

Moving in Limbo?

Exploring a decolonial feminist perspective on immobility.

Ethnographic case study in the Nea Kavala refugee camp

Lena Hansen

Radboud Universiteit



Moving in Limbo?

Exploring a decolonial feminist perspective on immobility.

Ethnographic case study in the Nea Kavala refugee camp

Lena Hansen

s1043896

Master Thesis

Human Geography

Radboud University

November 2020

Thesis Supervisors:

Prof. Olivier Kramsch

Cesar Merlín Escorza

Second Reader:

Prof. Roos Hoekstra-Pijpers

Abstract

Tens of thousands of people are currently residing in refugee camps in Greece while waiting for their asylum interview, a situation that emerged in 2015, widely known as “refugee crisis”, when increasing numbers of people, mainly coming from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, arrived at the European borders. An overloaded asylum system results in prolonged stays in camps, which are constantly extending their capacities and are subject to overcrowded spaces and a lack of hygiene facilities, security and health services. The Nea Kavala refugee camp is located on the mainland near Thessaloniki and accommodated approximately 700 residents in the beginning of 2020, a number that has been tripled in the course of this year. The Solidarity Centre is one of the various humanitarian aid organizations that seek to provide support for residents by offering safe spaces and different activities. Volunteers on the ground organize recreational activities, language classes as well as consultation services and workshops with the aim to respond to the needs apparent in camp, and to form horizontal relationships between residents and volunteers.

This study focuses on the Women’s Space, where female residents and volunteers come together as a community to create comfort, safety and a non-judgmental women-only space in sight of the mainly male-dominated public areas in Nea Kavala. In this research study, I analyze the narrations of volunteers at the Solidarity Centre, and how their practices enable the reconstruction of new forms of mobility for female residents and volunteers. Fieldwork was conducted by my own engagement as a volunteer in Nea Kavala and ensuing in-depth interviews as well as epistolary correspondence with volunteers. Emphasis is put on the ways, in which volunteers navigate their role and how they situate themselves in the complex relationship between the Greek authorities and the residents they form bonds with. Volunteers find themselves in a state of an in-between limbo; on the one hand they seek to show solidarity and provide relief, on the other hand they are obliged to abide by the rules and restrictions of the Greek government. Following a decolonial approach, I seek to analyze the dynamics in the Women’s Space through a gender lens, and to critically observe the ways in which practices are carried out by the Solidarity Centre as a humanitarian aid organization. I focus on different dimensions of mobility that are created within the dynamics of residents and volunteers considering the reclamations of time, the voice and space.

Preface

This thesis has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements of the Human Geography department at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. It serves as the final product of research that took place between January and November 2020 under the supervision of Prof. Olivier Kramsch and Cesar Merlín Escorza.

I dedicate this thesis to the residents of Nea Kavala, and the millions of refugee camp residents in the world whose lives are put on hold at this very moment. To their perseverance, resilience and faith. To the homes that were lost, and the homes newly created. To a future in which people can move freely, safely, and happily.

This study could not have been realized without the many people who participated in it.

First, I would like to wholeheartedly thank the people in Nea Kavala for welcoming me into their community and for allowing me to take part in a fraction of their daily routine. I would also like to express my gratitude to the volunteers of the Solidarity Centre who introduced me to their team and keep working tirelessly toward dignifying living conditions and access to resources for everyone. To all the people who took time out of their busy schedule to share their stories, worldviews and feelings with me.

I would like to extend my sincere acknowledgments to the lecturers and professors of the Human Geography department at Radboud University. Special thanks to Cesar Merlín Escorza for his invaluable support, expertise and guidance throughout the supervision of this thesis. I would also like to show my appreciation to Prof. Olivier Kramsch for his inspiration and critical advice in structuring my ideas, and to Prof. Roos Hoekstra-Pijpers, whose lectures and class discussions were very helpful in the preparation of my stay abroad.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, for their loving support on every step of the way.

Lena Hansen

Hamburg, November 2020

Glossary

CFS – Child-Friendly Space

EU – European Union

Info-Hub – Information Hub

MVI – Medical Volunteers International

NGO – Non-governmental organization

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Soli Centre – Solidarity Centre

TSS – The Social Space

UNHCR – United Nations Refugee Agency

WIH – Women’s Information Hub

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Preface	iv
Glossary	v
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical Framework	4
2.1 Greece and the “Refugee Crisis”	4
2.2 The Feminization of Migration	6
2.3 Decolonizing Gender	9
2.4 Displacement—A Remark on Global Immobility	13
2.5 Outline	15
3. Methodological Framework.....	17
3.1 Methodological Tools.....	17
3.2 Choice of Sample Group.....	18
3.3 Data Analysis	20
3.4 Ethical Considerations	21
4. Introducing the Research Location	23
4.1 Nea Kavala.....	23
4.2 The Soli Centre—Introduction of the Spaces	26
4.3 The Soli Centre—The Women’s Space.....	28
4.4 The Volunteer Team.....	28
5. Needs of Female Residents in the Women’s Space	30
5.1 The Need for Time—Recreation and Individual Care	31
5.2 Moving Forward—Access to Information Services.....	37
5.3 To be Seen—Becoming Visible	42
5.4 Conclusions	46

6. Solidarity Practices—Responding to Needs and Challenges	48
6.1 “You could be Anywhere”—Diving into the Women’s Space.....	48
6.2 Informal Education—Navigating Victory and Frustration.....	51
6.3. Creating Room—Utilizing Spaces in Nea Kavala	55
6.4 Conclusions	59
7. Decolonial Feminism in Mobility—the Dimensions of Reclamation.....	61
7.1 Reclaiming Time	62
7.2 Reclaiming the Voice	66
7.3 Reclaiming Space	71
7.4 Conclusions	76
8. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Outlooks	78
References	83
Appendix	88

1. Introduction

On arriving at the Nea Kavala Refugee Camp, the most noticeable were the contrasts nudging each other. The camp is framed by fences that symbolize control and captivity, standardized blank containers that serve as accommodation, military and security personnel, and supervision as a constant companion of the residents¹ as they go about their daily routine. Seeing the bleak monotony only from the outside, one might tend to forget that residents of a refugee camp, even though they are faced with an indefinite wait, continue to build their lives in this phase of transit, raise their children, continue an education, develop their personality, grow up, and grow older.

Visible are the efforts that have been made to make the camp look more colorful, to acknowledge that human beings live in Nea Kavala. It appears as if there is an attempt to bring to this controlled, securitized ambiance a semblance of normalcy and more humane conditions. One comes across grey betony areas and people playing football on the meadow right next to it. Some of the containers are painted in bright colors as a sharp contrast to the standardized design. Small children are romping around, there is even a small falafel shop run by residents. It almost feels as if even in inhumane conditions, human touch always finds a way to inveigle itself. All these impressions can be signifiers of hope, of a “making do” (Greene, 2019) during a time of uncertainty. But there is also a different narrative that needs to be considered; people build homes in and around these little containers because their journey has been put on hold indefinitely, and they have to endure being subject to the European Union (EU) border regime that takes years to decide whether people are granted asylum or not.

Various international humanitarian organizations are operating in refugee camps as additional actors in the migration context. Volunteers on the ground attempt to realize humanitarian initiatives focused on different areas, e.g., the distribution of food, access to education, and legal or medical services. These organizations are especially relevant nowadays, as Andrej Mahecic (2020), spokesperson of the United Nations Refugee Agency

¹ In this study, I mainly use the word residents when speaking about the people who live in Nea Kavala. Due to the fact that the term refugee is politically and emotionally charged and could be negatively connoted, I avoid this term as far as possible. There is no single answer to the question, what terminology people prefer, some people might identify themselves as refugees and would like to be described this way, while others might distance themselves from this term. This is why I chose to use the word resident as a neutral alternative. However, in the quoted statements of volunteers, the word refugee will appear occasionally.

(UNHCR), highlights, because the work of international humanitarian organizations is an important response to the overloaded asylum system of the EU.

In February 2020, I joined the volunteer team of the Solidarity Centre (Soli Centre)², a non-governmental organization (NGO) that supports the Nea Kavala residents by offering different activities in community spaces inside of the camp. Most of the time, I was in the Women's Space, a place for women and girls to spend time in a safe environment. I took part in the daily routine and observed the evolving dynamics in the space. My objective is to explore feminism in mobility to contribute through my research to the understanding of how feminist theory and practice operate in mobility-related matters. I aim to contribute to the mobility discourse by referring to human needs from a feminist perspective to demonstrate how a decolonial feminist geographical approach can demonstrate voids and the meaningful deconstruction of dominant narratives.

The concepts by Quijano, Mignolo, Lugones, and Rivera Cusicanqui on coloniality, modernity and the decoloniality of gender lend this thesis its theoretical framework. I seek to connect their concepts with the existing debates on migration and mobility studies in the context of refugee camp settings by looking at it through a gender lens, as suggested by Lugones (2010), and taking into account the critical perspective of Giraldo (2016). Thereby, I want to show the dimensions of mobility that are created in the Women's Space of Nea Kavala. What are the dynamics between residents, volunteers, and the Greek authorities? How does the Soli Centre follow its approach of forming horizontal relationships and to show solidarity? How does decolonial feminism take place in the Women's Space?

Due to COVID-19, I left Nea Kavala earlier than planned and continued my research from a distance. The focus of the research transitioned from the residents to the volunteers who shared their stories, emotions, and worldviews with me through video calls and text messages. I analyzed their narratives together with my reflections on my experiences as a volunteer. With this change of perspective and the restructuring of research plans, I aim to show human geography as a flexible science that develops and transforms in real-time while the world is in flux. As a result, I seek to create a picture in which I connect the dots between theoretical debates and the lived reality in the context of NGOs operating in refugee camps, and to continue the work of decolonial feminist scholars who have highlighted the importance of seeing the role of women in migration studies not merely as an additional side of the normalized male gaze but, as Lugones (2007) argues, through a gender lens that allows

² The real name of the organization will be kept confidential to protect the privacy of volunteers and residents. In this research study, the pseudonym Solidarity Centre, abbreviated as Soli Centre, will be used.

us to reread dominant narratives of mobility and migration. At the same time, I seek to hold dominant researchers accountable for the narratives they tell and take on this responsibility as well by reflecting on my inherent bias that inevitably shaped the way I designed this study.

Feminist scholars have come a long way in the past decades to highlight the scientific relevance of taking on a nuanced gender lens in migration research. However, the unevenness of power on every social dimension remains, which makes it imperative to continue the exploration of ways to achieve scientific and societal recognition. Refugee camps will not simply cease existing, instead there is reason to believe that they will keep expanding, developing and changing, and so will the experiences of people staying in camps.

The past years have shown that needs of residents are dynamically evolving in sight of protracted waiting periods in camps, and require attention both from NGOs and local authorities (Hémono et al., 2018). By making Nea Kavala a research site focusing on the exploration of needs, I want to contribute to their visibility and relevance in the societal context as well. Needs of people residing in refugee camps will not be lifted simply by higher media coverage, but the strategies NGOs implement to cope with them should receive attention both in human geographical literature as well as by “the real world”, which refers to the local and global authorities and migration related institutions. Considering the societal relevance of exploring humanitarian initiatives to respond to needs in refugee camps, it is crucial to understand how needs are determined, visibilized and addressed in order to reveal blind spots and the potential ways to improve the quality of life of residents.

By accentuating the significance of developing migration studies through a gender lens, this research study might add a piece to the recognition of both the scientific as well as the societal relevance with the appeal for a continued nuanced development and reconstruction of the approaches taken by scientific and societal stakeholders. One of Lugones’ (2010) pieces of work carries the title *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*. Taking this title with me during research, I invite the reader to keep this expression in mind and wonder, Where are we at this very moment, on the path to decolonial feminism?

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical concepts that serve as the basis to understand where the theoretical debates are positioned. I will, later on, use the introduced concepts to connect them with the findings of my fieldwork. Subsequently, I want to show what happens if we “rub these theories together” and how the resulting reflections build scientific as well as societal relevance in the field of feminism and mobility studies. In the first section, I provide a brief overview and a critical understanding of the European “refugee crisis.” In the second section, the concept of feminization is defined with the focus on elaborating whether migration should be considered as feminized and the possibilities such consideration opens. The third section is centered on Quijano’s theory of coloniality and modernity, and Mignolo’s and Lugones’ development of this concept. This chapter closes with a remark on the current situation caused by COVID-19 and the challenges of conducting research in a state of being on hold.

2.1 Greece and the “Refugee Crisis”

Human mobility and migration have always been intrinsically natural phenomena in history. It is for this reason that Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2014) underline the importance of normalizing migration instead of fighting it as a seemingly unwanted development in a rapidly globalizing world. As Bueno Lacy and van Houtum (2015) explained at length, recent developments in particular show an increasing rejection of migration with concomitant consequences such as racism, discrimination, and distorted images displayed in the media. Such a perception deepens the problematization and politicization of migration, especially in Europe, where the “refugee crisis” reached its peak in 2016 and has continued ever since. The word “crisis” in this regard requires a critical examination, because it can be regarded as one of the factors driving political agendas that imply inherent chaos and danger coming from migration, which highlights the important relationship of the vocabulary used and the assumptions and expectations it creates in our minds.

For example, Cabot (2018) describes the current state of Greece as “Greece’s emergence as the Euro-Western front-row in an unfolding humanitarian theatre” (p. 3). Thinking of the implications of a theatre, one might link it to a spectacle or entertainment. These connotations are questionable against the backdrop of the lived reality of people

crossing borders in danger or to escape discrimination or inhuman living conditions. It also implies that the situation is something we watch from metaphorical Euro-Western seats, while we are not directly and personally involved. If we do fieldwork as researchers, we consequently have to acknowledge the bias we inherit and how it colors our perception, and ask ourselves uncomfortable questions about our motivations for conducting research in this phenomenon. Boas, Schapendonk, Blondin and Schrijver (2020) engage themselves with the issue of having inherent biases guiding a research project. Related to human mobility, this means that even if we go (seemingly) well-informed into the field, we might bring a romanticizing bias with us that manipulates our research design from the beginning. As a result, we might expect to encounter something spectacular, something that represents the impressive story we want to tell. It is not to say that such an extraordinary spectacle does not exist. It rather means that we have to be sensitive about our expectations of what we are going to find. Boas et al. (2020) used the example of irregular border crossings that are expected to be spectacular sources of rousing stories of life and death. In contrast, it becomes apparent that the people involved in such crossings might not consider them as eventful at all, they may assign more significance to other seemingly mundane movements.

In conclusion, a mobility approach has to be applied to our own research designs, too. This approach has to be dynamic and willing to admit and embrace its shortcomings and biased initial assumptions. To cope with this challenge, the authors suggest using such mobile methods as a “moving ground” (Boas et al., 2020, p. 143), which flexibly adjust to the results, surprises, and setbacks one might encounter in the process of conducting fieldwork. During my research, not unexpectedly, I found myself to be “guilty” of such inherent bias and decided to let the discovery become part of my reflections to express transparently how my ideas took form along the way and how I cannot deny the fact that, when writing about the mobility of others, my own mobility automatically pours into the narrations. Differentiating between a sensationalist and exaggerated image that is spread across media and politics without denying or understating the lived reality of people who are migrating and have to cope with an overwhelmed asylum system is a complex task. In fact, the lived reality is alarming and should be recognized as such; Mahecic (2020) underlines the precarious conditions on the Greek islands that together had capacities for less than 5,400 arrivals and currently accommodate 36,000 people, which results in a worrying lack of safety, hygiene facilities, water, and food.

These conditions do not only apply to the islands but are apparent all over refugee camps in Greece. Due to its geographic location, both the Greek government and society are

particularly affected by the numbers of migrants who are seeking refuge. For a country that has already been struggling to provide for the local population in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the austerity packages since 2010, this circumstance poses an additional challenge (Cabot, 2018). In this regard, Mahecic (2020) emphasizes the importance of the role of NGOs in tackling the emerging challenges. One might be tempted to let the relevance of residents in Greek refugee camps fade into the background, thinking that declining numbers indicate that there is control over the situation. However, although 59,000 arrivals compared to 1,000,000 per year in the past seem much more manageable, the on-site situation is worsening continuously because the new arrivals are joining an interminable asylum process that is adding to the already overwhelming burden and further intensifying critical conditions (Mahecic, 2020). Therefore, it is expected that migration will, in general, become an increasingly political and emotional issue and influence societal development in various ways (Castles et al., 2014).

Given these developments, using the term “refugee crisis” can contribute to an emotionally charged discussion, implying that migrating people *are* the crisis for Europe and its borders. I oppose this view by showing that if we decide to use the word “crisis,” we have to be aware of its implications for the people affected by it. In this research study, I focus on the Nea Kavala refugee camp, where residents are experiencing the direct consequences of the overloaded asylum system, which results in yearlong waiting periods for their asylum interview. For this reason, I disagree with the implication that people could be considered a crisis that has to be stopped. On the other hand, we could call the conditions in camps like Nea Kavala a crisis. It is a crisis that is not based on the mobility desired by the people but on the denial of this very mobility.

2.2 The Feminization of Migration

The term feminization is being increasingly used to describe shifting roles of sex and gender in social, academic, and political debates. In the context of migration, feminization refers to the growing numbers of female migrants and the increasing awareness of the role women play in migration. The International Migration Report by the United Nations (2019) showed that women accounted for almost 48% of international migrants in the world. These numbers are increasing in countries of the Global North and decreasing in countries of the Global South (UN DESA, 2019).

However, the term feminization should not lead to the illusion that female migrants have only recently become a part of migrating people worldwide. The total number of internationally migrating women among migrants has been around 48% for the past 50 years (Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017). These numbers suggest that the term feminization is flawed and is applicable only when referring to certain geographical areas where the number of migrating women has indeed increased significantly.³ Notwithstanding, it can be stated that women remained seemingly invisible in migration; their presence and distinct role in migration did not find recognition until the 1980s when migration studies started to shift away from a narrative that considered women mainly as appendices to male migrants (Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017). Vause and Toma (2015) emphasize the nuances of different dimensions that can be applied when using the term feminization. One could refer to absolute numbers and also to levels of mobility, which is why the discourse on feminization must include these dimensions. Hence, it might make sense to consider feminization as a process where the role of female migrants receives increasing recognition and finds its due relevance in scientific studies of migration issues. Relating to this, a feminist view on gender considers the social construction of such events and seeks to connect them to power relations and how the ensemble of migrating men and women changes the relationships between them. Consequently, it is one of the biggest challenges for contemporary scholars to unravel the invisibility including the underlying structures that lead to it in the first place.

Nonetheless, this process has been slow and various scholars have pointed out the still existent blind spots in research on female migration and mobility. Marinucci (2007) argues that female migration is still underrepresented in the overall discourse, which results in a publicly accepted denial of the relevance of female migrants' trajectories. With a similar approach, Boyd and Grieco (2003) state that the first results of a gender-sensitive approach have been unsatisfactory, because migrating women should not simply be seen as addition and in juxtaposition with migrating men without analyzing the societal and social structures that shape trajectories of people who migrate.

As a result, the embeddedness of gender is a crucial factor in the discourse about the subjects of movement, shifting the attention to migrant women and their families and how their movements are shaped and consequently influence them in their further trajectories of

³ An example of one of the nuances is the growth of female migrants in Southeast Asia in the 1990s, when quick economic development led to increased wealth among the population in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. This resulted in an increasingly higher demand for domestic care workers, a job that has mainly been attracting women from Indonesia and the Philippines, among other countries (Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017).

life (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Considering this background of theories as a starting point, this research study takes place under this overarching question:

How do female residents and volunteers of the Soli Centre reconstruct mobility in Nea Kavala?

In the context of the first approach to the visibilization of the female residents' prevalent needs in Nea Kavala, which are determined and addressed by the Soli Centre, the first sub-question is the following:

What are the most relevant needs of female residents in Nea Kavala that the Soli Centre determines?

Nelson and Seager (2005, p. 2) ask the rhetorical question "Where is feminism on the map of geography?" implying that although a lot of work has been done by feminist scholars, there is still room for further exploration. This question highlights the need to look closely at how feminism has been implemented in the management of refugee camp settings by humanitarian organizations and where we can see this feminist approach in the determination of needs that are specific to female residents.

A key element in this endeavor is the body; The authors argue that the embodiment of experiences by female migrants is crucial to "fundamentally challenge bedrocks of Western social and political thought" (Nelson & Seager, 2005, p. 2). I focus on the motivation for focusing on certain needs that the Soli Centre has determined as the most urgent, prevalent, or those that the voluntary organizations can address most efficiently by their available capacities. Speaking of visibilization, this also includes a critical reflection on needs that stay "invisible" because they have not been recognized as needs, or organizations are unable to respond to them. The determination of needs, I argue, is a way to contribute to the embodiment of experiences, specifically of female residents, because it is a way to show that needs are seen, heard, and addressed. The inclusion of female-specific needs in an organization's philosophy also plays a role in the feminization of humanitarian aid and can serve as a driving factor to treat lived experiences of female migrants, not as isolated from and contrasting with male migrants but in their interplay with one another. If we consider feminization as a tool to deconstruct Western-oriented narratives, we cannot do it separately

from the concept of colonialism. In fact, to see through a gender lens, these concepts have to be introduced along with their mutual interconnection. This will follow in the next section.

2.3 Decolonizing Gender

Postcolonialism and decolonialism often appear together in academic and political debates because both challenge the widely accepted and normalized superiority of Western knowledge production. Though both concepts arise from the developments of diasporic scholars, they should not be seen as synonyms. Postcolonial studies have been mainly concerned with the Middle East and South Asia and focus mainly on the 19th and 20th centuries, while decolonial arguments start in the 15th century with European imperialism directed toward the Americas, and their focus has remained mainly on South American works (Bhabra, 2014).

Postcolonialism might lead to the assumption that we are speaking of colonialism that exists only in the past, one that does not exist anymore and refers to a different era that began with decolonization, which describes the process of colonies officially gaining autonomy in the decades following the Second World War. However, the officially achieved independence of colonies cannot erase the inherent colonialism that lingers in every postcolonial debate, thought, and action (De Lauri, 2020).

The inevitable colonial influences are the parting point of decolonial theory. Anibal Quijano developed the modernity/coloniality approach in 1991 and elaborated upon the intertwinement of these two axes in the European identity. Following Quijano (1991), Europe, as dominant colonial power, frames its self-identity on the affirmation of modernity. This very modernity is based on its disparity with other cultures and ignores the cultural background that forms the basis of European domination. As a consequence, these cultures are being denied their existence and seemingly being erased as the context in which and the substrate from which modernity emerged in the first place. Since the whole European identity is based on modernity that continues to dehumanize the cultures it seeks to differentiate itself from, it cannot be separated from its colonial domination (Quijano, 1997).

Walter D. Mignolo (2002) expands Quijano's (1991) argumentation of the coloniality of power and argues for the decolonization of knowledge that can only be achieved if the colonial imbrications over modernity are recognized. Following his argumentation, it is imperative to look at the prevailing epistemological superiority of colonial dominance. In this regard, the geopolitical locations of knowledge play a fundamental role because they help us

to understand how the superiority of knowledge production came into being and prevails, and how we can deviate from this dominant narrative. With the words “the world became unthinkable beyond European (and, later, North Atlantic) epistemology,” Mignolo (2002, p. 90) shows the need to deconstruct the narrative of a history that falsely starts with Europe and North America as the core. Instead, he demands that the histories of other cultures be shown, not only to make them thinkable but also to create historical dialogues. In other words, we need to reconstruct epistemology and part ways with the naturalized assumption that European and North American modernity are the creators of superior knowledge.

Maria Lugones not only builds upon Quijano’s and Mignolo’s approach, but she also accuses Quijano of the narrow-mindedness that he himself criticized with the modernity/coloniality approach, by arguing that he does not sufficiently address the articulations of gender in his reflections. She argues, “Quijano seems to me to imply that gender difference is constituted in the disputes over control of sex, its resources, and products” (Lugones, 2007, p. 193), which does not resonate with her own understanding of coloniality. She extends the argument for a division based on race and argues for a deeper understanding of how race, gender, and sex are articulated through the coloniality of gender, which requires a conscious re-reading of the modernity/coloniality approach (Bhambra, 2014). Following Lugones further, by accepting the assumption that women are “resources” in terms of sex over which men dispute, Quijano himself represents Eurocentrism. In this context, she argues, he reproduces a patriarchal hegemonic worldview that does not take into account the complexity of gender and sex and their intertwinement with coloniality (Lugones, 2007).

“The semantic consequence of the coloniality of gender is that ‘colonized woman’ is an empty category: no women are colonized; no colonized females are women” (Lugones, 2010, p. 745). With these words, she describes the complex consequence of a hegemonic understanding of coloniality with regard to gender, which eventually contributes to the erasure of the subjectivity of colonized women. Since colonization disrupted the gender relations and, with them, the understanding and organization of such colonized communities, it resulted in the Eurocentralized creation of a racialized understanding of gender. The author further argues that we need to look at the resistance to the coloniality of gender and how we can situate the relation between the colonized and colonizer in the complexity of decolonial thinking (Lugones, 2007).

As of today, many political and academic debates are concerned with the problematic issue of lingering colonialism that cannot be separated from the European identity that

continues to infiltrate its naturalized superiority into every discourse, every theoretical discussion, and every direct and indirect action. The merit cannot simply be found in a “gendered reading” (Lugones, 2010, p. 1) but by rereading colonial modernity to understand gender, race, and sexuality within the complex relation of the colonized and the colonizer. Decolonial feminism should, therefore, be seen “as a lens that enables us to see what is hidden” (Lugones, 2010, p. 1). Contrasting this with the postcolonial lens means not only the exposure of colonial structures but also their active deconstruction to allow a shift in how we read human history. This approach includes the reflection on how seemingly decolonial approaches might, in fact, keep colonial structures alive under the guise of gender equality. In this context, Giraldo (2016) argues that it is imperative to reveal the risk of the coloniality complying with a postfeminist regime by performative action that only helps to perpetuate the superiority of the West.

The humanitarian aid sector is not freed from its attachment to a problematic understanding of the dichotomy between superiority and inferiority of cultures in which a Western-oriented approach is continuously reproduced due to a “kind of oligopoly formed by the UN agencies, key networks of international NGOs, and the OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development] donors” (De Lauri, 2020, p. 41). I aim to follow Lugones’ approach of decolonizing gender in the humanitarian aid sector with the example of Nea Kavala and the Women’s Space. By doing so, I want to connect the dots between decolonial thought in the feminization of migration discourses, and most importantly, show how these concepts evolve and exist in their mutual relationship.

Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) describes the female identity as a “dynamic cultural fabric that reproduces itself and spreads until it reaches the mixed and frontier areas” (p. 107). The relations between women and men in this context reciprocate and complement each other and unfold in a social order that allows hegemonic power to prevail. In this regard, decolonial thinking aims to challenge this development by subverting the modern structure. Instead of merely seeing them as additions in a male-dominated field, through feminine practices they establish a new form of mobility, agency, and trajectory (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). Boundaries themselves become the target of inquiry, allowing for a complete reconstruction of migrant bodies. The reasoning behind this is that the construction of physical borders and mental boundaries is inescapably intertwined with the mental construction of “social boundaries” (Silvey, 2005, p. 7), which makes it imperative to embed truly embraced gender sensitivity in migration and border studies. In this regard, the second sub-question is:

How is the approach of the Soli Centre carried out in the threefold dynamic between residents, volunteers, and the Greek government?

With this sub-question, I intend to analyze how exactly the solidarity approach of the Soli Centre is implemented. Do they merely include or specifically address the female perspective and insecurities and resistances they have determined? This question includes the critical questioning of practices carried out by Western-oriented international organizations and the risks that are posed by the goals they pursue.

As mentioned before, Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) establishes an in-between notion of identity that turns women into creators of unprecedented modernity, not only despite but also because of the “macho logocentrism” (p. 106) that excludes them in the first place. To internalize this approach referring to Nea Kavala, I show how the residents and volunteers together weave the fabric, to use Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2012) words, and how they encounter ways to alter trajectories and to reclaim a continuing life despite the overarching sense of being held in transit. This question is specifically aimed at the narrations of volunteers, who navigate through a daily routine in which they often encounter themselves “between the chairs” of the government and the residents. I seek to show how international volunteers situate themselves and carry out their goal of showing solidarity in specific situations, such as in language classes, and how in these situations the dynamics unfold that might lead to the creation of new mobilities. Further, I want to show how they cope with challenges, frustration, and hopelessness when facing the restrictions and limitations of their role as volunteers, and how they utilize the room they have for maneuvering. To evaluate the dimensions of mobility created in these dynamics, the third sub-question is:

How can the mobilities, created by residents and volunteers, be defined in the context of a decolonial gender approach?

Schapendonk (2012) explains that transit is a much more complex state than one might expect because what underlies the simple in-between notion of waiting is, in fact, a highly politicalized concept with significant consequences not only for the directly affected migrants but also for their environment. Vogt (2018) argues that there lies both violence and intimacy in mobility to describe how life in transit holds on to the past while striving for change. Crucial in this aspect is that “experiences of immobility do not necessarily correspond with physical immobility” (Schapendonk, 2012, p. 581), which deviates from classical notions of moving and stopping. In other words, mobility and immobility are

dynamic terms that represent various ways in which movement may occur. It also shows that a person might be physically moving but feels immobile at the same time or voluntarily chooses not to make use of their ability to be mobile.

It is also closely linked to Van der Velde's and Van Naerssen's (2011) threshold approach. According to these authors, migrants have to overcome three thresholds to migrate successfully: 1) the mental border threshold related to aspirations and motivations in the decision-making process to cross a border, 2) the locational threshold that determines the physical manifestation of a border in the broadest sense of the term, and 3) the trajectory threshold, which refers to the dynamic process of carrying out mobility. As Van der Velde and Van Naerssen (2011) argue, if the third threshold is not overcome, "the outcome can be that mobility will not materialize" (p. 222).

I will focus on the in-between notion in Nea Kavala, where residents stay in a period of transit, waiting for mobility to be continued. It becomes clear that neither discourse nor theory of decolonization can exist without decolonizing practices (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). Hence, the challenge is to mobilize a decolonizing practice and make the embodied reality of such practices visible. Referring to this sub-question, I argue that mobility is created by actively using the boundaries and limitations of resources to bounce back from them. Building upon Glissant's (1997) claim for "the right to opacity," I argue that acts of resistance are powerful in the subtle nuances they take place in. I further argue that space is created by the very act of giving it away and that mobility is created through the shifting of power by claiming one's right for absence and passivity. Lugones (2010) argues, "We are moving on at a time of crossings, of seeing each other at the colonial difference, constructing a new subject of a new feminist geopolitics of knowing and loving" (p. 756) and creates with these words the possibility of forming a new narrative that should not be read in contrast to the male gaze, but embrace the intertwinement of coloniality of gender in every aspect of our life. With this last sub-question, I aim to evaluate whether new feminist geopolitics are formed in the Women's Space and if they are of knowing and loving or other dimensions residents and volunteers might find within them.

2.4 Displacement—A Remark on Global Immobility

I consider it to be crucial to include a remark on the current global state. I am writing these words in the fall of 2020, approximately nine months after COVID-19 began spreading all over the world. The impact of this pandemic is impossible to estimate at this moment, but

it is safe to say that it already has severely altered the daily routine of migrants in Nea Kavala, who have gone through several lockdowns, and lost personal communication with volunteers and the presence of NGOs for an indeterminate period of time. The uncertainty under which this research study developed accompanied me during the whole research process throughout the data collection, interviews, and data analysis. In an almost ironic way, the very mobility that is the focus of my research was altered globally in an unprecedented way. For volunteers in a refugee camp, displacement is an overarching reality they experience daily. However, suddenly and unexpectedly, the international volunteers and I among them became the subject of displacement as well, gates and borders closed and locked us out of the place to which we always had open access.

I am aware of the fact that the privileged position I was in allowed me to still stay mobile so that I could return to my home country by the end of March. In altered ways, I had to “make do” (Greene 2019) with an incomplete research project with the aim to make it complete by unpeeling and redesigning it. Uncertainty has become a constant companion for the duration of my research, but even more importantly, it still encapsulates the entire world. For me, personally, it certainly is most visible in Europe, which is substantiated by my own positionality and amplified by the media I peruse, once again replicating a Western-oriented European and North American center of attention and assumed relevance.

There is reason to believe that the long-lasting effects of the pandemic will alter mobility studies, possibly in the form of additional layers that cause erosion of the models we are looking at right now. It could include the lived reality of our society as well and reshape political and social structures. For example, Butler (2020) argues that the political consequences of the current pandemic, such as border closures, might strengthen capitalism in the face of global hardship and lead to the cruel differentiation between human life, whether or not it is considered of any value. In her opinion, pandemic zones are not only places of the virus itself but also social spheres where the reproduction of inequality in various dimensions might grow within exploitation and radicalism, and therefore increase hardship for people who inhere less power than others (Butler, 2020). Bearing these arguments in mind, one may foresee the outcome in which residents of Nea Kavala will feel long-lasting effects of the pandemic in their daily routine, their trajectories, and their ability to follow aspirations of mobility.

As a closing remark, COVID-19 has altered mobility worldwide in a way that will reshape how we narrate our own mobilities and trajectories. How these narrations will look like in three, five, or 20 years is yet to be found out.

2.5 Outline

Following the introduction and theoretical framework in chapters one and two, I will introduce my research tools in the third chapter on methodology, followed by the introduction of the research site in the fourth chapter. The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters present the empirical part of the study by answering the research questions and eventually addressing the main research objective. The concepts that have been introduced in the theoretical framework will reappear in these chapters and build the framework of the analysis. The statements, memories, anecdotes, and worldviews of the people who spoke to me serve as the leitmotif of narrations through the empirical chapters and in the introduction of the research site to create a diversified and authentic picture of the research location.

More specifically, the fifth chapter is concerned with female-specific needs. Since needs in Nea Kavala are manifold, I selected three different forms of needs that are especially present within the spaces of the Soli Centre and address each of them in separate sub-chapters. The needs I identified were 1) the need for individual care, focusing on the lack of recreational facilities and resources for self-care and individual quality time, 2) the need for information, related to the Information Hub (Info-Hub), which addresses challenges by helping the residents to navigate through bureaucracy, provide access to medical care, and to speak up together in solidarity, and 3) the need for visibilization, which is concerned with spaces and mobility in physical and non-physical contexts and observes how the mobility of female residents is restricted due to a seeming invisibility of their needs.

In the sixth chapter, I focus on the strategic approach of the Soli Centre to address the aforementioned needs. Divided into three sub-chapters, I will focus on analyzing how the organization creates room to maneuver to carry through the opaque dynamics between NGOs, the Greek government, and residents. This is also related to the approach of expanding women's "territory" across the camp and to the question of under what circumstances this aim should have priority.

The seventh and last empirical chapter is concerned with the results of both the determination and accommodation of needs. It can be stated that mobility is created on different dimensions, which is why the sub-chapters refer to 1) reclaiming time, 2) reclaiming the voice, and 3) reclaiming space, concluding that mobility is created on a level that goes beyond the physical manifestation of movement, borders, and thresholds.

In relation to this, I argue that residents in Nea Kavala have to overcome additional thresholds that should find recognition in international migration and mobility studies. The

reason I argue this point is that these thresholds ultimately counter the dominant narratives of resistance mobilization and the manifestation of movement and transit. Further, I argue that, unexpectedly, even opacity and passivity can play a useful role in the reclamation of time and space as powerful political tools of resistance. My argument is based on the idea that the visibilization of acts of resistance is crucial to understand how “the feminine practice weaves the fabric of the intercultural” (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 107) and how these practices are inevitably influenced by the postcolonial order they aim to subvert. Finally, in the eighth chapter I will present my concluding results, the limitations of this research study and make suggestions on how we might make use of these findings in the future of migration and mobility studies.

3. Methodological Framework

This chapter is concerned with the methodology of this research study. I decided to include the process of changing my methodology in this chapter to provide transparency and more detailed insights into the transformation of the research process. First, I will explain the motivations for choosing the methodological framework, followed by an account of the changes I made and the reasons for making those changes. The inclusion of the originally planned framework and the methodology that was finally used is necessary for showing that human geography is a flexible science that can adapt, transform, and bring new insights into an ever-changing world. In the ensuing sub-chapters, I engage with ethical and moral aspects that should be taken into consideration, my role as a volunteer at the research location, and how I dealt with the challenges by restructuring my research design.

3.1 Methodological Tools

I picture my data analysis in the form of an umbrella. Its outer canopy stands for my main research objective that is the exploration of feminism in mobility, the overarching lens under which I aim to link the individual ribs and stretchers of the umbrella that are all connected at different ends. These are the categories and codes interconnecting and holding the canopy up for it to function properly. It should be noted that an umbrella is a flexible construct; it can bend and even be turned inside out by a strong gust of wind. I hope to have my fieldwork and research bend the figurative framework of my data analysis to establish truly meaningful connections between my selected codes in relation to my main research objective. One could argue that my informants are the shafts of the “data analysis-umbrella;” they are the backbone of my data analysis and lift my research study to the level of fieldwork-based conclusions.

The methodological research plan for my fieldwork in Nea Kavala was originally based on the aim to reach a profound understanding of the situation by using auto-ethnography, participant observation, and face-to-face interaction. This approach enables the researcher to become deeply engaged in a social setting while learning about the overall context and unique features of communication and social encounters (Jones & Smith, 2017). In sight of the developments of the pandemic, it was necessary to adjust the methods to meet the requirement of keeping a safe distance to all people involved in the study. At the same time, the new methods needed to be compatible with my (likewise partly adjusted) research questions and suitable to reach the original research objective.

For this, I decided to use epistolary interviews as a new component of my methodology. Epistolary interviews are asynchronous dialogues on a one-to-one basis. These are mediated by a technological device, e.g., email or voicemail, and allow freedom and flexibility for informants who can decide how and when to answer (Debenham, 2001). One of the benefits of this approach is that both sides can continue the conversation at their own pace. People can express their thoughts without feeling the pressure of time; therefore, they can give well-thought-out responses (Debenham, 2001). Given the uncertain and often changing circumstances in Nea Kavala, asynchronous interviews are particularly suitable to the social setting of the people who told me their stories, because they lower the pressure that synchronous interviews might produce. It is a process of constructing shared knowledge and can build valuable relationships between the interviewer and interviewee over time (Ferguson, 2009).

It turned out that technology became a fundamental part of my data collection in general. While some of the most relevant features of grounded theory, such as cultural immersion and triangulation (Babchuk & Hitchcock, 2013), cannot be put into practice during engagement using technology as the bridge-builder, the new way of communicating digitally over time and distance seemed to add a new valuable component in the ways I was able to build relationships with the people.

I am aware that some pitfalls of these methods cannot be overcome. The value of having direct face-to-face conversations with people while being in the same place and experiencing the same environment without time overlap cannot be replaced. Nonetheless, asynchronous dialogues are especially beneficial to comprehend a changing situation such as immobility because they allow the capture of a change in events and a change in dynamics. It turned out that this advantage positively influenced the research process.

3.2 Choice of Sample Group

When I started my fieldwork, I originally planned to conduct in-person interviews with residents who stay in Nea Kavala, volunteers who work for one of the organizations on the ground, and other individuals and groups who have direct or indirect connections within the context of refugee camps.

As per my agreement with the Soli Centre, I came to Nea Kavala as a full-time volunteer to work in the Women's Space and other spaces where additional support was needed. I was hoping to get to know as many people as possible and to eventually find a

group of people who would be willing to share their knowledge and stories with me. Ideally, my role as a volunteer in the Women's Space would allow me to establish first contacts with women who make use of the space regularly and to build a relationship of trust while continuously being transparent about my intentions.

However, I withdrew from my intention to speak directly with residents because it did not seem appropriate in the serious developments that were unfolding, and transitioned to a group of international volunteers who were involved in humanitarian aid.

The people who spoke to me were 10 volunteers who came from different European countries; Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain (Catalonia), and France. Most of the volunteers were from member states either of the EU or the Schengen Area, just as were the volunteers I met during my stay in Nea Kavala with a few exceptions. Therefore, in the context of the diversity of the sample group, it may be noted that the volunteers belonged mostly to Western countries and brought a Eurocentralized bias to the camp despite their every effort to be unbiased. Volunteers coming from other countries might have increased challenges joining the team due to visa regulations, which amplifies the presence of European volunteers as a continuing tendency in Nea Kavala. Most of them were in their 20's, and one person was in her 50's. She added the perspective of someone of a different age group. Some of my people were long-term volunteers,⁴ while others had only spent a comparably short time volunteering.

Given my main research objective and my role at the camp, the group of volunteers consisted almost exclusively of women, though not all of them were volunteering in a female-only space. Though I did not anticipate such a composition of the group, I should have foreseen it because most of my contacts were established in the Women's Space. To put this in perspective, a male volunteer added insights to the discussion from the view of the people excluded from the Women's Space. Additionally, to add to the diversity of the group, I included volunteers who mainly worked with male residents or in male-dominated spaces to avoid a one-sided narrative. Two people had a professional medical background and worked as medical volunteers in different settings, while others engaged themselves with no specific prior experience, e.g., by teaching English.

Although I did not ask any of my interview partners about their political orientation, it became evident that irrespective of our political orientations and pursuits, as volunteers, we

⁴ In this case, I define long-term volunteers as people who have spent several subsequent months volunteering and therefore have more experience and are well adjusted with the organizational structures and the daily routine at the camp.

shared similar beliefs in the context of the refugee situation in Europe; our various goals translated into supporting the residents of the refugee camps.⁵ Furthermore, I am aware that the people in this group expressed their opinions from an insider's point of view, because they were subject to the executive decision-making power of the Greek government to appoint their agency as volunteers.

Except for three persons, as long as I stayed in Greece, I shared a living room, ate meals, and spent most hours of the day with people as co-volunteers in Nea Kavala. To prevent my friendship with these volunteers from affecting the professionalism while working with the sample group, I reached out to other volunteers whom I had either met only briefly or not at all and opted for oral and written semi-structured in-depth interviews to maintain a certain level of formality. I also felt that the formality we established in digitally conducted interviews made it easier for people to express themselves freely without having to dismiss the fact that we were personally acquainted.

I am fully aware that these narratives cannot substitute potential interviews I could have conducted with the residents themselves; nonetheless, the unforeseen change of events led me to newly formulated research objectives and opened up other ways to analyze the position of volunteers and NGOs in solidarity with the residents, often seemingly in opposition to the government while still aiming to keep a positive and hopeful attitude. This is why the findings of this study may serve as parting point for future research projects to build upon them.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data was collected using triangulation described by Babchuk and Hitchcock (2013) as a multiple data collection method that facilitates multilayered and reliable data analysis. My goal is it to portray the dynamic relationship between different stakeholders while focusing on the voices of the volunteers who are the front-line workers of humanitarian aid organizations. They are the ones who directly witness the consequences of political decisions and often have a close relationship with the camp residents through community work and their routine activities as volunteers.

⁵ It should be noted that these similar beliefs are, of course, on a general basis. Certainly, the volunteers I spoke with represented different approaches, strategies, and their individual feelings and emotions. By similar beliefs in this context, I mean that all of them came to Nea Kavala driven by the desire to provide support services for the camp's residents in various ways. They were, by no means, a homogenous group, but they stood on the same ground and were acting from the perspective of members of a small grassroots organization.

When my stay in Nea Kavala was disrupted, I faced the problem of having to filter out information that I potentially could have used. In the preliminary stage of my research, for ethical reasons, I did not note down specific conversations that I had with residents. I felt that by asking someone via messages or voicemails about their experiences from a distance, I would not be able to sense if I was putting people in distress. In other words, I realized that they may have had other things to worry about at the moment and to question the research study participants amid crisis would be intrusive, especially given the privileged position I was in. I wished to avoid putting any additional pressure on people in the camp for the sake of my research, which would have contradicted my principle of protecting the people in their precarious situation. Moreover, it would have contradicted the code of conduct of the Soli Centre that I signed upon arrival at Nea Kavala. This problem was not as striking between the volunteers and me because all of us were “on the same level”⁶ for the fact that we met as volunteers.

To analyze the interviews, I applied a two-cycled inductive coding process to the collected data, using codes for references made regarding the role of volunteers, impressions of Nea Kavala, the purpose of the Women’s Space, female residents’ needs, the approach carried out by the Soli Centre, statements about resident-volunteer relationship, and references made on acts of resistance and adaptation. All data were coded manually and then categorized into emerging themes and sub-themes to establish an organized coding scheme. The coding frame was rather flat than hierarchical, with a few exceptions depending on the relevance people attributed to certain themes. I will emphasize the dynamics that emerge among different stakeholders and use the information provided by volunteers in the role of key informants to work with the abstraction that recurrently drifts off the margins of the lived reality on the ground.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

When I left Greece at the end of March, I knew that the chances of returning to Nea Kavala soon were slim. Some volunteers decided to leave at the same time, while others chose to stay even though entering the camp was prohibited until further notice. The gates of

⁶ Although I use the expression “on the same level,” I am aware that the situation affected people in numerous ways and I do not claim to be aware of all the concerns people could have been facing at the time of the interviews. I know that some volunteers were facing difficulties in returning to their home countries and others were coping with the prospect of an indefinite stay in Greece. However, because of the personal relationships we had built together, I felt that I could believe that their participation was truly voluntarily and did not cause them any negative consequences.

Nea Kavala have always looked relatively open to me because the residents were free to leave the camp to shop for groceries and meet with friends. All new volunteers had to register with the camp authorities, but I was never asked to produce my identification when I was walking across the space. I assumed that this was probably because our role as volunteers was obvious and automatically assumed by security personnel because we entered the camp by car and usually in pairs or groups.

I could not help but feel an almost ironic coincidence in the fact that my whole research study was supposed to take place under the key research theme of mobility right when the world, so it seemed, was put on hold. Flights were stopped, shops were closed, public life disappeared, and the streets became empty and quiet. The position I had as an international volunteer with the privilege to go back to the relatively safe environment of my home country, or the Netherlands, where I studied, was as blatant as the camp residents' inability to do so. By the time I left, my research had not caught the desired pace even though I was already in a place of routine and had a fixed plan for the next two months. As a matter of fact, the routine was broken when the Soli Centre withdrew its volunteers. While adjusting to these changes, I reflected on the words of Glissant (1997, p. 192) who claimed, "It is the idea itself of totality, as expressed so superbly in Western thought, that is threatened with immobility." Glissant's claim for opacity will come up repeatedly in response to my research questions, so I part from the idea that totality is the only way to find answers and instead acknowledge the voids I cannot fill as the potential for future research projects.

4. Introducing the Research Location

In this chapter I will introduce the research location and environment. First I will give an overview of Nea Kavala and explain how the location adds to the invisibility of the residents. This also includes narrations of volunteers who shared their first impressions of the camp with me. Subsequently I will address the different spaces in camp that are managed by the Soli Centre and serve different purposes. Finally, I will introduce the Polykastro-based volunteer team.

4.1 Nea Kavala

The Nea Kavala refugee camp is located on a former military airport a few kilometers away from the nearest town Polykastro. Interestingly, when looking up the name online on map search engines, although the map with directions shows the neighborhood of the camp, it does not show the camp itself. Instead, the map shows Polykastro Aeroclub, redirects the user to the website of the old airport, and states that it is “permanently closed.”⁷ Only on switching to the satellite view does the camp become visible; it is distinguished by the white containers, laid out in a slim rectangle stretched out for kilometers on the former landing strip where airplanes used to take off and land. During my stay, approximately 700 residents were registered in Nea Kavala. By the time I left, this number was close to tripling due to new arrivals from several islands. There is still space to add additional containers behind the existing ones, almost as if in expectation of filling the remaining strip bit by bit. This transformation of the airport into a refugee camp shows how geographies can take on new purposes as a consequence of political developments. It leaves a bitter aftertaste to contemplate the fact that this space used to be a functioning airport, a place of vibrant movement, travels, and trajectories before it turned into a place of yearlong state of being in limbo for people who are waiting to finally move on with their journey.

The fact that Nea Kavala is not directly visible on official maps is just another element that adds to its invisibility and isolation. Surrounded by mountains and open countryside, it is not integrated into the neighborhoods and has become a separate community, visibly cut off from the life in Polykastro. The demographic characteristics of Nea Kavala which contribute to the residents’ exclusion from the local community are no exception. In fact, the design of refugee camps plays a significant role in the degree of

⁷ The announcement of the airport’s closure and the aerial map of Nea Kavala and the surrounding areas can be found by following this link: <https://avinfo.greekhelicopters.gr/?p=2338>.

isolation resident communities experience, which is why a shift in refugee camp designs has become a part of the social and scientific debate (Jahre, Kembro, Adjahossou & Altay, 2018).⁸ The fact that there is no public transport between the two places further limits the mobility of the camp's residents, who have to walk for about one hour along the main road to reach the next town. This multi-layered isolation did not go unnoticed by the volunteers I spoke to. Lucien⁹ said:

The first day, I have been really surprised by the camp location: extremely isolated and non-visible from the road. The wind was really strong (but all the weather conditions are usually hard to handle at this airport). I have been surprised by the fact there was no tent, only containers; all seemed to be linked to the electric network. I was also surprised by the small amount of people walking around—the camp looked desert[ed].¹⁰ (Lucien, 18/06/2020)

Lucien addressed the problematic infrastructure that offers almost no protection from the weather. On some days, when the wind blows unrestricted all over the concrete runway, it is hard to leave the containers at all. Alexis noted the accumulation of containers:

When you see all the containers going along and they're all kind of squished together and then it's just in the middle of nowhere really, vast plains of land and nothing there, and then just loads of containers. I felt like it was quite an isolated place, and it is, I still think that. (Alexis, 25/05/2020)

⁸ For concrete examples of the designs of refugee camps, see e.g. Jahre et al. (2018), who compare different refugee camp designs in Greece, Kenya, Ethiopia and Turkey to highlight the fact that, even though an emerging shift in design is apparent, refugee camps across the globe are still mostly designed as temporary accommodation. This traditional approach does not sufficiently recognize the fact that many refugee camps have turned into permanent settlements and should be redesigned accordingly. Nea Kavala is an evident example of such a problematic: Built in 2016 as a temporary solution after Macedonia closed its borders to Greece and left thousands of people stuck between frontiers, it still exists today. Even though many residents live in Nea Kavala for several years, its geographical location and infrastructure separate the residents from the local community which contributes to tension, isolation and exclusion.

⁹ All names that appear in this research are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the people involved in the study.

¹⁰ In order to appreciate the voices of the people who spoke to me, I decided to keep my intervention by correcting spelling or grammar errors to a necessary minimum. For this purpose, errors in statements/messages are only marked when I considered it relevant to avoid any confusion about the content. Slight adjustments regarding punctuation or spelling were made to maintain the reading flow. Apart from this, I wish to maintain the authenticity of people's voices by leaving their words in the way they phrased them.

Aileen expressed her thoughts specifically relating to female residents in sight of the camp's location by saying, "Would I necessarily want to be walking along that road as a single woman myself? No. At daytime maybe, at nighttime definitely not" (Aileen, 19/05/2020).

The camp itself is only rarely presented in the media. Unlike widely known camps such as Moria camp on the island Lesbos, Nea Kavala is rather unknown and not the first place of arrival for residents.¹¹ It is not surprising that "hot spots" of crisis receive a much wider coverage on the media, but this should not be the reason for neglecting the dire needs of residents in Nea Kavala. There is a reason for the wide coverage of places such as Moria by international media—their overcrowdedness that shows the pure despair of people and the ultimate failure to provide sufficient humanitarian aid to those in need. This also translates to the sensationalism approached by Boas et al. (2020), and shows that the media is specifically looking to portray places where spectacle is expected. In contrast, Nea Kavala presents a very different image; it is relatively clean and organized. The residents are at a different stage of their journey. For volunteers, this can mean a positive surprise. When they first entered the camp, they expected the situation to be much worse. Savannah explained this in one of her messages to me:

My impression of the camp was that it was a lot quieter, calmer, more organized, more spacious, and cleaner than I had expected—most of the information I had about refugee camps in Greece before I arrived was on places like Moria camp in Lesbos, so I half expected that kind of environment when I arrived. And this was true for the people too—I had expected them to have very little and to be in a terrible state, so it was a nice surprise to see that people appeared to be well, were friendly, had clean clothes and adequate food, etc. (I'm not sure how best to phrase that, but I hope you know what I mean). (Savannah, 08/06/2020)

With these words, Savannah expressed a common perception of many volunteers—the perception of the fact that people in Nea Kavala neither seemed to be in an acute crisis nor fighting for survival in the physical sense. However, the fact that these needs find coverage in the media and scientific literature underlined the neglect of other less apparent

¹¹ Many residents have been in other refugee camps before they arrived in Nea Kavala, including the camps on the islands. It is part of the Soli Centre's code of conduct to not interrogate residents about the often-traumatic journey they have been through. So, I usually did not talk to residents about the different stations they had passed through along the way. However, the topic came up in some conversations when people would mention where they had stayed in the past.

needs that are harder to portray and measure. The struggles of the residents include the monotony of waiting, experiencing the void of the same routine day by day, and being burdened with the uncertainty of not knowing when, and if, the trajectory would continue.

4.2 The Soli Centre—Introduction of the Spaces

In the following paragraphs, I will introduce the different spaces of the Soli Centre, an organization that has been operating in Nea Kavala since 2016 and that consists of volunteers who run activities in camp. The NGO spaces are located in the refugee camp in direct proximity to the residents' accommodation. The volunteer accommodation is located in Polykastro, a small town at about 15 minutes distance by car from the camp. Volunteers come into the camp in small groups six days a week in several shifts per day according to a schedule of activities. The spaces and activities operated by the Soli Centre are:

CFS—Child-Friendly Space: This space serves as a kindergarten for younger children. It is used for supervised play, handicrafts, and all sorts of child-friendly activities that are prepared and implemented by the responsible volunteers. It is one of the few places in the camp where children have toys and a safe space to romp around in and be with other children of their age groups. Especially given the limited space in the containers, it is also a relief for families with small children to offer them activities and a room to learn and play.

TSS—The Social Space: This space is a community area used for various activities by the adults in the camp. Except for children, everybody is welcome into this space. However, it is male-dominated, so it may more rightly be called the space for male adults. The space has a coffee station, books, games, and musical instruments to be borrowed through a lending system. It is a room to socialize, play backgammon, or browse through information material about special days, bus timetables to different cities, and activity schedules set by the organizations who work in the camp. Unlike in other spaces, specific activities are not envisaged. It is rather a general area for the residents to be in others' company and to have a cup of tea. People often sit outside on benches and play games and instruments. It is also a place where hierarchies of volunteers and residents are flat. The aim is "to have horizontal relationships," as Lucien, who was part of the lead of TSS, told me. He added, "I think we learn how to discover people and set up positive environment and atmosphere" (Lucien, 01/06/2020).

Info-Hub—Information Hub: There are two Info-Hub sessions: an open one for all genders and a female-only session that was introduced recently based on the evaluation that it

would facilitate access for women to such information services. The purpose of the Info-Hub is to address questions, queries, and problems that residents have, often related to their asylum status, their upcoming asylum interviews, health care, or other personal problems. Compared to other spaces, Info-Hub takes place in a rather serious setting where complex and intimate problems can be discussed in a professional and considerate manner. Compared to other spaces, not many physical resources (such as books or games) are needed. Instead, the volunteers' knowledge and skill at answering questions and competent interpreters to overcome language barriers are essential. Lucien said:

The first thing is to be able to listen to people's needs through interpreters or by speaking the residents' language. Then, we must have the knowledge to help them in a good way, without mistakes or false promises. Contrary to Social Space, Info-Hub has to be quiet and discrete to be in good condition to work with people. What is more, they might have confidential stories or data to share, so it should be in the right place to do so. (01/06/2020)

It is difficult for residents to find privacy in Nea Kavala; neither the small containers nor the community areas have space where people can be entirely by themselves. This is why it is even more important to create a space to share confidential information, a place where residents trust volunteers to address problems discreetly. For example, volunteers are not allowed to replace immigration lawyers, but they can transfer clients to the authorized personnel and try to solve general issues, support residents in the preparation for their asylum interview, revise and proofread CVs, and forward job offers. Centered on information, this space aims to facilitate the often-complicated matters of legal nature, to make information accessible and easy to understand in all languages spoken in camp.

Language Classes: Language classes are held in different spaces, e.g. the Women's Space for female-only lessons. Students have to be at least 15 years old, if they are younger, they have to attend a local Greek school as determined by the Greek Ministry. The so-called ABC classes provide the basics of English and are even suitable for students who have never learned how to write. Besides this class, students can attend classes of levels one to four. However, female-only classes are only up to level two. This is partly because of the limited capacity of volunteers and partly because there is little demand for women's classes for higher levels.

4.3 The Soli Centre—The Women’s Space

As the name suggests, the Women’s Space is exclusively for female residents who can visit the space regularly either for different social sessions or for female-only English classes. The room can be divided into two smaller rooms with curtains from ceiling to floor to enable the holding of classes of two different levels of English at the same time. The walls are decorated with handicrafts and paintings made by the residents and volunteers to make the room colorful and “homey” to the extent the environment of a refugee camp permits the use of those terms. As Lynn, one of the leaders of the Women’s Space told me, in a figurative sense, it became “a big living room” (Lynn, 05/06/2020), so the focus on the space is to provide a comforting and peaceful environment where women can be by themselves. This is also why it is highly discouraged for volunteers to take pictures or recordings inside of the space. Even if they are just of the general room and not of residents, this is to avoid the risk that women might be uncomfortable or feel unsafe.

I formed the impression that all resources were used to their maximum and for different purposes. On some days, the space was turned into the Open Language Café where people taught each other different languages. Yoga mats could be used for workout sessions and then fastened to the windows to dim the lights for showing a movie. For this, blackboards draped with bedsheets became the screen and school desks became a movie theatre. Sometimes, the entire room was turned into a dance floor. At the same time, the space was not only created by volunteers but to the same extent also by the residents who left their creations on the walls, picked their favorite music to listen to while working on a piece of clothing or talking to their friends. The contribution of residents is fundamental for the organization’s approach too, as Lynn stated, “We thought, at the end, they are the ones that are using our activities, so they should have a part in forming what they want to have there” (Lynn, 05/06/2020).

4.4 The Volunteer Team

The volunteers live together in a shared volunteer house Polykastro. The number of volunteers fluctuates throughout the year. During my stay, the number of international volunteers varied between 10 and 20.¹² In addition to the international volunteers, the team also consists of volunteer residents who stay in Nea Kavala and support the team, especially

¹² The exact number of volunteers at certain times is not disclosed for privacy and security reasons.

as interpreters and mediators between the resident community and NGO members.¹³ The team consists of several coordinators who are responsible for organizing activities and logistics, recruiting new volunteers, and taking care of finances and management-related duties. The coordinators also lead activities in camp.

Since coordinators are in charge of the overall organization and are in close contact with the umbrella organization, they are the decision-makers and have the last word in discussions. Additionally, their range of duties involves the supervision of volunteers and assuring that all activities are operated under ethical guidelines and adhering to the code of conduct of the organization. However, it should be noted that the inner dynamics of the organization are based on eminently flat hierarchies that are evidenced by the fact that all volunteers are equally asked to share their thoughts, criticism, and suggestions for improvement. Coordinators and volunteers have regular one-on-one check-ins to ensure that all people involved feel confident and safe in the environment, share their concerns, or seek advice for coping with demanding/traumatic experiences.

In addition to this, regular group check-ins are provided to create a reassuring team environment where every single person can contribute to the project with their capabilities. Volunteers with a professional background, such as in psychology or social work, are encouraged to bring in their specific skills if they can, and other practical skills, such as knowing how to play a musical instrument, are always particularly useful because they can be turned into a new activity that can be implemented in one of the spaces. Most volunteers have one or several areas as their main responsibility. Nonetheless, depending on the demand at a given time, everyone is asked to help out in spaces other than their specific areas. During my stay, I was always a part of the Women's Space team, but I also found myself in TSS and CFS, and, for a short while, I had the opportunity to take over an English class to cover for another volunteer on leave. This way, all volunteers are familiarized with different spaces and support each other whenever a sub-team is short-staffed.

The volunteer accommodation is used as a place to recharge from the daily routine in camp, but it also serves as an office for preparing activities and information material, which has to be translated into Farsi, Arabic, French, and English. These translations either take place with the help of volunteers who speak the language, or with online translation services.

¹³ In this case as well, the number of resident volunteers is not mentioned to protect their privacy. For the same reason, I do not disclose the spaces they were involved in.

5. Needs of Female Residents in the Women's Space

In this research study, I focused on female residents in Nea Kavala, their needs, struggles, and their unique position in the interwoven and complex relationship between powerlessness and adaptation, clear notions of empowerment, and revolution just as much as quiet moments of unbreakable resistance.

I want to clarify that the importance of addressing and catering to these needs is not exclusive for female residents. In the following chapters, the reader will read about needs such as safety, privacy, and medical services; all of these fundamental needs deserve the same level of recognition, resources, and attention for female as well as male residents. However, for the aim of this study, they will be evaluated and analyzed in the context of female residents and the manifold ways in which needs are expressed, identified, and addressed. I would like to emphasize the fact that my interest is not to attribute more value to the well-being of women than men in refugee settings. The reason I focus on women in this study is to contribute to the decolonial feminist approach that I introduced earlier, to contribute to the visibilization of women who have been neglected in mobility studies for centuries.

In the process of choosing this specific research objective, I also considered my own position. As a woman, I am allowed in female-only spaces and have easier access to informal feminist discourses in female-oriented communities. I am mindful of the fact that a male researcher would not be able to conduct this type of research without facing significant hurdles. In the same way, I, as a woman, did have access to all spaces in the camp, including spaces where mostly male residents were present, because these spaces were not deliberately male-dominated and all genders were welcome to join. However, as a researcher, I would have faced challenges in viewing through a specifically masculine lens because of my own positionality and self-identification. Besides, there were ethical aspects that would hinder me from entering places that could be considered a safe place for male communities, even if they are officially for all genders. This is why it is useful to accentuate that this study does not arise out of a female vs. male confrontation. Instead, it is an acknowledgment of the work that has already been done by scholars such as Quijano, Mignolo, and Lugones and their achievements in the active deconstruction of colonial narratives. I aim to contribute to their work by exploring how the potential of the mobility they address can unfold in situations of seeming immobility and whether there are any other possibilities and limitations to be taken into account.

5.1 The Need for Time—Recreation and Individual Care

I noticed that most of the woman, they seem to be very involved in the family life and they don't really seem to have much time for themselves to just be as a person or to have fun or like really do anything that is just for themselves. Like, if you talk to them, they constantly have things to do, kind of really cliché household chores, like they cook for hours, they clean, a lot of them have a lot of children. The majority of women that I met seemed to be the ones in their partnership to take care of the children. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

With these words, Lynn, shared her impressions about the challenges female residents in Nea Kavala experience. Lynn had been in Nea Kaval for almost nine months at the time of the interview. As the head of the Women's Space, Lynn managed the schedule and content of activities as well as the regular assessment and evaluation of the project. When speaking about the space, she told me about the difficulties that many female residents she knew personally faced every day:

I feel like a lot of them [the female residents in Nea Kavala] haven't experienced much moments where they felt empowered or where they felt like they are doing something to really form their own future or where they have an impact on doing something for their own future. And I think this is also a really important part of what the Women's Space offers them. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

The lack of empowerment, or rather the lack of access to empowering resources, is something that was implied by many volunteers, which matched my own observations in Nea Kavala. The women in the camp are usually the ones concerned with childcare. I was considering the possibility of my own bias when observing this, whether I, possibly unconsciously, perceived this image because it was to be expected and represented rather traditional role of men and women. This is why I sought the opinion of other people involved in the spaces. Alexis shared a similar reflection on role allocations:

From what I've seen, for example, we've started doing the women's English lessons in the mornings at the same time as we'll do the Child-Friendly Space with the little kids. And so then, we can see the women will come in and drop their kids off and then

go to English class. But when the kids, you know, they don't want to stay in the space anymore, they want to leave. And we have a policy where if the children want to leave, you know, they can leave, and then we'll have to take them back, often they want to go back to their moms. And when we go back to the container, maybe the other parent is not there. So we have to take them back to the Women's Space, and then, it disrupts the women's learning. Or there's kids who will come into the English class with their mums, and again that's disrupting the women's learning. But you see in the afternoons, when we do mixed classes, I haven't really seen any men who have their children with them. So that's just one indicator for me that more responsibility for childcare seems to go toward the women. Like you said, I can't speak for the women, but just that's kind of an indicator that I've seen anyway. (Alexis, 25/05/2020)

Alexis backed up her reflections with visible outcomes that different role allocations have for the women and how they affect their personal schedule and their participation in desired activities. While, of course, not all women in the camp are mothers, and I can only speak for the women who joined the Women's Space activities, it became clear quite quickly that family care is mostly the responsibility of women, be it their children or those of other family members, such as grandchildren, nieces or siblings. While this insight is neither surprising nor specific to a refugee camp setting, I refer to it because I observed how these circumstances affected many other areas of life that are specific to the location we were in, which put many women in the position of having to reconcile the external expectations placed upon them with their individual needs and desires.

After only a few days in Nea Kavala, I realized that my goal, to look for the most prominent, relevant, or urgent needs, specifically of the female residents in their daily life, would not lead me to satisfying answers. Needs were so numerous, omnipresent, and diverse that I was overwhelmed by the task of knowing precisely where to begin. After Greece went into lockdown, this goal became even more opaque when uncertainty flooded the camp and seemed to intensify and spill over the edges of my prior findings. How could I determine the most dominant needs from a distance? How could I verify my observations and know where to delve deeper? I decided to take a different approach—to put the cart before the horse and start with the NGO. I turned to members of the team and to a volunteer from Medical Volunteers International and a former midwife who had worked with mothers, infants, and family care in refugee settings. In the following sections, I continue to present some volunteer

perceptions of the Women's Space, and their personal opinion of its importance and effectiveness. Volunteers, those who managed the space and other volunteers who worked in other spaces, made the following statements:

I think the Women's Space is really important. As you can see during the Social Space, there are almost never women showing up. [...] So I think it's really important to actually offer the safe space only for women where they can feel comfortable, take off their hijab, whatever they want. Maybe also take off a jacket, that they are actually in a t-shirt. Yeah, things they wouldn't do out of this safe space or out of their containers. (Zora, 07/05/2020)

You see women just coming there, having a cup of tea, painting something, listening to music, chatting to the other women and forming friendships and networks with other women around them, supporting each other, just letting go for a while. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

Its main purpose is for women to have a space inside the camp where they can go at any time—at any time when we're open, but basically anytime, and just spend time by themselves, to meet other women, to be without their children sometimes, and just to be away from all the duties and all the maybe pressing issues they may have in their daily lives. (Pia, 02/06/2020)

These statements all convey a similar message—the need for a place of individual care where women feel comfortable, safe, and relaxed amidst situations of worry, uncertainty, and fear. The need for such a space becomes evident when looking at the demographics of the camp; The NGO spaces are the only areas apart from washrooms, a provisional mosque, and the containers that are lined up far across the available space. One cannot find any other spaces that offer a retreat, and there are almost no trees or green areas to sit in private. Being a former military airport, the vast openness of the land adds to the impression of exposure, and the design of the accommodations and buildings strengthens this impression.

There might be practical reasons for this set-up, such as the ease of negotiating in the space for security personnel in the case of incidents. Arguably, open spaces allow for visibility and might even provide a sense of safety, because paths from A to B are relatively straightforward and easy to remember. However, in reality, it is obvious that all outdoor

public areas are mainly male-dominated. Women are not per sé invisible in camp, but one can tell that their appearance is in other locations. One might see them at one of the sinks or the water taps, but they usually do not linger outside in the common areas very often. Aileen explained this in the following statement:

It is quite telling in the sense that I didn't see so many women in camp. I always saw men. [...] I think that I always got the sense that they [women in Nea Kavala] were much more involved in looking after the kids. I mostly saw women going to either the sinks for washing up, so housework stuff, or with the kids. (Aileen, 19/05/2020)

The Women's Space is the only space that has a fenced little green area. While the gate is never locked, by its setting, it gives the idea of privacy. Moreover, it does not abut any of the paths, such as those leading to one of the sinks, communal taps, or washing facilities. Therefore, usually, people do not pass the entrance gate unless they intend to come inside. It showed me how the physical location of a space has the potential to add to its purpose, in this case, privacy, safety, and comfort. Lynn mentioned that other spaces are lacking this setting, making it difficult for women and girls to walk around freely:

Women mentioned it a couple of times that they even felt uncomfortable just walking into, e.g. [name of other NGO omitted to provide confidentiality], the other organization that has a big space, where a lot of men are sitting in the entrance, and they have to walk past them, and they're looking at them. And then their husbands hear about it and they don't like it. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

Addressing these issues, the Women's Space is a place that caters to the non-essential requirements, needs that can easily be pushed aside in the face of seemingly more urgent needs. These can be of cosmetics such as hairdressings, skin-care products, or nail polish, or for pursuing hobbies, such as sewing or playing music. The Soli Centre supports the philosophy that these needs, too, are relevant for the well-being of the residents and they provide a variety of self-care items and activities to address those needs in the Women's Space.

I vividly remember an incident that occurred when I was supervising the Women's Space. A woman approached me asking for a lotion or cream for her eyes. There was a language barrier, so we did not quite understand each other. I was under the impression that

she was having trouble with her eyes, possibly an eye infection, and was looking for a cream to treat it. While we were looking through the box of applications, I tried to explain that, unfortunately, we only have regular creams and nothing pharmaceutical that I could offer her. She kept pointing to her eye and I thought she might need to see a doctor if she was experiencing discomfort with her eyes. It took me minutes and more explanations from her side to finally understand that she was asking for anti-aging cream for the skin around her eyes, not a medication. It seemed to be a humorous misunderstanding at the time, but later on, I realized that it was also an expression of my own inherent bias. I had been immediately led by the assumption that the woman was experiencing a problem, in this case, a health issue. I could not even imagine that she could be concerned about laugh lines, a seemingly trivial thing that can still affect one's well-being and self-confidence.

This situation brought me to reflect on myself in my role as a researcher and volunteer and the way I see some needs and how I might be unwillingly ignorant of others. Asher (2017) calls these the dilemmas of representation to argue that a superficially applied decolonial lens might, in fact, reproduce the very coloniality one tries to fight against. In this case, this could mean that I tried to apply the idea of "refugee's needs" that was instilled in me years before I entered the space. Freedman (2016) too addresses the topic of vulnerability in the refugee context and also referred to a flawed representation of such a vulnerability. She describes how the imagery of a helpless migrant tends to neglect the fact that exactly this image can be strategically turned into forms of agency. She states, "There is little real analysis of the gendered experiences of migrants, and thus, stereotypes of the 'dangerous' migrant male or the 'vulnerable' migrant woman prevail both in media and political discourse" (Freedman, 2016, p. 580), which translates into manipulated notions of needs.

On the one hand, it is a fact that women have, on average, less physical strength than men, a factor that generally contributes to higher exposure to physical violence. On the other hand, if it is unquestionably assumed that women are in constant need of help and protection, we not only categorically dismiss these needs for male migrants, but we also attribute a general vulnerability to women and negate how the agency is created. These concepts should be taken into account when analyzing the informants' need-based perceptions as well. As a result of the patriarchic order that has been dominating the relation between women and men, this bias has been internalized through countless preceding generations, and countering this bias is a challenge that is gradually attracting greater attention in contemporary debates on modernity, patriarchy, and feminization.

It should also be noted that the clear structural conditions of male domination we encounter in Nea Kavala are by no means exclusively inherent to societies from the Global South. They are inherent among the populations of the Global North as well, which contributes to the tendencies that are remarked by international volunteers who create separate spaces for women and men. Volunteers' views might be biased because of the underlying imaginary of a "burdened housewife" who is solely responsible for her children and other basic necessities of the family. These notions could also be created by a Western-oriented background, as addressed by Giraldo (2016), which focuses on individualism and might see traditional role allocations in a negative light. I wondered if I had been too focused on such immediate needs and started to turn more to the more subtle nuances that became apparent in the safe area of the Women's Space.

It was evident that apart from the spaces provided by organizations in Nea Kavala, there was no room for recreational activities, especially for women. One might see children play outside of their containers, or groups of boys and men play on the football field, but women rarely participated. The Women's Space was the exception as a place where recreation and relaxation were some of the most important elements, offering both productive activities such as sewing or repairing clothes, as well as offering a break from responsibilities and duties. Inspired by Glissant (1997), this need for individual care could also be framed as a need for opacity. Glissant argues for the political power that lies with the reversal of totality. In his words, "the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity" (Glissant, 1997, p. 190), arguing that opacity is not a fixed momentum; instead, it is the convergence of multiple opacities, all together weaving fabrics, a metaphor that both Glissant (1997) and Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) use to describe notions of resistance against oppression.

Arguably, the need for such opacity is evident in refugee settings, even if it is not explicitly the need for political resistance but instead a straightforward need for absence, physically and mentally, from daily struggles that are often all-encompassing and overwhelmingly visible all over the spaces. Aria, who volunteered in Greece with a medical background due to her profession as a midwife, described to me the worries of mothers she worked with, who were desperately trying to assure the health of their babies and looking for any kind of assistance:

The first worry or main goal for them was to take care of the family, try to keep them safe and happy. Look for clothes, although they received prepared meals, they were not used to it, often they didn't like it, so they tried to find fresh food to cook meals they were used to. They were worried for the health of their babies so they consulted for any little thing they [would] find. (Aria, 17/06/2020)

Aria described how the worries of motherhood were one of the biggest burdens for migrating women with children, a state of constant worry, and looking for resources to provide for their families. This was the overall impression that volunteers had of mothers (or other female relatives) in Nea Kavala too. It should be noted that providing recreational activities could certainly not erase these worries, but the aim was to provide a space for rest that was unmet in other areas of the camp, and to listen to women voicing their concerns.

This goal is separated from the need for legal aid or professional advice. The effort is consciously directed toward “non-essential” needs, although it is possible to argue that these needs are as fundamental for the well-being as others. Consequently, an approach that recognizes these often obscure needs of female residents might enable the creation of resistance. Nelson and Seager (2005) take an interesting approach to this, and illustrate that a gender lens makes the body the subject of resistance against Western oppression on social and political levels. This concept aligns with Vogt's (2018) remarks about embodiment; Vogt remarks that the visible injuries, as well as invisible injuries of political oppression, are expanded to the migrant's body, a representation of structural oppression that alters their trajectories. Applied to the lived reality in Nea Kavala, there is reason to argue for increased attention to be paid to the “body” in terms of allowing for individual care to recharge and rest, providing resources for self-care given the demanding circumstances and limited resources for self-care outside of the Women's Space.

5.2 Moving Forward—Access to Information Services

Another need that I observed and that was directly addressed by the volunteer team, was the need for information services. I mentioned the isolated location of Nea Kavala before, which played into these circumstances; although Polykastro is only a 15-minute car ride away from the camp, it takes around one hour on foot and there are no public buses between the two locations. Consequently, internet cafés, libraries, and other public information service points are not easily accessible to many residents. It should also be noted

that even if residents would like to make use of such services offered in Polykastro, they come at a cost that probably not many residents could meet. In addition to this, the information that residents needed were often quite specific, e.g., regarding their asylum case. However, the language barrier was commonly encountered by the camp's residents when they needed explanations of complicated matters, such as their status as asylum seekers, legal proceedings, their rights and options regarding work permits, and other personal matters that required consideration on a case-to-case basis.

It is important to mention at this point that the volunteers did not take the place of professionally trained lawyers. However, they would refer clients to further service points and could give general information about possible job opportunities. I asked Savannah how she felt about the accessibility of information for camp residents:

I think female residents haven't had the same opportunities [as compared to male residents]—as evidenced by the fact that we introduced Women's Information Hub (WIH) several months after Information Hub was originally set up. Even though Information Hub was intended to be for everyone from the beginning, the fact that the spaces are generally default-male is enough to discourage women from attending and seeking help. (Savannah, 11/06/2020)

This observation confirms the phenomenon that is evident in all public spaces in the camp. While all people are welcome to make use of a certain service, the space for that service quickly becomes male-dominated. Visits from women and girls are isolated and stand out, something that might contribute to a spiral where it becomes increasingly hard for female residents to join the spaces without hesitation. As Savannah states, when spaces are “default-male,” a space dominated by male residents becomes the norm and contributes to the invisibility of women. Their appearance is seen as an exception, something unusual that is not a natural occurrence in that space. This invisibility makes it even more difficult to make use of support services and sets in motion another spiral that leads to further disadvantages. As Savannah stated, “In my experience, the women in the camp are a lot more shy and feel less comfortable asking for help in a non-women only space, particularly without their wider social group” (Savannah, 11/06/2020). When I spoke to Lucien about the same matter, he also considered the possibility that job-related information is rather relevant to men because often they are the ones in the family to search for work:

Indeed, the Social Space was mostly frequented by males. In Info-Hub, it was the same; I never saw any woman coming [in] to get advised or work on her CV. I think it might be difficult for women to come and speak about such private things without their husband. Or maybe they don't work? (Lucien, 02/06/2020)

Lucien has a rather external view on the Women's Space but an inside view of TSS and Info-Hub for all. He told me that he did not get in touch a lot with the women in the camp due to his position as a male volunteer and his allotted areas of responsibilities. Speaking from a different perspective, he also offered an alternative explanation that all the work and application procedures that are discussed in the Info-Hub may not be suitable for the female residents. This was another indicator of structural immobility that might hinder female residents from entering this space as a client.

Acknowledging the existence of this discomfort, the Soli Centre introduced a female-only Info-Hub. The high demand for its services indicated that there was indeed a problematic lack of services that female residents were able or willing to use. As Savannah said, "Our first session of WIH was very, very popular, signaling the lack of opportunity for women to get advice/help. And most of the help wanted was for their asylum claims and job search, similar to men" (Savannah, 11/06/2020). This shows that a lower number of women attending the Information Hub sessions could not simply be dismissed for the possible reason that they did not require the services. The true reason was that they were hindered in using the services by structural boundaries.

Although the WIH already recorded success, I learned that circumstances were not ideal yet. Language barriers were a ubiquitous problem in all spaces. However, the issues were more problematic in situations in which precise communication of questions and advice was essential, particularly on intimate or confidential topics. Zora was one of the few volunteers who came to Nea Kavala with basic knowledge of Farsi, which she had utilized in a different refugee camp in Greece where she volunteered before. She told me that she appreciated having these skills as a starting point for conversation with female residents during her previous volunteer experience, because it facilitated starting a conversation with people who did not know any English or were insecure about their language skills. This way, Zora explained to me, she was able to have at least simple conversations with residents to enquire about their well-being and people would feel more comfortable knowing that a volunteer spoke their maternal language (Zora, 07/05/2020).

The only translators for WIH were male, which was explained to all clients beforehand. Nonetheless, Savannah emphasized that it “might have discouraged other women from attending (something we can’t measure but we’re trying to fix)” (Savannah, 11/06/2020).

Savannah addresses an issue relevant to the work of small grassroots organizations such as the Soli Centre in a widely fluctuating social environment, namely, the inability to measure success or failure of strategic approaches. For example, if the number of women coming to the information services decreased, it would call for research to find the likely reason for the decline. Is it because women have found help at other service points? Is it because the situation in the camp has improved such that the residents’ medical and legal problems have declined? It could also simply mean that outreach has not been as successful as desired and many women do not know about the service or do not understand how to use it. As mentioned earlier, there is a constant fluctuation in the camp population with new arrivals and the old residents moving on. It may also be assumed that the lack of female interpreters could prevent them from fully describing their needs at WIH. Furthermore, Savannah mentioned that some questions that women generally asked were similar to those asked by male residents, while she detected some differences in others:

I also think the kind of help women need/ask for differs from what we normally provide for men. Both during WIH and International Women’s Day¹⁴, a lot of women were asking for specifically medical help/advice/aid—something we can’t provide and haven’t had men asking us help with in nearly the same numbers—and showing that there is a real need not being fulfilled in camp. (Savannah, 11/06/2020)

Other significant criteria were the ability and personal resources to actually implement the advice given during the sessions. For information services, this disparity became visible in terms of CVs and job applications. Many women would not have their own email addresses or phone numbers. “Whenever I asked a woman for her email/number to put on their CV, they almost always said that they didn’t know it, or I would have to put their husband’s/son’s/brother’s number/email instead to include,” Savannah (11/06/2020) wrote to

¹⁴ Savannah is referring to the special activities that were held in the Women’s Space to celebrate International Women’s Day 2020. The activities included workshops, information sessions, music, and other offers centered on women’s rights and gender equality.

me, pointing out the importance of having individual contact information to be reached by potential employers.

One could argue that this is also due to a lack of financial resources, e.g., for several members of the family to own phones. However, Savannah told me that this lack of contact information was unique for women; it was “never a problem we had when men came to Info-Hub” (Savannah, 18/06/2020). This observation indicates a lack of agency to take care of their own professional development in the work area. Phone calls or inquiries by prospective employers would most likely first reach another male member of the family, a circumstance that puts women in the position of not being able to take direct action. Metaphorically, thinking about a mobile phone that would be handed over to a woman who applied for a job, one could think this to be associated with power relations because the person’s success in their application is dependent on a third person who “hands over” the agency to accept the call.

Greene (2019) addresses the significance and power of digital devices in refugee camps. In this context, smartphones can be powerful tools to carry out strategies of adaptation, e.g. by consuming certain types of media in a form of self-care which can be translated into the creation of agency (Greene, 2019). Especially when volunteers of the Soli Centre could only provide external support from a distance, digital communication became particularly important to share information via group chats. However, it was evident that not all women had a phone of their own, which is another example of the fact that women in Nea Kavala were excluded, hindered or restricted in various ways in their possibilities to receive and mobilize information.

In regards to the pursues of the Soli Centre, to address the lack of information services requires the volunteers to be sensitive and reflective. Davids (2014) expressed the need for feminist geographers to be vulnerable in their actions to not only address their subjects of ethnography but also to refer back to themselves and their performative solidarity actions. Ideally, female residents could use information services to find support for challenges and problems they encounter. On the other hand, performative action could potentially turn into the assumption of flawlessly perceived needs, a risk that requires sensitivity and constant collaboration with the residents on the other end who are receiving knowledge, e.g., about their asylum case, but can also use their agency to produce knowledge themselves. We might conclude that the need for access to information services in Nea Kavala was evident. However, taking it further, this need does include issues of vulnerability and performative action of residents and volunteers relative to one another.

5.3 To be Seen—Becoming Visible

I start this sub-chapter by showing Madison's impression of the challenges women in Nea Kavala face due to restricted mobility in a male-dominated sphere:

I think, basically, just the main challenge is that the camp and even a lot of regards their whole culture in many ways is very male-dominated. So, I think that would be the biggest challenge. You know, making sure that you're providing women the space to talk and have fun and not necessarily feel like they're stuck somewhere. So, I feel like the biggest challenge is that it is male-dominated in a lot of aspects. (Madison/05/2020)

Madison described how women in Nea Kavala are restricted in their mobility to claim space because most of the space is already dominated by men. In view of the relatively small camp, one could argue that there simply is not a lot of space to "take;" however, certain female-related factors complicated the mobility of women. Staying in the context of female mobility, in what follows, I am introducing the topic of female-specific medical needs and feminine hygiene as key elements in addressing women's and girls' needs. As my data shows, the demographics and resources of Nea Kavala restrict women's movements further by denying female-specific resources. Lynn addressed this issue when talking about the sanitary facilities in the camp. "There are no garbage bins, garbage bags, where you could maybe put your sanitary pad in when you're on your period" (Lynn, 05/06/2020). She called out the unhygienic conditions in the camp bathrooms that did not provide a sanitary environment, especially related to menstruation and necessary items, such as garbage disposals. Besides the lack of basic sanitary resources, many women did not have access to other items regarding sexual health. Lynn further stated:

It just makes it difficult for women. You know, obviously, there are some challenges that only women face; generally, the access to any sexual-health related, women-specific things like sanitary pads or even birth control is quite hard for them to access. And if there wasn't the Women's Space, there would probably not be any place where they would feel comfortable in just taking these things that they actually need. Because I don't think that if it was laying around in the community center, that they would just go there and grab a handful of condoms. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

Lynn referred to sanitary and birth control items as examples of women-related necessities of daily life. She argued that the washrooms did not provide a sanitary environment for women to cater to these needs, which is also a neglect of room and space for women's health and self-care. She further told me about the difficulty to access even the available resources simply because these cannot be accessed in private.

This is another reason the Women's Space, as a refuge, is of great importance. It allows female residents to take care of themselves in a non-judgmental environment, where they do not feel watched by other people. Particularly, in regards to sexual health, this is not only a matter of comfort but also of healthcare, which is another service, the provision of which is inadequate in the camp. One of the biggest problems I encountered was the lack of female medical professionals. The only doctor was male and only partly present in camp. It became clear that many women could not comfortably ask him their questions or address their problems.

What does it do to female residents when their needs are not met because of a lack of resources? In many ways, this may result in the assumption that their problems do not exist. This very immobility again requires a reconstruction of the common narratives on mobility, to show that women's experiences are not only additions to a male gaze, but redefine the trajectories of people who migrate (Marinucci, 2007). Thinking back to Lugones (2007) this reminds us that a rereading of the discourse is relevant, because it shows that the lack of a gender lens is neither in the past nor only existent in theoretical debates. Instead, it becomes particularly visible in the context of neglected needs that turn seemingly invisible and how this neglect influences women's mobility in Nea Kavala.

Arguably, women's movement is restricted if they are not able to use sanitary products during menstruation. Even the walk to and from the container and bathrooms in broad daylight can become difficult if a person is uncomfortable or ashamed because the sanitary items are unavailable or there is no place where they can be disposed of. As Lynn said, it is a real risk if it "becomes this shameful thing" (Lynn, 05/06/2020). Even mobility expressions of short distances can, in such situations, feel like a "Spießbrutenlauf," a German word. The English idiom closest to it in meaning is "running the gauntlet." It used to be a corporal punishment meted out to delinquent soldiers and consisted of making the guilty run between two rows of soldiers armed with gauntlets (armored gloves) to hit them. In a figurative sense, this expression is used to describe a situation in which a person faces harassment or uncomfortable encounters from all sides. This metaphor might be an

exaggeration in reflecting what female residents personally feel when dealing with these situations, but it could be useful to describe how even seemingly mundane movements from container to washroom or garbage can might turn into situations of discomfort and encourage immobility. The metaphor is a violent one, referring to old military practice. Its violence in the modern context translates into judgment calls in the lack of privacy and the fear of stained clothes or lack of underwear to change one's clothes.

All these are indicators of constraints on the movements of female residents. Lynn did not sugarcoat the burden of this struggle but, in lucid words, posed a rhetorical question: "And then, what are you going to do with it? Take the bloody thing in your hand and walk over the camp to your container that could be quite far away?" (Lynn, 05/06/2020).

It seemed to me that the mere fact of being a woman in Nea Kavala restrained one's free and comfortable mobility. The lack of facilities to accommodate basic female needs and of feminine hygiene products was strikingly evident. At the same time, it became clear how complicated it could be for NGOs to accommodate these needs when operating with a limited budget. In this context, the way to achieve recognition for the feminization of migration in refugee camp settings is an arduous endeavor that must overcome constant challenges and limitations; even when stakeholders such as the volunteers of the Soli Centre are aware of lacking necessities, external circumstances complicate the matter of incorporating these blind spots into their approach.

In a specific situation, we were donated feminine hygiene products to distribute to the residents. While on the one hand, we wished to distribute the products equally to everyone and save some for those who might not be in the space that day, on the other hand, it felt wrong to limit how many products a person wanted to take because the subject was intimate and the needs personal. We could give away all the donated items at once or we could try and make them last as long as possible. It became clear that neither option was satisfactory. The essence of this is that determining the needs of the residents included accepting the fact that it might not be possible to address them fully.

For me personally, as a woman, having to limit the number of sanitary items another woman should take felt painfully unfair. I assumed that many women also wanted to share the products with their families and friends, and although we encouraged them to only take what they needed at the moment, it was entirely understandable that they would rather stock up on products, particularly because we did not know how much we would have left next week or next month. These feelings were in some ways similar to what Josefina, who joined the organization MVI (Medical Volunteers International) after finishing her studies of

medicine, experienced. She almost exclusively treated male patients in Thessaloniki, but she told me that she immediately felt the need to help when a woman came in. “I was treating men, but when I saw a woman, I wanted to get ... I had this feeling of protecting her because, of course, they are more vulnerable and normally they speak less the language” (Josefina, 20/05/2020). Her emotions might have been because women rarely used medical services. It could also be because of a feeling of solidarity of one woman with another. With reference to Freedman (2016), both her and my sentiments in such situations could arguably also be part of realized agency arising from the assumed vulnerability that I addressed earlier.

From a different perspective, these situations should also be analyzed based on the power relations they reveal between volunteers and residents in refugee camps. When it came to manage items and goods, volunteers usually became the “distributors.” Although we aimed to find a niche, possibly a drawer or a shelf to keep all products from where women can take the products themselves, at the same time, we had to supervise the products in a way to make sure their distribution was more or less equal for everyone. Ideally, we would have a sufficient supply at all times, but this is just one of the situations where resources limit the capacity to accommodate all the needs even if they are evident. This can happen equally in the cases of professional help that volunteers are not trained to render, or other areas of work, especially legal support and medical services that require professional education. Even when professional aid workers are present, the lack of resources and the boundaries set by organizations and the government would hinder the volunteers’ ability to show support. Aria told me how she often felt like she was not doing enough for the women and mothers she met:

I very often thought that I wanted to help them in many things. There were so many needs, so many things to do for them. Rules sometimes were an impediment, a difficulty to help them. The rules of operation in the camp were very strict, although I can understand that [they] were necessary. Otherwise, it could have been a mess. There was a lack of translators. As a midwife, I have to say that medical assistance was very poor and made me feel very useless. (Aria, 12/07/2020)

I realized that the feeling of uselessness might be unavoidable in humanitarian aid projects, especially in refugee settings where needs are overwhelming, both collective needs such as for accommodation, heating, and food, as well as individual needs such as for mental health services and other personal challenges and problems that cannot be generalized. I

chose to portray these needs in their inexpressibility because the links between female-specific needs and immobility are still missing in the discourse. In Nea Kavala, one can see the connecting dots between a maintaining patriarchal cultural framework that shapes both residents' and volunteer's perceptions on role allocations and the perpetuating invisibility of the lived experience of female residents. Nelson and Seager (2005) provokingly ask, "Where is feminism on the map of geography?" (p. 2). In the same vein, we might ask, where is feminism in transit? Where are female needs acknowledged in altered trajectories?

5.4 Conclusions

In this section, I discussed the key needs of female residents of Nea Kavala identified by the Soli Centre as a point of departure to gain clarity on the motivation of the organization. The chapter was divided into three parts, each part relating to one need, although all of them should also be seen as interrelated.

1) The need for individual care: This need is related to providing safe, non-judgmental areas for self-care and recreation and to enabling the residents to spend some time away from their responsibilities and worries (although it is not to say that these worries of women easily disappear when they are in the Women's Space), a comfortable place to recharge, rest, and be recognized as individuals prioritizing their well-being. It became clear that among all the public areas in the Nea Kavala camp, the Women's Space was the only place where women and girls could find privacy because all other areas were male-dominated.

2) The need for access to information services: This need refers to both informative sessions about the general situation, consulting services for individual cases, as well as health-care and career-related services. Volunteers have stated that the lack of such services or the difficulty in making them accessible to everyone was one of the biggest challenges. With regard to female residents' needs, there are indicators that it was more difficult for women to access these services for various reasons, e.g., childcare responsibilities, lack of female interpreters to address intimate issues, and a lack of female doctors in the camp.

3) The need for visibilization: This need is based on the overarching male-dominance in Nea Kavala as a consequence of the patriarchal structural dominations rooted in the residents' as well as volunteers' cultural frameworks that presumed gender roles. The narrations of volunteers implied how women in Nea Kavala face restricted mobility because of the societal patriarchic order replicated by the residents in the camp, which is why the creation of space exclusively for women might lead to the recognition of female residents as

individual people and not simply as mothers and wives, etc. with care-giving responsibilities.

It is evident that this list of needs is not an exhaustive summary of the needs residents might experience. These needs have been identified from the depiction by volunteers and are also based on the voices of residents who have expressed their wishes and requests to volunteers when they did outreach. Nonetheless, it is likely that as volunteers we cannot fully see through the layers of needs that the residents experience. In the end, we might see what we expect to see, a problem that Boas et al. (2020) highlighted in the context of fieldwork, a tendency that applies to volunteer work as well. Volunteers come into Nea Kavala with different levels of knowledge about the place, but they are all subject to imagination and assumptions about migration, which depend on the media they are exposed to and consume, their environment, and their personal opinions. As a consequence, we might attribute weight according to the urgency we attach to various needs, and our points of view do not necessarily coincide with those of the residents. At the same time, we might let our own emotions lead our actions, e.g. female volunteers might feel protective towards the female residents they meet.

Of course, it should also be noted that needs will never apply to the whole group of residents as if they were a homogeneous group. Needs are fluent, dynamic, and can be highly intimate given one's personal situation. For the Soli Centre volunteers, the goal is to respond to the needs they identify to the best of their abilities.

Early in the fieldwork, it became clear to me that the difficulty was not only with detecting urgent or widespread needs but also with determining if and how far the Soli Centre could meet those needs at all. For example, we should not forget that the greatest need of the residents would be to continue their journey and not to be in Nea Kavala in the first place. This form of immobility was a state over which the volunteers had no control. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will analyze in greater detail how exactly volunteers attempted to approach the needs they recognized and how they situated themselves in the complex relationship between the Greek government as a powerful stakeholder and the residents with whom the volunteers had established close bonds.

6. Solidarity Practices—Responding to Needs and Challenges

In this chapter, I focus on the organization's strategic approach to addressing the needs volunteers identified in the camp. I focus both on the aspect of how these needs were identified and communicated and what exactly volunteers did to reach solutions to the problems female residents faced. I take this approach to shine a light on the feminization of migration in the lived reality of camp residents and volunteers. This chapter aims to understand the connection between the feminization of migration and immobility, and to eventually show that such connection is used by NGOs to create some room to maneuver. I will focus on specific situations in which volunteers used a certain approach to show solidarity and support, their emotions, and entanglement in the situation. In the ensuing discussion, I will make informal language classes the subject of discussion and emphasize the value that comes from horizontal relationships in the Women's Space. Finally, I will put the focus on the often-divided role of volunteers who find themselves as intermediaries among different stakeholders, which resulted in inner conflicts and helplessness in the face of requirements and limitations imposed by the Greek Ministry.

6.1 "You could be Anywhere"—Diving into the Women's Space

I asked Madison, who had volunteered several times in Nea Kavala in the past, how she would usually proceed in finding out how women in the Women's Space enjoyed the offered activities and if they were happy with the overall situation:

We would often speak to the women and ask what they liked or what they enjoy doing, what they would like to see and do. We didn't have a suggestions box, but even then, these conversations would just be in a friendly manner. It would just be whenever we were talking about it, there wasn't a set protocol. (Madison, 20/05/2020)

As I already mentioned in Chapter Five, identifying and analyzing the most prevalent needs in Nea Kavala could become an overwhelming challenge. As Hémono et al. (2018) argued, a tendency in a shift of needs in the past years is apparent, pointing to an increase in mental health issues and gender-based violence due to the lengthening duration of transit in the camps. Specifically, I wanted to know more about the Women's Space, so I asked Lynn how she, as a long-term volunteer, takes measures to create activity schedules and how she chooses, together with other members of the sub-team, which activities and offers to pursue.

She told me that, at first, the availability of resources had to be taken into account. “I think, first of all, it’s just stuff that we have the resources to. We have the sewing materials and you don’t need much for it” (Lynn, 05/06(2020)). Although aspirations of volunteers are high, resources set the pace of the possibilities and limits of the actual implementation. They show what can, realistically, at a certain moment be bought or created. As sewing machines were already provided, we only needed to stock up on wool and other sewing materials, which could be purchased in bulk.

Besides this, the team actively sought women’s opinions to identify blind spots and potential factors that needed improvement. Lynn kept telling me about the time when she first entered the spaces and how she began organizing a schedule:

I was welcomed with this document of activities that had been done before to get an idea of what could be offered again. And I think, in the beginning, when we reopened the activities, we kind of just tried out all different activities and then talked to the women what they liked and what they wanted to do. And also checked which ones were popular, when did the most people come. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

As explained by Lynn, female residents are encouraged to bring in suggestions to include them in the planning process of the space to create a unified community in which everyone can take part in shaping the Women’s Space. With some activities, this process had been relatively straightforward, such as sewing, which has always been well-liked by many residents: “Definitely, sewing was always really popular, just because the women have a lot of clothes that they want to adjust or fix and it was just really useful for them” (Lynn, 05/06/2020). Still, there were more opportunity areas that could be considered. For example, the number of sewing machines was often not enough. Usually, we had four machines in working order, so sometimes women would take turns in using them. Volunteers would not always know how to use these machines, which, in fact, often resulted in situations where residents took charge. This was interesting to observe because, in a way, it countered the narrative of the “knowledgeable” Western stakeholders. Madison similarly described the popularity of sewing. Since she was a volunteer in Nea Kavala at a different time, this activity was always a favorite in the Women’s Space:

Sewing was really popular because that was where they [the women] would come to and mend all their clothes. Because a lot of them, in their country they’ve been tailors.

And so, they were really skilled at sewing. And it was also needed because they would need to mend their clothes. So, sewing was probably the most popular activity, just for practicality reasons. (Madison, 20/05/2020)

Similarly, art projects were carried out, often planned to provide activities that were simply done for enjoyment or with a practical purpose, e.g., handicrafts could be used to decorate the walls of the containers or used as toys by children. Lynn told me that many women liked to have something to either take with them or to leave in the Women's Space as part of the overall design of the space:

And if you ever visit someone in their container, you see that they hang them up on the walls. And I mean, they just don't have colored pencils and watercolors. So, obviously, it's really nice for them that they can decorate their containers with it. But a lot of them also like to hang it on the artwork wall in the Women's Space because this has maybe become sort of a big living room for them in a way. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

When I spoke to Aria about her experience as a midwife, she, too, referred to the evident needs of addressing the limited resources that women would need to take care of themselves and their newborns:

We had, in the camps, a tent to assist them. This tent was only for women. There, we assist[ed] pregnant women, gave them food bags, for pregnant [women] and for those who breastfeed, took care [of] babies, weight control. We organized different kinds of meetings or groups of women, to talk and share. We gave information about different health aspects. All women were welcome to come in. Also we gave sanitary pads [and] hygienic products. (Aria, 17/06/2020)

In the Women's Space of Nea kavala, although every week there was time scheduled for planned activities, the space also oriented itself to resemble other spaces in the camp and implemented some activities happening in those areas, which had been missing in the Women's Space. For example, the need for passing the time without a purpose, without being productive in any way, seemed to be missing for women. Therefore, certain hours of the

week were dedicated to an open space where women could use the space as a free area for recreation and simply to be together or on their own in a safe environment:

And it's just tea and cookies and music and chatting and really casual. And that seemed to be something that was just missing in the women's daily life as well. So, you notice that often maybe we don't even need to plan crazy activities, but just give them a space where they feel comfortable and where they feel safe and where they can come together and just enjoy their time. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

While I was in the Women's Space, I too realized that the casual recreational sessions were very popular. It showed me that support does not always have to link to productivity and working toward goals. In the case of Nea Kavala, it meant opening up space for women to move freely without having to take on responsibilities. It was insightful to observe how carefree the atmosphere in the Women's Space often seemed, despite the pressing circumstances that were all around. Madison highlighted the important aspect of separating the Women's Space from the lived reality of the camp and creating a setting where women could escape from the dire conditions in the camp: "Like, you could be anywhere. You know, it didn't feel exactly like you were at a refugee camp. It could be, you're just sitting, having coffee with friends sort of thing" (Madison, 20/05/2020).

Nonetheless, this should not negate the fact that many of the female visitors needed conversations that could not have been handled easily in a crowded space with limited privacy. Others wanted to practice specific knowledge or use the time to learn a new language. This is one of the reasons informal education is another important part of the Soli Centre, which will be further discussed in the following section.

6.2 Informal Education—Navigating Victory and Frustration

In Chapter Five, I mentioned the difficulty the women faced in providing their individual contact information in job applications and other documents where contact details are mandatory. Savannah told me in more detail about the proceedings in this case and how she handled such situations.

I tried to deal with it by telling the women that it was important to have an email/have a reachable number to get a job, and if they didn't know theirs (or didn't have one or

want to say), then ask about somebody else's number to use (which ended up being a male family member, usually). I always told them that if they knew theirs or wanted to change it, then they could come back and we would update their CV. I wasn't really sure if they were just shy about giving their info out, they actually didn't know it, or they didn't have a phone/email and didn't want to embarrass them by probing further. (Savannah, 19/06/2020)

Her experiences in the WIH were insightful and matched my own experience in the Women's Space. Occasionally, when going through the registration process for English classes, several family members would share a phone number. In the Women's Space, this was not really problematic because the main reason for volunteers to contact residents was to inform them about the schedule of activities, homework for classes, and similar organizational concerns. In the case of job applications, however, one could see that it could be a more serious hurdle that seemed to exclusively concern women.

Savannah also told me about her hesitation in pointing out the lack of contact details in the fear of embarrassing the women. In the end, it was not our place to say that they should have their own phone number. Maybe they felt more comfortable having a male family member as a person to contact, or maybe cultural and societal norms did not allow them to have their own means of contact. Although the latter option could be an indicator of problematic power imbalances in some families, it was not for us to measure or identify. This is also because the WIH was created to support women with the personal issues they wanted to resolve and not to point out other identified shortfalls or problems.

I'm afraid I didn't offer to talk about setting up an email, mostly due to the fact that it was a really busy session with a lot of people waiting and it would take a long time, there were language/translation issues, and because [name of other organization omitted to provide confidentiality] already ran computing classes and I didn't want to step on their toes. Also because if the women didn't have their own phone, then email was a non-starter really—they'd need to have the other person's phone with them to set it up. (Savannah, 19/06/2020)

In this case, volunteers tried to create personal mobility for female residents by encouraging them to have an email address/phone number, etc. At the same time, whether a woman is willing or able to do so remained for her to decide. It also disclosed a vicious

circle: If a woman did not have a phone, she would not be able to have her own email address. In this particular situation, one could argue that not only residents but also volunteers had to accept the limitations, though acknowledging the fact that the situation was not ideal.

On the other hand, it was slightly different in the case of informal education where it became apparent how the emerging relationship between volunteers and residents turned into embodied solidarity and community mobilization. Lynn and Pia held English classes in the Women's Space three times a week. The classes were divided into levels one and two and an ABC-class for women with no prior knowledge. It is important to mention that these classes were informal, which means that the teachers were not professionals but mostly untrained volunteers. To minimize unnecessary repetitions and stick to a teaching plan as much as possible, a detailed handover was desired whenever a new teaching volunteer arrived. Pia and Lynn had both been in the space for several months, which resulted in comfortable routine and close relationships between them and the students.

In many cases, the women and girls that took part in the English lessons were also regular visitors at the Women's Space. This indicated that they felt comfortable in the space and with the volunteers as parts of their routine. Pia taught the ABC class in which several students had never learned to read or write in either English or their native language. Pia addressed the aspect of unequal educational opportunities based on nationality and the political circumstances that led to a lack of basic skills such as reading and writing, particularly for women. The English classes, she said, did not solely fulfill the purpose of improving the students' English but, even more importantly, of creating a community of empowerment where women and girls have the opportunity to grow beyond their limits. Thereby, Pia makes a powerful statement about the core purpose of providing informal education as opposed to formal institutions that might be more focused on the practicalities of didactics. She told me about her experience with students of all ages who began the class with no prior knowledge and started to learn English from scratch:

It's really nice. I would say in the ABC class, we had at last maybe 20 women in the list, and at least 15 of them wouldn't read and write in Farsi as well. I always found that a very, very interesting process, just thinking that this might be one of the first steps they do in a written language, and in reading and writing, and coming to a classroom together. (Pia, 02/06/2020)

English classes were generally open depending on capacity and available volunteers. Capacity is also the reason there is a level-three mixed English class but only levels one and two for women. However, some limitations have been set. All students must be at least 15 years old to attend the informal classes because children under 15 years of age are required to participate in the lessons in local schools outside of Nea Kavala.

Occasionally, this boundary can lead to difficulties if students are not able or willing to attend the formal classes, but cannot legally make use of the informal classes either. Pia stated, “Personally, I wouldn’t mind teaching girls that are younger than 15. It’s just that we don’t have a choice; we are limited by the Ministry.” She told me that she sees certain reasoning behind this policy and that “at some point, you have to draw an age line” (Pia, 02/06/2020). Nonetheless, it bothered her having to deny people access to the classes if they wished to take part in them. While it does make sense to require children to be integrated into the local school and be taught by professionally trained teachers, this policy would sometimes complicate the relationship between residents and volunteers.

I was in such a situation when I covered for one of the English teachers for a short period of time. After filling out the registration process together with a potential new student, she was set to join the class. Only later we realized that she was too young to attend, while her friend who registered on the same day could stay. I learned that she already spoke fluent Greek and felt that her attendance there was not of any use to her. At the same time, she eagerly wanted to learn English. Unfortunately, we were not able to bend the rules to let her stay. For one, acting against these rules that we as members of the NGO agreed to adhere to while being in the space could have legal consequences, such as the complete suspension of English classes or other activities held in the spaces. Moreover, the Soli Centre aims to be a stable and reliable source of support and information. Bending rules or allowing such exceptions on an emotional ground might lead to a destabilization of the organization’s principles. If one girl can join the informal classes instead of attending the Greek school, it would not be fair to others in the past who might have wished to do the same but were not allowed to join. On the other hand, this demonstrates once again that volunteers are the ones to dictate rules, even though activities are ideally created by both volunteers and residents equally. Such situations would sometimes lead to frustration.

It should be noted at this point that Pia’s relationship and affiliations to her students may have shaped her opinion. She had an affectionate relationship with the women she knew in camp. Consequently, the negative emotions evoked in the residents who were turned away from the spaces were likely to affect her as well. Although it is not her executive decision to

exclude certain students, in her role, she represents the authority in direct communication with the residents. While the reasoning for setting a certain age limit was to integrate the children from Nea Kavala into the local schools nearby, families faced obstacles in obeying these regulations. For example, the requirements for the children to attend school include certain vaccinations. In the isolated location of Nea Kavala, vaccinations are not accessible for all residents, and the process of delivering vaccines to the camp is protracted:

And then the vaccination, we've been waiting for this for months now, we know that there's at least 40 children in camp who need this vaccination in order to be able to go to school. If it was that way, that if they can't come to our class, they would actually go to another school, I would be more happy. But at the moment, I feel that by sending them away, they will miss an opportunity to learn and I'm not happy about this. (Pia, 02/06/2020)

While this situation is certainly one that affects girls and boys in the Nea Kavala equally, it should be taken into consideration that this regulation results in the exclusion from the only female-only space in camp, something that is unique to the experience of teenage girls who do not have many other places to go to move freely. I could tell by Pia's words how frustrating it was for her to witness how rules were made in a way that often did not facilitate but complicated resident's access to resources. It was the same kind of frustration many volunteers expressed to me about other situations, always related to a lingering feeling that something was not as good, efficient, meaningful, or beneficial as desired. The frustration was particularly evident in the area of informal education, when the wish for productivity in the form of practicing a foreign language was denied.

6.3. Creating Room—Utilizing Spaces in Nea Kavala

When addressing the issue of spaces, particularly the aim to find or create spaces where parts of the resident population would feel safe and comfortable, this is also a question of making space by accessibility. As a team, we discussed the potential value of more gender-mixed spaces, e.g., the possibility of making TSS, which has been almost entirely male-dominated, more attractive to female residents. Having all public spaces be equally usable by male and female residents would be an unrealistic and unproductive aim, since the need for a safe space for female residents only was as evident as the difficulty of opening up other

public spaces to women and girls. From a feminist geographical perspective, it is desirable to explore options that could facilitate efforts to make spaces accessible to all genders. For example, we were contemplating whether it would make sense to re-design TSS by providing activities that have been popular in the Women's Space. However, most volunteers I spoke to were critical of this idea. They questioned the actual need for mixing spaces, contemplating whether this would be a change that is desired both by female and male residents. In view of recent developments in humanitarian aid, these concerns have proven to be justified. As Olivius (2014) asserted, humanitarian policy-makers have to be cautious about the risk to instrumentalize the contributions of women for the sake of promoting the goals and achievements of an organization. It is also necessary to shine a light on the negative potential of such initiatives, and to carefully observe whether they are genuinely addressing the needs of beneficiaries or are rather a functional instrument to promote the organization.

In this regard, women's participation and representation have been essential for global governance organizations to be successful in the promotion and presentation of their goals, even more so since the shift to capitalistic strategies has become more apparent (Olivius, 2014). This means, the inherent danger of such projects lies in the risk of mobilizing women's agency, which is often connoted with positive outcomes, although mobilization might eventually not be advantageous for the women who are pressured into participating in it. This approach contrasts with Freedman's (2016) concept of mobilizing vulnerability into agency. In this case, the agency is the subject of exploitation and shifts the narratives of power relations.

Olivius (2014) further refers to the inclusion of female residents into male-dominated areas under the veil of enabling them to have agency, power, and equality. On the contrary, she argues that women are used for the desirable qualities that are attributed to them and are turned into resources for the benefit of the effectiveness of the humanitarian aid managing organizations on the ground. In other words, NGOs have to be aware of such risks and be attentive to the implementation of new goals. A genuine approach would not solely be directed toward measurable effectiveness, although, understandably, success rates have to be taken into consideration for many organizations that are dependent on sponsors and donations.

The fact that all volunteers I spoke to about this topic were critical of including women in the male-dominated spaces showed the awareness of these risk factors within the Soli Centre. Since Lucien had mainly been in TSS, he knew the regular visitors well and told me about his concerns:

In my opinion, it would be very difficult to attract women to the Social Space. If I were a woman and if I would not really want to be seen with men, then the Women's Space would be the perfect place to be. I might not need to go to the Social Space if there is a better place to be [...] I wouldn't be able to say if this issue must be one of our priorities: maybe the situation was completely fine and the women were happy with this? But one more time, am not aware of their personal situations and wishes, so am might be completely wrong! (Lucien, 04/06/2020)

Madison held a similar opinion:

I don't know if I'm probably the only one thinking this, but perhaps encouraging friendships with one another is perhaps more beneficial than trying to get groups to mix. Like gender groups to mix, if they don't necessarily feel the most comfortable doing that. (Madison, 20/05/2020)

Both of them argued that the well-being of the residents should have priority. Although all-inclusive spaces are in general positively connoted, it is questionable whether it would be in the best interest of the ones directly affected by it. Both of them also had doubts about whether this concern should have priority in the organization's support approach or whether other issues deserve a higher priority to be taken into consideration first. From a feminist point of view, one might be tempted to identify the underrepresentation of women and girls in most public areas as a need to "expand" in a way of actively trying to make the spaces more women-inclusive assuming an automatic improvement in female-inclusion and equality. However, this approach reminds of the first women-related migration studies in the 1970s and 1980s, when women were, metaphorically, stirred into male-dominated areas as criticized by Boyd and Grieco (2003). This approach mainly juxtaposes men and women as seemingly opposite counterparts, an approach that explains all differences as sex-role related. Bearing this in mind, there is reason to belief that a perceived need to establish gender-mixed spaces does not necessarily correspond to an actual need felt by residents. This possibility is backed up by the Soli Centre's approach to working closely with volunteer residents to better understand the true needs of people that might be different from the perceptions of volunteers with a Western gaze. Alexis accentuated the necessity to stay in constant dialogue with residents to stay updated about their wishes and requests:

I guess it's a combination of like speaking to the women, and then observing as well, try and cater to their needs. And I think we rely a lot on the resident volunteers to let us know what they think, what they would like, and what the community would like, to kind of be spokespeople. (Alexis, 25/05/2020)

In the role of “spokespeople,” as Alexis said, resident volunteers could identify the needs of other residents on a different level because they might share common experiences, nationality, peer group, language, or other factors that build a community.

This approach also includes the acknowledgment of one's own bias that might influence how the needs of residents are perceived, and the possibilities and limits to address them. For example, it is possible to ask if the need for space, in whichever way this need might be defined in the end, can be responded to by expanding the female-dominated spaces. Lucien voiced that there might be a certain bias toward the focus on women and children, which could lead to the exclusion of men from the discourse. Arguably, this one-sided focus would not lead to true inclusion, only to juxtaposing the genders only by their distinctive differences instead of seeing them as intertwined fabrics that, in Rivera Cusicanqui's concept, recreate one another in co-existence.

So I think it might be interesting to deliver general workshops for everyone—not only male refugees—on global topics: asylum processes, how to look for a job, LGBTQ Rights. I would be very interested for a discussion with one male migrant to have his point of view, to know if he sometimes feels kind of abandoned by NGOs. Maybe he would think that women and kids should be a priority? (Lucien, 06/06/2020)

Taking Lucien's words into consideration, and referring back to the need to carefully analyze the ways in which gender equality is promoted by organizations, it might be useful to look for ways to create dialogues and discussions both with men and women. In the specific case of utilizing and expanding spaces in Nea Kavala, volunteers of the of the Soli Centre were rather critical towards gender-mixed spaces, and shared the concerns about the possible side effect of pushing residents in a direction against their own interests, an approach that entails the risk of recreating postcolonial narratives under the guise of productive gender equality approaches (Giraldo, 2016). This again would stand in contrast with the concept of decolonial feminism, because women (and also men) are once again instrumentalized for the

sake of promoting the image of a dominant Western-oriented superiority. Perhaps the most telling aspect of this risk is that it refers back to the concepts of modernity and coloniality by Quijano (1991) and Mignolo (2002); It seems that the path of decoloniality can easily be confused with a path to a perpetuated modernity, so it is crucial to continuously question the steps that are taken. Lugones (2007) argues for a rereading of dominant narratives. In the same way, it might be necessary to “rewalk” the path to reach a decolonial feminism, and to acknowledge the pitfalls on the way that can be carelessly stumbled onto.

6.4 Conclusions

The anecdotes and narrations analyzed in this section focused on the specific activities that were carried out in the Women’s Space and how these activities responded to dominant narratives. In this part, there is a perceptible shift of focus from residents to volunteers who narrated their point of view in the constellation between the Greek authorities and residents of Nea Kavala. The way I see it, for the volunteers, the local government plays the role of an abstract executive of power that dictates the rules about the organization’s operations. The government is represented by the security personnel on the ground. However, it remains a distant power that is not close to the lived reality in the camp. Therefore, communication between authorities and volunteers is often difficult and indirect. Contrary to this, volunteers formed closed bonds with the residents whom they met regularly, heard about their personal stories, and felt the desire to help. In their narrations, I could hear their frustration; Savannah told me how difficult it was to work with women in the Info-Hub on their CVs if they did not have their own phone number. Pia was frustrated by the fact that not everyone could attend the informal English classes, even though she wanted to welcome everyone equally. Lucien and Madison shared their concerns about expanding the spaces for a greater inclusion of women.

These stories are some examples of the many ways in which the room to maneuver for a humanitarian aid organization is constricted by the limited capacities a small organization has, and by having to abide by the rules of the local government. Thereby, volunteers sometimes appear in an in-between limbo when they face a conflict between the actions they *can* take and the actions they *want* to take. Besides these frustrating moments, volunteers also appreciated the positive results of the community activities. For example, the joy they and the residents felt and shared when activities went well and they felt that there was a purpose to it that will benefit residents during their future journeys, e.g. in language

activities. The volunteers' narrations gave insights into how they coped with navigating through the complexities of their role, how they acknowledged that there are various issues they cannot solve. If we connect this thinking to the decoloniality of gender and Giraldo's (2016) critique on this, we might also introduce the thought that some issues *should* not be solved because the counter-response might not even be desired by the residents. It can be summed up by saying that concepts of modernity and coloniality (Quijano, 1991) are reoccurring axes in humanitarian aid projects. As a result, it is necessary to keep questioning the ways stakeholders such as NGOs use to promote their goals and to establish critical dialogues about feminist practices and the path to achieve it. To cope with the inner conflicts of wanting to help but not being able to, the volunteers at the Soli Centre focused on the bright side and celebrated their small victories, such as in establishing community mobilization in the Women's Space. In the following chapter, a further layer is added to the discussion, focusing on a decolonial feminist evaluation of the practices and how these can be translated into dimensions of mobility created within the Spaces of the Soli Centre.

7. Decolonial Feminism in Mobility—the Dimensions of Reclamation

In the previous chapters, I reflected on the narrations of volunteers who had been engaged in one way or another in Nea Kavala. Their narrations are shaped by the different spaces they volunteered in, by their personal relationship with the residents, and by their own positionality and emotions. The 10 volunteers who spoke to me shared their position with me, their memories, anecdotes, moments of frustration, as well as moments of hope. All of them were, however, united in their goal to show solidarity with the residents of Nea Kavala. In Chapter Six, it became clear that the strategic approach of the Soli Centre is not a fixed one and that volunteers are in a constant process of navigating a course to respond to needs in a space restricted by the government's regulations. I described aspects of the in-between limbo in which volunteers find themselves when aiming to provide support, often tiptoeing between operationalizing solidarity and being constrained by internal and external forces from doing that. All volunteers were involved in the dynamic relationships with residents and with an invisible but powerful government. In this last empirical chapter, I focus on the results of these solidarity efforts to argue that mobility is created in subtle nuances that deviate from a literal sense of moving. Nonetheless, their power is unambiguous as evidenced in the small and big victories that residents and volunteers celebrated together. On the other hand, there might be other acts of the agency that escape our sight even though we expect the lens we take on to be all-encompassing. These seemingly invisible acts of agency do not matter any less, but as researchers, we have to acknowledge our inability to see all of them. To spin this thought further, for residents this might also be the agency to withdraw themselves as much as possible from all contact with the NGOs, to consciously abstain from all of the offered activities, and to focus on other personal aspirations that might be far from what the Soli Centre would imagine.

Spending time in activities that one considers as productive and useful for the future can be a way to claim agency, to show that, in a way, the movement has not ceased. At the same time, we should not foist just another Western-oriented gaze onto an already vulnerable community and assume that people must be productive, positive, and hopeful. Who is to say that agency is only enacted if it is cheerful, revolutionizing, deconstructing? Perhaps, the agency can also mean to simply wait it out, to hold onto the things that remind a person of their home country, instead of adapting as much as possible to the cultural norms that are presented by international volunteers. All of these issues will be discussed in the following sections. With regard to these reflections, this chapter centers on the reclamation of time,

voice, and space. Are these the ultimate goals of humanitarian action by the Soli Centre and are the mobilities that we find to be meaningful the right response to the immobility residents face? What role should volunteers have in the future of these spaces?

7.1 Reclaiming Time

The team [of the Soli Centre] was really good at making sure the space and activities responded to and were led by the women that took part—such as creating the Language Café, having picnics, etc. I do think there were some gaps, such as not really having info sessions on topics relating to women (save for International Women’s Day), but I know this was something the team had begun working toward, and I think it’s important to remember the significant language limitations we had to deal with too and lack of female translators. (Savannah, 09/06/2020)

Savannah had an overall positive impression of the Women’s Space. She mentioned the Language Café and outside activities as examples in which the female residents themselves took the initiative in deciding how they would like to spend their time. Room for improvement, she argued, was mainly concerned with a lack of informative sessions, where people could learn about certain topics in the informal setting of the Women’s Space. She also acknowledged the language barriers that often complicated the communication between residents and volunteers, since it was more difficult finding female than male translators. It was especially important to have a female translator to discuss female-specific and intimate topics. This difficulty also highlights the fact that the male-dominated structure exceeded the borders of the camp and extended to organizations and institutions that provide certain services, such as female translators. This circumstance would sometimes complicate the goal to create time for female residents to focus only on themselves, although, as Lynn expressed, “providing the space that was only for women, and recognizing them as an individual person who is entitled to have some time to just feel well and relax” (Lynn, 05/06/2020), was one of the main purposes of the Women’s Space.

An example of this was the difficulty in encouraging individual care and personal quality time for female visitors and, at the same time, acknowledging the fact that many women were mothers and wanted to bring their children with them to the activities. As a compromise, there were certain days when children were welcomed in the space and other days when women were asked to come by themselves. Although this might be perceived as

an unnecessary intervention in the women's personal decisions, Lynn told me the reasoning behind this insistence on child-free activities. She drew a colorful picture of the difference in the atmosphere when children were present and when they were absent:

It was a completely different atmosphere. With the children, it was always this wiggly, nice, high-energy atmosphere that could become quite stressful though as well, because it was just much louder. Kids were running around, things would fall down, crayons would be flying anywhere. Women who don't have children and wanted to come for a cup of tea and read a book or something, felt disturbed in what they're doing. And then on the days where only the women were allowed to the space, it was just much calmer and, I mentioned before, some women also literally said, 'Oh, I'm so happy to have a couple of hours without my kids, no matter how much I love them.' (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

On the one hand, Lynn addressed the changing ambiance of the room that was noisy when younger children who need attention and supervision were present. Not all female residents had children and those without children wanted to use the space for recreation and as a place of tranquility. On the other hand, as Lynn told me, mothers themselves had expressed to her how much they enjoyed having a few hours to themselves without the responsibility of childcare. Indeed, the space was a lot more hectic when children were present. Naturally, they would run around, scream or fight, and the volunteers would often have to jump in to take care of such situations, and the atmosphere was similar to CFS, which was not the original purpose of the space. On the other hand, as Lynn stated, "if we send the kids away, it also means that we potentially send some women away" (Lynn, 05/06/2020). This was a situation that I encountered several times during my time in the Women's Space. Women who would not leave their children alone and had nobody else to take care of them had to leave, showing once more that the responsibility for child care was largely that of the women. Even though we encouraged building support networks among residents, it was apparent that many women could only take part in the Women's Space sessions if their children were allowed to come with them. As a compromise, children were allowed in the space once a week, and on that day, rather child-friendly activities were carried out. The other days were strictly without children. Lynn told me that this is especially important to fulfill the purpose of the space. "And they also maybe sometimes just have to let their mothers have a

break and not constantly want something from them and just respect that they maybe deserve a break and some mom-time every once in a while, too” (Lynn, 05/06/2020).

With this claimed right for absence, a parallel can again be drawn with with Glissant’s (1997) concept of opacity. If we are cautious in the way seemingly empty spaces are subsequently filled with change, we might be able to use these dimensions for the theories that have already been established. In the way that women claimed their right over the individuality of their bodies, they shifted the spaces of actions, handing over their children, and metaphorically their responsibility, to husbands, fathers, brothers, or other family members who had to acknowledge the women’s temporary absence. Arguably, they created visibility by creating time that was not charged with responsibilities but could be filled with the activities they chose which included doing nothing. This might seem paradoxical at first glance; how could absence contribute to becoming more visible? How can nothing turn into something? However, it makes sense if we reflect further on the implications of their absence. By delegating responsibility, they raise awareness of the void they leave and the meaningfulness of their presence. This way, it might be possible to create a new understanding of the relation between men and women, in which women do not hide in safe zones but consciously claim them as their own and transfer these claims into any other area of their life.

In view of these reflections, I argue that the power that lies in the temporary disappearance of women is a way of reclaiming time. Then, how can we grasp the female identity, if it is foregrounded by its disappearance? As Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, p. 106) describes it, “the notion of the identity of women, however, is similar to a fabric.” If we apply this concept to the women’s absence from their expected responsibilities in the role of a mother, it is possible to argue that the shift of responsibility inevitably redesigns the spaces of action too. In consideration of the Soli Centre’s responsibility in this regard, it might be reasonable to have a closer look at how a space of recreation should look like, in practice and in imagination, to be suitable for its purpose to give time for “being absent.” Arguably, the role of the volunteers is a fundamental one, since they prepare and lead the space and eventually propose the rules of co-existence, capacities, and limits. Several of the volunteers who spoke with me stated that consistency was one of the most relevant factors in providing a space of trust and comfort:

I do think that consistency is the most important thing to enforce, especially in the Women's Space as well. So, making sure that you've got the same volunteer who is there for the whole time, not like the whole time, but there for longer periods of time, rather than having always a different mix of volunteers [...] I feel like if you've got the same volunteers, it definitely creates the whole environment. (Madison, 20/05/2020)

The relationship between volunteers and residents came up in almost all interviews with volunteers in the way that it shaped and formed the spaces. On the other hand, several people argued that it would be beneficial to aim for a shift in responsibility here as well by substituting volunteers as the main lead. Lynn, for example, explained that international volunteers should ideally be inessential for the successful operation of activities.

I thought that should ultimately be the goal of the Women's Space, that we international volunteers become kind of unnecessary. Maybe just give some guidance but not interfere really at all in the activities. And just support the women and lifting each other up. I think that would be really amazing. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

She shared with me the idea of how external volunteers could shift into the background, leaving more room for maneuver to resident volunteers who would take a leading role in the spaces without being influenced by external volunteers. The latter would simply be there to support the setting of the space and provide resources. Alexis agreed with this, but also highlighted the importance that international volunteers have in the international discourse on migration policies:

And I think that would be great if we could have, you know, a Women's Space team lead, and it would be a resident volunteer, and international volunteers could come in and help because I think it's important that we do have international volunteers. They bring different disciplines with them. And it's good because it shows that different people from around the world are supporting these asylum seekers and refugees. And then they go home and then they tell people about what they've seen, and you're raising awareness that way as well. But it would be nice, I think, to have resident volunteers that are really taking the lead on spaces. (Alexis, 25/05/2020)

At the moment, it is generally more difficult to recruit new volunteers since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic caused long-term restrictions to be placed on travel. Therefore, this might be an appropriate moment to discuss how the spaces would look like with fewer international volunteers. This may make it possible to enquire further whether more residents would be interested in continuing the activities in the spaces as leaders than as participants. However, this is just a concept of an experiment and we should be careful to evaluate this as a beneficial solution. In the end, these spaces exist for the residents and they should be comfortable with the ways the spaces are managed. Resident volunteers have been invaluable for the Soli Centre, especially when mediating between residents and volunteers, but it is also possible that they would eventually prefer to have international volunteers in charge and not in the background. Bearing in mind that the access to services offered by the Soli Centre was generally more complicated for women, it is also a likely scenario that taking a lead in one of the spaces would be even more difficult for female residents. In conclusion, residents leading in spaces such as the Women's Space would be an interesting possibility to explore, but this should actively include residents and their wishes about the future of the spaces.

7.2 Reclaiming the Voice

The way the volunteers showed solidarity towards the camp's residents was according to their capabilities, skill sets, and ideas. These involved direct action by "showing up," by being there in multifold ways, using their privilege of unhindered mobility to enter a space of seeming immobility. For an uninvolved outsider, the daily routine in Nea Kavala could seem like a prime example of paralysis with people waiting in uncertainty, with limited resources, and dependent on external stakeholders who are in charge of their future. I realized that immobility in Nea Kavala is not all-encompassing. Neither does it fill all cracks and joints of the space, nor is it a static state of stopped movement. The mobility I witnessed during the weeks in the camp was a subtle one, a quietly happening inside of the spaces. However, that mobility was still shadowed by the risk of reproducing colonial structures. Still, it becomes apparent that the state of waiting does not have to be a meaningless period of lost time. Instead, the concept of waiting can be turned into a room for resistance and acts of mobilization (Greene, 2009).

One of the spaces where this was happening was in the English classes in the Women's Space. Pia described how the classroom transformed into a space of community mobilization in the process of navigating the language barriers, the misunderstandings, and

limits of informal education. She also told me a lot about her personal relationship with the residents, emphasizing how in many ways the English classes are much more than a language course. Success is apparent in the practical sense of the classes, in learning new letters, words, and grammar. The fact that for many women these are not only additional words but also the first words they have ever written in their life shows remarkable strength and resilience. As Pia said, it is about “taking these steps, and being brave, and coming to the board and writing something, and reading something out loud” (Pia, 02/06/2020). She expressed how even these basic elements of a classroom atmosphere turned it into a space of community mobilization and empowerment. Looking closely at what Greene (2019) observed, it is possible to draw parallels to her concept of “making do.” According to the author’s findings, smartphones become the facilitators of mobility among a group of migrant women facing displacement. Arguably, in Pia’s classroom, the whole learning process becomes the instrument of making do, even more than the actual practical results of the lessons taught. To make do with something describes the act of coping with a situation with the available limited means, leading to a result that is perceived as adequate enough. It is possible to see these classes as a way to respond to patriarchal gender roles and to respond to the immobility of residents by moving on in different ways in the belief that the journey will continue eventually. Nonetheless, thinking back to Quijano’s (1991) inseparable axes of modernity and coloniality, a more critical narrative should find room, especially in connection to Mignolo’s (2002) concept of the geopolitics of knowledge.

It is evident that knowledge is dictated in the informal English classes, even though the classes are voluntary. Residents and volunteers each learn with and from each other, but still, the picture of the Western teacher, who seems to hold superior knowledge, persists, contrasting with the residents who turn into students and are encouraged to learn what they are taught for their own good. From a more pessimistic perspective, one might see the colonized and colonizer once again representing imbalances of power, the inferior vs. superior, even in the colorfully and thoughtfully decorated classrooms. This impression is amplified by the fact that English is one of the languages spoken by former colonizer societies. One should consider that this might not be a moment where voices are reclaimed, as the title of this section suggests, but instead a moment where a Eurocentric voice is reproduced by reinforcing the silencing of other languages. Being able to communicate in English can be a practical tool in general, and I do not wish to deny its usefulness, but it is still important to acknowledge the parallels to a perpetuating Western-driven geopolitics, as suggested by Mignolo (2002).

Volunteers seem to highlight the positive aspects of educational offers. They focus on the meaningful moments they (the volunteers) experience when reaching new goals with the students. Pia told me about the insightful moment of starting from the very beginning, such as practicing where to open exercise books:

It took me a couple of weeks to understand how basic it is and how slow you have to go in the beginning, saying from which direction you open your book, because in Farsi and Arabic, if you read the other way around, you will open your book the other way around. There's so many students who start their book, writing in their book from the back actually, or from the bottom to the top. (Pia, 02/06/2020)

By unraveling a long-installed routine, one might argue, volunteers and residents build a community where they learn to phrase their surroundings in a new way, a positive side that should thoroughly find recognition in its potential to benefit people. Josefina referred to the potential of intergenerational knowledge transfers, she explained:

I think, in refugee camps, we could do a very big job educating women, or maybe more than women, teenagers or kids or girls because they are the ones that are going to go to school and they're going to learn Greek. It's going to be easy for them to learn English and Greek. And I guess it's easier for them to learn and then pass the information to their mothers because changing the mindset of an adult, I guess it's more difficult. (Josefina, 20/05/2020)

In the Soli Centre, this shift of directions indeed happened in both ways. Younger children and teenagers had their own spaces of learning and development, and as Josefina rightly said, they might be able to take their knowledge into other spaces and become ambassadors of their own. I have also seen this happening the other way around—elderly women attending the classes with perfect attention, although they come in slowly or have trouble walking, determined to make progress. As role models for their younger relatives, they might pass on this perseverance and sense of hope to their daughters, granddaughters, and other members of the next generations. Nonetheless, one has to be careful not to romanticize this knowledge production as a way to empower women without critically questioning whether the volunteers might emerge from the teaching experience more empowered than the residents. To be truly revolutionizing, decolonial critique should be

applied to these spaces just like in any other place where tendencies for Western-oriented power relations are present. For feminist and decolonial practices, we have to draw attention to the fact that the epistemological West usually is in charge, leading to a Western-oriented diffusion of knowledge, a dangerous development that results in the coloniality of gender as a “by-product of a local history” (Giraldo, 2016, p. 165).

Transitioning to a more positive narrative, the Soli Centre does offer a room in which residents can learn with other residents and volunteers without a school environment and dictated knowledge; the Language Café, which was introduced as a free learning space and takes place regularly in the Women’s Space. It is a place where women can teach each other their mother tongues or practice a newly learned language together, play games, and also offer to teach their skills to volunteers. The impressive element of the Language Café is the fact that it was introduced by the residents and started by women who wanted to teach each other Farsi, as Lynn remembered:

So, the women approached us. Some of the Farsi-speaking women noticed that some of them can write in Farsi and that some of them have even experience in teaching. And some of them weren’t able to write Farsi, but actually, they really wanted to learn [...] And they asked us whether they can use the room to give Farsi lessons. And then, in an attempt to make it more inclusive and not just limited to Farsi-speaking women, we came up with the concept of the Open Language Café. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

In this case, volunteers only served as facilitators; they provided books, games, and other items that could be useful, but the main idea and the wish to use a room to teach Farsi, came from the women themselves. One could argue that this is an active way of resisting a Western-oriented knowledge production, a shift from the English language. By teaching each other Farsi and other languages, they replicate their own mother tongues instead of becoming silent in it. It might be a way to hold onto the memories of their home and to stay connected with it, or it could even be a way to transfer their knowledge to volunteers who in turn might reproduce it. I argue that in this scenario the geopolitics of knowledge production, which Mignolo (2002) uses in his critique, are disturbed and deconstructed, and enable dialogues that are neither driven by Western-oriented stakeholders, nor expressed in their languages. Turning around spaces of knowledge production in which the “colonizer” becomes the student, listens, and learns could be seen as decolonial practice because it disrupts the everlasting reproduction of a naturalized knowledge discourse coming from the Global North.

If we consider that this change of narratives can influence the way conversations and dialogues happen inside of the Women's Space, there is reason to believe it could be a relevant step on the path toward decolonial feminism in which the feminist voices come from female residents themselves and not only from volunteers. One could even argue that it is precisely this situation that enabled them to collaboratively work toward a shift in epistemology, one that is neither forced by traditional structural violence, neither by neoliberal Western-oriented oppression, but ideally by horizontal relationships between people. From this perspective, it is possible to see the practices in the Open Language Café as a way to achieve the reclamation of the voice. The concepts of decoloniality and gender cannot be separated from one another here without damaging their very purpose, and so Giraldo (2016) argues, "yet there is a need for feminists to think theory proper from within a decolonial framework" (p. 162), to avoid modernist thinking that eventually only perpetuates colonialism. In the lived reality of the Women's Space in Nea Kavala, this meant constantly raising the question of whether we, as a community of volunteers and residents, would reclaim the "right" voices and not the ones designed by a hegemonic West. Madison used the example of building the confidence to speak up for oneself in the face of gender-based oppression:

You know, there's so many women who, after coming to refugee camps, or even just being in Western or European countries [...] They've been able to build on the competence, been able to talk back to their husbands, and if they're being treated badly, they're able to say, 'no, you can't treat me like that.' (Madison, 20/05/2020)

In response, it can be stated that in the Women's Space, female residents are encouraged to claim their voice, individually and as a community. The ABC classes prove that achievements can happen on a small, for outsiders almost invisible scale. When Pia taught her English class on the other side of the curtain, I could sometimes hear them all repeating letters, numbers, or sounds together. "You have to get them to repeat and repeat and repeat and you get them to say it louder and louder. And you count to 10 altogether: ONE, TWO... We can be quite loud" (Pia, 02/06/2020), she told me, highlighting the community effort of adapting to the difficult situation they are in. In other moments, it was evident that the residents did not only make do with the resources that were provided by the volunteers but also with their skillsets and talents, e.g., setting up their own learning spaces in the Open Language Café and deciding what they wanted to teach to others:

And everyone who came in there, they came and [would] sit together and would just start a conversational English game or take a notebook and study on their own, or someone would go to the whiteboard and give like half-an-hour lesson [...] There was one Afghan woman who suddenly just taught German because she was just learning on her own with an app. So, she just taught everything that she was learning with the app to the other women, who also wanted to learn German [...] And that was really, really nice. (Lynn, 05/06/2020)

Given these narrations by volunteers, we might think of Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) who asks about the nature of decolonization, “Can it be understood as only a thought or a discourse?” (p. 100) and ask ourselves whether “we” have already done it. Have we actually achieved decolonization by such practices? Perhaps the answer is that the process can never be complete and the reclamation of the voice can only be achieved if we continue to explore the dangers of perpetuating colonialism, even if they are hard to grasp under the veil of feminism. This also includes me in my role as a researcher in this environment and the voice I choose to write about it.

7.3 Reclaiming Space

At the beginning of fieldwork, I was looking for visible acts of resistance. Revolution, so I thought, would be noticeable in one way or another. In other words, I was prepared to see feminist acts of resistance and had partly hoped to be a part of it in my role as a volunteer as well. One of the most important insights gained from this research study has been the fact that the acceptance of restricted physical mobility can, in fact, be turned into new forms of mobility. One could argue that an organization with a gender-equality approach fails to achieve this goal when a space stays male-dominated. Contrary to this, one could also call it a failure when an organization instrumentalizes women and their inclusion in male-dominated areas just to make a pretense of promoting the achievement of a goal. Mobility, I argue, can be achieved behind the walls of a safe space, a space where trajectories can be formed and reconstructed.

Art historian Demos (2009) operationalizes the art of filmmaking in the context of representing Palestinians without portraying them as transparent, easily traceable, and tangible figures of a shaped reality. He argues for “an obscurity that frustrates knowledge and

that assigns to the represented a source of unknowability that is also a sign of potentiality” (Demos, 2009, p. 114).

With this concept, he refers back to Glissant’s (1997) claim for opacity and opens up the possibility of potential that is unaccounted and immeasurable by neoliberal strategies of modernity. Residents in Nea Kavala and international volunteers claimed space by building a safe area in a male-dominated sphere they do not aim to take over. The act of claiming space is a seemingly paradoxical way of *not* claiming it.

Could scholars, researchers, students, and politicians, as much as stakeholders in international humanitarian organizations, start acknowledging the potential of the process in which mobility is facilitated by not accepting it? I noticed in the anecdotes of volunteers how they witnessed female residents in the Women’s Space in a comfortable state of moving casually, dancing, and enjoying the space without constraints in contrast with the general public areas many women aim to avoid:

And about the Women’s Space itself, I just see that there is no other place in this camp where women can be women. And then I see how they change when they’re in the Women’s Space when we do music and dancing. There’s a lot of music and dancing sometimes in the camp, at any celebration. But the women would just not really go and dance there, because the men would dance in public. But as soon as we’re in the Women’s Space [...] almost every time it happens that someone starts dancing and they really, really love dancing. And then the headscarf goes down a little bit and no one cares, they can even take it off. (Pia, 02/06/2020)

In Pia’s descriptions, one can see a direct link to mobility and movements of the body in the way that she describes the process of “letting loose” and moving carefree around the room. This includes the non-conformity to social expectations, such as an unadjusted headscarf or dancing in front of other people that hinder them to act in the same way in the public spheres of the camp. This could be an indicator of achieved mobility, although mobility in the camp is still restricted due to the male-dominated public areas. In the Women’s Space, residents and volunteers create a space where the overarching restrictions can be countered and where the physical movement goes along with responding to these constraints by not conforming to them.

The threshold approach by Van der Velde and van Naersson (2011) states that migrating people have to overcome the mental border threshold, the location threshold, and

the trajectory threshold to realize mobility. What would happen, however, if we introduced a fourth threshold to the range, a threshold that is created in between the notions of post-mobility (after physical mobility has been undertaken) and of pre-mobility (when mobility is stopped in Nea Kavala) at the same time? We might assume that this threshold is an act of resistance to overcome structural oppression. Van der Velde and Van Naersson (2011) already argue that “it might be necessary to take the sequence of decisions again” (p. 222) if certain conditions are met, e.g., when the perception regarding the place of destination for a person who migrates changes. However, what happens if the destination country remains the same but the way of traveling, the inner trajectory, changes due to mobility that is created within the experience of transit? Women in Nea Kavala might shape their continuing trajectories differently after they spend six months, one year, or even five years, a sadly realistic prognosis for many residents, in the camp. If we apply the decolonial feminist approach by Rivera Cusicanqui, we consequently apply mobility and border paradigms to the “idea rivers,” which she describes as follows:

Ideas run, like rivers, from the south to the north and are transformed into tributaries in major waves of thought. But just as in the global market for material goods, ideas leave the country converted into raw material, which become regurgitated and jumbled in the final product. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 104)

Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) describes women as the creators of unprecedented modernity, figuratively weaving fabrics of culture that reproduce and fill in spheres and borders. The women I met in Nea Kavala weaved their own fabrics, and let their rivers of ideas run, by constantly challenging the spatial and socio-cultural limitations they faced in their everyday life. Arguably, they did so together with the volunteers who stood in solidarity with them against the oppressive EU border regime, by finding ways to create notions of space they could utilize. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that the practices of volunteers intervene in the making of these fabrics, their presence automatically manipulates the ways in which ideas and spaces come into being and develop.

It is an interesting parallel that sewing literal fabrics was an important part of the activities offered in the Women’s Space. Observing this activity helped me to draw connections to these ideas. It was almost as if one could see the theories come to life. On the one hand, I have to acknowledge the fact that I was actively looking for such connections between theories and the lived reality I saw during research. Another researcher might have

focused on a different activity and put less weight on the implications of sewing in relation to the reclamation of space. On the other hand, it can be argued that it was one of the few activities in the camp where women could actively be in charge of the creation of something. It should also be noted that the women might have a different opinion on this matter and may have seen the sewing rather as a necessity than as an activity they would define as empowering. However, there are indicators that, at least for some of them, it was indeed a source of something that went beyond its practical purpose.

For some, this might be by making their accommodation more comfortable by adding little decorations, adding their individual taste to the standardized containers and walls of the Women's Space. For others, it might have been a source of self-confidence by using their skills from their former profession as tailors. For others, it might have been a valve or distraction from the challenges and worries they encountered in their life in the camp. This shows that there is not a single way to claim space and to use this claim as a source of fulfillment, resistance, or even escape. The women actively made use of the Women's Space. Many of them attended every offered session and, therefore, claimed the space as their own. At the same time, it might be stated that by claiming this specific space as theirs, the women also accepted the overarching male dominance in other public areas of Nea Kavala.

This could mean that the act of claiming space did not extend to claiming other public areas besides the Women's Space. It could even mean seeking refuge instead of claiming the physical extension of space. Thereby it is a form of opacity that can become a political demand for resistance (Demos, 2009). Demos (2009) wonders, "Might the embrace of opacity as a strategy of resistance against oppressive identifications, for instance, end up unintentionally silencing the other, as the unforeseen mimicry of political erasure reenacts the very effect of colonization?" (p. 126). Arguably, in the context of mobility and feminism, this risk is fundamental. Consciously choosing the Women's Space of the Soli Centre as the only safe haven and restraining from the male-dominated public spaces could be regarded as a surrender of feminist efforts to reclaim spaces. Notwithstanding, it could be regarded as a powerful opacity that gives room away in a way to expand borders. In this regard, postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship must build bridges by creating dialogues between them, even though this is not an easy goal to achieve (Asher, 2017).

Taking these theories, their connections, and their blind spots into consideration, there is reason to argue that space is reclaimed in and mobility is created by the active and passive acts of resistance. On the other hand, there is a lingering "nonetheless" in the background—a warning and a reminder not to fall into the trap of romanticizing the imaginaries of the ways

in which residents cope with their situation, in which we portray perpetuation of modernity as feminist victories, although, in the end, we only celebrate an everlasting superiority of Western-gazed worldviews.

The value of having international volunteers present in general is given. However, goals should be articulated to reflect on volunteers' motivations for becoming part of an organization, and to critically observe the role that volunteers play in the migration context. We might never reach a complete state of decoloniality because we cannot separate ourselves and our minds from the coloniality inherent to the core of our identity. Perhaps space can never be fully reclaimed because coloniality will always occupy some room in it, room that we can only make visible and attempt to deconstruct bit by bit. It might be comforting to glamourize small moments of hope into exaggerated images of a revolution, but, in the end, I want to show that all of these mobilities, as meaningful as they are, can never replace the freedom of movement people would have outside of a refugee camp. After Josefina and I had talked for almost an hour, she too was overrun by the sentiment of hopelessness that she shared with me:

Because it's horrible and there's no short-term solution for it. So, stop coming and try to build a future in your country. But then, who are you to tell them this? You that you live in your comfortable house in Europe and that you have access to education and healthcare and everything [...] So, at the end, there is no European Dream. (Josefina, 20/05/2020)

With these words, she gets to the heart of how difficult it can be to acknowledge one's privilege and to see the misery in which Western superiority has placed millions of people and, at the same time, to accept that one's agency to achieve change will always be limited, even worse, that we might contribute to the very coloniality from which we aim to move away.

At the end of this last chapter, I am reminded of Lugones' (2010) piece of work *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, which I introduced in the very beginning and wonder how far we have truly come. Thinking back to Rivera Cusicanqui (2012), the answer might be that our post-colonial bias will forever remain a part of the fabrics that we weave and will keep creating the spaces these fabrics touch and transform. Perhaps we may never fully attain the state of decolonized feminism, but we can continue to touch and caress, crumple up, stretch, stitch together, and keep weaving layers of those fabrics.

7.4 Conclusions

In this last empirical chapter, I suggested some answers to the questions that we might encounter about mobility and its limitations. In the end, the result might be a sobering one. As valuable and supportive humanitarian initiatives are, they cannot replace the freedom of movement the residents currently are wishing and waiting for in Nea Kavala, stuck in a transit zone. I did not start my research with this perspective; instead I started with a rather optimistic point of view. In this last empirical chapter, I analyzed how different dimensions of mobility were achieved within the spaces and dialogues happening in the Women's Space of Nea Kavala. I called these the reclamations of time, the voice, and space, leaving room for a critical understanding, if these reclamations could be considered successful.

It is interesting to see how agency is visible, how even absence can be considered a powerful tool as a political statement of resistance. By consciously taking time away from their family responsibilities, women transferred their responsibilities temporarily to other male family members and used passivity and opacity as tools for visibilization. Arguably, while taking time for themselves, e.g., in taking English lessons, they also came together as a mobilizing community. This did not have to be in the form of complex political statements, but rather in the form of a symbolic message. Pia narrated how many of the women started learning to write and read from scratch in the ABC classes and how they mobilized their courage to speak up in front of others, possibly for the first time in their life. On the other hand, this positively connoted narrative should not stand alone without exposing the colonial structures that come to life in the form of Western-oriented knowledge production and naturalized superiority of volunteers. Working toward a more horizontal relationship, the Open Language Café can be seen as decolonizing practice to disrupt this very superiority by supporting a different form of the geopolitics of knowledge.

As an interesting parallel, women in the Women's Space weaved fabrics both metaphorically and literally. These two dimensions seemed interconnected, e.g., by creating objects to make their container, a place that was never intended to become a permanent residence, more comfortable. This last remark might be the crux of the answer to the question of whether mobility was achieved and how that very mobility could be defined. Even if time, voice and space are reclaimed in nuanced ways, these achievements should not be seen as adequate substitutes for the time the residents lose while being in a state limbo. In the end, we might have to accept the fact that we can never erase the inherent bias that manipulates our perception, shapes our vision, and influences our action. However, what we can do is to

articulate clear visions of decolonial practices that help reminding us to always question our own positionality, be it as volunteers or researchers. Thereby we might acknowledge decolonial feminism as a never fully walked path and take on the responsibility to weave it in ways that bring us closer to a lived decoloniality.

8. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Outlooks

Residents of Nea Kavala are in a constant state of limbo, while they wait up to several years for the day of their asylum interview. In the few weeks that I spent in the Women's Space of the Soli Centre as a volunteer and researcher, I observed how residents and volunteers came together and created notions of mobility as a response to the restricted freedom of movement people face. By determining and addressing needs in the camp, the Soli Centre seeks to show solidarity and to form horizontal relationships with residents. Volunteers navigate their room to maneuver in the complex constellation between the Greek authorities and the residents they wish to support. As a result of these relationships, the mobilities that are reconstructed within solidarity practices of volunteers and female residents shine a light on the ways in which a decolonial gender lens allows for the transformation of dominant key concepts in migration and mobility studies.

This study took shape during a period of uncertainty; it suffered setbacks, layovers, and was subject to processes of restructuring. The transit phase, the feeling of being put on hold and experiencing restricted mobility suddenly ceased to be only the main interest of my study and became intertwined with the process of the research itself. Thereby it was an insightful and instructive coincidence in which immobility suddenly became a part of every aspect of life. I acknowledge that the answers that I found are not complete. Instead, I consider them as a contribution that could serve as a point of departure for future research.

As a volunteer, I was hoping to end my research by visibilizing acts of resistance, revolution, and victory as a response to patriarchal and colonial structures. In a way, I was expecting to witness a spectacular enactment of agency, a tendency that Boas et al. (2020) highlight as one of the risks for researchers with biased starting assumptions. I could see the tendency to be hopeful in the other volunteers as well, for they tried to stay positive most of the time, even in difficult situations. I understood that keeping a positive attitude was an essential part of the Soli Centre to keep going without denying the severity of the situation by focusing on the achievements and directing efforts toward solving the problems that appeared to be solvable.

The main research question of this study was the following:

How do female residents and volunteers of the Soli Centre reconstruct mobility in Nea Kavala?

In order to visibilize and evaluate the mobilities that were created, I first focused on the determination of needs, then on the practices aimed to address these needs, and finally, on the evaluation of how these practices might reconstruct mobility by reclaiming it in different ways. I defined three dimensions of reclamation; the reclamation of time, the voice and space. In the end, I consciously decided not to give an absolute answer to the question of whether these claims should be considered as successfully made. To provide a concluding overview, in the following section are summarized the main arguments of the three research sub-questions.

What are the most relevant needs of female residents in Nea Kavala that the Soli Centre determines?

Identifying the most relevant needs of the residents is a complex task for an organization. In the specific context of the Soli Centre and the Women's Space in Nea Kavala, it became apparent that the determination of needs had to be addressed not only by asking the question of which needs seem most urgent, overarching, and prevalent at the moment but also by assessing the practicality of responding to those needs. The Soli Centre followed an inclusive approach where residents of the camp play an active role in voicing their needs and creating spaces to address them. This approach was supported by several methods of receiving feedback, through outreach and by inquiring about the individual needs of the residents. However, it had to be acknowledged that this approach entailed the risk of overseeing needs or evaluating them differently than how the residents would. It should also be taken into consideration that volunteers are not free of biases and, consequently, should always reflect on their actions and critically question why they addressed certain issues.

The key needs for female residents in Nea Kavala elaborated on in this study can be summarized as follows: 1) the need for individual care: this need is related to self-care and recreational activities conducted in a non-judgmental space and a safe area where the female residents can spend some time away from their responsibilities and worries. This does not mean that problems would simply be solved by the mere existence of the space, but it provided people with a comfortable place to recharge, rest, and be recognized as individuals prioritizing their well-being; 2) the need for access to information services: this need refers to both informative sessions about the general situation, consulting services for individual cases, as well as to health-care, and career-related services. Particularly female residents faced challenges in accessing services for several reasons, e.g., childcare-related responsibilities, a

lack of female interpreters to address intimate issues, and also a lack of female doctors in the camp. Furthermore, even when women accessed information services such as WIH, compared to male residents it was more difficult for them to utilize the services, e.g. because they did not have a phone/email address, or because they felt limited in the way they could voice their concerns to a male interpreter; 3) the need for visibilization: this need resulted from the overarching male-domination of public areas of Nea Kavala. Women did not seem to be equally visible in the same way as men. This tendency went beyond their absence in public areas of the camp and expanded to a seeming invisibility of their needs, e.g in relation to feminine hygiene products, which in turn lead to an overall restrictive mobility in camp.

Many of these needs refer back to patriarchal structures that are internalized and replicated both by residents and volunteers. They show how increasing attention for feminization in migration discourses and policies is a strenuous endeavor that keeps facing limitations due to a seeming invisibility of female-specific needs.

How is the approach of the Soli Centre carried out in the threefold dynamic between residents, volunteers, and the Greek government?

This question was focused on the Soli Centre's responses to the needs that had already been identified. By combining the narratives of volunteers with my own observations and experiences, I analyzed how these responses were implemented in reality, how the interaction between residents and volunteers took place, and where volunteers positioned themselves in the dynamics between the residents they wanted to support and the Greek authorities that limited their capacity to do so. At times, this resulted in frustration and dissatisfaction among the volunteers, who did not feel that they were able to show that level of solidarity with the residents that they personally wished for.

In the Women's Space, Volunteers aimed to actively create a space of recreation for women, who could choose whether they wanted to use the space for productive activities such as sewing, or simply enjoy some quality time of their own. Informal English classes showed the potential of utilizing the Women's Space to acquire skills that could be useful for the next steps in the residents' journey, be it in a future profession or the everyday life in a country that speaks a different language. On the other hand, the analysis showed that there is a risk of romanticizing the practice of a Western-oriented knowledge production that could lead to the preservation of colonial tendencies among the volunteers. In this context, the coloniality of gender became particularly clear and led to the conclusion that modernity and

coloniality, as suggested by Quijano (1991) always go together, and are intertwined in the sector of humanitarian aid as well. Another aspect is the consideration of gender-mixed spaces. Although it is an interesting option to explore regarding the creation of room for female residents in a male-dominated area, it should be emphasized that goals of increased gender equality in spaces might not correspond to the desires of the residents themselves, which is one of reasons why volunteers from the Soli Centre expressed concerns about this idea. Consequently, humanitarian initiatives should examine their motivations to promote a certain way of knowledge production that does not lead into the pitfalls of promoting colonial structures under the guise of gender equality. Volunteers navigated between their positive emotions, e.g. about the community mobilization in language classes, and moments of embitterment, e.g. when they had to turn people away due to restrictions by the Greek Ministry. It became apparent how volunteers had to cope with frustration in their role in-between residents and the local authorities, but kept a positive attitude towards their goals by accepting their limitations and providing support in the ways they were able to.

How can the mobilities, created by residents and volunteers, be defined in the context of a decolonial gender approach?

With this last sub-question, I intended to evaluate the dimensions of mobility that were achieved by residents and volunteers and to consider how we might situate these mobilities on the path to a decolonial feminism, inspired by Rivera Cusicanqui's (2012) notion of weaved fabrics and Lugones' (2010) gender lens. Volunteers and residents in Nea Kavala weave their own unique set of fabrics by challenging the structures they might perceive as limiting or restricting. A relevant insight gained from this research was how powerful passivity can be in the context of decolonizing gender. By actively not claiming spaces, by accepting the male-dominated public areas in the camp, and by seeking refuge, women achieved a form of opacity that can be considered as resistance in itself. At the end of the study, I concluded that within the solidarity practices of the Women's Space, mobility is reconstructed in three different dimensions. I called these dimensions the reclamations of time, the voice and space. However, I argue that even these dimensions cannot be seen as detached from the coloniality of gender, and have to be considered critically in relation to the path to decolonial feminism, that is paved with risks to fall back into a perpetuating colonial modernity.

One of the main insights caused the acknowledgment of the fact that even though the efforts and achievements of the Soli Centre and other initiatives bring valuable demonstrations of solidarity and address some of the issues that women in Nea Kavala face, these initiatives should not be seen as substitutes of true freedom of movement, the absence of which is the reason why people have to stay in the camp. Although it is tempting to emphasize the positive aspects, especially for volunteers who, understandably, hope that their efforts are proving meaningful, I further argue that we also have to acknowledge the failures, the setbacks and the redefining of our own path, be it as volunteers, researchers, or both.

By answering the research questions I aimed to contribute to the exploration of decolonial feminism in migration and mobility studies and to gain a better understanding of the ways feminist theory and practice are presented in mobility-related research. We may ask, Can the fabrics we weave ever be washed clean of internalized colonial thinking? One answer I proposed was that we might see decolonial feminism not as a goal we can eventually achieve but our progress toward its achievement, harking back to Cusicanqui's (2012) theory, as the process of weaving the dynamic fabrics around us.

At the very end of this study, I think back to the Nea Kavala camp that was built on an abandoned airfield. I wonder if the time will come when this place goes back to being a bustling airport where people will not be stuck but fly freely to far-away destinations all over the world. Where transit will not mean years of being in limbo but only a few hours of waiting in between flights. Where nothing keeps people from leaving if they wish to move on. Where the runway will not be full of makeshift homes in containers anymore but a place where airplanes land and take off to bring people home, wherever this may be.

References

- Asher, K. (2017). Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the dilemmas of representation in postcolonial and decolonial feminisms. *Feminist Studies*, 43(3), 512–524. doi: 10.15767/feministstudies.43.3.0512
- Babchuk, W. A., & Hitchcock, R. K. (2013). Grounded theory ethnography: Merging methodologies for advancing naturalistic inquiry. *Adult Education Research Conference*. Retrieved from <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2013/papers/5>
- Bhabra, G. (2014). Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues. *Postcolonial Studies*, 17(2), 115–121. doi: 10.1080/13688790.2014.966414
- Boas, I., Schapendonk, J., Blondin, S., & Schrijver, A.P. (2020). Methods as moving ground: Reflections on the ‘doings’ of mobile methodologies. *Social Inclusion*, 8(4), 136-146. doi: 10.17645/si.v8i4.3326
- Boyd, M., & Grieco, E. (2003). Women and migration: Incorporating gender into international migration theory. *Migration Information Source*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory>
- Bueno L. R., & Van Houtum, H. (2015). Lies, damned lies & maps: The EU’s cartopolitical invention of Europe. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23(4), 477–499. doi: 10.1080/14782804.2015.1056727
- Butler, J. (2020, March 7). Capitalism has its limits. *Verso*. Retrieved from <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4603-capitalism-has-its-limits>
- Cabot, Heath. (2018). The European Refugee Crisis and Humanitarian Citizenship in Greece. *Ethnos*. 84(3) 1-25. doi:10.1080/00141844.2018.1529693.
- Castles, S., Haas, H., & Miller, M. (2014). *The age of migration* (5th ed.). (n.p.): Palgrave Macmillan.

- Davids, T. (2014). Trying to be a vulnerable observer: Matters of agency, solidarity and hospitality in feminist ethnography. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 43, 50–58. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2014.02.006
- Debenham, M. (2001). *Computer mediated communication and disability support: Addressing barriers to study for undergraduate distance learners with long-term health problems* (Doctoral dissertation, The Open University). Retrieved from <http://oro.open.ac.uk/46223/15/Margaret%20Debenham%20Doctoral%20Thesis%20001.pdf>
- De Lauri, A. (2020). *Humanitarianism: Keywords*. Leiden: Brill. Retrieved from <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/42542/9789004431140.pdf?sequence=1>
- Demos, T.J. (2009). The right to opacity. *Otolith Group's Nervus Rerum*, 129, 113–128. doi: 10.1162/octo.2009.129.1.113
- Ferguson, R. (2009). *The construction of shared knowledge through asynchronous dialogue* (Doctoral dissertation, The Open University). Retrieved from http://oro.open.ac.uk/19908/1/RFerguson_Thesis.pdf
- Freedman, J. (2016). Engendering security at the borders of Europe: Women migrants and the Mediterranean 'Crisis.' *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(4), 568–582. doi: 10.1093/jrs/few019
- Giraldo, I. (2016). Coloniality at work: Decolonial critique and the postfeminist regime. *Feminist Theory*, 17(2), 157–173. doi: 10.1177/1464700116652835
- Glissant. (1997). *Poetics of relation* (B. Wing, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1990)
- GreekHelicopters (n.d.). [Google Maps showing Nea Kavala from a satellite view]. Retrieved September 10, from <https://avinfo.greekhelicopters.gr/?p=2338>

- Greene, A. (2019). Mobiles and ‘making do’: Exploring the affective, digital practices of refugee women waiting in Greece. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(5), 731–748. doi: 10.1177/1367549419869346
- Hémono, R., Relyea, B., Scott, J., Khaddaj, S., Douka, A., & Wringe, A. (2018). The needs have clearly evolved as time has gone on: A qualitative study to explore stakeholders’ perspectives on the health needs of Syrian refugees in Greece following the 2016 European Union-Turkey agreement. *Conflict and Health*, 12(1). doi: 10.1186/s13031-018-0158-9
- Jahre, M., Kembro, J., Adjahossou, A., & Altay, N. (2018). Approaches to the design of refugee camps. *Journal Of Humanitarian Logistics And Supply Chain Management*, 8(3), 323-345. doi: 10.1108/jhlscm-07-2017-0034
- Jones, J., & Smith, J. (2017). Ethnography: Challenges and opportunities. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 20(4), 98–100. doi: 10.1136/eb-2017-102786.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759. doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x
- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/ modern gender system. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186–209. doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x
- Olivius, E. (2014). Displacing equality? Women’s participation and humanitarian aid effectiveness in refugee camps. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 93–117. doi: 10.1093/rsq/hdu009
- Mahecic, A. (2020). UNHCR calls for decisive action to end alarming conditions on Aegean islands. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.ca/news/unhcr-calls-decisive-action-end-alarming-conditions-aegean-islands/>
- Marinucci, R. (2007). Feminization of migration? (C. Nascimento Menezes, Trans.). *REMHU-Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, 15(29), 5–22. Retrieved from <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=407042006002>

- Mignolo, W. (2002). The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1), 57–96. doi: 10.1215/00382876-101-1-57
- Nelson, L., & Seager, J. (2005). *A companion to feminist geography*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Quijano, A. (1991). Colonialidad y modernidad/racialidad [Coloniality and modernity/rationality]. *Perú Indígena*, 13(29), 11-20. Retrieved from <https://www.lavaca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/quijano.pdf>
- Rivera Cusicanqui S. (2012). Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A reflection on the practices and discourses of decolonization. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111(1), 95–109. doi: 10.1215/00382876-1472612
- Schapendonk, J. (2012). Migrants' im/mobilities on their way to the EU: Lost in transit? *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 103(5), 577–583. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9663.2012.00735.
- Silvey, R. (2004). Power, difference and mobility: Feminist advances in migration studies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(4), 1–17. doi: 10.1191/0309132504ph490oa
- Tittensor, D., & Mansouri, F. (2017). The feminisation of migration? A critical overview. *The Politics of Women and Migration in the Global South*, 11–25. doi: 10.1057/978-1-137-58799-2_2
- UN DESA. (2019). International migrant stock. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>
- Van der Velde, M., & van Naerssen, T. (2011). People, borders, trajectories: An approach to cross-border mobility and immobility in and to the European Union. *Area*, 43(2), 218–224. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00974.x

Vause, S., & Toma, S. (2015). Is the feminization of international migration really on the rise? The case of flows from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Senegal.

Population, English Edition, 70, 39–62. doi:10.3917/popu.1501.0041

Vogt, W. (2018). *Lives in transit: Violence and intimacy on the migrant journey*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.