 Conclusion .....	80

## **Chapter 6: Migrant networks in Greece. Their roles and dynamics .....82**

6.1 Introduction .....	82
6.2 Who constitute migrants' social networks in Greece? .....	82
6.3 The roles of the networks .....	84
6.4 Change of the networks' significance .....	89
6.5 Conclusion .....	91

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion and Discussion ..... 93**

7.1 Results and conclusions .....	93
7.2 Discussion and recommendations for further research .....	99
7.3 Policy recommendations .....	100

## **Bibliography – References ..... 103**

## **Appendix ..... 111**

1. Questionnaires .....	111
2. Some features from the interviews with the migrants .....	114
3. Photos .....	122

## Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Total number of asylum applications in Greece (2001-2010) .....	26
Figure 2: Number of grants of refugee status in Greece (2001-2010) .....	27
Figure 3: Arrested irregular migrants across the Greek-Turkish land borders (2009 – 31/08/2012) .....	50
Table 1: Arrested and deported migrants (2006-2010) .....	31
Table 2: Some personal information about the respondents .....	45
Table 3: Entry in Greece .....	46
Table 4: Countries of origin of all the 27 respondents .....	46

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## Preface

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My first contact with migration issues dates back around ten years ago, when I was a young student in the Department of Geography of the University of the Aegean in Mytilene, the capital city of the island of Lesbos, Greece. My five years stay in the specific island has played a major role in developing a great interest about migrants that come in Greece from every corner of the world. Lesbos is one of the main migrants' entrances in Greece and by extension in Europe and the EU. I saw several times migrants being transferred by policemen to the detention camp near the city of Mytilene and I witnessed efforts of migrants' deportation to Turkey. Ideal for my developing interest in migration to Greece were the presence of many students and local activists fighting for the rights of migrants and of professors in my department who were giving courses on migration promoting the critical thought.

After years, when I could find the chance to deal again with migration issues in an academic level I chose to go to Nijmegen in the Netherlands and to study at the Radboud University. The multicultural environment of the Netherlands and of the University as well as the attendance of the master program of Human Geography that I chose to follow opened new horizons of thought on the issues arising from the phenomenon of the movement of people from their countries of origin to other countries. From the beginning of my studies in Nijmegen I was trying to find a topic for research for my thesis which would combine the phenomenon of migration with my country of origin, Greece. The economic and political developments in Greece the last years created ground for research on the migrants' lives and their difficulties in a country of, as it seems, multifarious crisis.

The elaboration of this work would be impossible without the valuable help of certain people during all the stages of the research. First of all, I would like to thank the supervisor of my thesis, Joris Schapendonk for his guidance before the start of my

fieldwork. Our meetings proved very valuable for the conduct of my research and through our discussions the final topic of my research and thesis was formed. I also want to thank the second reader of the thesis Henk van Houtom for devoting time to read my work and for his very influential lectures during my academic year in the Netherlands. In addition, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my professor in the department of Geography in Greece, Electra Petracou, for everything that she has offered me through her courses and all our discussions in the past.

I would like to show my gratitude to all the migrants and asylum seekers who trusted me and shared with me their worries, their desires and their experiences. This thesis is about their lives and without their kind help nothing would be possible. I wish them to overcome all the barriers and live a safe and descent life as they dream. Extra thanks to dr. Imad Al G. for all the information he gave me about the migrants that come in Northern Greece and to the lawyer Ch. T. for the information about the Greek and European migration and asylum policy.

Beyond the people who helped me with the collecting of the needed data for the writing of my thesis I would like to thank all those people who have supported me in various ways during all my academic years. Starting from the year I lived in the Netherlands, I would like to express my thanks to all my new friends in Nijmegen. Special thanks to all my friends from the Vossenveld student complex for all the great moments we lived together. I must admit that our evening basketball sessions were really helpful in relaxing during a demanding year in Nijmegen!

Moreover, I want to thank all my friends in Greece who have helped me a lot not only living beautiful moments but also in building my character and dealing with any problems that appear in my life.

Last, but of course not least, I want to express my gratitude to my entire (typical large Greek) family. Special thanks to my father Lazarus, my mother Eleni, my brother Dimitris and my sister Theano for their loving support and advices. No words can describe their role and importance in my life.

Nijmegen, November 2012



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## Abstract

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Over the last years Greece has emerged as a country of great importance for the migrants from Asia and Africa heading for Europe. From a clearly traditional emigration country, Greece has turned into a host country as well. As a result, many studies and researches have started taking place in order to reveal and explain various issues that emerge from the phenomenon of migration to this specific country.

The current thesis attempts to present, through the migrants' perspective, the quality of their lives in Greece in the context of the economic crisis plaguing the country. Being the result of a research that was based on the use of methodological tools of the qualitative research, it studies the lives of the migrants in Greece as those are determined by the EU and the Greek government, the dangers they face inside Greek society and their developed networks in the country.

The majority of migrants who enter Greece wishes to migrate to a country of the Northern and Western Europe. However, the laws and treaties of the EU countries force them to stay in Greece extending often for many years the transit period in this country. The fear of deportation leads them to apply for asylum in Greece and therefore to the compulsory waiting of the decision in the specific country. The Greek laws are characterized by a vast bureaucracy and they are violated by the authorities themselves. Migrants' first experience in Greece is the life in detention camps near the Greek-Turkish borders under extremely harsh conditions for which Greece has been repeatedly criticized by national and international human rights organizations. After a period of stay in these camps many of them move to the big cities of Greece, mainly to Athens and to Thessaloniki, where they try either to begin a new life or to work and save money to continue their journey to the West. The economic crisis plaguing Greece has affected to a large extent migrants' lives in these Greek cities because of its social consequences. A growing xenophobia inside the gulfs of the Greek society and an unprecedented increase in the racist violence together with the arbitrariness from the side of a large part of the Greek police have led to an even

bigger degradation of the migrants' lives where danger and fear are added to their exploitation in the labour sector. The quality of the migrants' lives, however, can be facilitated by the existence of personal social networks which, in these difficult and dangerous times, are helpful not only in matters of accommodation and work but also in providing the feeling of safety and the will to go on with their lives.

**Key words:** *Migrants, asylum, Greece, Athens, Thessaloniki, detention centres, migration and asylum policy, crisis, racism, networks*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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One of the most affective phenomena for the human societies is that of migration. More and more studies deal with this dynamic phenomenon and with several aspects that emerge from it. The existence and sovereignty of the national states over specific spaces and specific populations defines and forms the character of the people's movements (Tapinos, 1999; Petracou, 2003; van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007) related to the modern idea of the border which is "*a continuous line demarcating the territory and sovereign authority of the state, enclosing its domain*" (Walters, 2006:193). Although migration is not something new and there were several periods of mass population movements we can say that we now live in the 'age of migration' (Castles & Miller, 2009). Contemporary migration takes many new characteristics. One of them is the increase of what is called 'irregular migration' (Castles & Miller, 2009). The term 'irregular migration' is used in the modern literature to describe the movement of people that takes place outside of the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries (Spencer, 2011: 6). It refers to the people who migrate in ways that do not comply with the immigration laws of the receiving countries and is often used instead of the term 'illegal migrants' which shows relationship to criminality (Mousourou, 1993; Migrants' Rights Network, 05/ 2009: 3). While the most common way to enter an EU country is through several legal routes and become irregular later (Migrants' Rights Network, 05/ 2009), large numbers of people from problematic Asian and African countries gradually move in various illegal ways from country to country until they find themselves living a better life in a European country. This trend of the way of movement attaches considerable importance to certain countries and specific routes. One of the major entrances of the migrants in Europe is Greece and its land and sea borders with Turkey (Schapendonk, 2011). It is believed that around 80% of the 'illegal' migration into EU is taking place through the Greek-Turkish borders<sup>1</sup>. This fact highlights Greece as a country of great importance

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<sup>1</sup>The battle for Attica square: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPI9PW7ONIQ&feature=related>

both for migrants who want to enter the EU and the Greek state who is called upon to manage and respond to migration flows.

Regarding Greece's relationship with migration it must be said that traditionally it is one of the most important emigration countries of Europe. Many thousands of Greeks traveled in waves both before the First World War and after the Second World War in countries such as USA, Germany, Canada and Australia, creating there significant communities. In addition to those migration movements thousands of Greek communists became refugees to countries of the 'Eastern Bloc' after their defeat by the governmental and English army in the civil war that ended in 1949, and of course, thousands of Greek refugees from Istanbul, Black Sea and Asia Minor were forced to abandon their homes in the early 1920's and settled in Greece.

However, around the '80's Greece started gradually to transform into a host country for some migrants from Asia and Africa (Rovolis & Tragaki, 2006). The fall of the 'socialist' regimes in Eastern Europe in the early 90s led to the arrival of thousands labour migrants from the countries of the 'Iron curtain', mainly from Albania (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). More economic migrants and asylum seekers from countries of Asia and Africa started to migrate to Greece during the same decade (Papadopoulou, 2003). The geographic and topologic characteristics of Greece (position, many islands, long coastline) make this country ideal for the passage of migrants to the West.

Greece has become a country with a significant proportion of foreigners in total population, reaching levels that are found in traditional destination countries such as the Netherlands and the UK<sup>2</sup>. The entrance of thousands migrants in Greece has affected both the Greek society and the migrants themselves. The Greek state not having significant experience as an immigration country did not have any policy on this issue<sup>3</sup>. A series of laws from 1991 and onwards have determined, mainly by police means, the status of legitimacy and therefore the very quality of life of the migrants. The entanglement of irregular migration with asylum and the pressures from

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<sup>2</sup> According to IOM (International Organization for Migration) figures, the percentage of the migrants over the total population in Greece is 10,1 % while in the Netherlands is 10,5 % and in the UK is 10,4% (<http://www.iom.int>)

<sup>3</sup> During the 60's and 70's, the Greek State signed several agreements with countries from Africa and Asia to 'import' temporal workers the moment that thousands of Greeks were going mainly to Germany as guest workers (Gastarbeiter) (Lafazani, 2004). This means that Greece had some laws concerning migration issues but not laws capable to deal with mass influxes of migrants.

the EU has made irregular migration one of the greatest challenges for the Greek governments (Papadopoulou, 2003).

Another influential phenomenon of our times is that of the global economic crisis which especially in Greece has shown its worst face. The last years a debilitating for society financial crisis has been plaguing Greece. Thousands of Greeks have lost their jobs and the salaries of those who still work have been shrunk. It is estimated that a thousand of employees lose their jobs every day and that the rate of unemployment has surpassed the 25% of the working age population. The corresponding percentage for the youngsters has reached the 54% (tovima.gr, 11/10/2012). Together with the increase of unemployment, most subsidies have been abolished and more and more taxes get enforced worsening dramatically the Greeks' standards of living and leading a great part of the Greek population to the total poverty.

It can be said that economic, political and social life of a country are closely intertwined. Any change in one of them has direct repercussions on the other two. The relationship of this general crisis with the treatment of migrants is immediate. Migrants are treated as the scapegoat because they are the easy target. Their life in the Greek cities is affected by this crisis in a negative or maybe sometimes in a positive way.

Since the last century, migration researchers have tried to understand why people decide to move, where they move to and how they move (Boer & Karczemski, 2010). Yet, there has not been given particular attention in studying the lives of irregular migrants in Greece and their intentions and especially now, in the current times of crisis. People from Asia and Africa leave their countries due mainly to the inequalities that exist there, or a combination of economic, social and political pressures (Jolly & Reeves, 2005:9) and move to Europe. Several researches though, claim that migration never ends (Schapendonk, 2011). It is a process that depends on the living conditions migrants meet in the countries they go as well as on the role of their personal networks that might be spread in several countries of immigration. Research on migration in Greece has mainly focused on labour migrants from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union who comprise the majority of foreigners in the country (Mousourou, 1993: 3; Lianos, 2004). There are relatively few papers and formal reports (in my knowledge) for the lives of migrants from Asia and Africa that enter 'illegally' in the specific EU's country which functions either as a passage or as a

country of immigration. The term ‘irregular migrants’ used in the current paper describes people who do not comply with some aspect of immigration law and rules (Migrants’ Rights Network, 2009). I prefer to use this term rather than the equally (or more) popular term ‘illegal migrants’ because it has to do mainly with the relationship between migrants’ status as constituted solely by the laws of the State and not that of the ‘illegal’ which has associations with criminal acts.

This thesis deals with the ways in which the EU and Greek state’s policies treat migrants, the dangers that migrants face as a result of the ‘Greek’ crisis and finally the ways their networks in Greece affect their quality of life and their various decisions concerning their destinations and their routes. Through the migrants’ perspective I try to present their lives and their desires.

## 1.1 Research goal and research questions

In this thesis I concentrate on the experiences of the migrants from Asian and African countries who enter irregularly in Greece. The main goal of my research is to present **the lives of those migrants from their own perspective in times of a general crisis in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki and the roles that their networks in Greece play on their everyday life**. In other words, my intention is to present how the migrants deal with the situation in Greece and what is their relationship with the Greek society under the changing economic, political and social conditions. Moreover, I want to find out if and how the conditions of their life in current Greece force them to leave the country.

My main research question is formulated as follows:

*“How do migrants experience their everyday life in Greece in times of economic, political and social crisis and in what way do their networks in Greece help them to get ahead in life?”*

I focus both on the period of time they spend in the detention camps (for those who spend some time there) and the conditions of life inside them and on their lives after this period. I explore the conditions of their lives determined by their legal status. The places they live, the ways they manage to survive and to earn their living and several

aspects of their everyday life are the subject of study led by this main question. The objects of this research are the migrants who enter irregularly in Greece from countries of Asia and Africa and live in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Moreover, I want to find out how migrants organize their lives while living in Greece and how their experiences in this country affect their will to leave or to stay there. There have always been problems for this population in Greece. Special importance though has the current period because of the economic crisis plaguing the Greek state and Greek people, which has a direct impact on the political and social life of the country. I will show that this general crisis in Greece has significant consequences on the migrants that enter Greece either in order to stay there or to use it as a passage for other countries of the Western and Northern Europe.

An essential issue studied in this research is the role played by migrant networks in Greece in facilitating their daily life. I believe that the personal networks determine to a large extent the decisions that migrants take while what is also interesting in the current research is the presentation of possible changes of the networks' importance as well as the creation of new networks.

In order to get sufficient data to answer the main question, I decided to divide it into the following sub-questions each one of which studies one partial issue.

*1<sup>st</sup> sub-question: How and why do migrants end up in Greece?*

This sub-question tries to understand the reasons that bring migrants in Greece. I want to find out what desires and 'strategies' bring them in the country and thus, if Greece is considered as a destination or as a transit country before the start of their movement.

*2<sup>nd</sup> sub-question: What are the Greek state's policies and practices towards irregular migration?*

I believe that one of the most important factors that affect the lives not only of the migrants but of all the people that live in a country is the policies of the dominant state. The status of the migrants in Greece plays an important role in their everyday life by protecting or blocking their human rights. What I also want to find out with this sub-question is to what extent the practices of the Greek state and authorities are

in harmony with the statutory laws and the international conventions signed by the Greek governments.

*3<sup>rd</sup> sub-question: What are the daily threats and opportunities for migrants in Greece?*

The first issues that this sub-question refers to are those of the living and working conditions of the migrants in the Greek cities and the social relations of the migrants. It mostly investigates the helps that migrants get and the ways they get organized in a foreign society. In other words, it seeks to bring out migrant's societal behavior in Greece, which is determined from their relations with members and organizations of the Greek society as long as with members and associations of their ethnical or even other migrant communities in the city they live.

Other issue of concern of this sub-question is that of the difficulties that migrants face from the moment they enter into Greek territory and when they go to live in one of the two biggest cities of Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki. Apart from the difficulties risen from the policies of the state there are also dangers emerge from the whole political and economic situation which have to do with the rise of the Nationalism in the Greek society as it is shown from the results of the last two Greek elections in May and June of the current year. More and more Greek people adopt hostile beliefs against migrants as a result of the worsening of the standards of living in the country and under the influence of the Media rhetoric. Many incidents of racist violence against migrants are indicated in a daily basis mainly in Athens but also in other cities and counties of Greece which they start to play an important role in the increase of the dangers in migrants' daily life. Special attention is given to the rise of a neo-Nazi 'political' party named Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή- Hrisi Avgi) and the arbitrariness of many police officers.

*4<sup>th</sup> sub-question: How do migrant networks look like and how do they help them to get ahead in life?*

This final sub-question aims to show which people or groups of people constitute the migrant personal networks in Greece and what are their roles on the migrants' lives. I explore the quality of those networks and to what extent these networks remain the



same or change over time. Networks settled before leaving from the countries of origin and new networks that may be created in Greece are of concern and also their role on the decisions for migrants' present and future life.

The answers to all these questions will hopefully lead me to the understanding of the views that migrants acquire for this country which might determine the potential advices to the new migrants. They will show if Greece is just a transit country or might also be a destination one.

## 1.2 Societal relevance

The study of migrants' lives in the big cities of Greece is of a high societal importance since nowadays migrants constitute an important part of the total population of the country. Greeks, as probably all European people, get informed about the migrants coming in their country by several mass media and mainly by television. It is very rare for a TV program to show something about the lives of irregular migrants in Greece and for their problems and desires<sup>4</sup>. The media inform people only when a crime is committed by a migrant leading a significant proportion of the Greek population to make generalizations about migrants considering them as criminals. This leads to the creation of fear in the gulfs of the society towards the 'different' which under the propaganda of uprising extreme right-wing parties is transformed into hate. During my field research in public places where migrants hang out, I saw hostile treatment by many Greek shop owners against even the most vulnerable migrants such as women and young children. Hearing also conversations between Greeks in central Athens I could understand that their opinion about the migrants was totally shaped by the media and by the propaganda of the aforementioned nationalist party<sup>5</sup>. I believe that significant role in this hostile treatment of the migrants by an everyday growing part of the Greek population has played and continues to play the economic crisis plaguing the country. Greece, whose role as an immigrant country is new compared to the countries of Northern Europe, suffers because of this crisis – at least for now- more than any other country in the European Union. I think that the

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<sup>4</sup>This is mainly done by some notable TV shows displayed in very late hours that are difficult to be watched by a large number of viewers.

<sup>5</sup>Specific presentation of that party named Golden Dawn and its influence on parts of Greek society towards migrants is made in Chapter 5.

economic crisis affects every social aspect and thus both the ways that some Greeks treat the migrants and the several decisions of the migrants regarding their stay in Greece. Migrants become an unconnected and isolated part of the Greek society and they are forced to create their own separate communities, their own spaces in several deprived areas of the Greek cities and mainly of Athens.

What makes even more interesting the current project regarding the relations between the locals and the migrants is the relatively recent history of Greece and hence of its people. Large parts of the Greek population are descendants of refugees coming from Asia Minor and the region around Black Sea and know stories of the difficulties their ancestors experienced when they were forced to come to Greece even if they were talking the same language and having many customs in common. Districts of both Athens and Greece have taken the names of cities and regions where their inhabitants' grandparents were born and grew up. Moreover, and with regard to Thessaloniki – where the longest period of my research took place - it is a city with a *“longstanding history of multiethnic coexistence and transnational ties”* (Hatziprokopiou, 2005: 2). It is therefore interesting to see if and how the history of the city has an influence on the way its inhabitants see migrants and if the economic crisis puts in second place history and forms today's beliefs of a part of Thessaloniki's society.

My desire for this thesis is to be one more voice in the promotion of the human rights of the migrants. It is an effort aiming to the change of the treatment of migrants as criminals by the authorities as well as to the awareness of the Greek society that migrants should not be the scapegoat for the problems plaguing it. Therefore, I think that those who are going to benefit from the results of my research written in this paper are those who want to deal with some more issues that emerge from the phenomenon of international migration and more specifically those who want to see and learn the opinion of the migrants themselves formed by their own experiences. My thesis, by presenting the irregular migrants' everyday life as it is determined by the Greek legislation, migrants' relations with the Greek society and the role played by their networks developed in Greece, can be beneficial to further research on the social relations formed in a country whose inhabitants are constantly tested.

Knowledge gained from my research and presented in this thesis can be helpful to people who want to acquire more information about the foreigners that have left their

countries and for several reasons are now in Greece. My research shows that migrants in Greece do not come to take the jobs from the Greeks or to commit crimes as the Nationalist or even the state's and Media propaganda declares. I believe that the sayings of the migrants themselves must be known to the Greek society parts of which follow the easy way of just listening to guided media without seeing other sides of the issue. Moreover, I think that it is in the interests of the Greek authorities to know if migrants see Greece as just a transit country or as a destination one. Finally, I believe that several organizations in Greece dealing with migration issues can use the information I collected and elaborated.

### 1.3 Scientific relevance

Migration is a quite popular field of study that concerns a wide range of disciplines. It is a process which affects every dimension of social existence and thus, research on this phenomenon is interdisciplinary (Castles & Miller: 21, 2009; Papastergiadis, 2000). One of the disciplines that deal with the phenomenon of migration is that of Human Geography. Migration as a phenomenon has to do with the movement of people inside geographical spaces while it has great influence to the societies and the cultures of people and that is probably a clear reason why Human Geography deals with it. A lot of studies and researches have taken place the last decades concerning issues emerge from international migration. What is evident though, by the existent literature, is that migration studies focus chiefly on the impact of migration rather than on the migration process itself (Karczemski & Boer, 2010). Several theories have been developed that deal with international migration while nowadays the trend to an interdisciplinary approach prevails (Castles & Miller, 2009).

Two issues of scientific interest are examined in this paper. The first is the quality of life of the migrants who enter Greece irregularly as this is determined by their relations with the Greek state and the Greek society and the second is the composition and the roles of the networks of migrants in Greece.

There seems to be a lack of scientific knowledge on the lives of the migrants in Greece and especially now in the difficult times of the 'Greek' crisis. Most of the literature concerning the migrants who enter Greece and Europe focuses mainly on the reasons that lead to their mobility and on the influence of their existence in the

societies of the host countries. In a scientific level what I refer to with my project is the developed theories about the impact of migration on the lives of the irregular migrants in a specific Southern European country as well as the social networks and their roles in migrants' lives. The conduct of a research about the issues of concern for the migrants that enter 'illegally' in the EU using Greece as the gate of entrance is of great scientific interest as to the way in which this group of people is treated by both the institutions and the society, and in the ways of their survival in one, as it turns out, hostile place and uncertain social environment. It is important to see to what extent the policies of a country with a geographic specificity like this of Greece go together with the policies of the entire EU and what the role of this country for the Union is, regarding the issue of the international migration. Moreover, it is interesting to see to what extent the formal laws of the Greek state go together and maybe justify the practices of the country's authorities towards the migrants who enter 'illegally' in its territory. The significance of the emerging of those issues lies to the presentation of the conditions of life of the migrants in Greece.

With regard to the issue of the social networks of the migrants, this thesis refers to some migration theories that highlight the facilitation of migration by several actors (Castles & Miller, 2009; Schapendonk, 2011). As I mentioned before most of the attention in migration studies has been given to the impact of migration on the societies of the receiving countries. However, it is now obvious that a big portion of the contemporary research gives emphasis on the role that the social networks of the migrants play in the migration process (Schapendonk, 2011; Koser & Pinkerton, 2002; Spittel, 1998). According to scholars like Massey, Arango, Hugo and others, migrant networks are *"sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin"* (Gelderblom & Adams, 227: 2006). The theorists argue that networks provide crucial types of help to the migrants such as financing and information (Koola & Özden, 2008). They conceptualize the social networks as social ties that manage the life and journey of the migrant from the time (s)he departs from the country of origin until (s)he finally arrives to the destination country. What is clear therefore from their scripts is that the decisions taken for the trajectories of the migrants are the result of the participation of several actors and not only of migrants themselves (Castles & Miller, 2009). Some important discussion points within network theories on the study of migration are the importance of the

families and the households as well as the increasing importance of the smugglers on the facilitation of the steps of the migrants through different countries till they finally reach a country of destination. Moreover, another important discussion point that becomes more popular is the study of the role of the religious groups on the creation of networks during the migration process (Koola & Özden, 2008). Migration is therefore understood and treated as a social product and not as a simple result of decisions made by individual actors (Boyd, 1989; Spittel, 1998). That is how migration is seen by the *new economics of labour migration* approach and also by the *migration network theory* (Castles & Miller, 2009; Schapendonk, 2011). These two strands are found under the perspective of the transnational approach to migration which takes into account the existence of several external influences on migrants' plans and highlights the importance of the social networks not only for the facilitation of the journey but also for the process of the integration to the destination country (den Hamer, 2008). Both of the above theoretical strands, however, focus on the family, friendship and community ties (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002) and not on the new contacts that migrants develop in the transit countries. What is obvious though is that the growing significance of the transit countries demands the study of the new networks that are created in them. The latter years, the stricter policies of the countries of the Western Europe towards asylum seekers and irregular migration have as result the diversion of those people to transit countries (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002). Therefore, the power and the infallibility of the network theories should not be overrated. These theories do not pay enough attention to the reasons and the ways that the migrant networks change during the journey. In other words an important limitation of the network theories is the inability to explain how the new contacts of the migrants in the 'transit' countries change the trajectories and even the geographic destinations (Schapendonk, 2011). In addition, another limitation of the networks theories is their inability to address the factors that motivate someone to migrate while they answer why people are able to migrate and how they migrate (Philip Yang in Spittel, 2008:42).

So, with relevance to social network theories the scientific importance of the current project lies in the gaining of information about both the expected and the real help that migrants take from the social networks in Greece. It is important to find out if the power of the networks consist of friends, family members and people of the same origin remains powerful when they come and during their stay in this country or

it gets weaker and get replaced (and to what way and extent) by new networks created there. It will also provide new information on social networks, as the crisis situation is explicitly taken into account.

#### 1.4 Structure of the thesis

The current thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 was an introduction and presentation of the issues I studied in the field, the goal of my research and of my main research question. Moreover, I presented the reasons that make the study of these issues significant. Chapter 2 briefly introduces some of the characteristics of the EU policy towards irregular migration and the development of the policies of the Greek state towards irregular migration and asylum. Moreover, I write about some of the practices that Greek authorities follow against irregular migrants and in a brief way the approach of irregular migration by the Greek political parties. The third chapter presents the theoretical background of my research and the methodological tools I used during its conduct as well as some information about the respondents to my research. The fourth chapter deals with the entry of migrants in the Greek territory and their first experiences in the ‘reception’ centers along the borders. I refer to the main places and main ways of entrance of the irregular migrants in Greece, the reasons they choose to reach and enter Greece and I describe the conditions of living in the ‘reception’ centers according to the migrants’ words. The fifth chapter deals with the lives of migrants in Greece after the first period of stay in reception centers. It sets out the ways of living in the two major cities of Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki and their daily lives. An important part of the chapter copes with the dangers faced by migrants due to the increase in racist attacks while there are also presented several aspects of their mobility within the Greek territory as well as their own desires for their present and future. The sixth chapter comprises a description of the migrants’ networks in Greece and an analysis of their role on facilitating their conditions of living. It is also showed the change of the significance of some networks and the creation of others during their stay in Greece. The seventh and last chapter constitutes the epilogue of the thesis where I present the conclusions resulting from my research together with suggestions for further research and for the policies of the Greek state towards ‘illegal’ immigration and asylum policy.

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## Chapter 2: Greek policy towards migration and asylum

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### 2.1 Introduction

As already mentioned in the introduction of the current thesis, Greece had not developed a migration policy that could manage the flows of migrant ‘waves’ towards its territory. Since 1991, when it started to become understood that Greece was converting to an immigration country especially for Albanians and people from other countries of the Eastern Europe, Greek governments started to enact several laws that purport to regulate the entry, exit and the legal status of the migrants who enter the country. As a member of the EU and due to its geographic location, Greece holds a very important position regarding the issue of irregular migration. ‘Illegal’ migrants are thrust high onto the Greek policy agenda. This was particularly evident during the two election periods of the current year (2012)<sup>6</sup> where the control and fight against immigration or ‘illegal’ - clandestine migration, as has prevailed mostly in journalistic and political discourse, was one of the main topics of discussion and controversy among Greek politicians.

Section 2.2 is a brief description of how the EU treats the phenomenon of irregular migration and the importance of Greece for EU’s plans and desires. In section 2.3, I present the evolution of the Greek migration policy from the early ‘90s to the present time and in section 2.4, I describe some features of the Asylum policy followed by the Greek government. Section 2.5 sets out some of the practices of the Greek authorities against migrants who come to Greece while section 2.6 shows in short what the stand of the Greek political parties is towards migration. Finally,

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<sup>6</sup> The first parliamentary - general elections of 2012 were held on May 6 without a party to show off as a winner while there was no cooperation between the parties to form a government. The elections were repeated on June 17 and the government formed came after three-party cooperation.

section 2.7 is the conclusion of the chapter where I mention some basic outcomes of the chapter.

## 2.2 EU responses to irregular migration and the role of Greece

International migration in Europe is not just a matter of national interest. It has become a matter that concerns equally the members of the EU and this is how it is faced by the European governments. This is a result of the expansion of the EU and of the common policies that the EU member-states have started to adopt since the Schengen Agreement in 1985<sup>7</sup>.

This treaty creates a free movement area for those who live legally in the signatory countries while on the other side among its targets are the stricter controls at the external borders, a common policy on the granting of visas and a common asylum policy (Greek embassy.org; Mousourou, 1993; van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007; Walters, 2002). It gives the power to intergovernmental and supranational institutions to make the decisions on the above issues (Walters, 2002) resulting the ‘‘loss of sovereignty’’ for the states (Sassen, 1996). The cooperation between the EU countries to address immigration and asylum was strengthened with additional agreements like that of Amsterdam’s in 1997 and that of Tampere in 1999 which focused mainly on the prevention of irregular migration and the punishment of those who facilitate people migrating irregularly (Senses, 2010). One of those agreements that plays a crucial role on the current situation of the migrants in Greece is that of the *Dublin II Regulation* that was adopted in 2003, replacing the 1990 Dublin Convention. It is the law that states the principle that **a single state-member is responsible for the examination of an asylum application** and it aims to the prevention of sending those who have applied for asylum from one country of the Union to another (europa.eu) as well as to the readmission to the country where the asylum application took place (Amnesty International, 2010). This of course, combined with the fact that the irregular migrants that enter Greece and get arrested by the authorities apply for asylum in order to

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<sup>7</sup> The Agreement was first signed in 1985 by five countries (Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxemburg, France and West Germany). Italy signed the Agreement in 1990, Spain and Portugal followed in 1991 while Greece joined in 1992. Since then, the Schengen area gradually expanded to include nearly every Member State. (for more information visit: [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/justice\\_freedom\\_security/free\\_movement\\_of\\_persons\\_asylum\\_immigration/133020\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/133020_en.htm))



escape deportation has as result their immobilization in Greece (Human Rights Watch, 2012). It becomes obvious that Greece, like all the countries of the Southern Europe, has turned into a kind of 'buffer zone' where they gather all those who do not want to leave Europe (Mousourou, 1993: 37).

Irregular migration is seen and treated as a security issue like terrorism and the organized crime (Schapendonk, 2011; Walters, 2002) a fact that is evident from the choice of using the term 'illegal' by the official states for the characterization of those people (Senses, 2010 ). Especially after the terrorist attacks in the U.S. (11/09/01) and Europe (Madrid on 03/2004, London on 07/2005) governments of the West started to increasingly relate international migration to terrorism (Schapendonk, 2011) although there are no formal evidence for such a connection (van Houtum and Pijpers 2007). The main current objectives of the EU are the blocking of access of migrants and refugees to European Union's territory, the reduction of the residence time inside EU and the exclusion from the procedures for obtaining asylum (Petracou, 2004). EU's policy is now characterized by a market-driven migrant selectivity (Favell & Hansen, 2002; van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007; Herman, 2006) which excludes migrants of no use for the economic development of enterprises.

To reach these goals specific measures which give special weight to countries like Greece, Italy and Spain should be taken. The governments of these countries have erected larger barriers to control and to prevent irregular migration (Massey et al. 1998) while they have also proceeded into agreements with non-European neighbor countries like Libya (agreement with Italy) and Turkey (agreement with Greece) where detention centres function and after a period of stay there migrants are sent back to their countries of origin (Carter & Merrill, 2007). This latter practice shows that an EU's goal is to extend its migration policy into countries of transit and origin (van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007). Moreover, special information systems are created such as SIS (Schengen Information System) whose main objective is the identification and deportation of non-Europeans (Poulou, 2005:21-24). In addition, special organizations responsible to cope with 'illegal' migration such as the 'European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders' of the member states of the European Union (FRONTEX) are founded. FRONTEX, founded in 2004, assists in the training of the guarding of the EU's external borders and coordinates the actions of the EU countries for the implementation of Community

measures concerning the management of the external borders (europa.eu). The role of FRONTEX was expanded in 2007 leading to the establishment of a 'special force' to combat illegal migration to Greece under the name 'Rapid Border Intervention Team' (RABIT) (Spencer, 2011: 168; Schapendonk, 2011).

The strengthening of the external EU borders with the adoption of draconian measures, the strict procedures for the administering of labour permits (Papastergiadis, 2000: 46), the cooperation in sharing data and the use of fingerprints through the 2000 Eurodac regulation, the signing of readmission agreements with main source countries (Spencer, 2011) and the operation of detention camps at the borders of the Union indicate the police policy of the EU towards irregular migration and asylum and the desire of the Western governments to intercept migrants and refugees before having a chance to claim any rights (Walters, 2006: 195). In all these should also be added the heat detecting cameras introduced by FRONTEX to search for 'suspicious' movements along the Greek-Turkish borders (Al Jazeera English, 2010)<sup>8</sup>. It is obvious, therefore, that we can talk about a 'Europe – Fortress', a term that is used more and more in the modern literature (van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007). The walls of this fortress coincide with the borders of its peripheral countries. Thus, according to the above, Greece is a country of a great importance for the EU regarding the issue of the entrance of irregular migrants, operating as a gatekeeper at Europe's southeastern border for the security of the European Union (Baldwin-Edwards, 2001; Papadopoulou, 2003).

With regard to the migrants who are already inside the EU countries and they have not secured their legitimacy remaining in precarious statuses, they face the danger of deportation. In addition, they live on the margins of society not being able to ensure basic labour and human rights (Taran, 2001).

However, having as core several treaties signed by the governments of the EU members, each state sets the laws and ways of dealing with international and irregular immigration (van den Bergh, 2006) retaining the national sovereignty over migration and asylum issues (van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007) and to what extent irregular migrants are permitted to have access to basic rights such as education and health (Senses, 2010).

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<sup>8</sup> "Greece tightens immigration control":  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vs58YSHC8kc&feature=related>

### 2.3 Evolution of the Greek Migration Policy

Greece is seen by the European Union as a stepping stone to the rich countries of the Western and Northern Europe and its policy reflects the pressures of 'Fortress Europe' (O'Brien, 2003). The sudden and abrupt entrance of thousands of migrants in the early 90s from the Eastern Europe and mainly from Albania found totally unprepared both the Greek government and the Greek society. Law 1975<sup>9</sup> of 1991 was the first law enacted by the Greek state to determine the entry, retention, labour relations and removal of migrants from the country (KEMEA<sup>10</sup>, 2008: 12; Hatziprokopiou, 2005). At that time migration to Greece was regarded as something transient and was treated as a criminal act while the law was aiming to the reduction of the migrant flows to Greece by even setting the penalty of imprisonment up to five years to anyone who entered illegally the country (Kalofolias, 2011) and to those foreigners working without having the proper papers (Lafazani, 2004)<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, it made very complicated the entrance of migrants in the legal labour system and in their legal residence in the country by being an act full of prohibitions and police measures. The treatment of the migrants as criminals can be understood from the words of the government's sponsor of the 1975/1991 law who said in the parliament:

*'Suddenly, Greece started to flooded with aliens, who, entering, staying and working illegally, create enormous social problems for the state, while they inevitably try to solve their own problems by engaging in criminality (drugs, robberies, thefts etc)'*<sup>12</sup>.

In 1998, and while no longer seemed that migration in Greece was something temporary, the Greek state proceeded to the first mass legalization of migrants by introducing two presidential decrees aiming to the recording and provisional settlement of migrants already living in the country. Those ordinances granted residence permits of limited duration and working permits to those who have

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<sup>9</sup> Law 1975/1991 on Entry - exit, residence, employment, and expulsion of foreigners, procedure of recognition of alien refugees and other provisions.

<sup>10</sup>KEMEA (in Greek) stands for 'Center for Security Studies'.

<sup>11</sup> However, there were no penalties for the Greek employers (Lafazani, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Parliament, Session 10<sup>th</sup> October 1991; cited in Baldwin-Edwards, M. (2004): 'Immigration into Greece, 1990-2003: A southern European paradigm?' UNECE, Mediterranean Migration Observatory (MMO), Panteion University, Athens

requested for them<sup>13</sup> (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). Greece started legalizing migrants that had entered the country 'illegally' in the past, hoping to divert them to other countries of the Schengen's territory (Mousourou, 1993: 36).

However, the requirements and the criteria to be met by the migrants did not lead to the expected results, a fact that led to the adoption of a more integrated and 'realistic' act, that of the 2910<sup>14</sup> of the year 2001. This law improved to a significant extent the situation for the migrants already living in Greece with some basic settings such as the reduction from fifteen to two years as a required residence period of time of the migrant in the country for the right of the family reunification as well as the right to minors' education. Moreover, it is especially important the fact that with this act the migration issue is no longer a responsibility of the Ministry of Public Order (as it was with law 1975/1991) but becomes a responsibility of the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization (Kalofotias, 2011; Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). This law, however, focuses also on the fighting of irregular migration and on the strict control of the migrant flows to Greece by maintaining and strengthening the special groups of border guards that were introduced by the law 1975/1991 (antigone.gr). A basic issue that this law focuses on, and which is maintained in the laws to follow, is the punishment of those who facilitate the transportation of migrants into Greece and from Greece to Europe. An article of the law 2910/2001 (article 5) determines strict punishments for the smugglers such as imprisonments and confiscations of the boat or vehicles they use to transport migrants (Papadopoulou, 2003). The implementation of the law encountered several problems along the way mainly because of its complexity and the large bureaucracy that characterized it. The criteria for the migrants who could apply for legalization still remained very demanding as illustrated by the requirement for the submission of 300 stamps per year the moment that large number of migrants was working in the illegal labour sector and the procedure for the obtaining documents for a work permit was very difficult (Tsiantas, 2008; antigone.gr; O'Brien, 2003). An additional problem was that of the lack of adequate personnel both in number and in training (Tsiantas, 2008: 74; antigone.gr).

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<sup>13</sup> They are known in Greece as 'white' and 'green' card.

<sup>14</sup> Law 2910/2001 entitled: "Entry and stay of foreigners in the Greek territory. Acquisition of the Greek citizenship by naturalization and other provisions".

Nowadays, the law that regulates the issues of immigration is the 3386/05<sup>15</sup>. It determines several types of residence permit. The main aims of this act are the simplification of the procedures and the elimination of the problems that were caused by the bureaucracy both for the acquisition of a residence and a work permit which finally consolidated into one (Kemea, 2008). It also provides for criminal, financial and administrative sanctions to those who grant services to 'illegal' migrants. Moreover, it gives more power to the regional migration commissions helping -at least theoretically- that way to the decentralization of the problem from Athens and Thessaloniki.

However, this new act does not achieve many changes because of the poor organization of the authorizing mechanisms. The bureaucracy remains large and the personnel remains quantitative and qualitative insufficient having as result the delay in the decisions for the granting of residence permit. The large number of the requested documents and the high cost of some legal procedures prohibit migrants to apply for a residence permit. It is in fact estimated that almost 70% of undocumented migrants in Greece are left out of any process under this legislation (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2005).

The main characteristic of the migration laws, according to the words of the lawyer who gave me an interview, is the exclusion of the economic migrants whiles in general the state delays in purpose to adjust the migrant flows serving that way the needs of the Greek entrepreneurs for cheap and uninsured labour (Lafazani, 2004). From there on, the following procedures for the granting of asylum are determined by individual presidential decrees. Especially in the case of Greece and because of the negative for the economic migrants evolution of the Greek and EU laws there is now a significant entanglement of irregular migration with asylum, at least as regards migrants coming from Africa and Asia. For this reason it is necessary to consider and study the Greek asylum policy as an integral part of each government's policy towards the influx of foreign individuals and populations in the Greek territory.

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<sup>15</sup>The Law 3386/2005 entitled "Entry, stay and integration of third country nationals in Greece".

## 2.4 Asylum Policy

As expected, as there was no migration policy before 1991 there was also no clear policy for the issue of asylum. Greece, of course, has signed the *Geneva Convention* for the status of refugees which is still up and binds the states which have signed it. According to this convention a *Refugee* is:

*"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.."*(UNHCR, 2012).

Greece has also signed the 1967 New York Protocol, related to the status of refugees which cancels the time and geographical restrictions of the Geneva Convention<sup>16</sup>.

Historically, the main key of all the Greek governments' policy was clearly that of considering Greece as a place of intermediary station (Petracou, 2004:7). Two important exceptions that made Greece (to a smaller extent, of course) a country that accepted refugees was the issue of the Palestinians in the early '80's and the issue of the Kurds of Turkey that both came in waves seeking protection against the Israeli and the Turkish state, respectively.

A series of presidential decrees and supplements to their articles from 1999 and onwards created a relatively progressive (at least theoretically) treatment of those seeking asylum in Greece<sup>17</sup> while in migration laws there were only some articles about a particular kind of 'humanitarian status' of limited duration. After the air attacks of al Qaeda at the twin towers of New York<sup>18</sup> in 2001 the granting of asylum become extremely difficult and all the identifications are rejected in the first stage of

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<sup>16</sup> Geneva Convention (1951) had two basic restrictions, a time one according to which the Convention applies only to those who become refugees after the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1951 and a geographical one according to which the States limit their obligations exclusively to European refugees. (Read both Geneva Convention and New York Protocol here: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>).

<sup>17</sup> More information on the Laws are available in the Greek Ombudsman site (<http://www.synigoros.gr>)

<sup>18</sup> 11/9/01.

the request. At the period of the research the legislation that determined the overall process required for granting asylum was the Presidential Decree 114 of 2010 (114/10)<sup>19</sup>. Responsible ministries for the process of examining the asylum requests are the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection. An important step taken by this decree is that now those who apply for asylum get immediately the 'pink' card which gives them, at least temporarily, the rights of residence and work. Two months later they are called to give interview to a rank-holder policeman. This is an interview of registration of the request where the applicant explains the reasons (s)he left his /her country and came to Greece. This measure improves the situation existing for many years where at first they were taking a plain white paper that simply stated a date for an interview without providing the rights given by the pink card. From there on begins a long bureaucratic process with a second interview to a rank-holder policeman of the asylum department with the presence of a person from UNHCR<sup>20</sup> which has an advisory role in the decision if the request is reliable according to the Geneva Convention. The decision is taken by the director of the (local) asylum service who is a police officer. This decision is always negative and usually leads to an appeal from the side of the applicant. After a period of three to six months, depending on the characteristics of each case, a new interview on the merits of the asylum claim is given again to a three-member committee consisting of an Interior Ministry official<sup>21</sup>, a representative of the UNHCR and a representative of the National Commission of Human Rights<sup>22</sup>. This level of the examination of a request for asylum is actually where there is a chance for the granting. At this point it should be noted that the vast bureaucracy that exists at this part of the procedure might be beneficial to the applicants as it offers more protection due to the non-participation of the police. From there on if the decision is negative again, then, the asylum applicant may apply for cancellation of the decision in the administrative courts of the country where if (s)he is not vindicated (s)he enters into deportation proceedings.

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<sup>19</sup>According to a lawyer that helped me during my research, a decree in consultation was pending for a new change of the Act for the asylum which would probably come in force after the elections of June 2012.

<sup>20</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

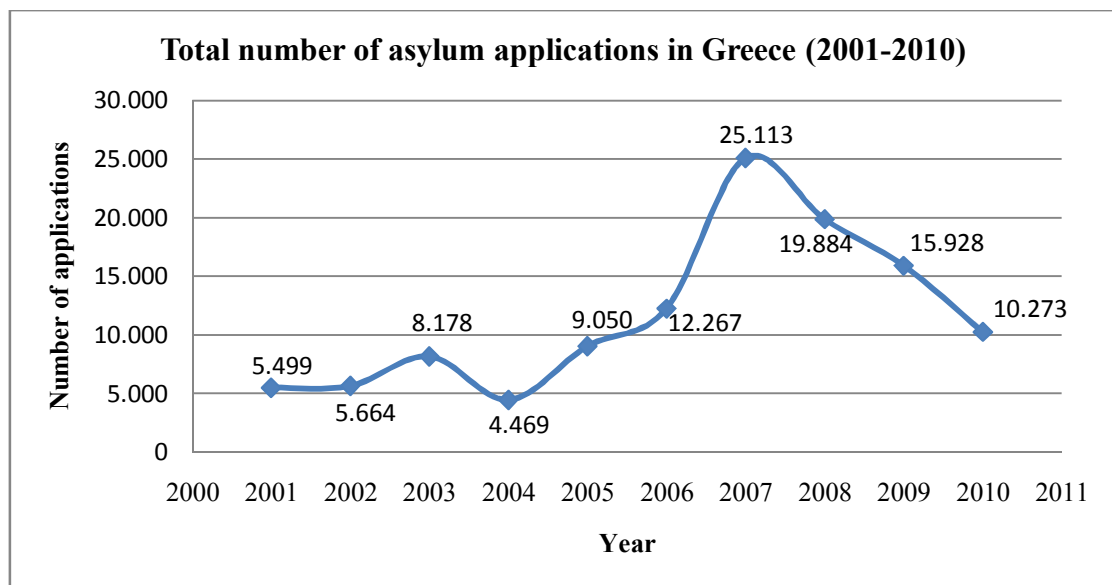
<sup>21</sup>This employee usually has no expertise on issues of migrants and asylum seekers. (S)he usually is a graduate of a gymnastics academy!

<sup>22</sup>It is an independent state administrative authority.

Generally, in order not to be deported from Greece, applicants must submit a range of evidence to substantiate their fear of living in their country of origin. This is extremely difficult, often impossible, as many of them come to Greece without holding any formal document. A pretext of the Greek authorities for not granting asylum and for the deportation of several applicants is the statement of false information by many economic migrants in order to be treated as refugees and to enjoy the rights conferred by the refugee status. The percentage of the asylum granting in Greece is one of the lowest in the EU. According to Eurostat, in 2011, the overall recognition rate at first instance was only 2%<sup>23</sup>.

All of the interviewees of my research have applied for asylum. Six of them applied immediately after their entry in Greece, three between a period of one to three years after their entry and one after sixteen years of residence in Greece. Among others, they all declared that they applied for asylum in order not to be deported. Even many of those who want to continue their journey to the Western and Northern Europe apply for asylum in Greece (Protagonistes, 21/11/2011).

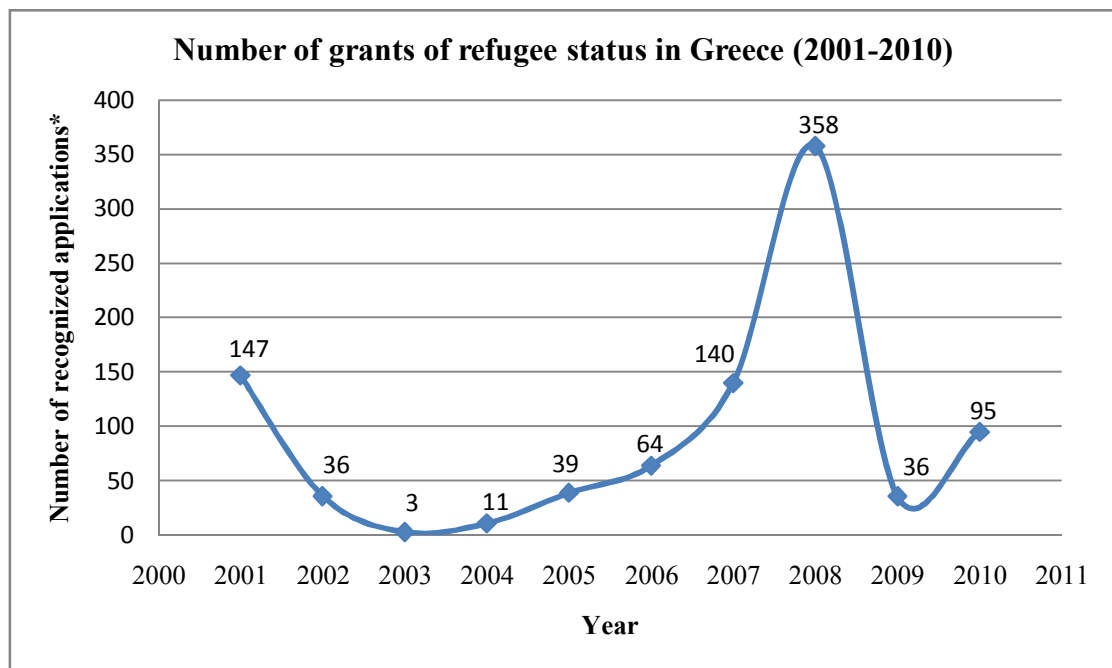
**Figure 1**



<sup>23</sup>Out of 8,670 decisions at first instance, 45 claimants were granted refugee status. 85 were granted subsidiary protection, and 45 were granted authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons. (eurostat, 03/2012 in Human Rights Watch (2012), *Hate on the streets: Xenophobic violence in Greece*)



Figure 2



Source: UNHCR, 2010

\*Both first and second instance applications

## 2.5 Practices of the Greek authorities

The interview I took from a lawyer shows that the problem in Greece is not so much the content of the laws, which of course are not perfect concerning the human rights of migrants and refugees, but the vast bureaucracy and especially the abuse of the laws by the authorities. So, in practice it is very common the non-observance of the procedures described in the previous sector.

These violations start right from the time of entrance of boatloads of migrants in the Greek territorial waters which are turned “mid-sea” back to Turkey without any examination as to whether any of those aboard are prospective asylum seekers or refugees with rights of protection (O’Brien, 2003: 54). Moreover, in its effort to prevent migrants enter the country, the Greek government has begun to construct a 130 km long moat and a 12.5 kilometer border fence along the land borders between Greece and Turkey, increasing the danger of border - crossings and leading to more deaths of migrants who try to enter in the EU (Pro Asyl, 2012; Human Rights Watch,

2012) ignoring that way the dangers that lead many of these people to leave their country of origin<sup>24</sup>.

In addition, contrary to the disposals of the Geneva Convention, readmissions of people are carried out before they apply for asylum. This practice is assisted by the concept of the '*safe third country*' which was adopted by the EU in 1992, in order to return to the borders and to neighbor countries of the EU the asylum seekers who enter its territory (Haddal, 2009). According to this concept, if an applicant of asylum passes through a 'safe' country, (s)he is not entitled to stay in the EU and (s)he must go back to this country on the basis of readmission agreements signed between countries (Poulou, 2005; Haddal, 2009). Such a readmission agreement has been signed between Greece and Turkey in November 2001, under international pressures on Greece (O'Brien, 2003: 45), presenting Turkey as a country where people, who wish to enter Europe to escape their imprisonment because of their dissident activities in countries such as Iraq and Iran, are not in danger<sup>25</sup>. Thus, sliding over any legal procedure and violating international treaties that are still active (Schapendonk, 2011), many migrants are not allowed to exercise their right to request for asylum and are sent to Turkey. Greece has informally undertaken deportations of migrants back to the transit or sending countries. Many Greek international organizations have reported about cases of illegal deportations of torture victims and other forced migrants (Papadopoulou, 2003: 4; Pro Asyl report, 2012: 3).

The hostile practices of the Greek state towards migrants can also be obvious from the existence and maintenance of minefields on the eastern land borders between Greece and Turkey which so far have led to the deaths of hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers who try to enter the country 'illegally' across the Evros border.

In addition, and despite that in the Geneva Convention is explicitly written that the asylum seekers should not be detained, in Greece there are camps where migrants and asylum seekers live under conditions of prison. In fact, in the early months of the current year it was decided the creation of at least 30 more 'first reception centers' in several regions of Greece. Their opening was 'frozen' during the investigation because of the national elections<sup>26</sup>. The living conditions in the detention centers of

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<sup>24</sup> Map 1 at the end of the sector shows where this fence is being built.

<sup>25</sup> This is a practice that I saw with my own eyes some years ago when I was a student in Mytilene, capital of the island of Lesbos, from where people from Iran and Iraq were sent by boat and accompanied by police to Alexandroupolis and from there by busses to Turkey.

<sup>26</sup> Only one new center has started to operate in Amygdaleza of Attica, near Athens.

Greece are often criticized and condemned by various international organizations (Senses, 2010; Schapendonk, 2011) as within them human rights are violated and the migrants face a number of dangers<sup>27</sup>.

Moreover, asylum seekers in Greece do not receive any government subsidy (Papadopoulou, 2003) while, according to complaints of various organizations, the European funds for the asylum seekers have not been used (Greek Ombudsman; antigone.gr). It is also a frequent phenomenon when an applicant for political asylum goes to renew his/ her card or (s)he is called to receive his/her booklet of political asylum, to be given a paper with a deadline of a month to leave Greece<sup>28</sup>.

One of the most popular practices of the Greek police under the orders of the responsible Ministry are the Sweep Operations (known as ‘‘skoopa’’ i.e. broom) (Hatziprokopiou, 2005) which have been applied since the early 90’s when the vast majority of the arrested migrants were Albanians. After the outbreak of the economic crisis these operations have to do mainly with people from Africa and Asia, which get arrested and checked if they have any documents. If they have no documents, they get into the procedure of deportation. During the summer of 2012 a new ‘‘skoopa’’ operation of large scale under the cynical choice of the name ‘‘**Zeus Xenios**’’ (Greek: Ξένιος Ζευς)<sup>29</sup> was put into practice. According to the words of migrants many policemen not only arrested migrants but also used excessive and unjustifiable violence against them during this operation.

Another practice of the Greek state is that of the *repatriation* of migrants. The Greek government has adopted a program of voluntary repatriation of migrants funded by the European Return Fund. According to the IOM during three phases of the program from March 2010 to May 2012, 2519 migrants mainly from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Bangladesh left Greece. The 7.135 foreigners who have applied

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<sup>27</sup> The conditions in the detention centers are described in chapter 4 where they are presented through the words of people who lived in those centers.

<sup>28</sup> This was a problem that the refugee of my sample faced twice. According to him, before he took the booklet of the political refugee, police officers from the Asylum Department of the Migration Directorate of Thessaloniki called him two times to go and take his papers of the granted asylum. Instead of those he was given a paper of a one-month deadline to leave Greece! He recourse to the courts both times and he was vindicated.

<sup>29</sup> **Xenios** is one of the most popular epithets of the god Zeus, father of gods and men in the ancient Greek religion. Zeus was the patron of hospitality and guests, ready to avenge any wrong done to a stranger (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus>). The epithet Xenios refers to the hospitality (xenia - philoxenia).

for the repatriation program are mainly irregular migrants and also people whose asylum requests have been rejected (tvxs.gr, 03-05-2012).

Finally, there is the speculation that the granting of asylum is in direct dependency on specific countries of origin. There are delays on the decisions for people who come from countries where there is war (e.g. Soudan, Afghanistan) while it is very unlikely for someone who comes from countries like Nigeria and Pakistan to get the refugee status even though the situation there is not safe<sup>30</sup>.

**Map 1:** The area where the 12.5 kilometer border fence is being built



<sup>30</sup>This was mentioned by a lawyer I talked with.

**Table 1:** Arrested and deported migrants (2006-2010)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Arrested for Deportation (SUM**)</b>	<b>Arrested for deportation (Asians &amp; Africans)</b>	<b>Deported (SUM)</b>	<b>Asians and Africans Deported</b>	<b>Percentage of the total arrested population that was Deported</b>	<b>Percentage of the Arrested Asians &amp; Africans that were Deported</b>
<b>2006</b>	43.159	18.570	17.650	1.120	40,89%	6,03%
<b>2007</b>	58.602	32.915	17.077	1.174	29,14%	3,57%
<b>2008</b>	81.741	52.397	20.555	992	25,15%	1,89%
<b>2009</b>	-	-	63.427	1.556	-	-
<b>2010</b>	-	-	52.469	2.600	-	-
<b>SUM</b>	-	-	171.178	7.442	-	-

\*It regards the sum of deportations and refoulements.

\*\*Migrants from countries of all the continents (most come from Albania)

**Source: Ministry of Citizen Protection**

## 2.6 The Greek political scene towards migration

‘Illegal’ migrants are thrust extremely high onto the political parties’ agendas. This was extremely obvious during the election campaigns on May and June 2012. During those periods seemed that the two most important issues worrying the political arena (and therefore the voters) was what exactly would happen with IMF (International Monetary Fund) and hence the position of Greece inside the Euro zone (associated of course with the dramatic increase in unemployment since the moment of IMF’s involvement in the economic life of the country) and the issue of migration to Greece. All the political parties during the presentation of their programmes either in the Media or in their rallies throughout Greece attached great importance to the solution of the migration ‘problem’. With the exception of the two parliamentary parties of the Left (KKE- Greek Communist Party and SY.RIZ.A- Coalition of the Radical Left) and the smaller leftish and extreme leftish parties that took part in the elections, all the rest of the political parties were in favor of fighting against the influx of migrants in the country and in favor of the deportation of all those who do not meet the criteria to take the refugee status. The words used by the politicians of the latter parties were extremely aggressive and seemed to regard criminals and not people who seek a safer

and better life away of the situations they face in their countries of origin. Indicatively, some words of Greek politicians regarding the issue of migrants follow:

*"Greece today has become a center for illegal immigrants. We must take back our cities, where the illegal trade in drugs, prostitution, and counterfeit goods is booming. There are many diseases and I am not only speaking about Athens, but elsewhere too."*<sup>31</sup>

(A. Samaras, President of the conservative party 'New Democracy' and Prime Minister of Greece after the elections of June 2012)

*"The country is getting lost. Since the Dorian invasion, 4000 years ago, the country has never received such a large scale invasion [...] It is a bomb in the foundations of society and state [...] We are in danger with a complete lesion of the society, the migration problem may be bigger than the economic."*<sup>32</sup>

(N. Dendias, Minister of Public Order)

*"Greeks are a peaceful people. The main problem is the presence of thousands of people who live here illegally... We have one of the lowest rates of criminality in Europe. What exists is petty crime, linked to foreigners."*<sup>33</sup>

(M. Chrysochoidis, MP<sup>34</sup> of PA.SO.K<sup>35</sup>, ex- Minister of Citizen Protection)

*"When our time comes, the 1<sup>st</sup> day we will make it clear: When a boat passes the Greek territorial waters will be sink!"*

(G. Karatzaferis, President of the extreme-right party LA.O.S – Peoples' Orthodox Alarm)

*"Greece must deport the illegal migrants to their countries of origin"*<sup>36</sup> (*ΔΗΜ.ΑΡ- Democratic Left*<sup>37</sup>)

<sup>31</sup>"Samaras claims Greeks must 'take back' cities from immigrants," Athens News, April 19, 2012, <http://www.athensnews.gr/portal/8/55031>

<sup>32</sup>skai.gr. 06/08/2012, available in Greek: <http://www.skai.gr/news/greece/article/209833/n-dendias-gia-metanasteutiko-eisvoli-aneu-proigoumenou-i-hora-hanetai/>

<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Watch, (2012) Hate on the Streets. Xenophobic Violence in Greece, p. 36

<sup>34</sup>Member of the Parliament.

<sup>35</sup>Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement.

<sup>36</sup> Taken from <http://www.alterthess.gr/content/dim-arenisxysi-tis-fylaksis-kai-epanaproothisi-ton-paranomom-metanaston>

The words become more aggressive when they come from members of the extreme right organization named *Golden Dawn*<sup>37</sup>. The words and characterizations that these ‘politicians’ use for the migrants remind Nazis’ rhetoric. However, the populist ‘politicians’ of Golden Dawn try not to use racist words while giving interviews to journalists. During an interview to the Human Rights Watch on January 2012 the leader of Golden Dawn stated his view:

*“We want Greece to belong to the Greeks. We are proud to be Greek; we want to save our national identity, our thousands-year history. If that means we are racist then yes, we are. We don’t want to share the same fate of the Native Americans. Right now, the immigrants are the cowboys and we are the Apache.”*<sup>39</sup>

In addition during an interview to a foreigner channel he said:

*“Greece is the garbage bin of Europe....The crystal clear position that we have is that all of them should leave our motherland.”*<sup>40</sup>

All these statements show that the main way the above politicians and their parties intend to address migration to Greece is through policies of exclusion and deportation. Each potential new government was promising tighter controls on the irregular migration. In my opinion, the party of New Democracy won the elections based firstly on the citizens’ fear of exiting from the Euro zone and secondly because of its harsh positions against migrants.

Closing this section I would like to note the extent of some migrants’ concern for the general Greek elections that took place a few days after our meeting. Some of them, who have been living for many years in Greece, were showing a great interest for the elections and wanted to discuss on the political agendas towards migration

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<sup>37</sup> It is a new political party that came from a fragmentation of SY.RIZ.A. Its positions on the migrants’ issues is one of the major differences with their former ‘comrades’.

<sup>38</sup> The case of Golden Dawn and its opinions about migration as well as the impact of these opinions in Greek society after the outbreak of the economic crisis are presented in section 5.2.4

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch, (2012) Hate on the Streets. Xenophobic Violence in Greece, p. 37

<sup>40</sup> “No Refuge” a film by SBS, distributed by Journeyman Pictures, August 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTs4q9XgNd0&feature=relmfu>

issues. Through our discussions it became clear that they were taking the side of the parties of the left and especially of SY.RIZ.A which for the first time in the ‘democratic’ history of Greece was quite close to win the elections.

## 2.7 Conclusion

The EU policy separates people into those who live inside the Union and those who live outside the Union. It divides the countries into members and non- members and equates migrants and asylum seekers to terrorism facing them as unwanted invaders turning this way the EU into a gated community (van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007; Walters, 2002). The Schengen Agreement has removed the borders among the countries – members and strengthened the external borders of the Union by offering expertise and money to its regional member-states leading to a huge contradiction of its neoliberal politics. From one side the neoliberal EU offers the freedom to move and to trade inside the Union while on the other side it militarizes its borders excluding people who seek a safer and better life in one of its member states opposing that way to the democratic demands and human rights (Carter & Merrill, 2007). In general, EU sees and treats migrants and refugees as a ‘problem’ (Walters, 2002) which must stay outside of the Union’s territory making clear that it makes a moral distinction between European citizens and the ‘others’ (van Houtom & Boedeltje, 2009). Its migration policy gets extended outside the borders of the EU (Walters, 2006) and gives special weight to the role of its ‘border’ countries.

Based on this policy, Greece is called to close its borders to the East and act as a firewall of the Fortress Europe. The Greek governments promote policies and practices of exclusion of the migrants serving several interests of the capital which presses for a kind of legalization of the black and unsecured work (Lafazani, 2004). Irregular migrants face a strict bureaucratic system which forces them to stay in Greece under illegal and unsecured status (Pavlou, 2007). Many of them, even if they want to go to another country of the EU, apply for asylum in Greece in order not to be deported and they enter in a huge bureaucratic procedure that forces them to stay in the country. The Greek government and the authorities violate their own rules treating migrants as criminals and as a problem of the Greek society.



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## Chapter 3: Research methodology and methods

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### 3.1 Introduction

A *research methodology* includes philosophical and socio-political issues (Karczemski & Boer, 2010) being the scientific approach which leads the way that the research question will be studied. On the other hand, *research methods* indicate solely on the practices used by the researcher during the conduction of the investigation for collecting and analyzing his/her data.

In this chapter I present the theoretical background and the adoption of specific ways for the conduction of my research and the draw of the desired information. More specifically, section 3.2 is about the research methodology that led me during my research while in section 3.3 I present and analyze all the research methods I used for the conduction of my research. Section 3.4 describes every step of my work and section 3.5 presents some limitations and difficulties I faced during my research which to an extent had as result the non-complete coverage of my initial expectations. Finally, section 3.6 gives some details on the characteristics of the research population that gave me the main information to write the current thesis.

### 3.2 Research methodology

This research belongs and has the characteristics of the so-called *qualitative research*. My intention is to explore in depth the experiences and the quality of life of the migrants that live in Greece and not to provide a representative sample able to give data for any statistical research. It resides in what is known as *Case Study Research* which aims to link empirical data that is derived from the study of one particular case with the already existing theory or to highlight the theory itself. This kind of research tries to give answers to questions like “how” or “why” (Yin, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Due to the fact that the requirements of qualitative analysis over a period are greater than those of a quantitative one, having therefore as an effect the limiting of

the study sample, and that in such a case study where many aspects and determinants are shown, the qualitative approach outweighs that of the quantitative for the interpretation and the study of this social phenomenon. Besides, an essential characteristic of the qualitative research is that it is based, compared to the quantitative research, on fewer cases aiming to build a clearer understanding for each case, and on the discovery of their commonalities and not on the forming of generalizations about social phenomena as the quantitative research aims (Kiriazi, 2002: 51-53). A positive figure in a qualitative type research is, as Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln mention, that there is always a possibility of non-obedience to strict rules (2000).

The study of a social phenomenon such as migration and the issues arising from it should take into account the social structures that exist in a country. As I see it, the qualitative social research is based mainly on the scientific positions of post-modernism and post-structuralism as also to this of *Social Constructionism* which has been influenced by the other two. Social Constructionism considers that reality is integral with the socially constructed knowledge and that knowledge is bounded to social action (Iosifidis, 2011: 111). Moreover, and extremely important for the current project, big role is played by what is known as *Constructivism*, the theory which supports that knowledge is created by the learner (S. Papert in Saw, 1995). This particular statement is inseparable with my belief that the theory for an issue under investigation should be formed during and after the collection and analysis of the data from the fieldwork. According to Tsekeris the qualitative social research accepts the social character of knowledge and considers science as a ***social process*** that produces working hypotheses (2008: 16). In addition, it gives special emphasis on **understanding** -rather than measurement and quantitative analysis- and prefers the knowledge of the **specific and the partial** rather than the knowledge of universal “laws” that ignore the complexity of human experience while it studies the phenomena in their “**natural**” context (non - structured interview and observation instead of experiment) (Tsekeris, 2008).

### 3.3 Research methods

The collection of the data for the writing of the current thesis was a result of combining both the use of secondary sources and (mainly) of fieldwork in places of intense presence of migrants in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki.

With regard to the **secondary sources**, those were articles and academic papers of Greek and English literature concerning mainly the policy of the EU and of the Greek state towards ‘illegal’ migration but also the following practices of the Greek authorities after migrants enter Greece. Moreover, I used data from NGOs as well as a mixture of reports from the media which nowadays present issues related to migration on a daily basis.

With regard to the experiences of the migrants that live in this country, the data was mainly collected in the field using various qualitative methods. One of the most useful methods was that of *direct observation*. This is one of the most popular methods of the qualitative research which help on the collection of empirical materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Spending a lot of time in public squares and streets where migrants hang out and observing directly the issue of interest I gained a variety of information and knowledge. Another helpful method was that of the *participatory observation* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) which was used mainly in the cases of migrants and refugees I knew for some time. Hanging out with them, eating and drinking brought us closer and led us to informal conversations that helped me to understand many things for their life in Greece. It should, of course, be said that I tried to avoid as much as I could to obtain research behaviors capable to put at risk the reliability of my research such as, for example, my fully equation with the social group which is under investigation and all the behaviors that raise issues of research ethics (Robson 2002).

The contacts I had developed some years earlier in Thessaloniki helped me to find and to talk with other migrants who, in their turn, brought me in contact with more places and people of interest for my work both in Thessaloniki and in Athens. This procedure of expanding a sample for a research is known in the literature as *snowball method* (Marshall, 1996; Audemard & Mariotti, 2010) and plays a key role in conducting a research whose subjects come from a vulnerable group and are difficult to approach.

Another important method used for the collection of my data was that of the *Semi-structured/ in-depth interviews*. Detailed questionnaires helped me to capture the point of view of the migrants and to get closer to their perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interviews were largely determined by the correspondents. They were looking more than discussions but they followed a logical sequence so that no requested information could be lost. I used *open questions* so that the respondents were free to develop their answers without any prefixations (Iosifidis, 2011). Of course, together with this type of questions, there were also used descriptive questions which helped for the extraction of some specific personal information of the respondent migrants as well as some opinion questions to explore the attitude and the perceptions of the migrants for the social phenomena that are under study in this project (Iosifidis, 2011). I paid special attention not to use prescriptive questions during my interviews so that the opinion of the subjects of the research would not be distorted and the research results would not be led by my opinions and beliefs.

Moreover, together with the interviews, very helpful proved the conduction of *informal discussions* both with migrants and with people that deal with migration issues. This kind of conversations might not covered all topics of interest like in a comprehensive interview, but, as I realized while carrying them out with several migrants, they were more ‘free’ and ‘open’ regarding the reluctance on the part of the subjects of the investigation.

Finally, one more useful method was that of the *Use of visual materials*. The study of the phenomenon of migration has received some interest from various organizations and so there is visual material that helped me in the collection of useful information for the lives of the irregular migrants. Watching some documentaries relevant with the phenomenon of migration in Greece gave me a lot of important information and also productive ideas.

As it can be understood from the writings in the present text, the answers to the questions of the semi-structured questionnaires are those that lead to the final text of the thesis. This means that they guide and form the different themes of the written text. All the answers of the people that took part in the interviews and the discussions are analyzed separately trying this way to present as detailed as possible the issues of interest to this study.

### 3.4 Description of the research

The present paper is based on a field research conducted with migrants and asylum seekers from several Asian and African countries in Thessaloniki and Athens from mid April to mid June in the year 2012.

For the needs of the research three **questionnaires** were prepared (they are cited in the appendix). The first of them, which was the one that I used more, was addressed to migrants that entered Greece in an ‘illegal’ way. The second questionnaire was used in an interview with a member of a migrant community in Thessaloniki and the third in an interview with a lawyer - representative of the UNHCR. The interviews were semi-structured and the answers of the respondents guided them making them look more like conversations<sup>41</sup>.

Overall, the numbers of the interviews were:

- Ten with migrants
- One with a migrant, president of the Sudanese community of Northern Greece
- One with a lawyer, representative of the UNHCR

The themes of the questionnaire for the migrants were the following:

- a. Demographic (personal) information
- b. Entrance in Greece
- c. Everyday life in Greece
- d. Dangers in Greece
- e. Social networks in Greece

The bulk of the information was collected from the ten semi-structured interviews. The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to two hours. The longest in duration was that of a refugee who received the papers of this specific status a few days before our meeting and of one asylum seeker who has been in Greece for the last twenty years while the shortest interview was that with the only woman of my sample. Generally, it was expected that the number of interviews with women would be very

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<sup>41</sup>I mean that I didn't follow faithfully the order or even the prepared questions. The initial questions were the true basis of each interview, but the flow and the contents of the interviews changed each time depending on the words of the interviewees.

limited and not of long duration as it is shown from other researches that women are more vulnerable and therefore more frightened (Schapendonk, 2011; Kastner, 2010). The answers of the interviewees offered information about the reasons of leaving their countries, the reasons they are in Greece, the ways of living and surviving in Greece and the opportunities and risks they face in these times of the multilevel crisis. They also presented from the migrants' perspective the policies and the practices of the EU and the Greek state towards irregular migration and the granting of asylum.

Before starting the field research I knew that I had somehow to overcome the barriers of reluctance and suspiciousness that these people show towards strangers inside Greek society. So, the first step to take in the field was to come in contact with refugees and migrants I knew from some past research occasions. Believing that the qualitative research I had to do demanded a sense of closeness between the researcher and the researched (Schapendonk, 2011; O'Reilly, 2009) I had a three-week period of familiarization with places where migrants hang out before I conducted the first interview<sup>42</sup>. My personal networks, both of migrants and refugees that I met during other researches as well as of Greek friends and acquaintances that they either deal with migrant issues or just maintain friendly relations with some of them, contributed to that familiarization and especially to the familiarization of the migrants towards me. Also, another method of contact was the use of phone calls to several migrant communities, whose representatives were willing to help me as they do more frequently nowadays with students of Greek universities who write dissertations on migration issues or with journalists.

Therefore, the snowball method played an important role in finding more people to interview or to just have some informal discussions from which a lot of data came out<sup>43</sup>. Thanks to the people I mentioned above and the snowball method I met a positive and without suspicion treatment from the people I finally talked with. In fact, at times, while I was taking an interview from a migrant, fellow countrymen of the interviewee came and watched and even intervened on questions having to do mainly with the difficulty of getting status papers, the racist violence and their desire to go to

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<sup>42</sup>This period of course did not stop at the end of these three weeks but actually continued throughout the whole period of the fieldwork until to have a sufficient number of interviews for the needs of the research.

<sup>43</sup> Some of the migrants I talked with didn't want to see me writing while we were talking but they wanted to tell me some of their experiences or the experiences of people they know in Greece and also in other European countries.

another EU country. All informal discussions took place after the interviews with people who out of curiosity and interest approached me and stated their complaints for their treatment by the Greek state. There were cases of migrants asking me information about the life in Holland, the treatment of the foreigners by the authorities and the demands of the Dutch state for granting papers of legal residence and work while some also asked me to write and make known to Europe the difficult situations they face in Greece. Moreover, in Athens, a large part of our discussions had to do with the increase in the number of the racist attacks and their fear because of the action of Golden Dawn.

As I have mentioned, the interviews were conducted in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Athens is the biggest city in Greece and there live the majority of the migrants and the asylum seekers while Thessaloniki is the second city in foreigners' numbers. The period of research in Athens was twelve days while in Thessaloniki about 1.5 month. In the city of Thessaloniki I interviewed six people and had informal discussions with another twelve while in Athens I interviewed four people and talked informally with five more.

During my research I thought that approaching an organized migrant community would give me much additional information on the issues of my interest while the taken answers would involve more people and not a single case. An interview with the president of the Sudanese community of Northern Greece was an additional source of information on the way of life of old and new migrants in the Greek cities, on the ways that Sudanese (and more) migrants get organized, the problems they face inside Greek society, their networks in Greece and the trends on their desires for their present and future.

To gain a fuller picture of the policy followed by the Greek state towards 'illegal' migration and asylum I contacted a lawyer, representative of UNHCR, involved in the examination of asylum applications. Apart from the several followed policies and procedures, this interview gave me information on the administrative issues and services dealing with migration and asylum and also on the abuse of the rights of asylum seekers.

Finally, through solidarity activities such as marches for migrants' rights (which occur frequently in Greece) and discussions in various 'political places' I came in contact with groups of people who fight for the betterment of foreigners'

lives in Greece and I drew various data for the dangers these people face and for the support they get from a part of the Greek population.

The places where the interviews took place were chosen by the interviewees. Both in Athens and in Thessaloniki these places were mainly squares where it was evident the 'existence' of migrants. Also, some interviews and discussions in Thessaloniki took place in buildings where political and migrant groups are located. The language of communication was English with a frequent use of Greek words and phrases. Two of the interviews were conducted in Greek as the interviewees live in Greece many years and their knowledge of the language is in a very satisfactory level. In every interview new questions were born and thus new data came out. The interviews were not strict and were more like conversations while questions were changing according to the characteristics and the status of the interviewee.

The interviews were decoded and analyzed in order to get the results of concern to the research. I made as soon as possible the transcript of the discussions with the migrants and the other interviewees when my contact with every one of them was still 'fresh' and I had immediately under comparison their answers to the questions.

Also, I must mention that I didn't use any tape recorder in order to create a friendly and not cold 'environment' so that the respondents would answer openly and with the least possible hesitation. All the words of the migrants written in *italic* in the paper were recorded quickly with pen during the conversations. Finally, it should be noted that I kept all the interviews anonymous and that I only know the first names of the respondents<sup>44</sup>.

### 3.5 Limitations - Difficulties

A research on such an important issue and from only one person is impossible not to face difficulties and limitations that have immediate impact on the quality and quantity of the gained data.

A major limiting factor was that of time. An in-depth qualitative research takes more time and this has mainly to do with the relationship of trust that has to be

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<sup>44</sup> The observance of the anonymity was an assurance demanded by the respondents in order to give an interview.



developed between the researcher and the potential interviewees. I noticed that some of the respondents in some of the questions (especially to those that were related to their legal status) were thinking much more and their answers were shorter.

At this point I must say that the conduction of the research in Athens and the contact with the migrants who live there had greater difficulties compared to the research in Thessaloniki as my personal networks with migrants were significantly smaller and substantially were based on my contacts from the city of Thessaloniki. Furthermore, the research period in Athens was only twelve days while in Thessaloniki it lasted for 1, 5 month resulting not to get so familiar myself with the issue in the Greek capital as in Thessaloniki<sup>45</sup>.

Another difficulty was that of the lack of clear statistics concerning some issues of my interest such as the concentrations of migrant populations in the Greek cities and the racist attacks against migrants and asylum seekers. With regard to the first issue the existed maps and clear information do not concern the recent years while regarding the second issue the numbers and the statistics are mainly estimations from various organizations. I tried to contact with the responsible authorities, the Department of Aliens both of Athens and Thessaloniki, but the answer in both cases was the same: 'It is confidential data'.

Finally, one more difficulty was the lack of sufficient number of papers for the life of the migrants who enter Greece 'illegally' and for the role of networks inside Greece.

### 3.6 Research Population

During my field research in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki I conducted ten semi-structured with migrants. Nine of the interviewees were men and only one was woman. The youngest of my sample was the woman from Somalia who is 21 years old while the oldest was a Turkish man who is 43 years old. So, all of them are at the most productive period of their life. With regard to their ages at the time of entering Greece they were ranging from 18 years old (the Somali woman) to 33 years old (the Turk refugee).

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<sup>45</sup> Thessaloniki is my hometown and thus it is natural for me to be thoroughly familiar both with the city and with the places where migrants hang out.

The respondents were from the Middle East and from sub-Saharan Africa. More specifically, the countries of origin were Pakistan (2), Afghanistan (1), Iran (1), Iraq (1), Turkey (1), Nigeria (3) and Somalia (1). Six of them are Muslims, three Christians (the three Nigerians) while the Turkish (of Kurdish origin) declares as atheist. As for their educational level, three are graduates of primary school; six are graduates of high school and one is a university graduate. With regard to their marital status seven of them are single and three of them are married. One of the married is in Greece with his wife and his child while the wives and the children of the other two are still back in their countries of origin.

They all declared that they left their homelands to seek a better life in a rich European country and to avoid the violent situations in their countries. Two of them (a 43 year old Turk and a 34 year old Iranian) particularly stressed that the reasons they left their countries are political as they prosecuted by the authorities because of their political beliefs and participation in political parties /groups that are in a state of illegality. Eight out of ten entered without any official documents with them while two entered using fake passports. With the exception of a 41 year old Nigerian who entered Northern Greece and went straight to Thessaloniki, all the others have lived even for a while in a detention centre. Finally, the period of stay in Greece ranges from one to twenty years.

As I wrote before important information collected also from informal conversations with more migrants in places they hang out and usually after the end of an interview. The number of people who participated in these discussions and covered some of the questions in the questionnaire was seventeen people. Twelve of them were in the city of Thessaloniki and five in the city of Athens. They were all of young age no more of 40 years old. The countries of origin were Pakistan (2), Afghanistan (2), Turkey (2), Syria (2), Bangladesh (2), Iraq (1), Nigeria (1), Mali (2), Senegal (1), Somalia (1) and Ethiopia (1).

The three following tables give some information about the respondents of my research.

**Table 2:** Some personal information about the respondents

Number of interview	Name	Country of Origin	Sex	Year of Birth	Marital status	Educational level	Religion	Occupation in country of origin	Occupation in Greece
1	Rahim	Iraq	M	1984	Single	Secondary	Muslim	Coffee-house keeper	-
2	Karim	Iran	M	1978	Single	University (Department of Architecture)	Muslim	Architect	Salesman in an Iranian store
3	Nadifa	Somalia	F	1991	Single	Primary (not finished)	Muslim	-	-
4	Azim	Afghanistan	M	1977	Married (1 son)	Primary	Muslim	Worker in cement factory	-
5	Mehmet	Turkey (Kurd)	M	1969	Single	Secondary	Atheist	Pastry cook	Meat market
6	Daniel	Nigeria	M	1969	Single	Secondary	Christian	Market business	Street vendor
7	Peter	Nigeria	M	1971	Married (1 son)	Secondary	Christian	Market business	Street vendor
8	Masood	Pakistan	M	1979	Married (1 daughter)	Primary	Muslim	Worker in factory	Salesman in Pakistani store
9	Ahmed	Pakistan	M	1977	Single	Primary	Muslim	Worker in wheat fields	Salesman in Pakistani store
10	Patrick	Nigeria	M	1983	Single	Secondary	Christian	Salesman in family store	Street vendor

**Table 3:** Entry in Greece

Number of interview	Date of interview	Name	Entry in Greece	Place of Entry	Place of Residence	Destination country*	Destination country**
1	3/5/2012	Rahim	10/2008	Evros	Thessaloniki	Germany/ Sweden	Germany/ Sweden
2	12/5/2012	Karim	2008	Evros	Athens	France	France
3	18/5/2012	Nadifa	4/2009	Chios	Thessaloniki	England	England
4	19/5/2012	Azim	2009	Lesvos	Thessaloniki	Netherlands/ Sweden	Netherlands/ Sweden
5	25/5/2012	Mehmet	4/2002	Evros	Thessaloniki	Greece	Switzerland
6	31/5/2012	Daniel	1992	Samos	Thessaloniki	No specific	England
7	31/5/2012	Peter	2003	Thessaloniki	Thessaloniki	No specific	England/ Spain
8	5/6/2012	Masood	2008	Evros	Athens	England/ Sweden	England/ Sweden
9	5/6/2012	Ahmed	2006	Evros	Athens	No specific	England
10	5/6/2012	Patrick	2011	Evros	Athens	No specific	England/Netherlands

\*At the beginning of their journey

\*\*After the 'Greek' experience

**Table 4:** Countries of origin of all the 27 respondents

Country of Origin	Number of Respondents
Pakistan	4
Afghanistan	3
Turkey	3
Iraq	2
Syria	2
Bangladesh	2
Iran	1
Nigeria	4
Somalia	2
Mali	2
Ethiopia	1
Senegal	1

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## Chapter 4: Entering Greece

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### 4.1 Introduction

It could be argued that the arrival in Greece is the big jump to Europe. Greece is a gateway to Europe and also a ‘stopover junction’ for many Asian and African migrants trying to reach the wealthy countries of the EU (Markoutsoglou et al., 2007). Many people wait, for short or long periods, in neighboring Turkey to pass to Greece alone or in groups. They either pass to Greece by small boats if they go to one of the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea or on foot if they pass through the land borders in North-eastern Greece. In the first case they face the danger of drowning and their mid-sea return by the Greek coast guard and FRONTEX while in the second case they face the dangers of the minefields and border guards. Their first contact is with the Greek authorities and the detention camps across the borders of Greece.

This chapter deals with the first experiences irregular migrants have in Greece. Sector 4.2 presents the main places of entrance and the ways migrants use to enter the country. Sector 4.3 presents and analyzes the reasons migrants are in Greece according to their own words. Finally, through the interviews and discussions I had with migrants in Athens and Thessaloniki, in sector 4.4 I display their experiences and the conditions of life in the detention centers operating at the borders of Greece. Sector 4.5 is the conclusion of the current chapter.

### 4.2 Places and ways of entrance in Greece

Irregular migrants try to enter Greece either by using fake passports or without any document with them. In the first case they use as entry points harbors and airports while in the second case, which is the most popular in Greece’s case (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004), they use more dangerous patterns and sea routes in order not to be

detected by FRONTEX and coast yards' patrols. They enter Greece either on foot or by boat (Papadopoulou, 2002).

The risk when trying to enter Greece is very high because, as the migrants indicate, the passing takes place during night hours and when the weather is bad in order not to be noticed by the military forces who guard the land and the sea borders. Minefields placed in 1974 along the Evros River lead to the deaths of many would-be migrants. According to the Coroner of Thrace region, in 2010, 70 migrants died in the area, while by August 2011, another 47 migrants lost their lives in their effort to cross the borders (Pro asyl, 2012; 88). The dead bodies of hundreds of unknown migrants are buried in fields near the borders<sup>46</sup>. The deaths of migrants in the Aegean Sea or in the river of Evros are due, as I said before, to the bad weather conditions as well as to the bad –fake as it was mentioned by some migrants I talked to- construction of boats they use to pass into Greece.

*“We came twelve people in a very old inflatable boat that normally fits 5 people. Water was coming through all the time...”*

states Azim, a 35 years old Afghan asylum seeker who came from Ayvalik to Lesbos in 2009. In addition, many people coming from countries like Afghanistan and Iran do not know swimming and risk their lives even when the weather is not too bad (Protagonistes, 21/11/2010).

In order to cross from Turkey to Greece most migrants- asylum seekers use a facilitator. Most of the migrants who were interviewed reported that they paid money to smugglers for specific parts and border crossings in the countries they passed during their journey. Those entering from Evros region usually spent first some time in Istanbul while those who use the islands of the Aegean Sea to pass to Greece stay in one of the Turkish coast cities (Izmir, Bodrum, Ayvalik etc.). There, they come in contact with circuits of smugglers and they go to the Greek-Turkish borders waiting the right (bad) conditions to cross the borders with the presence of a smuggler. It is believed though, according to the words of migration specialists that I met, that in many cases smugglers do not guide irregular migrants into Greek territory because of the risk of being arrested and imprisoned and thus they just equip migrants with the

<sup>46</sup> The battle for Attica square: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPl9PW7ONIQ&feature=related> (TV 2 Norway, 2010)

necessary means for moving – usually a small boat in bad condition- which can explain why there have been so many deaths by drowning, or simply driving them up to a point. Smugglers often suggest migrants who pass to Greece by boats to sink them while they are in the sea in case they get detected by the coast yard so that the latter will save them and not force them to turn back to Turkey (UNHCR, 2010<sup>47</sup>). Moreover, there are indications that when they transport migrants and see that it is possible to get arrested *delicto* (i.e. in the very act) -with the consequence of facing long periods of imprisonment in Greece – they abandon migrants in the open sea (Carter & Merrill, 2007).

Smugglers, the illegal “entrepreneurs” (Herman, 2006) should be considered as small groups or even individuals operating in the area rather than part of extended crime organizations (Papadopoulou, 2003). My respondents mentioned that the nationalities of the smugglers vary and they are not only Turks and Greeks but also from other countries of the Balkans. Often the smugglers are Turkish people who live near the borders and cross migrants to Greece to earn some extra money for their income (Protagonistes, 21/11/2010). According to some of my interviewees, finding a smuggler to help crossing to Greece is a very easy task because in some of the places that migrants reside in Turkey smuggling is like a job and everybody knows them. They can be easily contacted through mobile phone (Papadopoulou, 2002). Apart from assisting under payment migrants to pass to Greece, smugglers also provide information about what to expect in Greece and in other destination or stopover countries (Papadopoulou, 2003).

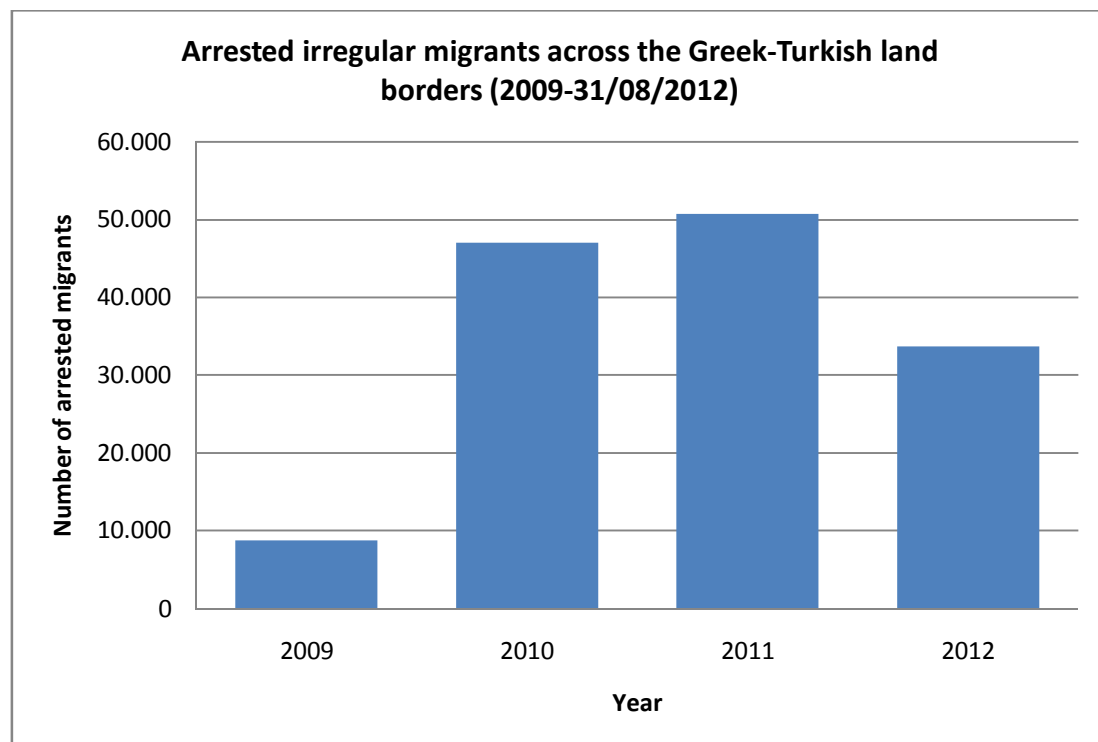
Only three people of my sample didn’t use the help of a smuggler. Two of them entered Greece using fake passports while the third (a Turk of Kurdish ethnicity), who is a member of an illegal in Turkey political party, crossed alone the border in the Evros region under the advices of his comrades who had done the passing before.

So, the main entrances used by irregular migrants from Africa and Asia to enter Greece are the islands of the Aegean Sea, the river of Evros (mainly the Northern part of the river) and the land borders between Greece and Turkey near Evros. Especially with regard to Evros region, indicative of its importance as a passage is the fact that only in 2011, 54,974 undocumented migrants and asylum

<sup>47</sup> Refugees in Greece” Evros- Lesvos- Athens available in Greek: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGhxjX21KHo>

seekers were arrested for ‘illegal’ border crossing<sup>48</sup>. According to the Greek authorities and to several organizations around 300 to 400 people cross the borders of Evros every day<sup>49</sup>. With regard to the migrants who were interviewed, six out of ten came in Greece by passing the river of Evros, three used the islands of Samos, Lesbos and Chios and one entered Greece from the North taking a train from Bulgaria to Thessaloniki.

**Figure 3**



### 4.3 Why Greece is a choice for the migrants?

After its entrance in the EU in 1981 Greece started to become a country of destination (to a lesser extent compared to the Western countries) mainly for migrants from the ex-‘socialist’ regimes of the Eastern Europe (Lafazani, 2004). A general development in various sectors made Greece as a relatively attractive country for thousands of migrants.

<sup>48</sup>Doctors without borders, 29-02-2012- available in Greek: <http://xorissynora.msf.gr/>

<sup>49</sup> The battle for Attica square: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPI9PW7ONIQ&feature=related> (TV 2 Norway, 2010)



Over the last years the situation in Greece has become very difficult due to the economic crisis. Nevertheless, thousands of migrants and refugees continue to enter the country every year. FRONTEX recorded 55.000 irregular migrants crossing the Greek-Turkish borders in 2011 (Human Rights Watch, 2012:31). So, what are the reasons that bring them to Greece? What are the trends in the routes- trajectories and decisions of migrants and what is the significance of Greece? Is it initially a country of destination? As I wrote in the second chapter migrants get stuck in Greece because of the EU laws and that is one reason of the big numbers of migrants living in Greece.

According to the words of my respondents, Greece is primarily a passage and stopover on their way to a country of the Western and Northern Europe. It is believed that the majority of the migrants that come to Greece use the country as a stepping stone (The Stream, 04/05/2012). Seven of my interviewees declared that Greece was considered just a passage for them from the moment they left their countries or after decisions taken during their journey, two of them that it was considered as a place where they would stay if they could find a better way of living and only one stated that Greece was his primary destination. The same, generally, applies to those who talked with me 'unofficially' on this issue. Thus, during my conversations with migrants and specialists on the issue of migration several reasons came out on why migrants go through Greece and either choose or are forced to stay in the country for short or long periods.

An important reason that brings migrants to Greece in a first place is the natural consequence of the geographic location of the country which is near to the zones of 'underdeveloped' countries like those in Northern Africa and Middle East (Zavos, 2008; Hatziprokopiou, 2005) and the existence of many islands and long coastline that characterizes the country<sup>50</sup>. The migrants also present as a very important reason the existence of land borders between Greece and Turkey thanks to which they can avoid passing to Europe by boats. Some of my respondents claim that it is easier and safer to enter Europe through the land borders of Evros than passing with small boats the Mediterranean Sea. The choice of Greece is also a result of the existence of large populations of specific ethnic groups. The existence of those populations is considered as extremely useful for the potential newcomers mainly for practical living reasons. In general, the presence of friends or fellow countrymen is a

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<sup>50</sup> Greece's coastline is at 13,676 km in length, featuring a vast number of islands (approximately 3.000, of which 227 are inhabited (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece)).

fundamental reason to choose Greece as a stopover or a destination. The influence of the migrants' networks is extremely high<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, there are people who state that they ended up in Greece simply because smugglers led them in the country. There are cases of people who paid smugglers to help them reach Italy and instead of this they were disembarked on a Greek island<sup>52</sup>. One more reason for selecting Greece, this time clearly as a destination country, has to do with political strategies. More specifically, and as pointed out by the Turkish refugee of my sample, one reason that some asylum seekers of Turkish citizenship<sup>53</sup> choose Greece to migrate is the fact that it is adjacent to Turkey. Many of those asylum seekers have suffered a lot in Turkish prisons and are not able to travel to more distant countries while others stay in Greece where they continue to offer to the political and social struggle taking place in Turkey, mainly by collecting money for the needs of their parties/groups and making known the violations on the human rights in their country. Finally, some of the respondents indicated that extra role to the choice of Greece as an entry point to Europe played the information they had that they could not be deported if they surrendered themselves to police and apply for asylum.

With regard to the long period of residence in Greece of those migrants who do not want or never had planned to stay in Greece, this is a result mainly of the fact that they are stuck in Greece because of the European and Greek laws as well as with the lack of the required money to continue heading to Northern and Western Europe.

#### 4.4 Living in detention camps

For many of the irregular migrants who enter Greece their first place of accommodation is that of a detention camp (which usually are former barns and storehouses) at the country's borders. The Greek authorities name the detention camps as 'special areas for hosting foreigners' or 'special facilities for aliens' (Article 81(1) of Law 3386/2005 in Pro Asyl, 2012). This is the first experience of reception and

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<sup>51</sup> The role of the migrants' networks is discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>52</sup> This was stated by people during our informal conversations and was regarding mainly people from countries such as Somalia who paid money for bigger trips.

<sup>53</sup> I use the term 'citizenship' to include all those from Turkey who define differently where they come from (e.g. Kurds).

living in Europe. According to the CPT<sup>54</sup> there are ‘*some 36 different sites in which immigrants have been detained since 2001, including specialized immigration detention centres, police and border guard stations and ad hoc facilities*’ (Global Detention Project, 2009)<sup>55</sup>. The total capacity of these centres was estimated at 2,500 in 2007 (Pro Asyl 2007, 19). In addition to the existing detention centres at the borders with Turkey, the government announced in March 2012 the immediate construction of 30 ‘hosting’ centres for ‘illegal’ migrants (it is mainly about the conversion of old military sites which are no longer used) in the ten country’s administrative regions having the capacity of 1.000 migrants each. The funding for the operation of these new centres will be a responsibility of the EU (government.gov.gr, 07-02-2012). Here lies the first violation of an International Convention that is still in force and which Greece has also signed. It is the Geneva Convention, which states that an asylum seeker should not be detained.

Seven out of my ten interviewees were detained in such camps. With the exception of Patrick, a 29 year old Nigerian who stayed only few days in a camp close to Evros River, the rest six stayed in camps of Evros and of the Greek islands for a period of two to three months. All respondents highlighted the squalid living conditions in these centers confirming the reports and complaints of various Greek and international human rights organizations. First of all, they all declared that there was no source of information as there was no contact with the outside world and no interpreter to help them by explaining what was to happen to them, while they had no access to any legal assistance. Concerning the legal assistance lawyers I came in contact both in the past and during the research for the current thesis reported that their entry into migrants’ detention centres is often prevented by the authorities.

With regard to the living conditions in these centres, migrants state that they are ‘*worse than the conditions in prisons*’. Severe overcrowding in small cells, lack of hygiene and of hot water, not enough basic facilities such as toilets and heating, limited access to medical care and even no access to fresh air constitute the living conditions of migrants when they manage to enter Greece. Some examples of the bad living conditions were narrated to me by Masood, a 33 years old Pakistani asylum

<sup>54</sup>CPT stands for European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment)

<sup>55</sup><http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/greece/introduction.html>

seeker according to whom there were no beds in his cell and all the people living there (more than 15 men) had to sleep on cardboards and cartons while they were provided no medication when they were ill. Moreover, regarding the feeding he states:

*“The food was insufficient. I had some money to travel inside Greece and finally I almost spent all of it to buy more food for me and for other people”.*

In all the above should be also added the abuse of many migrants by the policemen as well as the lack of adequate reception conditions for vulnerable groups of people such as unaccompanied minors, mental or physically sick or victims of torture (Pro Asyl, 2012; Schapendonk, 2011). Regarding to the police behavior towards migrants all the people I talked with had to narrate about an incident of police arbitrariness happened to them or to someone they know.

*“Some policemen didn’t show us any respect. They refused a lot of times to give us medicines, they were making fun of us, they were pushing us... one of them was often showing us his gun and he was waving his baton pointing towards Turkey. We did not know what he was saying but we could understand quite well what he was meaning...”*

reports Rahim, a 28 years old Iraqi asylum seeker who stayed for 2,5 months in a detention centre in Evros before coming to Thessaloniki.

Another problem which is caused by the overcrowding and it was indicated from two of my interviewees is the appearance of tensions between individuals of different ethnic groups. These tensions have to do with the claim of space inside detention camps and also with the sharing of goods which is not always done in an organized way.

Usually, when migrants are transferred to detention camps they create their own collectives which are mainly based on the common ethnicity, the traditionally good relations between different nations and religion. This practice helps them to feel more secure against various risks caused by police or organized crime. The making of

those collectives is a survival strategy that contributes to the protection of the migrants and also to the creation of solidarity among them (Collyer in Schapendonk, 2009)<sup>56</sup>.

Last information reported by two migrants who were detained in detention camps in the islands of Lesbos and Chios both of them for a period of three months, was the help that migrants often get from the local communities and some various human rights organizations. Their help has to do mainly with the collection and supply of essential items such as clothing, canned food and items needed to women and children as well as with the spread of information about the violation of migrants' rights in the detention camps.

Although Greece has been repeatedly condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for the humiliating conditions in the detention centers, the situation has not changed at all while specifically for the region of Evros there is a talk of a humanitarian crisis (Pro Asyl, 2012; FRA<sup>57</sup>, 2011). The following statement by Christos Papoutsis, the former Minister of Citizen Protection, during a press conference on May 18, 2011 shows that the lack of improvement in the living conditions of the detention centres is clearly a political will aiming to discourage potential migrants to come to Greece.

*'But we need the whole package – the reform of the asylum system and the fence, the detention and first reception centres. A clear message for the international community and especially for the countries of origin of these people, that Greece is not a transit place on their way to Europe and cannot become the Promised Land for those who want to leave their countries and come to Europe' (Pro Asyl, 2012; 5).*

## 4.5 Conclusion

One can say that the arrival in Greece is a great achievement for people who travel for months or even years using various modes of transportation. For many migrants

<sup>56</sup> A more detailed reference for the role of those collectives is given in Chapter 6.

<sup>57</sup> FRA stands for 'European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights'.

Europe is their 'Promised Land' where they are supposed to find a better and safer life away from their harsh experiences in their countries of origin.

Greece is the first step of many irregular migrants from Asia and Africa in the EU. Several reasons such as the country's geography and the existence of migrant communities bring them in Greece. However, what migrants face when they enter Greece has nothing to do with their dreams and aspirations. The reception from the Greek state, and therefore from the EU, means their imprisonment in detention centres and in police departments. The living conditions in the detention centers throughout Greece degrade the human dignity (Pavlou, 2007) and are resembled to the conditions of concentration camps (Carter & Merrill, 2007). Violation of human rights by the Greek authorities and inhumane living conditions compose irregular migrants' lives during their first months in Europe. From there on, if they are not sent back to Turkey through illegal and short procedures, they either go to a Greek city (mainly in Athens and secondarily in Thessaloniki or somewhere else) to stay at least for a while or they go to Western Greece to continue 'illegally' their travel to Italy. They therefore *"leave behind them the nightmare of detention centres and continue chasing their dreams"*<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup>Words said by a Pakistan asylum seeker interviewed in Athens.

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## **Chapter 5: Living in the Greek cities. Opportunities and dangers in times of crisis**

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### **5.1 Introduction**

After entering Greece and spending some time in the detention camps at the borders, the migrants move to a Greek city, mainly Athens, or if they want to continue immediately their journey they go to cities – harbors of the Western Greece like Patras or Igoumenitsa to pass illegally by boats to Italy. During the waiting period in the latter cities they live in empty lots near the harbors. Those who go in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki (and who were the subjects of my research) have to solve the matters of accommodation and employment. They start new lives in the Greek cities and face new opportunities and new dangers which determine their desires for staying or leaving Greece.

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part 5.1, presents the quality of the daily life of migrants with regard to their housing and working. To be more specific, in section 5.1.1 I present the conditions of migrants' accommodation in the two biggest cities of Greece while in section 5.1.2 I present their working conditions. Section 5.1.3 deals with one of the characteristics of migrants' lives as it emerged from my interviews with them, that of their mobility inside Greece. The second part of the chapter deals with the social relations and dangers of migrants in the Modern Greek society. In section 5.2.1 the social relationships migrants develop while living in Greece are presented. Section 5.2.2 shows the role of the Media on the way Greek people look on migrants while section 5.2.3 analyzes the beliefs of the Greeks towards migrants mainly under the impact of the economic crisis. Section 5.2.4 deals with the rise of the racist beliefs and violence and it focus on the acts of a specific neo-Nazi group and of a part of the Greek police. Section 5.2.5 presents the migrants' opinions

about their experiences in Greece and their desires while finally, section 5.2.6 is a critical conclusion of both parts of the chapter.

### 5.1.1 Accommodation

When migrants go to a city they have to deal with the issue of housing. Many arrange this earlier through their acquaintances that already live in the cities and many go to their fellow countrymen communities or to various NGOs which arrange for their temporary housing and for the finding of a flat to rent. Migrants either know about the existence of those communities and NGOs when they are still at their countries of origin or they learn about them during their stay in the detention centres. Frequent is the phenomenon of habitation abandoned buildings, mainly in Athens, where under very harsh conditions entire groups of migrants try to survive. Also, a significant number of people, who usually have applied for asylum, cover temporarily the housing problem by staying in a guest house, which operates under the direction of an NGO.

The quality of a migrant's house is directly related to the period of his/her residence in Greece and to his/her occupation. Those who moved many years ago to the country and have a stable job live in better conditions than the newcomers. They usually live with a relative or a friend and the flats they rent do not differ much with those of the Greek's working class. However, before reaching this situation, migrants have to pass through several phases in the level of the quality of the housing. Generally, the fresher is the arrival to Greece the simpler and with more deficiencies are the flats they rent while the quality of the housing conditions improves as the years pass by. Usually, their homes are characterized by shortages of basic facilities such as heating as well as by oldness with all that this implies while there are many migrants who rent underground rooms. Important feature, however, is the co-habitation of many people in small apartments. Of the 10 migrants I spoke with - who are long enough in Greece and have gone through many phases- two were living alone, a refugee was living with his brother who came two years ago in Greece, one was a guest of a fellow countryman and the rest were living with two to four people. With regard to the political refugees and asylum seekers who live in Greece, they rent bigger apartments where many of them live together. The housing areas are the most



deprived districts of the cities where the rents are lower (Zarafonitou et al, 2012; Skandalis et al, 2008). Districts of Athens' city center like Kypseli and Patisia and areas of the central and western districts of Thessaloniki present a large geographic concentration of migrants.

A positive feature highlighted by some respondents is the proximity of the areas they live to various public services, NGOs and other civil society organizations whose offices are usually located in the center of both cities of the research.

The concentration of thousands of migrants in Athens and in Thessaloniki raises the question about the creation of migrant ghettos. Here, it must be clear that in Thessaloniki there is not significant social polarization concerning the housing areas, at least not to the extent that may exist in Athens. Therefore, cheap flats, mainly because of their oldness, can also be found in districts of the Eastern Thessaloniki while in the neighborhoods where most of the migrants live Greeks live as well and thus we cannot talk about a ghetto-like situation in Thessaloniki (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Also, with regard to the districts of Athens where large numbers of migrants reside, we cannot, at least yet, characterize them as ghettos as they are missing in intensity some of the basic features international literature gives to the term 'ghetto'<sup>59</sup> (Zarafonitou et al, 2012). Someone can argue though that some districts in central Athens can be characterized as 'transitional' towards this direction as more and more migrants gather, very often from specific countries (Zarafonitou et al, 2012). What is certain so far is that some particular public areas such as parks and squares which are in the districts where many migrants live become meeting places for them and have become multicultural. As for the newcomers, they try to go to places where they learn that there are more people from their country because they feel that there they would be more protected against the different society they entered and that they would live in a more familiar environment (van Houtom & van Naerssen, 2002).

Finally, an important issue related to the accommodation of migrants in the Greek cities is the difficulty of finding a place to rent because of their unsecured status and because they are foreigners.

*“Many landlords didn’t want us to rent their flats because we are migrants. They told us this with clear words...”*

<sup>59</sup>For example, one of the main characteristics of a ghetto is the presence of a dominant minority group. In Greek cities there is no minority that dominates in a district.

says Patrick, a 29 years old Nigerian in Athens who finally found a place to live in the district of Kypseli with a friend who is also from Nigeria. According to Daniel (43, Nigerian), who has been living in Thessaloniki for twenty years, this is a diachronic problem for the migrants which nowadays is growing because more and more landlords feel insecure to rent out their apartments to foreigners due to their marginalization by the Greek society as a result of the economic and social crisis.

Apart from this difficulty migrants very often are exploited in the house market (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Two of the most often ways of their exploitation is firstly by not signing a tendency agreement which gives the power to the landlord r to drive them away whenever (s)he wants and secondly, by renting properties that are not supposed to be used for accommodation (e.g. small warehouses).

### 5.1.2 Working conditions and the impact of the economic crisis

After, or simultaneously, with the issue of housing, migrants have to find a job so that they can live in Greece and save money to continue their journey inside the EU. Due to the large informal economy it is difficult to find clear official data on the situation of migrants in the labour market in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004), especially the latter years under the new conditions prevailed by the economic crisis.

Similarly to the issue of accommodation, the occupation of a migrant depends on the years (s)he lives in Greece and on his/her status and presents gradations. One can observe that many migrants may experience improvements in their salaries and in the kind of their jobs as the years pass by. The reason for this is a combination of factors such as the regularization, the language fluency and the relationships with Greek people (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Moreover, some of them become skilled in occupations they learned in Greece and can start their own job after years of stay in the country.

Migrants generally work in degraded areas of the labour market where there is no sufficient offer from Greek workers. The male migrants work on the dangerous and heavy manual jobs and the female migrants work on the domestic - housekeeping

jobs (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004; Hatziprokopiou, 2005)<sup>60</sup>. They work in the constructions (Lafazani, 2004) - a sector that now, because of the crisis, presents an extremely decline- where in the recent years it seems that beyond Albanians, who consist the largest migrant group, Pakistanis and Bangladeshi also have large presence (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). It must be said that thousands of legal and 'illegal' migrants worked in the constructions for the 2004 Olympics in Athens and in other cities of Greece under extremely harsh working conditions, low wages and often without the necessary precautions. At least thirteen foreign workers lost their lives in the preparation of the Olympics and more than eighty were those who got injured (Clandestina.org).

Moreover, their participation in Union trades is very low making them more vulnerable to the employers' demands while very often the working day lasts longer than eight hours (Hatziprokopiou, 2005).

*"I worked with two friends for the renovation of the house of a guy from Athens in his village. 10 hours per day, 7 days a week for 20€ the day... half of the money went to food...he just let us sleep in an old small barn..."*

states Ahmed, a 35 years old asylum seeker from Pakistan. It is almost a rule that migrants change many kinds of jobs while living in Greece. They accept any offered job even if they are qualified for 'better' ones which they used to do when they were in their countries of origin (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). A conversation with a member of an NGO in Thessaloniki made clear that the vast majority of the migrants coming in Greece do not have the luxury to choose a job they like. There may be cases of people who at first deny a job offer because they think that it is socially lower than the one they used to have in their countries but soon or later they decide to accept what is offered to them and forget any employment standards.

In addition, an important source of jobs offer is that of the small enterprises owned by migrants who live in Greece many years. Three of my respondents were

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<sup>60</sup> Due to the fact that almost all of the migrants who agreed and came forward to talk to me were men the collected data has to do mainly with men.

working in shops of their fellow countrymen whose merchandises mainly address to other fellow countrymen (ethnic supermarkets etc.)<sup>61</sup>.

It's not few those who show notable mobility inside Greece because of finding jobs in the agricultural or the construction sector (Lafazani, 2004). Especially the seasonal agricultural work, which is very extensive in Greece, has great demand for migrants as there is very little interest from the Greek population (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004: 10). Going to Athens by train for the needs of my research, I came across a group of African migrants who were returning to Athens after agricultural work in central Greece and were talking, among other issues, about their next jobs somewhere in Southern Greece<sup>62</sup>.

Another case of migrants' seasonal mobility for working is that of several street vendors who, during the summer season, go to touristic places of Greece. They are not few, however, those who finally stay in those places for many years due to better job opportunities and better way of life. A Syrian man I talked to the telephone left Athens for a summer and he finally settled in Chania, Crete where he's been living for the last twelve years.

What in general was obvious in my conversations with most of the migrants was their feeling of being exploited by their employers both for the correspondence between their payment and the working hours and for not getting any social insurance coverage even if they have legal documents (Markoutsoglou et al, 2007). There are also many stories, according to the results of other researches in Greece, of irregular migrant workers who never got paid by some employers under the threat to call the police (Hatziprokopiou, 2005).

One of the biggest concerns for the migrants is the possibility to get arrested by the police. According to what they say, there were always some periods that police unleashed chasing against them but not in the intensity of the last couple of years. Those who face the danger of getting arrested by policemen in a daily level are the street vendors. Arresting street vendors and taking or destroying their merchandises is one of the main responsibilities of the municipal police. There is an everyday cat and mouse chase in the streets of Athens and Thessaloniki between municipal and other

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<sup>61</sup> More about this in chapter 6.

<sup>62</sup> Judging from their accent and the use of English I think that some of them were probably from Nigeria.

types of policemen and street vendors. Beyond the destruction of what they sell migrants report that policemen often beat them.

*“One day four policemen with big motorcycles stopped me while I was walking in a road in the centre of the city (Thessaloniki). They started swearing me and after seconds two of them started ripping my posters and the other two started hitting me....they didn’t asked to see my papers...”*

reports Rahim, a 28 years old Iraqi (and ex-street vendor) who lives in Thessaloniki the last 4 years.

My respondents’ answers on how economic crisis has affected their labour vary. As it seems, the degree of the impact of the economic crisis is related to their residence time in Greece and to their legal status. Extremely negative is the impact to those who live many years in Greece and have managed to gain a better way of life and a stable job. The effect of the crisis is similar to that of the Greek’s working class. Wages cuts and layoffs constitute the experiences of the legal migrants as a result of the economic crisis. Like many Greeks, when they become unemployed they ‘jump’ again to the informal labour market. However, it seems that those who own an enterprise which offer ethnic-traditional products have not been affected as much as those who own a regular enterprise.

From the other side, regarding those who do not live many years in Greece and have not still ensured a status that give them some ‘privileges’, it seems that economic crisis hasn’t affected them as much as the previous group. They have always worked in the informal labour sector and as some mentioned they are getting used to the new difficult situations. There are migrants who see some small temporal opportunities made due to the crisis. For example, some of the street vendors see their merchandises becoming more popular than they were before. A young Pakistani<sup>63</sup> in Thessaloniki states:

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<sup>63</sup> One of the people I had an informal discussion with.

*“Most of the Greeks now suffer...they do not have money to buy some basic staff from the supermarket so they buy them from me now...”*

and he continues:

*“I used to sell more fancy but useless things, now I sell more useful stuff like batteries, sponges and working tools...”*

showing that there are migrants that try to adjust themselves to the circumstances that crisis brought to the country.

Generally, during their stay in Greece, most of the migrants have experienced short or long periods of unemployment which make them more used in difficult situations as they develop solidarity and coenobitic life. The economic side of the crisis plaguing Greece may affect migrants but not in the level it has affected the Greeks. Migrants are affected mainly from what follows the economic crisis which in plain words is the rise of the racism and the violence against them<sup>64</sup>.

### 5.1.3 Migrants' mobility inside Greece

In the previous sector I mentioned the seasonal mobility of migrants inside Greece due to job opportunities they find. The conversations with the migrants brought out three more reasons which make them move inside Greece and not to stay in the most popular residence place which is mainly the city of Athens.

The first one, which is already presented in relevant literature, is that of the saturation of migrant communities in some cities (Schapendonk, 2009). This has as result the difficulty in the coverage of newcomers' needs. The existence of a multitudinous migrant community may be considered as a key pull factor for newcomers (Schapendonk, 2009: 19) but it is often helpful only for the first days of living in Greece. The conditions actually force some migrants to seek another place in Greece where they can have better job opportunities with less competition.

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<sup>64</sup> Presentation of this issue is given in the next sections.

A second reason which was mentioned by migrants living in Athens and having as short term plan to move to another city is that of the rise of the racist violence in the streets of Athens.

*“Every day I hear a story for a beaten migrant close to my neighborhood. I’m thinking to go to another city, a smaller one but you know...a city where people from my country live”* (Patrick, 29, Nigerian)

The feeling of danger for their lives has started leading people moving to other big cities of Greece where the percentage of the migrants over the total population is smaller.

The last reason refers to the seekers of political asylum and political refugees who are members of political parties/groups of their countries. Some of those people who remain members of those parties continue their struggle against the governments and the regimes of their countries while living in Greece. They go where the leadership of their party asks them. They open offices firstly in Athens and in Thessaloniki and then if their numbers get bigger they spread in several Greek cities where they can continue their political struggle mainly by selling their newspapers and books earning thus money for the needs of their cause.

We can argue that mobility inside a country is basic for the migrants’ lives (Schapendonk, 2009). New factors may arise which push or pull people to other places regardless the years someone has lived in a place.

## **5.2 Relations and dangers in Modern Greek society**

### **5.2.1 Relationships inside Greek society**

The development of social relationships is highlighted as one of the most important factors for surviving in the Greek social reality.

*“You can’t do anything alone. You need friends”* (Peter, 41, Nigerian)

It seems that again the length of time of living in Greece is a factor which plays an important role on the relations that migrants develop. Conversations with migrants showed that there is a widening of the relationships they develop in conjunction with the years they have spent in Greece and their job experiences. This does not happen to the same extent with the women migrants. The only woman respondent of my sample spends time only with her fellow countrymen and very rarely with some Greek women who offer help to migrants. That's what men migrants also reported when I asked them for the women migrants from their countries.

At the beginning of their residence in Greece migrants keep relationships only with people from their country. They come in contact with them through the communities and groups that former migrants have established in the big Greek cities. Through their jobs and through their organizations they meet migrants from other countries and Greeks who are activated in the struggle for the human and social rights of migrants. With regard to the latter, these are mainly students and workers who belong to anarchist or leftish groups which try to provide support to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and to conduct anti-racist activities (Pavlou, 2007; Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Migrants who live in Athens claim that nowadays the only public places they feel safe are those where many people of the above groups hang out.

In general, apart from some of their Greek neighbors who treat them well, migrants do not establish peculiar relationships with many Greeks because of their lack of time. They use their time to find better opportunities in Greece and to get more information about the countries of the EU. As they say, it takes a lot of time to trust a Greek as they feel insecure against them.

*“You never know who is the guy who approaches you...He can be a cop or someone who wants to exploit you...” (Karim, 34, Iranian)*

This statement shows that migrants try to avoid any contact with the policemen. They try to avoid them even when it is only for a routine relevant to their papers. In that case they ask the help of a lawyer or of an NGO member.



Those that migrants keep relationships with, act to a large or smaller extent, as their networks in Greece. Thus, their role will be presented in detail in the next chapter of the thesis. What follows in this chapter has to do with the daily dangers that migrants face inside the Greek society.

### 5.2.2 The role of the Media

The media play a catalytic role on the way Greek people see migrants. As I mentioned earlier<sup>65</sup> the vast majority of the Greeks get information for the migrants only from the media and mainly from television. In recent years, and especially after the economic crisis started to become particularly noticeable in the Greek households, the time of the news programmes devoted from both the public and private channels to the presentation of issues related to migrants in Greece grows more and more.

The worry of the journalists is evident every time it seems that an immigrant or a refugee flow is about to enter Europe. This was extremely obvious during the writing of the current thesis when the Greek channels, through the words of their newscasters, were emphasizing the need for even more better border guarding because of the expected refugee ‘waves’ from Syria<sup>66</sup> heading to Europe. Thereby, they fuel the fear of the Greek TV viewers for the arrival of more poor and unwanted strangers (Schapendonk, 2011) which will worsen even more the problems that country faces. It is obvious that the media rhetoric equates all those who enter Greece by using the term ‘illegal migrants’ even if they are people who left from their countries to save their lives. Even populations like the Kurds, who used to have a relative ‘good treatment’ from the media<sup>67</sup>, are not seen anymore as refugees but as ‘illegal migrants’ (Papadopoulou, 2003).

The term ‘illegal migrants’, which is adopted by most of the newspapers and the TV channels, is used on a daily basis almost always to accompany the announcement or even the description of a crime. It is typical when there is a news story on a crime committed by a foreigner to highlight the nationality of the

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<sup>65</sup> In section 1.2 ‘societal relevance’.

<sup>66</sup> During the writing of the Thesis there was an ongoing bloody civil war in Syria as a continuation of the public demonstrations that started on 15 March 2011 as a part of the wider *Arab Spring*. Many thousands of Syrians had already moved to Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian\\_Civil\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Civil_War)).

<sup>67</sup> Perhaps because they were seen as Turkey’s enemies.

perpetrator while for the cases of Greek's crimes are given designations as 'psychopath' in the case of brutal crimes or that (s)he 'was in need' when their crimes are not so serious e.g. when it refers to a robbery of a small amount of money. Always labeled as "illegal migrants" and not migrants or refugees - asylum seekers (O'Brien, 2003) TV and the newspapers reinforce the views which regard that the increase in criminality is due to the foreigners. What is shown from the mass media is that migrants have come to Greece to rape, to steal and to kill and that Greeks are now living in fear in their own country (O'Brien, 2003). They persistently focus on the districts where migrants live and stigmatize them as places of high crime and dangerous for the public health (Arapoglou et al., 2009).

Thus, what in fact media do is to create fear against the 'different' and generalize opinions for all migrants in Greece by developing the stereotype of the "dangerous migrant" (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). One particular crime used by the media to strengthen that stereotype was that of the murder of a 44 years old Greek man on May 2011 in the center of Athens by two migrants from Afghanistan while trying to rob him<sup>68</sup>. TV channels dedicated a lot of time in the description of the act and gave a lot of time to opponents of migrants to express their opinions enhancing this way the moral legitimacy of pogroms followed against migrants in central Athens by supporters of the Golden Dawn. On the contrary, the case of two Pakistanis who lost their lives on April 2012 while trying to rescue an elderly couple who trapped on the tracks of trains in Krioneri, Attica (near Athens) was merely referred from the media without receiving the same attention and persistence.

The hostile treatment of the migrants by the media is not something new. But, especially now, under the economic crisis, this treatment is even harder using them as scapegoats for part of the suffering plaguing the Greek society. They spread the view - indirectly most of the times - that migrants take the Greeks' jobs while those jobs are not in demand by Greeks, a lot of whom now prefer to migrate themselves in rich countries of the EU to find better jobs with better salaries. A lot of time is given to the presentation of the views of conservative politicians and other public persons while the propaganda of extreme right-wing politicians and organizations has reached very

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<sup>68</sup> This crime was really tragic as the murdered man was preparing to take his wife to the hospital to give birth to their child. After the murder, his family brought a charge against the Golden Dawn about "exploiting" and "desecrating the memory of the dead". The family accused the neo-Nazi organization of Golden Dawn that took advantage of the event to increase its publicity and to unleash pogroms against migrants in central Athens (tvxs.gr. 2011-05-16) with the tolerance of the Greek society.

high levels, mainly through TV shows of both nationwide and regional channels. Moreover, it has become almost the rule that a public person that supports the rights of migrants is not allowed to state his/her views clearly and completely by facing a degrading treatment from the side of the journalists.

The rise of the racist violence and the increase in the racist actions of the members of Golden Dawn have led the media to show, to a small extent, some crimes committed against migrants. My opinion though is that they do this only because of the shrinkage of the political parties whose interests have been serving the last decades (since their existence) and the rise of new political powers.

Closing this section I would also like to add two more ascertained policies-practices of the mass media related to the migrants. The first is that they almost never present the working accidents that have as result the injuries and deaths of migrants. Full of pride they were presenting the attainments on the construction sector for the Olympic games of 2004 but never mentioning the services rendered by migrants in constructing all kind of the needed facilities. The second one has to do with the ignorance they choose to show towards the movements and acts of solidarity to migrants from Greek groups and organizations not showing this way another view on the issue of migrants in Greece.

### 5.2.3 Greek society towards migrants

An important factor for the quality of migrants' lives in Greece is their treatment by the local societies. A number of questions prepared for the interviews and more questions emerged during those interviews were related to the ways Greeks see foreigners. The question "*How do the locals treat you?*" received many different answers abstaining from the direct answers of just 'good' or 'bad' and their gradations. Almost all of them stated that they have met good Greeks who treat them well. However, some of those who live many years in Greece declare that there is an increase in the number of people who do not behave them well and talk to them with irony.

*“I feel the support of many Greeks....they help me a lot...but there are a lot of people now, even in my neighborhood where I live many years who started to be cold to me”* (Peter, 41, Nigerian in Thessaloniki)

I believe that the way Greeks treat migrants is a huge issue which cannot be explained only by using economic criteria. The Greek society has some characteristics associated with the complex history of the country, recent or older, which has led to the construction of a Greek national identity based among others on blockades (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). It is a society where it is obvious the political and social construction of the ‘Other’. The belief of the concept of ‘‘Greekness’’ which is based on genealogical, linguistic and religious criteria (Hatziprokopiou, 2005) seems that is gaining ground separating people who live in Greece in Greeks and foreigners even if some of the latter were born and raised in the country. I believe that especially religious criteria play a crucial role for the Greeks on dividing people into ‘us’ and ‘them’ because of the power of the Church as an institute and its impact to the beliefs of many Greeks. Regarding migrants, despite the cases of parishes that help them in a humanitarian level (mainly by offering them food rations) there are some highly influential metropolitan bishops (e.g. the metropolitan bishops of Thessaloniki and Piraeus) who often make speeches against them after the end of their liturgy.

The existence of racist perceptions has deep roots in the Greek society. There have always been racist stereotypes against ‘‘traditional enemies’’ like Turks and the other neighbors (Hatziprokopiou, 2005) which gave place or reinforced new, more racist ones connected to the major migrant groups like the Albanians at first and later to groups like the Pakistani, the ‘Blacks’ etc. The increase in the numbers of migrants with different external characteristics who come from countries with different culture and the transformation of many Greek neighborhoods in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki affects even more negatively Greeks’ stand toward the foreigners. Foreigners are considered as people who distort the sense of living in someone’s home and create anxiety when there are in big numbers near him/her (van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007). A big part of the Greek society more and more regards migrants as parasites who enter society’s gulfs aiming to erode it. Migrant is considered just as a *xenos* (van Houtom & Pijpers, 2007) and often as an enemy who invades the locals’

society. Thus, nowadays, the growing numbers of migrants have led the Greek society to an increased need to protect what is imagined as its own cultural legacy (van Houtom& van Naerssen, 2002).

Economic crisis has led to an even bigger increase in the negative opinions of Greeks against migrants. High unemployment rates, increasing poverty as well as the rise in criminality are directly connected to the massive influx of aliens into the Greek society (Hatziprokopiou, 2005; Carter & Merrill, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2012) and lead now to an open expression of racist feelings. The rise in criminality, which of course is due to the degradation of the lower and middle classes of Greek society (migrants included), is attributed mainly to migrants and the increase in their numbers. Migrants are accused for the worrying changes in social relationships (Papastergiadis, 2000: 51) while opinions that belong to nationalist groups-political parties such as that migrants abuse the limited welfare resources of the nation-state gain more and more ground (Papastergiadis, 2000: 51). I believe that Greeks recognize that they are a people who ‘traditionally’ migrate but they consider that as migrants they always help in the development of the host countries and that they were never ‘illegal’, while on the contrary their country suffers from the irregular migrants. Moreover, large proportion of the Greek population is descendant of the refugees who were displaced from their places of birth which are in the neighboring countries (mainly in modern Turkey). It seems that this works more as creator of hatred toward the peoples of these countries rather than compassion for today's refugees seeking asylum in Greece.

Migrants now feel more the aversion and even the hate of bigger parts of the Greek population. Some of my interviewees stressed that they do not feel so comfortable and safe walking in the streets because of the critical looks and comments they receive.

*“I’ve always felt people staring at me because of my color. I got used to it, but now I’m a little more careful”*

(Daniel, 43, Nigerian in Thessaloniki)

*“Greeks are not so tolerant anymore. Some years ago the situation was different. Here, in Thessaloniki, they used to help us more,*

*especially when they knew that we are refugees. Besides, many Greeks in Thessaloniki are grandchildren of refugees”*

(Mehmet, 43, Kurd in Thessaloniki)

It seems that negative stereotypes against minority groups not only do not disappear in this EU country but they can be reinforced and strengthened (Pavlou, 2007) while nowadays racist violence is ‘legitimized’ by an important part of the Greek population. The uncontrolled rhetoric against the migrants has become extremely strong and migrants are seen as a big part and cause of the problems in the labour market and in the increase of violence (Carter & Merrill, 2007).

Extremely interesting were the conversations with asylum seekers who live in Greece many years and have formed opinions on the Greek society through their contacts with Greeks in the workplaces, either working for them or with them. So, according to their words and with regard to the Greeks who argue against the existence of migrants in Greece, the deterioration of their quality of life because of the economic crisis was the reason that sparked their racist feelings and made them to see foreigners as unwanted. Until that time they used to exploit and treat them as slaves. Moreover, a growing number of Greeks turns to the extreme right because of the corruption of the dominant political scene of the ‘democratic’ period of Greece<sup>69</sup>. The combination of these factors has as result the acceptance of extreme views on the treatment of migrants and the tolerance to the violence against migrants by neo-Nazi groups by a large part of the Greek population.

#### 5.2.4 Rise of the racist violence: Neo-Nazi and police violence against migrants

One of the main topics of discussion with the migrants I met was the way their lives are affected by racism. Migrants themselves claim that one of the most obvious results of the economic crisis in Greece is that of the elevation of the racist violence. There have always been cases of racist violence in Greece but not to the extent occurring

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<sup>69</sup>In Greece, in the public discussions made for the country’s course on political, economic and social level it is mentioned always as a kind of starting point the year 1974 when ‘democracy’ was restored after the fall of the 7 year military dictatorship (1967-1974).

nowadays and not with the level of ‘legalization’ of those actions from the side of a big part of the Greek population. Just in the city of Athens and only in the first three months of 2012 there have been more than 500 racist attacks (antiuk.wordpress.com) while now undisguised racist assaults are reported on a daily basis in every corner of Greece.

The main exponent of racist ideas and also instigator of the racist attacks is the ‘political party’ of Golden Dawn (in Greek: Χρυσή Αυγή – Hrisi Avgi) which plays an increasingly important role in the political and social life of Greece. It is an extreme right-wing political organization registered as a political party in 1993<sup>70</sup>. It can be surely characterized as a neo-Nazi and fascist group although its members deny these characterizations and prefer to use the label of nationalists. For many years it had been in a relative obscurity and it was known mainly for the assaults of its members on migrants, anarchists and leftists. Over the past years Golden Dawn formed groups of ‘indignant citizens’ to patrol the streets at night and ‘clear’ them from the migrants (Human Rights Watch, 2012)<sup>71</sup>. Its electoral strength started to increase in 2010 when Golden Dawn’s leader managed to win a seat on the city council of Athens. The existence of many wretched migrants living in abandoned buildings in neighborhoods of the central Athens like Agios Panteleimonas and Attiki and the general degradation of those districts as well as the failure of the governments to deal with the over accumulation of migrants in those areas (The Stream, 04/05/12) led thousands of residents to vote this organization. The general crisis and the corruption of the political system gave more power to the Golden Dawn which is presented as a patriotic organization fighting for the wealth of the Greek people and for the punishment of those who brought Greece in its bad economic condition. Many Greek voters who used to support other right and extreme right parties which share some of the same ideas with those of Golden Dawn got disappointed by them because of their participation in the total corruption and started supporting Golden Dawn. Therefore, the overall dissatisfaction of a big part of the Greek population combined

<sup>70</sup> Most of the following data comes from both the English and Greek Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Dawn\\_%28Greece%29&http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%A7%CF%81%CF%85%CF%83%CE%AE\\_%CE%91%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%AE\\_%28%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C\\_%CE%BA%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Dawn_%28Greece%29&http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%A7%CF%81%CF%85%CF%83%CE%AE_%CE%91%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%AE_%28%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C_%CE%BA%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%29) )

<sup>71</sup> There are no proofs that Golden Dawn formed and mobilized those groups BUT its members always were taking part in demonstrations against migrants in those districts of central Athens while there are people of that groups who ran as candidates on the Golden Dawn roster in the May and June 2012 elections. Golden Dawn in general denies any involvement in the racist attacks.

with various charities of the Golden Dawn towards (only) Greek people finally brought the party into Greek parliament after the elections of May and June 2012. Despite that Golden Dawn propagandizes extreme positions such as sterilization and euthanasia of mentally ill people, reinstatement of the death penalty and ‘retaking’ of Istanbul and of Asia Minor, its influence is not reduced. Golden Dawn takes advantage of sports and mainly football fanaticism approaching young hooligans of several Greek teams as well as other young people who are pushed to the margins (Pavlou, 2007) creating patrolling forces in the streets of Athens to attack foreigners, anarchists and leftists. It would be an omission if I didn’t mention the strong-intense presence of its members on the internet with the creation of more and more blogs and sites aiming at the ‘proselytism’ of young people.

Golden Dawn takes advantage of some crimes committed by foreigners and mounts pogroms injuring or killing migrants. Pivotal moment for the ‘legalization’ of Golden Dawn’s actions from a significant part of the Greek society was the murder of a 44 years old man in central Athens on May 2011 by Afghanis migrants who tried to rob him (Wikipedia.org; Human Rights Watch, 2012). Golden Dawn mounted a pogrom against migrants in central Athens while the police’s interference to stop it was really slow. A new practice of the ‘party’ was the checking of migrant vendors’ documents at various religious festivities throughout Greece by members of the party (some of them are also members of the Greek parliament) and the destruction of the merchandizes of the migrants.

During the period of the research, due to the increase in the racist assaults by members of the Golden Dawn (result of the 440.000 votes of the elections on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May) the situation in the streets, mainly of central Athens, was very ‘strange’ and anybody could feel that intense fear was spread.

The strengthening of Golden Dawn has negatively affected to a large extent the quality of life of the migrants, especially in central Athens. It is telling that many parks have been rid from migrants who used to hang out there and that now more and more migrants prefer to go to the Exarchia Square. Exarchia Square in the central area of Athens is marked as the epicenter of the anarchist and radical leftist political movements in Greece (O’Brien, 2003). When I called by telephone a Nigerian migrant in Athens to set up a meeting he suggested to meet in the Exarchia Square telling me *“let’s meet there just to be sure for our safety”*. According to the migrants I



interviewed in Athens the assaults against them are more and more frequent and brutal. *“They beat people with iron bars, bats and they carry daggers”* reports Masood, the 33 years old asylum seeker from Pakistan whose friend was chased and beaten by members of the Golden Dawn a month before our meeting. Another migrant from Pakistan, Ahmed, states that his life has changed a lot the last 6 months and that he has started to think to leave Athens and to go to another city or even to another country, despite he has spent more than six years in the city. He reports:

*“When we take the train in Athens we stand in a corner watching all the time whether a guy with shaved head<sup>72</sup> stares at us...They wait at the train stations and when they see migrants they enter the wagons and beat them”<sup>73</sup>.*

and he continues:

*“They even attack migrants’ houses. They break the doors, smash everything inside and beat people...”*

An interesting 'prediction' or better a fear on the phenomenon of the increase in the racist violence emerged from the conversation with the president of the Sudanese community of Northern Greece. According to him, the creation of 'war' situations in central Athens and in other places of Greece is very possible because there are populations coming from several countries of Africa that do not tolerate violence against their own people and they may use violence as reaction. Therefore, if racist violence continues and gets spread there is a serious possibility that the neighborhoods of the Greek cities will become places of constant conflicts.

One would wonder what is the state's response to the increasing xenophobic violence. I believe that the state's toleration towards the acts of groups like Golden Dawn and the racist attacks of the past has facilitated that increase. The Greek state has not introduced a specific official plan for tackling the racist violence (Pavlou, 2007)<sup>74</sup> and just condemns the racist incidents that get known to the public. The only

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<sup>72</sup> He means a member of Golden Dawn. Like Nazis, most members of Golden Dawn shave their heads.

<sup>73</sup> Many details and stories about the racist attacks in Greece can be found in: Human Rights Watch (2012) *Hate on the streets. Xenophobic violence in Greece.* (<http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/greece0712ForUpload.pdf>)

<sup>74</sup> The reference is from 2007 but nothing has changed in that.

disclosed data for the racist attacks come from the Greek Ombudsman as well as from other organizations for the migrants' rights which have no substantial relations with the state.

The responsible body to deal with the street violence is police. The training of the Greek policemen includes courses on the human rights, racism and xenophobia but as it seems it's very difficult to influence them (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Police is an institutional body always characterized by conservative and right-wing views. A research published in 2006<sup>75</sup> showed that violence against migrants is not considered as a serious problem by policemen and that they also believe that usually racist crimes are acts of self-defense against the criminal foreigners (Pavlou, 2007: 14). Moreover, some polls after the two elections of 2012 showed that at least one out of two policemen of the riot police is a voter of the Golden Dawn (tovima.gr). There are many allegations of collusion between the police and Golden Dawn members (Human Rights Watch, 2012: 40) that can be proved by some videos on the internet which show Golden Dawners and men from the riot police fighting together against groups of Anarchists and Leftists.

There are many cases of migrants' abuse by policemen as well as of cases where police delays to interfere and stop a racist attack (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Internet increasingly gets 'enriched' with videos proving police violence against migrants. There are even videos leaking on the internet 'shot' by policemen involved in incidents of migrants mistreatments.

All migrants of my sample highlighted police's violence against them. This violence is not occurred only in the police departments but also in the streets of the cities where there are many cases of policemen beating migrants undisguised and very often without any clear reasons. Several migrants told me that they have faced offensive treatment by individual policemen.

*“They stop us in the streets and ask us for documents. Even if we show them our papers they continue talking us in an aggressive way and telling us not to show up again. Sometimes they kick and punch us...”* (Karim, 34, Iranian)

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<sup>75</sup> Antonopoulos G.A., Greece: policing racist violence in the 'fenceless vineyard', Race & Class, Institute of Race Relations Vol. 48(2): 92-100, <http://rac.sagepub.com>, 2006

This situation gets even worse when migrants have to face more corrupted policemen who take advantage from their insecure status and take money from them. There have been several charges by migrants and refugees for such behaviors but the investigative procedures from the side of the responsible authorities do not proceed (ksm.gr<sup>76</sup> 27/07/12). An Afghani asylum seeker informed me that some policemen in Athens make assaults on the working places and the houses of Afghani migrants demanding money and beating them. He claims that their assaults are totally racists because they do not always care about documents and do not arrest them for illegal actions. They just threat and maul them.

*“Now when something happens we are afraid to call the police...they may arrest and beat us” (Azim, 35, Afghani)*

This statement shows that migrants are afraid to appeal to police's help during or after a racist assault increasing that way their feeling of insecurity. When migrants face racist attacks they prefer to call NGO members or anyone they think that can be helpful. Many migrants, especially in Athens, equate policemen's treatment to that of the members of Golden Dawn. They state that when they see policemen in the streets or people who look like Golden Dawners they change their course and start to run. For some of them their life in Greece has started to look just like their life in their countries of origin.

Migrants try to get organized against the racist attacks but as they claim they cannot achieve many things. They approach and get approached by many Greek organizations and groups who try to fight fascism and racism inside Greek society. Some migrant organizations participate in anti-racist actions but the problem is very deep and these actions are not enough.

*“I know that a lot of Greek people are really good and do not approve racist ideas and attacks. The problem is that they do not do anything about this....We feel isolated...” (Peter, 41, Nigerian)*

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<sup>76</sup> Sunday's school of migrants (in Greek: Κυριακάτικο σχολείο μεταναστών- Kiriakatiko scholeio metanaston). It is an initiative of migrants and Greeks for free learning of the Greek language and for the support of the migrants' rights.

### 5.2.5 Opinions for the ‘Greek’ experience. What are the migrants’ desires?

A fundamental expectation from the beginning of the research was the extraction of some conclusions about migrants’ desires as those are affected by their experiences in Greece. These are some words of my ten interviewees:

*“We want you to treat us like human beings. We are not animals!!!”*  
(Daniel, 43, Nigerian in Thessaloniki)

*“I wish to stay here, but if I lose my job I will go to some relatives in Switzerland”* (Mehmet, Kurd in Thessaloniki)

*“I have a wife and a kid back in Nigeria. I’m trying to bring them here. All I want is to get the papers and to go to Europe. It’s not good here”* (Peter, 41, Nigerian in Thessaloniki)

*“I like the place my friend...I see though that it is very difficult for me here, so, I want to leave. I want to go to a place with jobs...”*  
(Rahim, 28, Iraqi in Thessaloniki)

*“My life is not better here than back in Afghanistan... I want another life”* (Azim, 35, Afghani in Thessaloniki)

*“I am stuck here...I want to get papers and go to England”* (Nadifa, 21, Somali in Thessaloniki)

*“If I had the refugee status I would probably stay here. I can’t wait anymore. I’m desperate. I want to leave...”* (Ahmed, 35, Pakistani in Athens)

*“I do not imagine my future here. I just want papers and then I will leave”* (Patrick, 29, Nigerian in Athens)

*“If they cannot keep us here they should let us leave the country...There is no dignity here...”* (Karim, 34, Iranian in Athens)

*“Here, I am afraid to get out of my home at night. It is dangerous. I want to live...”* (Masood, 33, Pakistani in Athens)

It is obvious that one of the main concerns of the migrants is that of the documents granting. It was the most highlighted issue in every conversation I had. The people I interviewed had temporal documents but they experience huge delays in the final decisions on their status. Other people who participated in informal conversations and had no documents have as a main concern either the documents granting or to find ways to leave Greece. Most migrants claim that if they had the refugee status they would go to another country of the EU. They compare the situation in Greece to the situations in other European countries as they learn about them from relatives and friends who live there. What many of them hear from their networks in countries like Sweden, Great Britain, Holland and Germany is that the life there is better with more possibilities to get legal permit to stay and with well paid jobs. Even if they have been living in Greece for many years and mobility is a distant memory the intention of leaving still exists (Icduygu in Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008:3). Migrants and refugees working legally are willing to leave Greece in case they lose their jobs despite that they have started a new life in a Greek city.

The people who hadn't have a particular destination country when they left their countries of origin, after the Greek experience they try to find information for the lives in other countries of the EU especially with regard to the bureaucratic procedures needed to take the legal papers and to the job opportunities in the legal labour sector. A desire that has to do with their present life in Greece is that of the decrease and elimination of the racist attacks. The increase in the xenophobic violence is a very influential factor on the decisions of migrants, especially of those who live in central Athens. Together with police's violence and arbitrariness it functions as an additional motivation to decide leaving Greece or going to another Greek city.

Those who find it very difficult to leave Greece and have been familiar with the idea that they will live many years in Greece set as a priority the improvement of their lives in the country through learning the Greek language and the collective effort in the field of labour.

It seems that crisis in Greece has started affecting the decisions and desires of the migrants. For six of the ten interviewees Greece has remained just a stopover. They may live many years in Greece but they want to go to the Western and Northern Europe where they believe that life is much better. *"I do not think that there is a worse country for migrants in Europe"* says Peter after his 9 year experience in Greece. Generally, what can be understood by talking with these people is that most of them wish to leave Greece. Even those who did not have any specific destination when they started moving and they live in an environment with many fellow countrymen see more and more positively the possibility of leaving Greece. During the interviews, however, they were not 'opened' in describing the ways of leaving Greece. Each one is practically alone in this act. No one is aware when someone leaves the country<sup>77</sup>.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the experiences of migrants while living in Greece. It presented the issues migrants face in their everyday life from their own perspective. The first part of the chapter consisting of the description of migrants' quality of life with regard to accommodation and working presented the opportunities and the exploitations of the migrants often in relation to the duration of their stay in Greece. It has argued that migrants' lives become better as the years pass by. They were presented the poor living conditions of migrants in the Greek cities and the exploitations migrants face when renting rooms and apartments. Moreover, there were presented the types and conditions of work of migrants who, as it is proved, work in dangerous jobs non popular among the Greeks, under of inhuman conditions and with low wages. Economic crisis creates new situations and it seems that it directly affects in a negative way those who live many years in Greece and work legally.

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<sup>77</sup> This was reported by the president of the Sudanese community of Northern Greece and by a refugee who helped me find people for my research.

The second part of the chapter dealt with the daily dangers migrants face in today's Greek society as a result of the economic and social crisis. It was highlighted the role of the mass media on the Greeks' opinions towards migrants and argued that they promote the stereotype of the migrant-criminal cultivating sentiments of alarm by selecting and publishing specific information focusing always on the nationality of the offender (Hatziprokopiou, 2005).

Combined also to the role of the Media, another highlighted issue was that of the rise of xenophobic feelings and ideas in the Greek society connected both with 'ideals' upon which the construction of the Greek identity is based and (mainly) with the phenomenon of economic crisis. Many Greeks have started feeling that their identity and their country is under migrants' threat and their socially constructed feelings of belonging to a certain place regenerate having as victims the people who come in the country looking for a better and safer life. It is obvious that since the economic crisis broke out and more and more Greeks started being pushed to the margins, there is an enormous increase in xenophobic feelings (Human Rights Watch, 2012). This rise of racism is reinforced by the moral legitimacy of racist crimes led by members of the neo-Nazi organization of Golden Dawn. Emphasis was given on the presentation of the particular organization and the increase of its power as through the fieldwork was proved that it has affected to an important extent migrants' lives, mainly in central Athens. The activities of many policemen are similar to those of the members of the Golden Dawn. Therefore, migrants' lives are characterized by a constant insecurity (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). They live with the fear of being arrested even if they hold certain documents that allow their stay in Greece.

Through their experiences in Greece their desires for their present and future are formed. Migrants' desires have to do mainly with the granting of papers for legal and permanent stay in Greece giving them the right of exercising a legal work and also of a legal entrance to another country of the EU and the improvement of their life in relation to their treatment by the Greek society and state.

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## Chapter 6: Migrant networks in Greece. Their roles and dynamics

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### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter there are frequent references to the roles of the migrant networks in securing of significant needs which determine the migrants' quality of life. During the discussions with migrants became clear how important is the role of their networks in Greece for the quality of their lives. This chapter aims to present in more detail the composition of these networks as well as to bring out their role according to the sayings of the migrants themselves. Initially, section 6.2 determines the composition of the migrant networks in Greece. In section 6.3 I refer to the several roles these networks play in the migrants' lives as migrants reported to me while section 6.4 presents the change of the importance of some networks and the possible creation of others. Section 6.5 is the conclusion of the chapter giving an overview of the main findings.

### 6.2 Who constitute migrants' social networks in Greece?

As I wrote in section 1.3, according to Douglas Massey and his associates<sup>78</sup>, migrant networks are '*sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin*' (in Gelderblom & Adams, 2006). Derik Gelderblom and Whynie Adams distinguish migrants' social networks into those in the area of origin, those in the destination area and those connecting the two areas (2006:228).

With regard to Greece's case we can argue that networks created in the country could belong both to the kind of the networks in a destination area and to the

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<sup>78</sup> Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellgrino & Taylor, 1994:728



kind of the networks that connect the areas of origin and destination. That is because for some migrants Greece is or even ends to be the destination country and for others (the most) Greece is a country of intermediate station. For the latter, the maintenance of ties with the networks in Greece is not as important as the maintenance of ties with the networks in the countries of the NW Europe (Papadopoulou, 2002).

A migrant network in Greece emerges when the first migrant from the region of origin establishes himself or herself in the country (Gelderblom & Adams, 2006:230). The three main kinds of networks as they are determined by the personal relations of migrants are those of their relatives, friends and fellow countrymen (Boyd, 1989; Herman, 2006). The first two types are composed of relatives and friends who already live in Greece. The newcomers desire either to find them and live with them or to stay temporarily with them until they continue their journey to the West. Very often newcomers meet people they know from their countries of origin in certain squares of Athens (No refuge<sup>79</sup>). It is essential to emphasize that the networks belonging to the third type can play important role not only before migration begins but also during the movement of the migrant and after the entry in Greece. Migrant communities-organizations belong to this kind of networks. Migrants often get informed for them during their stay in the detention camps or when they come in contact with NGOs either in the detention camps or after they reach Athens or Thessaloniki.

It must be said that initial networks may consist of individuals from the same country of origin that the migrant never knew personally. For example, Daniel, a Nigerian asylum seeker who lives in Thessaloniki came in telephone contact with a fellow country man who was living in the city when he was still in Nigeria without knowing him personally. A Daniel's friend knew this man and brought them in contact. Daniel believes that this man, who later went to England, did not hesitate to help him due to their common background. *"It is something that I also do. I help people from my country"* he adds, making clear that solidarity by nationality is very fundamental in the creation of the networks.

Another type of network that regards the politicized asylum seekers is the one which is created by the members of a political party-organization of their country (Papadopoulou, 2002). In Athens and Thessaloniki, as in some other major cities in

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<sup>79</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTs4q9XgNd0&feature=relmfu>

Greece refugees and asylum seekers from various countries such as Turkey, Palestine and Iraq have opened offices and continue their struggle addressing to the Greek people. These organizations constitute the main network for their comrades who come to Greece at all stages of their movement and offer them a coenobitic way of life while they continue to contribute to the cause of their political party (Papadopoulou, 2002).

The entrapment of migrants in Greece results the emergence of new social networks with both migrants and locals. As regards the latter, these are people that migrants meet either in the workplaces and with whom they maintain contacts mainly at professional level or in places where practical solidarity to the migrants performs. In addition, NGOs and NGOs' members who deal with migrants' issues can be considered as a type of network for the migrants during their stay in Greece.

Finally, except of the networks derived from relative, friendly and solidarity relationships there are networks which are characterized by economic relationships and have to do with the passing of migrants from Turkey to Greece. These networks consist of the smugglers with whom come in contact either the migrants who want to enter Greece or their relatives and friends who already live in the country.

### 6.3 The roles of the networks

Migrants highlight the existence of networks in Greece as one of the most important facilitators for their lives. Networks are very important right from the beginning of moving from the country of origin. Especially nowadays, in the midst of this unprecedented crisis plaguing Greece, migrants' networks emerge as key factors for the quality of their lives. For example, in chapter 5 we have seen the dangers that migrants face because of the increase in the racist violence. The existence of networks, however, offers a sense of safety to the migrants.

According to Jeff Crisp<sup>80</sup> networks play four main roles in the lives of the migrants (Crisp, 1999) all of which were mentioned or described by those I interviewed. These roles are the following:

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<sup>80</sup>Dr Jeff Crisp is Head of Policy Development and Evaluation at UNHCR's headquarters in Geneva.

- Providing of information
- Providing of financial help
- Providing the organizational infrastructure

and

- Providing of subsistence and support

Networks in the host country (Greece) act as a very important *source of information* to the potential migrants and asylum seekers (Massey et al, 1987; Crisp, 1999; Papadopoulou, 2002; Gelderblom & Adams, 2006). This information concerns both the routes that should be followed by the prospective migrants in order to enter Greece and details on the ways of travel and the stopovers as well as on the economic, social and political situation existing in Greece. Migrants with no networks experience longer and more difficult journeys and smaller rates of success (Herman, 2006). A key type of the given information is that concerning bureaucratic issues. Migrants highlight the need for right information regarding their trajectories and anything that can facilitate their journey as well as the conditions of life in the receiving country. More reliable as to the dissemination of information are considered the networks of friends and relatives (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002). Those migrants who enter Greece without having there a friend, a relative or a person from their region of origin have to rely for information on the smugglers and rumors risking thereby to be confronted with unexpected situations (e.g. the conditions in the detention centres and the unemployment) or even to end up in another region or country<sup>81</sup>!

As some interviewees mentioned their own role is important in discouraging migrants to come or pass through Greece. Their bad experiences in the country have an impact on the potential migrants by actually suggesting them to find other routes to Europe (Gelderblom & Adams, 2006).

A second role of the networks in Greece is that of the provision of *financial resources* (Crisp, 2006:6; Gelderblom & Adams, 2006) to those who want to leave their country and reach Greece. Many migrants try to save money to send back to their country so another member the family will follow them. This, however, does not apply to all migrants. Those who send money to their relatives in order to join them in

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<sup>81</sup> A case of an asylum seeker from Somalia who thought he landed to Italy while smugglers left him on the island of Chios!

Greece are those who live many years in the country and to some extent have rebuilt their lives. One example of such case is the refugee of my sample who provided financial support to his younger brother to travel to Greece. Also, some of those who are stuck in Greece send money to their relatives either to find them in Greece or to migrate to the richer countries of Europe taking other routes. From the other side, those keeping as main goal to leave Greece they save the money they earn in order to continue their journey.

*“It’s impossible to send money at home. It barely is enough for me. I will send when I find a good job in England or in Sweden“*

says Masood (33, Pakistani) showing that migrants’ plans for themselves and their families change constantly and depend to a large extent on the obstacles encountered on their way.

The third main role of the networks, which however was mentioned only by few respondents, is that of the *organizational infrastructure*. As migrants move from place to place they come in contact with certain illegal circuits of smugglers. Therefore, through their experiences and acquaintances made during their journey they mediate in the arrangements with smugglers (Crisp, 2006). The contact is done by phone. According to some informal conversations with migrants, for some of them the contacts with smugglers do not stop after they pass to Greece. On the contrary, they come again in contact with them when member(s) of their family or friend(s) are about to enter Greece in an irregular way. The contacts with smugglers are therefore of a great significance as the latter, and as it has been said before,<sup>82</sup> play a very crucial role in the migrants’ movement and in passing from Turkey to Greece but also in passing from Greece to the Western and Northern Europe (Papadopoulou, 2002).

Finally, the fourth important role of the networks is that of the *subsistence and support*. I must say that this was the most highlighted role by my respondents. They all reported that having and developing a network is the main factor that can lead to the facilitation of a migrant’s life in Greece. This role is played not only by relatives and friends of the same origin but also by migrants from other countries and Greeks. Finding of accommodation and access to the labour market are easier due to the help

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<sup>82</sup> In section 4.2

of the personal networks (Crisp, 2006; Papadopoulou, 2003; Hu & Salazar, 2005). With regard to working, almost all of the respondents declared that they found their first jobs through relatives, friends and migrant communities. Moreover, many migrants find either legal or illegal jobs in the ethnic enterprises of their fellow countrymen. The street vendors I talked with in Thessaloniki reported that they actually work as unofficial groups of people from the same region who sell the same products in the streets and that every year more and more people work with them. Networks are extremely helpful during the period of unemployment of a migrant as they cover his/her basic needs until (s)he finds a job.

A very important contribution of the networks to the newcomers is their first introduction to the Greek society<sup>83</sup>. Migrants, who had the help of people from their country when they arrived either in Athens or in Thessaloniki, indicate that their stay in Greece was greatly facilitated with regard to the dangers that someone can face in a big city. Great help is given from the *migrant communities* which provide protection and the feeling of safeness among those who come in contact with them. They provide practical advices on basic daily matters (Markoutsoglou et al, 2007) and can also be really helpful in finding accommodation and job both to newcomers and to those who live more time in Greece. Migrants create their own organizations that make them feel more protected. These organizations function also as sources of information for migrants through the information they collect themselves (Schapendonk, 2009).

*“We help the Sudanese people who come here mainly in a social level. We give them information for the city and for job opportunities in the Northern Greece. Many ask some of us in private to help them leave the country but this is something that we cannot risk...”*

says the president of the Sudanese community of Northern Greece. According to his words a migrant community can offer accommodation in the beginning and if possible a job. Some of the newcomers do not know about the existence of their fellow countrymen in Greece. They learn it in the police departments and sometimes it's the police who call the members of a migrant community to go and pick them.

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<sup>83</sup> See also J. Crisp's "Policy of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regimes" (UNHCR, 2006)

Networks in Greece function also to a large extent as 'intermediary networks'. They link the sending countries with the reception countries (of the North and West Europe). Most migrants report that they maintain networks in countries such as the UK, Holland, Sweden, France and Germany and that their networks in Greece function, to an extent, as a part of their overall network on which they rely on for the facilitation of their transition to the richer EU countries.

An issue emerged from the discussions about the help of the networks to the newcomers was that it cannot be unlimited. Based on the work of Alejandro Portes, Schapendonk states that *"...a migrant's community has a limited capacity, or a limited will, to provide support to newcomers with similar backgrounds"* (2011: 135). What happens, according to the words of some migrants, is that when someone cannot live and work with other people of his region of origin because of the saturation in Athens (s)he tries to find other fellow countrymen in other cities of Greece. Coming from Athens to Thessaloniki, for example, to work and live with people of the same origin is becoming more frequent for many nationalities according to Peter (41, Nigerian).

Particularly important after the outburst of the economic crisis and the increase in the racist attacks is the issue of feeling safe against xenophobic violence and police's arbitrariness. Migrant organizations offer the feeling of that safety through their relations with Greek NGOs and other organizations who deal with the protection and promotion of the human rights.

Together with migrant communities there are organizations and groups of locals who act as networks for migrants mainly on matters that have to do with their legal statuses and the promotion of their rights. Both in Athens and in Thessaloniki (as well as in other Greek cities) there are places known as "stekia"<sup>84</sup> operating under the rules of self-organization and which house various social agencies and organizations that deal with daily migrants' problems. In 'stekia', several kinds of support are provided to migrants while they are also the places where the meetings of organized migrant groups often take place<sup>85</sup>. Finally, it should be noted that important role in facilitating migrants' lives is also played by the NGOs which activate in crucial issues

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<sup>84</sup>Steki in singular, stekia in plural. It means the places where people hang out often.

<sup>85</sup> Many migrant organizations have their own offices; nevertheless, because of the economic crisis there are not few those who are forced to shut them down and to transfer their activities in the "Stekia" of migrants.

such as the granting of documents, work, addressing of psychological problems etc. (Papadopoulou, 2003).

The economic crisis, of course, has not left unaffected the quality and the quantity of assistance to migrants both from other migrants and from the Greeks. All the organizations are facing economic problems hindering therefore the aid to the migrants but as Karim (34, Iranian) notes:

*“Their help is priceless...we would be totally unprotected without them...”*

Access to networks generally is considered by migrants as a feature of great importance which may conduce to a migrant’s decision to stay in the country due to the facilitation of his/her life.

#### 6.4 Change of the networks’ significance

During the research it became clear that the significance of some networks may change. For many migrants some networks lose their original importance while others become more important over time. This is due to the evolution of a migrant’s life in Greece, his/her desires as well as to the original ties of the migrant with his/her networks and on whether those networks are characterized by strong or weak ties.

According to the president of the Sudanese community of Northern Greece networks change constantly. As he mentions migrants do not rely just on the networks they might have before coming to Greece but they find and make new networks wherever they pass (see also Koser & Pinkerton, 2002). It seems that each network plays a specific role in the migrants’ lives and each one’s importance has to do with migrants’ desires. For example, the migrant organizations offer help in a social level while migrants are in Greece or if a migrant wants to return to his/her country. If a migrant is interested to continue his/her journey to another European country (s)he has to develop some other network(s) inside and outside Greece. Thus, the significance of a migrant’s network might be limited only on particular issues.

Because of the saturation occurring in some areas of Athens many migrants cannot find the help they might expected before entering Greece and thus, networks

that are characterized by kinship factor lose their importance either to a big or smaller extent (Gelderblom & Adams, 2006). On the contrary, it seems that the social networks that are created ‘along the way’ (Schapendonk, 2011:137) get particular importance during the stay in Greece. Some migrants report that they rely on other migrants’ networks (not just of the same nationality) that they meet in the detention camps (see also Hu & Salazar, 2005). Therefore, it becomes obvious that the collectives and organizations that migrants create in order to face their daily problems acquire increased importance (Schapendonk, 2011).

In many cases migrant networks grow (see also Schapendonk 2011) while as the years pass by and migrants live for a long time in the same place, some of their old networks lose their significance (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). It appears that over the years the networks that are constituted by Greeks become more and more important for the migrants. The migrants that have been living in Greece for many years report that as the time passes by more and more Greeks are included in their networks. Moreover, it is possible for migrants who have successfully integrated in the Greek society to feel that they do not need the help of their old networks leading us to the conclusion that the facilitation provided by the networks may be reduced over time (Gelderblom & Adams, 2006).

Changes in the importance of the initial networks can also turn up in the cases of politicized applicants of asylum and refugees who, for several reasons, stopped to be members of the political groups they belonged. For example, the Turkish refugee of my sample after some years of living in Thessaloniki withdrew from the political party he belonged and he stopped maintaining the kind of relations he used to have with his former comrades. He still keeps contact with them but as he says he does not spend his whole day with them anymore as he was doing when he was a member of the party. Instead of them he has now developed other networks consisting of both migrants and Greeks.

Exception, though not strict, are the networks consisting of relatives. The strong ties that characterize them (Herman, 2006) result in the non-removal from the desires of the family. Family functions more as a ‘body’ and depending on the desires of its members acquire concrete networks. However, there are cases where the presence of members of the family does not influence migrants (Schapendonk, 2009)



and follow their own personal desires and ambitions having often as a consequence to rely on other networks and not on the familial.

It is clear that networks are not static or unchanging structures (Hu & Salazar, 2005). As Hu and Salazar perceive “*dynamic changing is inherent in the very nature of social networks*” (2005: 3). Networks and their significance always change depending on the situations a migrant meets in the society that (s)he enters and depending on his/her present and future plans.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter was about the migrant networks in Greece. First of all, individuals and groups of people consisting migrant networks were presented. Secondly, there were analyzed the roles of those networks in facilitating the lives of migrants in Greece as well as their roles to a further migration to Greece.

Networks are presented as structures that are basically consist of relatives, friends and co-ethnic individuals and groups. Beyond them, networks include people who facilitate the transition from or to Greece with financial compensation, the so-called smugglers. As demonstrated by the discussions with migrants, the residence time in Greece plays a crucial role in the synthesis of networks. Thus, networks expand and as the time passes by they consist also of migrants of other nationalities as well as of solidaristic Greeks and various NGOs.

A network is a type of social capital (Portes in Spencer, 2005). As Sarah Spencer indicates, “*Networks reduce both the cost and risk of migration by helping migrants secure access to jobs and accommodation, providing information, contacts and support*” (2011:11). Therefore, I focused on four main roles that networks that are set in Greece play in facilitating the migration to the specific country. The two most highlighted roles by the migrants themselves were that of the networks’ function as source of several kinds of information both for prospective migrants and newcomers in Greece and that of the provision of subsistence and support to the newcomers by helping them in matters such as the finding of accommodation and work. Networks also provide the feeling of safety which is of particular importance nowadays because of the increase in the numbers of racist attacks in the Greek cities. Another role is that of providing of financial help also both to those who want to migrate and to those who have reached Greece while, finally, a forth analyzed reason

was that of providing the organizational infrastructure needed for the migration of relatives and friends from the countries of origin to Greece.

An important outcome of the fieldwork was that the networks of a migrant are not static. Migrants create new networks while travelling and the importance of their initial networks may change over time. I argued that the change in the significance of the personal networks of migrants is directly related to their desires and needs that they have every single period of their lives. Similarly, the migrant networks increase or decrease depending on the needs and aspirations each migrant set in his/ her life.

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## Chapter 7: Conclusion and discussion

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Building on the perspectives of migrants coming from Asia and Africa this thesis has explored the quality of their lives in Greece. Its main goal was to present some of their experiences from the time they enter the country and forward.

This conclusion starts with providing an overview of the main findings of my research. Thus, in section 7.2, I make some recommendations for further researches in the field of social sciences concerning the changes taking place in a society plagued by a general crisis such as the Greek one. Finally, section 7.3 consists of a list of recommendations for the policies of the EU and the Greek government on the issue of migration to Greece (and by extension to Europe) and also on the dealing with phenomena directly linked to the presence of large numbers of migrants in the Greek territory.

### 7.1 Results and conclusions

To give an answer to the main question - *How do migrants experience their everyday life in Greece in times of economic, political and social crisis and in what way do their networks in Greece help them to get ahead in life?*- I had to divide the question in four sub-questions each one of which forms the topic of a chapter. In order to collect the needed data I came in contact with migrants in the two biggest cities of Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki. Conducting interviews with migrants and people who deal with aspects of the phenomenon of migration I saw clearly that migrants' quality of life depends on the adopted policies of the EU and the Greek government as well as on the relationships that migrants develop in the Greek society and the roles of their existed networks in Greece.

*Chapter 2* has answered to the question "*What are the Greek State's policies and practices towards irregular migration?*" It is a chapter where I have dealt with the policies and practices of the Greek government and authorities towards migration to

the country partly under the requisitions of the EU. First of all, I focused on the EU's responses to the entry of irregular migrants in European territory which as I argued play a significant role in the situation that exists in Greece. The EU has been transformed into a land of freedom of movement only for those who come from the countries-members of the Union excluding people from other countries. EU's policy towards migration is characterized by strict controls at the external borders transforming this way Greece and other peripheral countries of the Union to guards against the entry of unwanted migrants from countries of Asia and Africa. EU divides people into Europeans and non-Europeans and via several treaties signed by its member-states, pushes the unwanted migrants either outside Europe or to the poorest peripheral countries that are converted into walls of the Europe-Fortress or in 'warehouses' of people.

Responding to the policies of exclusion adopted by the EU, the Greek governments violate their own laws. The bureaucracy of migration and asylum laws is very high and migrants experience long delays in decisions on their applications for documents that allow their legal residence in Greece. Great importance is given by the Greek state to the guarding of borders and to the prevention of migrants to enter the country as well as to the arrest of undocumented migrants in order to deport them, usually to the considered as a 'safe third country', Turkey. Especially after the outbreak of the financial crisis, the Greek government has ordered a series of sweep operations showing that chasing migrants is a task of great importance. Many politicians' words are directly disputed by the final state's acts. From the one side there are politicians of the government who talk about an open country that respects the rights of migrants<sup>86</sup> and from the other side in a few months is decided (by the same government) the rising of a wall for the prevention of migrants entering Greece while illegal deportations with accelerated procedures are carried out.

Tackling migration to Greece is one of the major concerns of the political parties. I have supported that now the rhetoric of the parties that argue against migrants has reached too aggressive levels equating migrants with criminals and terrorists.

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<sup>86</sup> The battle for Attica square: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPI9PW7ONIQ&feature=related> (the words of Spiros Vougias, Deputy Minister of Citizen Protection, 04:30-04:53) (TV 2 Norway, 2010)

Before dealing with the migrants' experiences in the Greek cities I considered as necessary to look for the reasons migrants enter and stay in Greece. So, *Chapter 4* has answered to the question "*How and why do migrants end up in Greece?*" At first place I have presented the places and the ways migrants use for passing from Turkey to Greece highlighting the great risks they take and the role of smugglers. Those places are the islands of the Aegean Sea and the river of Evros as well as the land borders of 12,5 km near Evros River. In order to pass to Greece they pay a facilitator (smuggler) who either takes them up to a point and shows them the way they have to follow thereafter or transports them himself to the Greek borders. Migrants face many dangers during the passage to Greece that often lead them even to death. Drownings in the river and the sea due to bad weather and the absence of light (they usually pass to Greece during the night and with bad weather conditions in order not to be detected by the coast patrols and FRONTEX) are very frequent. This is also due to the use of small boats in bad condition in which embark large numbers of people.

According to my respondents Greece is mainly a passage to the West. Therefore, the main reasons that bring them in Greece are the country's geographical features. The location, the long coastline, the numerous islands and the existence of land borders make easier the passage to Greece than the passages to Italy and Spain. Other reasons can be the existence of relatives and fellow countrymen's communities who can help them either settle in Greece or to continue their journey to the West or even the proximity of Greece to the country of origin in the case of political refugees who struggle against the regimes of their countries.

An important part of this chapter has presented the living conditions of migrants in the detention camps just after they enter Greece. After entering the country, migrants either get arrested or give themselves up to the authorities in order to apply for asylum and to avoid the risk of immediate deportation. However, their contact with the authorities usually entails their enclosure in detention camps located near the borders for a period ranging from a few days to three months. The living conditions and the often bad treatment of the migrants by the policemen have led to many complaints against Greece by international and Greek organizations for human rights violations. The UNHCR in fact speaks of a "humanitarian crisis" in Greece<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup><http://www.unhcr.org/4c98a0ac9.html>

So, the first hostile treatment to those who enter Greece seeking a better and more secure life either there or somewhere else in Europe comes from the institutional and executive bodies of the EU and the Greek government showing them by the moment of their entry in the “promised land” that they are unwanted and that they are far way from fulfilling their dreams for a better life.

Leaving detention camps migrants either try to continue immediately their journey to the West or to go to the city of Athens (most of them) or Thessaloniki. There they try to build a temporary or more permanent life (time is always relevant, especially for migrants). *Chapter 5* has answered to the question: “*What are the daily threats and opportunities for migrants in Greece?*” and I divided it in two parts. In the first part I have presented the two main issues of concern for migrants who go in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, those of accommodation and work. What it seems is that the quality both of the residence and of the labour has to do with the period of stay in the country. In general, however, the residential areas of migrants are the most deprived with lower rents and old houses that lack in many major facilities. Cohabitation of many people of the same nationality is particularly frequent while frequent is also their exploitation by those who rent them the places to live. Their work is also characterized by difficult and dangerous conditions without insurance and low wages. One more issue presented in this chapter is the mobility of the migrants within the country both due to the working opportunities that occur seasonally or more permanently in other regions and due to the saturation of certain areas by their fellow countrymen as well as because of the increase in racist attacks mainly in the city of Athens.

In the second part of the chapter I have presented the relations that migrants develop in the Greek cities and mainly the dangers that migrants face inside Greek society as results of the economic crisis plaguing Greece. The relations of migrants are initially limited to their fellow countrymen and with the passage of time they include other migrants and also Greeks that they meet either in workplaces or in places where organized solidarity to the migrants occurs. Nevertheless, the way migrants are treated as a whole by the Greek society cannot be considered as friendly. The way in which large portion of the Greek population thinks of and treats migrants is affected enormously by the rhetoric of the mass media and especially television. Greek media treat migrants as criminals highlighting and focusing only on specific

news fueling that way the fear within Greek society and affecting the relations between nationals and foreigners. Greek society is a society with deep-rooted stereotypes against to the ‘different’ that in times of economic crisis arise even more and turn into fear and hate. The result of this is that many Greeks ‘target’ migrants for their plight. The increases in the numbers of racist attacks and their moral legitimacy by more and more Greeks as well as the entry of a neo-Nazi group in the Greek Parliament are facts directly connected to the disappointment of the Greek people for the ‘traditional’ political scene of the country. Migrants’ lives in the Greek cities are negatively affected by the violence emanating both from racists- members of the organization of Golden Dawn and from many police officers who apparently are supporters and often collaborators of Golden Dawn.

The experiences they get because of the above treatments influence to a large extent migrants’ desires and plans. Their primary concern remains the granting of papers for legal residence that give them the right to move within the EU. From there on, their desires have to do with the ensuring of a safer life, the elimination of the racist attacks and the ensuring of their rights in the labour sector and by extension to their standard of living.

With the exception of the people who stand on the side of migrants’ rights and various organizations and NGO’s, the previous chapters have mainly shown the difficulties and dangers migrants face in the context of a country deeply affected by the economic crisis. *Chapter 6* has presented the facilitation of the migrants’ lives by the function of their own personal networks in the Greek cities. The answered question in this chapter was: “*How do migrants’ networks look like and how do they help them to get ahead in life?*” I have argued that their networks play crucial roles on the facilitation of their lives in Greece. The composition of their networks in Greece depends on the period of stay in the country as well as on the desires and ambitions of each migrant. Networks consist of relatives, friends, fellow countrymen and migrant communities with whom they come in contact either before the journey or after entering Greece. In the first case, networks offer financial assistance and also important information for the journey of prospective migrants. Moreover, smugglers constitute an important part of the networks as the migrants that now live in Greece maintain contacts with them in order to facilitate the entry of their friends and relatives in the country. Over the years the networks are composed by more and more

Greeks. In addition to the information and the financial help for the journey to Greece, networks offer information that makes life easier in the country as well as support and subsistence in matters as accommodation and work. They also function as links with other networks in other countries of Europe useful for those who want to continue their movement. Another noted role has been that of the provision of the feeling of safety given by the migrant communities and migrant organizations which become even more important at the present time because of the upsurge of the racist violence. Finally, a last conclusion is that networks are not static. New networks can emerge while older can lose their original value or even to cease to constitute networks for some migrants. Their importance for each migrant is different according to his/her quality of life in Greece and according to his/her ambitions and desires.

Generally, based on the results of my research, we can argue that the combination of the absence of an effective policy that respects the human rights and deep economic crisis has led to a “humanitarian crisis” in Greece<sup>88</sup>. This crisis lies both to the treatment of the migrants in the detention centres and on their treatment by the society and the authorities during their stay in the Greek cities. The migrant presence is not perceived as an ethnic diversity (Arapoglou et al., 2009) but as a danger to the economy, society and culture. In my opinion this has led to the strengthening and the danger of prevalence of amoralism within the Greek society.

Greece is perceived as a ‘transit’ country by the majority of the migrants from Africa and Asia. At the same time, it has turned into a place of forced stay for many thousands of migrants who are not allowed to go further into the EU. For some though it is not clear what their plan is (Papadopoulou, 2002). In some cases Greece is also a destination country. However, the bad experiences, especially at the current times of crisis, have resulted in the desire of many of those who initially wanted to stay in Greece to move to another country of the EU. The situation of many migrants in Greece is characterized by involuntary immobility similar to the one that many migrants experience outside of the European territory (Schapendonk, 2011; Papadopoulou - Kourkoula, 2008). Thus, we can argue that a period of crises reveals the dynamics of migration processes.

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<sup>88</sup>See also <http://www.unhcr.org/4c98a0ac9.html>



## 7.2 Discussion and recommendations for further research

I believe that studying the phenomenon of migration and issues emerged from it in a country like Greece is of a great importance for the modern social sciences. Especially nowadays, Greece and the Greek society offer a wide range of issues for studying. Searching for secondary data for my thesis I saw that the last years, researches and reports for the situation in the detention centers in the Greek borders are getting popular giving important information about a crucial part of migration. However, I think that my research has raised at least two specific issues that should be under investigation in further researches.

One issue could be related to the interconnectedness of the economic crisis and the rise of racism against migrants. Given the significant developments taking place in the Greek society and the increase in the racist attitudes it would be very interesting for the social sciences to turn more to the causes of the social phenomena that occur in Greece after the outburst of the economic crisis. There should be an in-depth study of the relationship of the Greek society with the migrants. Its results will be useful not only for Greece but also for the rest of Europe because I believe that the economic crisis will widely be of great concern in more European societies and not only in those of the Southern Europe.

A second issue for further research could be the study of the reaction of migrants against xenophobia and the dangers they face. It would be interesting to study the ways migrants get organized and try to cope with any attacks they face and to assert their rights. On the side to this issue it can also be studied the dynamics and the offering of the Greek groups and organizations that are in favor of the rights of migrants.

In my opinion it is very important if discussions in academic and political level about the crisis of Democracy itself in Greece take place. Greeks are proud of the fact that Democracy comes from their country. But also this is the country that Tyranny comes from which as it seems has stronger roots. It is an urgent need for the social sciences to promote the values of solidarity and real democracy especially now in an era with many social and political turbulences. By extension, these discussions should take place throughout the EU as it bears great responsibility for the situation of the migrants in Greece.

### 7.3 Policy recommendations

Greece is a country with many problems. The corrupted governments have led many sectors of the public life to collapse. The relationship of these problems with the treatment of migrants is immediate. In order to become better the situation of the migrants in Greece, radical changes that should concern in the whole many interconnected issues of the country's life have to take place. For example, the phenomenon of racism cannot be tackled independently of that of the economic crisis.

I believe that migration is a phenomenon that will never stop. To reduce the large flows of migrants and refugees, a prevailed global equality and the stop of military operations are required. This is inconceivable in a world dominated by the capitalist system which is based on inequality. Not generalizing therefore, I cite some policy recommendations concerning the migration issue that I believe that is feasible to carry them out (especially if they come along with changes in economic and political issues). These recommendations address to the EU and the Greek government and concern the following four issues.

*a) Observance of the national and international laws by the Greek state.*

It is necessary the pressure for the observance both of the international treaties (e.g. the Geneva Convention) that the Greek state has signed and Greek acts that are constantly violated by the state organs. I believe that this pressure must be obtained from international and Greek NGOs as well as from the EU who has to change its attitude.

*b) Reception of migrants.* Some of the recommendations are the following:

- The minefields on the land borders between Greece and Turkey must be cleared in order to avoid any more deaths of migrants.
- Asylum seekers should have the chance to apply freely for asylum and their applications should be examined in a short time.

- Detention centers must become reception centers with decent living conditions and the migrants must be free to go wherever they want as long they wait for the decision on their asylum applications.
- The reception centres should be staffed and supervised by expert personnel. This presupposes the training of specialized personnel by organizations such as UNHCR or other organizations who deal with human rights issues.

*c) Tackling of Xenophobia and Racist violence.* Some of the recommendations are the following:

- Develop a national strategy on combating racism and xenophobia at all levels.
- Focus on the education of young Greeks in the issues of xenophobia and racism and on the familiarization with different cultures and the multicultural society.
- Obligatory training for police officers in investigating racist crimes.
- Police brutality must be dealt with. Removal of all the police officers with xenophobic beliefs and general change of police's attitude.
- Co-operation in Europe for technical and theoretical assistance in tackling racism and racist violence.

*d) Change of the EU's role on the issue of migration and of some treaties that hinder the situation in Greece and in the other peripheral countries of the Union.*

The EU, in co-operation with the Greek government as well as with all the governments of the countries that migrants use to enter Europe, should introduce policies for the proper management of the migrant flows, always according to the needs and the rights of migrants.

The EU should review and make changes to the Dublin II regulation which hinders the situation in Greece and to follow policies that utilize the migrants who enter its bosom.

*Borders are the gallows  
Of our collective national egos  
Subjective, lines in sand  
In the water, separating everything*

*Fear is the cause of separation  
Backed with illicit conversations  
Procured by constant condemnations  
National blood-painted persuasions*

*Here's my song for the free  
No, it's not about praise and publicity  
Corprotocracy, what a hypocrisy  
Aristocracy versus democracy*

*The king is dead and now  
We're dancing in the streets  
As the waters rise  
We're merely covering our feet*

*Your gods are dead and now we're dancing in the streets  
As the waters rise, we're merely cowering in defeat*

*I never let you go  
I never let you go  
I never let you go  
I never let you go*

(Borders Are, Serj Tankian)

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEB2OsiONZ4&feature=related>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDx7QdnztPI&feature=related>

The battle for Attica square, October 5, 2010: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP19PW7ONIQ&feature=related> (TV 2 Norway, 2010)

"No Refuge" a film by SBS, distributed by Journeyman Pictures, August 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTs4q9XgNd0&feature=relmfu>

Journeyman Pictures, (2008), “Keeping immigrants at bay- Greece”  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzzRhv0x9fc&feature=relmfu> (for the situation in Lesvos island)

Al Jazeera English, The stream (04/05/2012), Greece’s right wing: a new dawn?  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WIH3BwDbMo&feature=related>

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# Appendix

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## 1. Questionnaires<sup>89</sup>

### 1.1 Questionnaire for the migrants

#### *Some personal information*

1. Sex
2. Place of birth & year of birth
3. Nationality & citizenship
4. Religion
5. Marital Status
6. Educational Level
7. Occupation in the country of origin
8. Why did you leave your country?

#### *Entrance, everyday life, dangers and networks in Greece*

1. When did you come? Which was the place of entry?
2. Why Greece? It was your choice or someone else's? (Why Athens/Thessaloniki?)
3. Was Greece suggested to you by someone? Who?
4. Where did you first stay when you entered Greece (detention camp etc.)?
5. How long did you stay there? Describe the conditions of living in the detention camp.
6. What had you learned about Greece as an entry and a transit country before starting your journey? Was this information finally true?

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<sup>89</sup> These are the initial questionnaires. The nature of the interviews had as result the constant changing of the questions and their adjustment accordingly to each interviewee. The discussions were based on these questions and more questions emerged every time.

7. How do you see Greece (as a transit country, do you want to stay)?
8. Do you want to stay in Greece? Why/why not?
9. Do you get any help by someone (money etc.) for living in Greece or to continue your journey?
10. Do you get any help in Greece? By whom (NGO's, migrants, individuals etc)
11. Have you applied for asylum? If not, why? If yes, when?
12. Do you have any papers? What kind?
13. Describe the conditions of living and working
14. How do you 'live', if you don't work? Who helps you?
15. Where do you live (region, description of conditions)
16. Narrations
17. Do you have a specific destination country? Which one? Why?
18. Do you have a relative, friend in another country of Europe?
19. What information do you get for the country of destination? By whom?
20. Who gives you information for the journey and the pattern of reaching the destination country?
21. In what extent the situation in Greece leads you to leave the country? (Crisis, political and social situation etc)
22. With refugees and immigrants of the same or other nationality and religion
23. With the locals (are there people that help you? Who? Do you face any racist confrontations etc)
24. With the authorities (police)
25. With public services
26. With NGOs. If yes, with which and for what reason?

## **1.2 Questionnaire for the lawyer**

1. What is the followed procedure from the moment of the entry of an irregular migrant in Greece concerning the granting of asylum? Who is responsible to decide if one asylum application will be accepted or not?

2. Who is the law that is into force for the 'illegal' migration? In what does the new law differ from the previous? How is it combined with the policies of the other countries of the EU?
3. Where is insufficient that law?
4. What is the duration of the final decision for the granting of asylum? Why are there delays in the final decision?
5. What are the practices of the Greek authorities (police) towards migrants? What kind of complaints do you receive?
6. What is the situation of the human rights in Greece? To what degree are there violations of the international (and national) laws regarding foreigners?
7. Do you have access to the detention centres? How do the authorities deal with the lawyers' approach to the asylum seekers? Do they make it difficult? If yes, how?
8. How do you come in contact with the asylum seekers? How do you get informed about matters relating to asylum granting or the deportation of asylum seekers?
9. What are the difficulties faced by the asylum seekers during their applications and the expectation of the decision?
10. What are the impacts of the rejections on their lives?
11. How do the migrants see Greece? As a transit country? What are their desires?
12. Why do they apply for asylum in Greece?
13. How do their networks influence their decisions?
14. What is going on with the new detention camps?
15. Are there any specific characteristics of the lawyers who handle matters of asylum seekers?
16. What are the suggestions of the networks of lawyers who deal with issues of migrants and asylum seekers regarding the laws?

### **1.3 Questionnaire for migrant community**

1. What is the role of the community? What are the areas of its action?
2. Do you help the newcomers? How?
3. How do you find them (or how do they find you)?

4. Do you collaborate with the authorities (ministries, police etc)? How?
5. Do you collaborate with NGOs? How?
6. What do you think of the Greek migration and asylum policy?
7. What are your contacts with the Greek society? How do the Greeks treat you?
8. Is there any difference in the way Greeks treat migrants now (after the outburst of the economic crisis)?
9. What are the biggest problems of the migrants in Greece?
10. Why do they leave their country of origin?
11. How do they leave? Description of the journey?
12. Is Greece a destination or a transit country (or both)?
13. Where do migrants from your country (and others) want to go and why?
14. Why do they choose to enter Greece? Who decides for this (networks, smugglers etc.)?
15. Who helps migrants in Greece? How?
16. Do the networks change during the journey?
17. How do migrants choose their destination country and who determines their routes?
18. Those who leave Greece do they keep contacts with the country and those who have stayed?
19. Who helps them leave Greece and how? Do they help people leave Greece?

## 2. Some features from the interviews with the migrants

<b>Number of Interview:</b>	1
<b>Name and nationality:</b>	Rahim, Iraqi
<b>Date of interview:</b>	03/05/12
<b>Place:</b>	Thessaloniki, ‘‘Migrants’ Place’’
<b>Duration:</b>	60 minutes

**Comments:** I met Rahim through an acquaintance Iraqi refugee who has been living in Thessaloniki for many years and who helped Rahim during his early days of stay in



the city. As place of the conduct of the interview, the interviewee chose that of the “Steki of Migrants” because he goes there every day and it is a familiar place to him. He was particularly willing to answer my questions and he focused more on those who had to do with his desire to leave Greece and move to Germany or Sweden. He is the youngest of the men interviewees and he was quite optimistic for his future even though his situation is no different from that of the rest. The language of the interview was mainly English but also Greek as he wanted to practice his skills in the Greek language.

<b>Number of Interview:</b>	2
<b>Name and nationality:</b>	Karim, Iranian
<b>Date of interview:</b>	12/05/12
<b>Place:</b>	Athens, Saint Nicolaos’ Square, Acharnon street
<b>Duration:</b>	90 minutes

**Comments:** A common Greek friend helped me to find and take an interview from Karim. He is the only high educated person of my sample. He was very descriptive in his narrations both for his period of stay in a detention camp of Evros and for his life in Athens. He knew from the beginning of his journey that he would face a lot of problems in Greece. His main fear now is the increase in racist violence. He was an eyewitness in the beating of a Pakistani migrant by members of the Golden Dawn while he has faced a lot of times mistreatment by police officers. He is a very active member of migrant groups against racism and he keeps a lot of contacts with people from Greek antiracist groups. His main concern is to get the refugee status and to go to France where he wants to work as an architect.

**Number of Interview:** 3

**Name and nationality:** Nadifa, Somalian

**Date of interview:** 18/05/12

**Place:** Thessaloniki, refugee reception centre

**Duration:** 40 minutes

**Comments:** Nadifa was the only woman of my sample. She wanted to meet me outside of her previous residence, the ‘refugee reception centre of Thessaloniki’ (ΚΥΠΘ)<sup>90</sup>. I found her accidentally there and surprisingly she was eager to talk to me. However, her answers were short and she didn’t want to talk to me for several matters like her relations with the authorities. She was eager though to talk about the conditions of life in Thessaloniki. After three years in Greece (Thessaloniki) she hasn’t developed yet many relationships with people except of some of her fellow countrymen. She wanted me to bring her in contact with more lawyers to run her case. She was repeating constantly her desire to go to England where her brother and cousin have taken the refugee status and live and work legally.

**Number of Interview:** 4

**Name and nationality:** Azim, Afqani

**Date of interview:** 19/05/12

**Place:** Thessaloniki, refugee reception centre

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Comments:** I first met him the day I took interview from Nadifa. He was living there and he agreed to talk to me the next day. What he said to me while I was discussing with Nadifa was *“I want to talk to you to show you how awful our lives are here”*. So,

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<sup>90</sup> The refugee reception centre of Thessaloniki operated from 2000 to 2010 under the auspices of the Deputy Prefect of Thessaloniki and the Ministry of ‘Health and Social Solidarity’. The bad (mainly economic) management of the centre by a local NGO named “Social Solidarity” led to the closure of the centre. However, ‘the antiracist initiative’ of Thessaloniki, a group of locals and migrants who fights for the migrants’ rights took control of the centre for the next year. Economic and structural problems made impossible to keep managing the centre so, now, it is just a place where some migrant families live with the voluntary help of several locals.

we met the next day at the same place where he was waiting me with a glass of tea together with his wife and his 8 years old child. His answers were very short and he actually wanted to talk more about the bad conditions of his life in Greece. He mentioned a lot of times the bad treatment from the side of the policemen. At the period of our meeting he was unemployed and he was collecting rubbish from the streets of the centre of Thessaloniki. His main concern was to send his son to a school and get the refugee status. When he entered Greece he had no destination country in his mind. They just wanted to enter Europe. After almost three years in Greece (3 months in a detention camp in the island of Lesbos, 1,5 year in Athens and one year in Thessaloniki) he wants badly to leave the country. They are thinking to move to the Netherlands or to Sweden because they have heard that in those countries there are jobs and the situation is better for the refugees and migrants.

<b>Number of Interview:</b>	5
<b>Name and nationality:</b>	Mehmet, Turk (of Kurdish descent)
<b>Date of interview:</b>	25/5/12
<b>Place:</b>	Thessaloniki, in a Turkish tavern
<b>Duration:</b>	2 hours

**Comments:** The first time I met him was almost 8 years ago. At that time he could only speak a few words in Greek while now he speaks it almost fluently. He is the only one in my sample recognized as a political refugee from the Greek state. He has passed through the whole process of asylum application. Our conversation took place in a tavern where, in a way, we celebrated the end of his problems with the Greek authorities. He talked a lot of his experiences in Greece the last 10 years and also about his future plans and the trips he will finally do in Europe now that he will get a passport. Mehmet lives in the city center of Thessaloniki with his younger brother who has applied for asylum two years ago. He works legally in the meat market of the city center and his life is similar to the Greek working class members. After all these years in Thessaloniki, he says that this city is his 'second house' and that he will be very sad if one day he has to move somewhere else.

**Number of Interview:** 6  
**Name and nationality:** Daniel, Nigerian  
**Date of interview:** 31/05/12  
**Place:** Thessaloniki, Navarinou Square, city centre  
**Duration:** 2 hours

**Comments:** He was the most eager of all the interviewees. I found him through the Nigerian association in Thessaloniki whose telephone I found on the Internet. He was very descriptive about his life in Greece and he was highly aware of the migrant policy of the Greek State. This interview was not his first one. Daniel is very active on the fight for migrants' rights and he has participated in a lot of researches in Greece related to the issue of migrants. He showed a great interest on the topic of my thesis. During our discussion he made a lot of questions about the situation in the Netherlands as he has started thinking to leave Greece after 20 years of stay in Thessaloniki. Moreover, he was very interested in the upcoming Greek elections hoping that SY.RIZ.A would be the winner and that one of its first measures would be the changes in the migration policy and the respect of the migrants' rights. The topics he focused more in the interview and he wanted to talk more about, were those of the treatment of locals to the foreigners and the bureaucracy of the Greek migration policy.

**Number of Interview:** 7  
**Name and nationality:** Peter, Nigerian  
**Date of interview:** 31/05/12  
**Place:** Thessaloniki, city centre  
**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Comments:** During my discussion with Daniel, Peter joined us as he was called by Daniel. This was a nice surprise for me. Peter is the only person of my sample that he did not pass to Greece from Turkey. He came in 2003 directly to Thessaloniki through

Bulgaria using false passport. At the beginning he wanted to stay in Greece and he was planning to bring his family too. However, he still faces a lot of problems with his status and he has started thinking to leave Greece and to move to countries of the Western Europe where a lot of his friends from Nigeria live. He also seemed quite aware of the Greek migration policy and he was eager to answer my questions insisting more on those who were relevant to the violation of the human rights by the Greek authorities. In addition, his main personal concern is his reunification with his wife and child who are in Nigeria and he hasn't seen them since 2003, the year he left Nigeria.

<b>Number of Interview:</b>	8
<b>Name and nationality:</b>	Masood, Pakistan
<b>Date of interview:</b>	05/06/12
<b>Place:</b>	Kypseli, Saint Georgios' Square
<b>Duration:</b>	40 minutes

**Comments:** A friend who worked in a NGO brought me in contact with Masood and Ahmet. I met them in a small square in the district of Kypseli, central Athens. This square is always full of migrants from many different countries of the world as this district is now inhabited by thousands of migrants. Masood came in Greece four years ago. His goal was (and still is) to go to Sweden or England. He lives with his friend Ahmed who came in Greece two years before him and with another Pakistani he met in Athens. He works in a Pakistani store with Ahmed who has helped him very much since he arrived in Greece. He mentioned many times the problems of 'his people' in the central Athens emerged from the raise of the racism while his main concern is the reunification with his wife and his daughter. During the interview he used many Greek words practicing, as he said, what he has learned in the Greek courses that he attends in Athens' 'Steki of migrants'.

**Number of Interview:** 9  
**Name and nationality:** Ahmed, Pakistan  
**Date of interview:** 05/06/12  
**Place:** Kypseli, Saint Georgios' Square  
**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Comments:** Ahmed came in Greece in 2006. His knowledge on the Greek language was really impressive. He keeps contacts with Greeks from several antiracist groups and tries to help in various ways the newcomers from his country. He was very eager to help me with my research and he brought also Masood with him to our meeting. He was very descriptive in his narrations about his experiences in a detention camp in Evros where he stayed for 2, 5 months. He gets used the life in Greece but he has started feeling afraid because of the actions of Golden Dawn. He now wants to go to England because there are more and better jobs there and also a huge Pakistani community which provides a stronger feeling of safety.

**Number of Interview:** 10  
**Name and nationality:** Patrick, Nigerian  
**Date of interview:** 05/06/12  
**Place:** Exsarchia Square  
**Duration:** 75 minutes

**Comments:** A friend of mine, who deals with migration issues, gave me Patrick's phone number. When I called him he told me to meet him in the Exsarchia Square where we would be safe. Patrick, a man of exactly my age, gave me the impression of a man who does not get easily disappointed. He was smiling and making jokes during the interview while he seemed very comfortable talking with me. He likes the 'alternative' character of Exsarchia and he likes spending time with people who hang out there, mainly with some punks and 'hippies' because as he said they are very

different from the people he knew before and he finds them interesting. He is very interested in learning the different cultures of Athens.

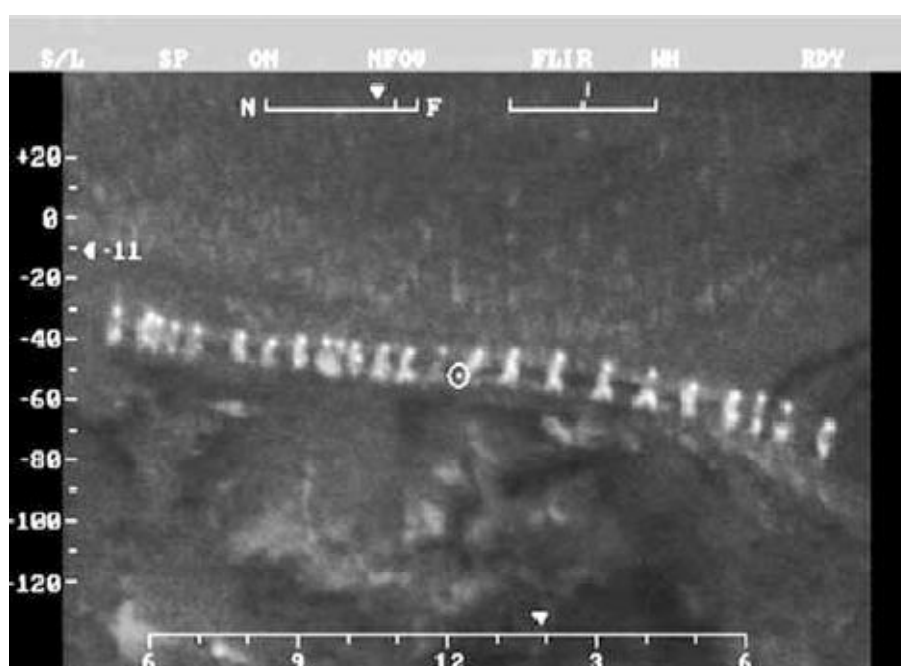
However, his answers at the beginning were short until we started talking about his relations with the Greek society. Apart from the above he expressed many times his concern over the increase in racist attacks and his fear about 'Golden Dawn'. After one year in Greece he has started to understand that is very difficult to secure a permanent stay in the country as well as to find a good legal job, so he is thinking to move to another European country, probably to England.

### 3. Photos

**Photo 1:** Graves of undocumented irregular migrants in Sidiro, Evros (taken from Wikipedia.org)



**Photo 2:** FRONTEX and the Greek authorities observe migrants at the border with infrared cameras (Pro Asyl, 2012)





**Photo 3:** Former Citizens' Protection Minister Christos Papoutsis looks through a fence being built in Evros area, on February 2012 (greekreporter.com).



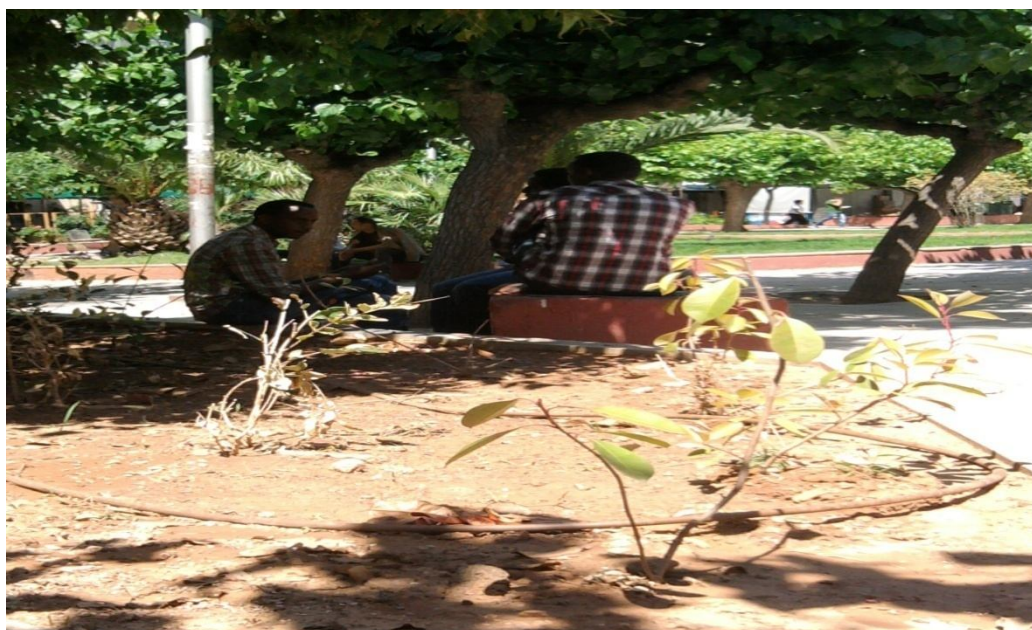
**Photo 4:** In a detention centre of Evros area (Pro Asyl, 2012)



**Photo 5:** Migrant in Athens during his 'illegal' job (Times, 04-06-2012)



**Photo 6:** African migrants sitting in Victoria square few minutes before the arrival of three policemen (06/06/2012)





**Photo7:** Victoria Square in Central Athens (06/06/2012). The photo is taken five minutes after the evacuation of the square by three policemen. The migrants that were there moved to the near streets waiting for the policemen to leave.



**Photo 8:** Police detain a group of migrants in central Athens (Fox news, 22/05/2012)



**Photo 9:** Policemen beat up a migrant somewhere in central Athens (taken from the ‘observers’<sup>91</sup>)



**Photo 10:** Members of the Golden Dawn with the leader of the organization (the one holding the bottle of water) (ethnos.gr, 01/04/2012)



<sup>91</sup> <http://observers.france24.com/content/20120515-greece-locals-help-athens-police-beat-immigrant-golden-dawn-video-brutality-arrest-inquiry> (there is also a clear video taken by someone who lives in the neighborhood).



**Photo11:** One of the most popular photos taken during Golden Dawn's pogrom against migrants in central Athens after the murder of a Greek man by migrants in 10/05/2011 (taken from [tovima.gr](http://tovima.gr), 13/05/2011)



**Photo 12:** Foreigners out (of Greece). This is Greece. Written on the outside door of a building where migrants leave. It is signed by the symbols of Golden Dawn (a friend's photo).



**Photo 13:** Antifascist march in Thessaloniki (08-06-2012, a friend's photo)



**Photo 14:** An anarchist banner near Exarchia square (in central Athens). The banner reads, “In the bosses’ world we are all foreigners. Solidarity to the migrants” ([www.athens.indymedia.org](http://www.athens.indymedia.org))

