



School of Humanities

**Language Education for Refugees and Migrants**

Postgraduate Dissertation

Young refugees' narrations in short documentary films created under the "Home new Home" documentary project. Film analysis and audience response.

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Patras, Greece, January 2024

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### ***"Acknowledgments and Dedication"***

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I dedicate this work to all refugees, women and men, who participated in the project and in particular, to the participants of the four films I studied. I appreciated their courage to share their lives and experiences in front of the camera, as well as their creativity. Their stories became a source of reflection, inspiration and empowerment for me.

## **Abstract**

This research is about four (auto)biographical short documentaries created by amateur refugees and non-refugees' creators in 2017, under the "Home new Home" international documentary project in the aftermath of the "refugee crisis". During this period there was an extended media stereotypical representation of refugees showing them either as victims or villains. This documentary project was created to produce a counter narrative on refugees, presenting their individual stories, highlighting their distinct personalities. The selected films of this project were studied within the context of their production including the public discourses on the refugee issue of this period and the objectives of the overall project. Employing a narrative and a narrative visual approach, we wanted to examine how young refugees constructed, negotiated and performed their identities and explore the recurring themes in their narratives concerning their lives. Considering these documentaries as accounts of identities' expression, we saw that the characters of the films, produced individualized narratives that revealed aspects of their everyday life while being in a transitional phase. These short documentaries provided the framework to study their experiences, values, aspirations, attachments, barriers, and fears. Subsequently, we conducted audience research, using focus group methodology. The aim was to investigate the ways the audience responded to refugees' identities that were presented in films and how these films have affected viewers' perceptions on refugees. This research proved that the audience response to films was influenced by personal experiences, stances, and to a certain degree by the mainstream media discourses in this period. However, the films became for the spectators a stimulus for further thinking and reflection into the refugee issue that could lead to a more sensible and active stance towards refugees.

## **Keywords**

Young refugees, identities, narrative analysis, documentary films, focus group research, audience response

Αφηγήσεις νεαρών προσφύγων/ισσών σε μικρού μήκους ντοκιμαντέρ του κινηματογραφικού πρότζεκτ " Home new Home". Ανάλυση ταινιών και μελέτη απόκρισης κοινού.

Μουχελή Αδαμαντία

## Περίληψη

Αυτή η έρευνα αναφέρεται σε τέσσερα (αυτο)βιογραφικά μικρού μήκους ντοκιμαντέρ που δημιουργήθηκαν από ερασιτέχνες, πρόσφυγες και μη δημιουργούς το 2017, στο πλαίσιο ενός διεθνούς προγράμματος παραγωγής ντοκιμαντέρ με τίτλο «Home new Home» στον απόηχο της «προσφυγικής κρίσης». Κατά τη διάρκεια αυτής της περιόδου υπήρχε μια εκτενής στερεοτυπική αναπαράσταση των προσφύγων στα ΜΜΕ είτε ως θυμάτων είτε ως επικίνδυνων-κακών. Το συγκεκριμένο έργο παραγωγής ντοκιμαντέρ είχε ως σκοπό να δημιουργήσει μια αντί-αφήγηση για τους πρόσφυγες, παρουσιάζοντας τις ατομικές τους ιστορίες και φωτίζοντας την ξεχωριστή προσωπικότητα του καθενός . Οι επιλεγμένες τέσσερις ταινίες αυτού του πρότζεκτ μελετήθηκαν στο πλαίσιο της παραγωγής τους, των δημόσιων λόγων για το προσφυγικό ζήτημα εκείνης της περιόδου αλλά και τους στόχους του συνολικού έργου. Χρησιμοποιώντας ως μεθόδους την αφηγηματική ανάλυση και την οπτική ανάλυση, θελήσαμε να εξετάσουμε με ποιους τρόπους οι νεαροί/ες πρόσφυγες/ισσες κατασκεύασαν, διαπραγματεύτηκαν και παρουσίασαν-επιτέλεσαν τις ταυτότητές τους αλλά και παράλληλα να ερευνήσουμε τα επαναλαμβανόμενα θέματα στις αφηγήσεις τους σχετικά με τη ζωή τους. Θεωρώντας τα ντοκιμαντέρ αυτά ως πεδίο έκφρασης ταυτοτήτων, είδαμε ότι οι χαρακτήρες των ταινιών παρήγαγαν εξατομικευμένες αφηγήσεις που αποκάλυπταν πτυχές της καθημερινότητάς τους ενώ βρίσκονταν σε μια μεταβατική φάση της ζωής τους. Τα συγκεκριμένα μικρού μήκους ντοκιμαντέρ παρείχαν το πλαίσιο για να μελετηθούν οι εμπειρίες, οι αξίες, οι φιλοδοξίες, τα σταθερά σημεία αναφοράς τους , τα εμπόδια και οι φόβοι τους. Συνακόλουθα, πραγματοποιήσαμε έρευνα κοινού, χρησιμοποιώντας τη μεθοδολογία των ομάδων εστίασης. Ο στόχος ήταν να διερευνηθεί ο τρόπος με τον οποίο το κοινό ανταποκρίθηκε στις ταυτότητες των

προσφύγων, όπως αυτές παρουσιάστηκαν στις συγκεκριμένες ταινίες και πώς οι ταινίες επηρέασαν τις αντιλήψεις των θεατών για τους πρόσφυγες. Η έρευνα αυτή κατέδειξε ότι η απόκριση του κοινού στις ταινίες επηρεάστηκε από τις προσωπικές εμπειρίες και στάσεις των συμμετεχόντων και σε κάποιο βαθμό από τον κυρίαρχο τη συγκεκριμένη περίοδο δημόσιους λόγους των μέσων ενημέρωσης για τους πρόσφυγες. Ωστόσο, οι ταινίες αποτέλεσαν για τους θεατές ένα ερέθισμα για περαιτέρω σκέψη και αναστοχασμό σχετικά με το προσφυγικό ζήτημα, που θα μπορούσε να οδηγήσει σε μια πιο ευαισθητοποιημένη και ενεργή στάση απέναντι στους πρόσφυγες.

### **Λέξεις – Κλειδιά**

Νεαροί/ές πρόσφυγες/ισσες, ταυτότητες, αφηγηματική ανάλυση, ντοκιμαντέρ, ομάδες εστίασης, απόκριση κοινού.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	v
Περίληψη .....	vi
Table of Contents .....	viii
List of Figures .....	x
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Literature Review- Thematic Framing.....	3
2.1. What is a documentary about? .....	3
2.2 First person documentary .....	5
2.3 Narration and narrative approach .....	6
2.4 Identity construction through narratives .....	8
2.5 Art- based projects on refugees .....	10
2.6 Spectatorship and audiencing. ....	12
3 Methodology .....	15
3.1 Research objectives and research questions .....	15
3.2 Research approach .....	16
3.3 The site of the image.....	16
3.4 Documentary selection.....	17
3.5 Narrative and visual narrative analysis .....	17
3.6 Audience research methodology.....	19
3.7 Methods.....	21
3.7.1 Method of film analysis.....	21
3.7.2 Participants in the audience research. ....	22
3.7.3 Data collection .....	23
3.8 Research ethics .....	24
3.9 Limitations.....	25
4. The overall context of the project "Home new Home" .....	26
4.1 Discourses about refugees during "the refugee crisis". ....	26
4.2 Structure and aims of the project. ....	28
5. Documentary presentation .....	31
5.1 "Hello Asef" .....	31
5.2 "We are not shadows".....	32
5.3 "In Between" .....	33
5.4 "Undercover Rapper" .....	34
5.5 Findings /results.....	35
5.5.1 Collective and individual identities.....	35
5.5.2 Liminal state .....	43
5.5.3 Empowering and expressing themselves through art. ....	53



5.5.4 The request for freedom. ....	54
5.5.5 Traumatic past experiences.....	60
5.5.6 Educational aspirations, fears and barriers. ....	67
5.5.7 Religious attachment.....	74
5.5.8 The importance of the family.....	79
6. Differences and common themes between films created by refugees and films created by non-refugees. ....	81
7. Audience research and impact of documentaries .....	83
7.1 Findings /results.....	83
7.1.1 Refugees' identities as perceived by the audience.....	83
7.1.2 Audience response to young refugees' educational aspirations .....	85
7.1.3 Documentaries' impact to the audience perception of refugees .....	88
8. Discussion .....	91
8.1 Constructing and projecting identities through film narrative. ....	91
8.2 Audience response to refugee identities as presented in films. ....	93
8.3 Aspirations and fears.....	96
8.4 Life in transition .....	98
8.5 The concept of freedom .....	100
8.6 Stable references in a transitional phase .....	101
8.7 Impact of documentaries to the audience.....	104
8.8 Emotional impact of films to the audience.....	105
9. Conclusion.....	106
References.....	109
Appendix : Indicative scenes .....	118

## List of Figures

Image 1. Dawn at the Malakasa refugee camp .....	36
Image 2. A speaks on behalf of his community for their problems.....	37
Image 3. People at the camp greeting A. ....	38
Image 4. Temporary accommodation center at the old airport of Hellinikon.....	38
Image 5. "We are not shadows": The title of the film.....	38
Image 6. Everyday life of Afghan women at the Malakasa camp.....	39
Image 7. A. reflects upon her decision to take off her headscarf.....	40
Image 8. O. blows an orange flower.....	41
Image 9. T. while rapping seated in front of his PC .....	42
Image 10. Elaionas camp in Athens .....	44
Image 11. Everyday life at Hellinikon refugee camp.....	44
Image 12. Y's temporary house.....	45
Image 13. Shots at the Malakasa camp.....	46
Image 14. A boy swirling holding a torn plastic cloth.....	46
Image 15. Waiting at the queue for food at the Malakasa camp.....	47
Image 16. T. expresses his indignation for not been documented as a refugee.....	48
Image 17. O. sitting on his bed at his container house in Elaionas camp.....	48
Image 18. O. at his workplace.....	49
Image 19. O. while singing on the stage of the "Alfa: theater in Athens.....	50
Image 20. O waiting for the train, wearing his earphones.....	50
Image 21. T. interviewing Syrian children.....	51
Image 22. Two teenage refugees in front of the wired fence and a pigeon flying.....	52
Image 23. The sun behind a torn plastic cloth at the Malakasa camp.....	52
Image 24. Yegane's shadow on the gravel while filming.....	53
Image 25. A girl wearing a headscarf opens the curtain.....	54
Image 26. Y. turns the camera on her face.....	55
Image 27. A. wonders about the reaction of her community on her decision to take off her hijab.....	56
Image 28. A without her headscarf speaks on camera.....	57
Image 29. O in the metro wagon talks about his new experiences.....	58

Image 30. The purple color of the sky at sunset behind the wired fence.....	59
Image 31. A boy with a broken arm stands against a wall where freedom is written.....	59
Image 32. O. narrating performatively his mother faint during their journey to Europe...	61
Image 33. The back side of a photograph with a bullet? Hole.....	63
Image 34. T explains how he became an undercover rapper at Exarchia square, Athens...	64
Image 35. T. talks about the killing of his friends.....	65
Image 36. A man sitting in front of window in a lighted room at the Malakasa camp.....	66
Image 37. Y at her desk in front of a book at the camp of Malakasa.....	67
Image 38. At the stage of the "Alfa" theater with the translator.....	68
Image 39. O. speaking about his educational aspirations.....	69
Image 40. T. in front of the closed door at the University of Athens.....	71
Image 41. The sunset through barbed wire.....	72
Image 42. Acropolis at sunset.....	73
Image 43. A pigeon flying away from the camp.....	73
Image 44. Dawn at the Malakasa camp.....	74
Image 45. Muslim men seated at the improvised mosque at the Malakasa camp.....	74
Image 46. Reading the Koran from a mobile phone.....	75
Image 47. Muslim women are praying at the improvised mosque at the Malakasa camp..	75
Image 48. A woman holding in her hands prayer beads.....	76
Image 49. A Muslim man praying at the Hellinikon camp.....	76
Image 50. Morning at the improvised mosque of Malakasa.....	77
Image 51. Different shots of the final scene with the muezzin's voice in the background	77
Image 52. O's mother and sister in their container-house at the Malakasa camp.....	79

## **1. Introduction**

In the aftermath of the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015, which brought a million people from Asia and Africa to Europe's doorstep, the image of the refugee was over-projected in media in a stereotypical and ambiguous way. Either violent and a threat to the European values, or helpless victim with no agency (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017), refugees were subjected to a homogenizing and dehumanizing process which positioned them as the “other” (Martikainen & Sakki, 2021). During the same period attempts were made to give refugees the means and the opportunity for self-expression and individual recognition through art-based projects, as research has shown (Bhimji, 2016; Frimberger & Bishopp 2020; Trencsényi & Naumescu, 2021; Uskan, 2022, Yalouri, 2019).

Within this framework, the documentary project “Home new Home”, started in 2015 in Mytilene, Lesvos Island and expanded in five more cities that were hosting refugees (Athens, Izmir, Amman, Tire and Ramallah). The aim of the project was to create stories based on characters, projecting the uniqueness of each story against the stereotypical media narratives. It aimed also to train young refugees in cinematic techniques, create an international network of support for refugees and finally to strengthen the intercultural dialogue between refugees and the locals.

In this context, this research intended to analyze the stories of adolescent and young refugees<sup>1</sup> as presented in four short documentaries of the project and the audience response to these films providing an overall framework of analysis. The researcher's participation in this project provided a strong motive for engagement in this study. This is the first research on this specific participatory documentary project with refugee participants, and it highlights the individual stories of the people who participated during this period, suggesting the stories presented, as narratives of the self. The research on art-

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term refugee as an umbrella term even though we could assume that most of the participants are asylum seekers. According to the 1951 convention, refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. IOM (2019) p.171

based projects on/with refugees is quite limited in Greek literature (Uskan, 2020; Yalouri, 2019). Moreover, (auto) biographical documentaries with refugee or migrant characters could be an important source of information and a valuable material for social research on refugees. The current study could as well provide a stimulus for further inquiry since it has touched only a restricted part of a quite extended project.

Following Rose's (2001; 2016) approach, the films were examined within a three-part context: the context of their production, the context of the image/film, and the context of the audience. Four short documentaries where adolescent and young characters narrated their experiences and aspirations, were selected for presentation, analysis and screening. Within the theoretical framing of social sciences, the objective of this research was to examine the ways in which young refugees construct, negotiate and perform their identities in their narrations in films. Additionally, we wanted to explore the recurring themes concerning refugees' lives in the four documentaries. Using narrative and narrative visual analysis, we considered how meaning was co-constructed orally, visually and aurally (Reissman, 2008; Barbatsis, 2016) examining visual narrative either as autonomous, complementary, or as commenting the oral narrations. Then, a comparison was made between the films created by refugees and non-refugees regarding common themes, narrative structure, and cinematography.

Moreover, using focus group research we wanted to investigate the audience response to young refugees' identities as well as whether the identities presented in the films were reaffirmed. The focus group methodology provided the framework to explore how peoples' understanding, opinions and views can be negotiated in social contexts through interaction (Kamberellis et.al, 2017). Adopting a cognitive film theory that emphasizes mostly the film -text and the spectator and less the viewing context, we also included in audience analysis the preexisting knowledge (Jongbloed & Gómez, 2021) that each spectator brings when watching a film. The cases, where the audience shared emotions with the characters, or identified with their stories, or translated their experiences into their own social reality were studied.

Finally, we tried to establish connections or detect discontinuities between the films' intentions, the participants' narrations and the audience's response, thinking about the

overall media context and the stereotypical perceptions they carry concerning the refugee image.

The structure of this dissertation includes a literature review that clarifies the construction of modern documentary and (auto)biographical documentary, the connection between narratives and identities, highlighting the way these documentaries were approached and analyzed as audiovisual (auto)biographical narratives. In the methodology section, we analyze how the narrative approach was developed for the analysis of recurring themes presented in films and the performative elements of each narrator as constituent parts of identity presentation. Additionally, we present the focus group methodology and how it was employed in the audience research part. The limitations of this study are also identified next. The main part of this dissertation includes the contextual framework of this project, the presentation of the films referring to the characters, the story, the setting, and the plot, the findings and the discussion of the film and the audience analysis. In the end of this part, a comparison of the films created both by refugees and non-refugees was introduced in order to emphasize the common themes, the narrative structure and the differentiations that were recognized. Finally, in the conclusion part, concluding remarks are included as well as suggestions for further research.

## **2. Literature Review- Thematic Framing.**

### **2.1. What is a documentary about?**

“Visual culture” is central to the cultural construction of social life in postmodern world and “what is important about images is not simply the image itself, but how it is seen by particular spectators who look in particular ways” (Rose, 2001, p. 11). Barthes related visual documents with social sciences, talking about the “rhetoric of the image”, tracing the underlying ideologies and exploring the multiple ways to decode images (Barthes, 2008). Cinema, and documentary in particular, part of this visual culture, is the meeting area of creators, participants, and audience, where an exchange and negotiation of meanings takes place (Evans & Hall, 1999).

Viewers expect that documentaries are about real people who do not play or perform roles, as actors do. Instead, they “play or present themselves” (Nichols, 2017, p. 5) and are presented by their creators who tell their own story about their subject matter (Bruzzi, 2006). As a filmic genre, documentary often provides a creative treatment of actuality and it is the result of conscious or unconscious choices of their creators (Grierson, 1966, as cited in Stefani, 2016, p.24). Hence, there is a selection of topics, people, angle, lens, juxtaposition, music, sounds, words (Barnouw, 1993 as cited in Bruzzi, 2006). “Documentaries are about real life, but they are not real life, they are portraits of the real life using it as their raw material” (Aufderheide, 2006, p. 1). “The fictional image can never simply be a truthful rendition of reality but can only be seen as part of many discourses on reality” (Kessler 2009 as cited in Ponzanesi, 2015 p.6).

In this context, contemporary documentary practice tends to abandon the ideal of objectivity in favor of the expression of subjective memories and experiences (Ros et al, 2018). Images created in documentary films can be understood as traces of identities, practices, social relations experiences, or institutions (Rose, 2014). During the last decades, documentary production has distanced itself from the ideal of the objective depiction of reality focusing on elements previously considered marginal to documentary practice, such as performativity (Bruzzi, 2005) and subjectivity (Lebow, 2012). Hence, the meaning of the documentary is not fixed, but fluid and stems out of a dialectical relationship between the text, the reality it represents and the spectator” (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 7).

In addition, during the last decade, due to the employment of accessible digital technologies there is a broadening of documentary definition. More than ever before documentary has become an heterogenous and fluid cinematic genre which encompasses new perceptions of the traditional rules, and changes of the essence of the film making process (Anishchenkova, 2018). An abundance of films brings new perspectives and alternative visions, new forms, fresh topics, stories coming of a world we all share, as well as an easy dissemination and public accessibility through digital platforms (Nichols, 2017).

Documentaries have also been described as new types of multimodal narratives. Multimodality is defined as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic

product or event” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001: 20). Meaning in film arises out of the multiple interaction of various modalities such as images, sounds, music, gestures, camera effects, etc. The interplay of the modalities results in a narrative text whose comprehension and interpretation requires the spectator’s active participation (Wildfeuer, 2014, p.1). Furthermore, films “have to be analyzed according to their contextual embeddings and social functions” (Wildfeuer, 2014, p.9).

Social reality shapes the wider context of documentary production and the issues that each documentary addresses. However, each creator chooses to show different aspects of this reality. Since the 1960’s, cinema began to be considered a cultural product, a reflection of the society and the historical conditions within it was produced, which subsequently had a big impact to the public. Thus, the film, documentary, or fiction, becomes a useful field of exploration of social reality and can be studied as a narration with speech, images and sound. It combines the subjective and the social, expressing not only attitudes, values, beliefs, but also meanings and ideologies. Therefore, films could become a useful tool to explore social reality (Lydakias, 2012). Documentary can be a means for the study of migration and individualized histories, that make a shift from stereotyping migrants and refugees. Some scholars argue that “documentary films provide knowledge about humans in different ways than other social sciences disciplines do and could become a distinct area of research for the social scientists” (Kaiser, 2016, p. 2).

## **2.2 First person documentary**

Within the framework of the development of (auto) biographical approaches in the social sciences and the broadening of the documentary content and scope, (auto)biographical documentary offered new insights in the study of personal identities. First person documentaries, a term Lebow uses when she refers to (auto)biographical documentaries, is about a mode of addressing and that the first person could include the “I” as well as the “we” (Lebow, 2012). “It could be not about only a person, self or other, but a neighborhood, a community, a phenomenon or event” (Lebow, 2012, p.5). The constitution of subjectivity in first person films is not a straightforward, or a singular



pursuit, but a complicated endeavor that co-implicates others and includes different conceptions of the self. The development of video and digital technologies has extended the limits of individual authorship, has doubted the unquestionable integrity of the subject, bringing to the surface a fragmented and relational perception of the self (Dowmunt, 2013).

Autobiographical documentary can be at the same time subjective and political illuminating important social issues. Storytelling and autobiographical narration in video recording can become a political act (Dowmunt, 2013). New digital technologies give the opportunity for creators with little formal training to produce documentaries that have challenged the homogenizing effects of mass technology, producing counter -narratives of marginalized groups, providing alternative postures than the ones presented in traditional documentaries (Lane, 2002).

### **2.3 Narration and narrative approach**

(Auto) biographical approaches are considered narratives of the self and first-person documentaries provide the framework for the use of a narrative approach. "A narrative is a bounded segment of talk that is temporally ordered and recapitulates a sequence of events" (Riessman, 2008, p.166). Sequence and consequence are the elements that make these diverse texts "narrative" in the sense "that they are selected, organized, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (Riessman, 2005, p. 1). Narratives are interactions within specific historical, societal, cultural, institutional, or interpersonal contexts. It is a way of understanding past and present experiences and emotions, organize events and thoughts, comprehending one's own and other people's actions and placing events into a meaningful framework (Chase, 2018). Experience centered approaches study narratives as stories of experiences that represent and reconstruct experiences, display transformation or change, are conscious about life turning points, are sequential and meaningful (Squire, 2008). Emotions and thoughts are considered as focal in narratives without the strict chronological ordering, presenting it more as a discourse (Chase, 2018). Likewise, narratives are considered as situated interactions within interpersonal, cultural

historical and institutional contexts (Chase, 2018), while other researchers perceive them as technologies of the self, emerging from the margins of a hegemonic discourse, following a Foucauldian approach (Tamboukou, 2008).

The “narrative turn” as a qualitative approach in the human sciences, emerged out of emancipation movements of marginalized groups, out of the “memory boom” in history, literature, popular culture and identity politics (Riessman, 2005). Thus, narratives of vulnerable or marginalized persons can be considered as counter-narratives to the dominant narratives that give ordinary people the chance to express their own experiences and be appraised as an active component of the sociohistorical reality.

Texts and oral narratives are not the only means for storytelling in our digital era, but storytelling of personal experiences and ideas presented through multiple media, and documentary films, constitute new forms of visualized narratives. Visual is a central cultural element of contemporary societies (Hall, 1996) and is suggested that “modern forms of knowledge depend on a scopic regime<sup>2</sup> that equates seeing with knowledge” (Jay, 1993 as cited in Rose, 2001, p.3). Hence, in our “visualized” world the meaning of narration expands to visual narration, challenging the notion that narrative is a linguistically formed entity and assuming that visual expressions are not qualitatively different from verbal one, recognizing pictorial storytelling as an alternative variety of the narrative form (Barbatsis, 2004). Visual narrative analysis scrutinizes how individual and collective identities are composed, performed, revealed or concealed visually alongside oral narratives (Reissman, 2008).

Personal narratives of refugees that capture the particularity, richness and uniqueness of personal experience, can become a useful tool for self-expression. In this sense, they can lead to the empowerment and catharsis of the narrators, fill information gap concerning particular situations, present refugees’ concerns and allow the audience to think ways to address them, highlight the agency of refugees and establish a relationship between the refugee character and the researcher, in our case the director (Powels, 2004). Digital technologies have provided the means for people to visualize their narrations and has also made easier the production and distribution of the films. Visual images are so thoroughly

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<sup>2</sup> Scopic regime is a term that refers to the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed (Metz, 1975 as cited in Rose, 2016, p. 3).

embedded in our world that we need to consider them seriously, making them a part of our analysis beneficial to expand our understanding of the subjects' worlds.

## **2.4 Identity construction through narratives**

The construction of the subject it became a focal point in the 1990's when there was a narrative turn in social sciences that brought together diverse disciplines such as linguistics, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology to name a few. Steward Hall (1996) has much influenced identity studies keeping an anti-essentialist stance, considering the discursive practices through which identity is constructed. Narrative researchers support that narrative and identity negotiation are closely connected (De Fina, 2015).

The fragmented contemporary social world characterized by mobility and displacement, discontinuities, loss of certainties, erosion of traditional systems of beliefs, brings to surface new approaches to the study of identities. Identity is not an unchangeable and stable set of characteristics that constitute the essence of each individual, but it is historically and interactionally constructed, through discursive practices (Hall, 1996 as cited in Defina, 2015, p.351). The interactional paradigm gives emphasis to relationality and interactionality as central characteristics in the identity process (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). Within this framework, identity "is not a product but a process that takes place within specific communicative and semiotic practices" (De Fina, 2018, p.3). Hence, identities are not self-contained but are made through discursive activities (Bamberg et al., 2007).

There is also a performative element in identity construction, and this becomes evident especially when it comes to visual presentation of the self. Drawing on Goffman's use of the performative staging of self in everyday interactions, Riessman suggests that identities are situated and accomplished having an audience in mind (Reissman, 2008). Body posture, gestures, voice and gaze, constitute bodily forms of communication that

dramatize the experience and engage the audience, establishing a simultaneous dialogue between the interviewee, the camera and the imagined audience.

The biographical studies of narratives, exhibit many common elements in the way they see how the self is constructed. In biographical approaches a person that narrates parts of his life experiences manages to build a coherent self, and this has a positive effect on self-identity. This way, through the process of constructing a life story, unity is achieved (Gregg, 2011, as cited in De Fina, 2015, p. 352). The interactionist approach focuses on the process of identity construction, "the strategies used by the narrators and their audience to achieve, contest and reaffirm specific identities" (De Fina, 2015, p.352) and considers ruptures and fragmentations in the construction of the self.

Narrations, in (auto)biographical documentaries, highlight the experiences of marginalized people and could change the established perceptions for them. New digital technologies give to these youth that feel marginalized in mainstream institutions and deprived of opportunities to explore a positive sense of self, a chance to be engaged in a positive identity work (Halverson, 2010). Moreover, the sharing of experiences through film gives people the sense that themselves are the creators of their own stories. Being able to narrate one's own story is a process of self-identification, self-reflection, interaction, and agency (Boldini, 2019). Thus, film products are a strong presentation of young refugees' identity and research has shown that the production of digital stories facilitates the identity development (Hull & Katz, 2006) and in action representation of themselves (Halverson, et.al, 2012). What individuals select to tell, how they express it, what information they select to report give us a picture of how they perceive their identity.

In (auto)biographical documentary films, the camera could be not only a recording device but also a catalyst of personal changes (Lebow, 2012). The roles and interests of filmmaker and the subject in these documentaries frequently coincide, giving emphasis not only to the factual dimensions, but also to the emotional elements that are shared (Ross, et al, 2018).

## **2.5 Art- based projects on refugees**

There has been an increasing interest in the last years in the visual representation of refugees in media, humanitarian organizations and art. These representations had reduced refugeeeness to an easily recognizable category and status who calls for humanitarian assistance. As some reserachers note, this approach does not represent adequately refugees and does not invoke action for their sake (Yalouri, 2019). In this context, there were efforts to allow refugees' own perspectives, standpoints and voices to be heard in a spontaneous and unmediated way in art-based projects.

During the so-called "refugee crisis" there was a profusion of audiovisual accounts aiming to present refugees' "untold stories" (Trencsényi & Naumescu, 2021). Several artistic projects all over Europe were initiated aiming in the visual representation of counter narrations to those prevailing in the mainstream media.

The OLive project within the frame of the Open Learning Initiative at the Central European University (CEU), created in 2016 in Budapest, was a participatory video workshop where OLive students were given means to create their own visual stories. The project was founded by a group of people which included migrants, activists and CEU members, some of whom had been directly involved in the 2015 events. This educational program for refugees and asylum seekers was the first of its kind in Europe. Among various means for artistic expression, they engaged refugee students to create participatory visual projects presenting a different perspective. In this particular project, refugee students created alternative representations to the migrant image, developing an ethnographic gaze not only towards refugees but also to the host society. However, towards the end of the workshop, the Hungarian government decided to move all refugees to closed camps at the borders and finally the project ended due to withdrawal of funders, some new strict laws and the decision of the CEU to stop the project. This effort and the obscure way it ended, shows how refugees' artistic products create counternarratives that can be considered detrimental for the unity of the nation state.

The theatrical project "Die Asyl Monologue" took place in Germany in 2015 where refugees presented themselves in narratives that they were performed by actors, whereas at the end of the performance they interacted with the audience during the discussion session

(Bhimji, 2016). Within the framework of this project, refugees used the theater to inform and protest against the situation in residential camps and manifest their political agency in an alternative way. Refugees and asylum seekers through their participation in the project demonstrated “a performative resistance against invisibility, isolation and disconnectedness” (Bhimji, 2016, p.85). They wanted to resist to the German state that had imposed on them a legal requirement “Residenzpflicht” that obliged them to remain at the district where they have registered and not be able to move elsewhere. The performed by actors’ true stories of refugees, served to subvert the basis of refugees’ identity based on injury and helplessness and present agency and power creating ruptures in the conditions in asylum seekers in Germany. As Bhimji (2016) notes, the project presented refugees and asylum seekers as political subjects and political agents. The notion of performativity was considered in the context of theater as a form of refugees’ political activism.

Most of the artistic projects during the same period were participatory, like “Scotland Our New Home” This was a Creative Scotland-funded participatory film-making project for young people, most of them unaccompanied refugee minors that have arrived in Scotland in 2015.” Through this participatory film making pedagogy the organizers aimed to realize the creation of films by the young peer mentors in order to support newly arrived young refugees in the process of making a home in Scotland. Film making and “the projection of the hopeful elements of making a home in Scotland emerged as a key pedagogical strategy in affirming their expert position and encouraging participation in their self-representation” (Frimberger & Bishopp 2020, p. 62). Creating autobiographical film vignettes of how newly settled young refugees entered the process of making Scotland their home and find their way in Glasgow, they tried to introduce newly arrived young refugees into the new reality of the city. This intensive social process with the technical and aesthetic requirements of film making, aimed to empower young refugees, projecting at the same time their uniqueness within the specific context they created the films (Frimberger & Bishopp 2020).

The creation of the short documentary “Natives of the new world” shot on cell phones by Kino Mosaik collective<sup>3</sup> at Lesvos in 2018, was the product of migrants of various origins

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<sup>3</sup> The anonymous writers, directors and producers of these documentaries were under the name Kino Mosaik.

who tried to transform collectively the period when they were “stuck” at Moria refugee camp in Lesvos. It was created as a counter narrative to the migrant image in media, humanitarian organizations representations, activists’ reports and art. Uskan who analyzed the film with a video activist approach, reflected on issues that the film negotiated, as home, new home, resistance, representation, repression and hope. (Uskan, 2022). The harsh situation at the Moria refugee camp is depicted with clarity as well as the collective resistance of refugees to this, creating a “documentary in transition” which stands against all the representational stereotypes of refugees. Refugees’ complex feelings and relations are presented providing a deeper engagement than the one presented in the media (Uskan, 2022).

Thus, art-based projects during and in the aftermath of “the refugee crisis” attempted to produce counter-narratives to the dominant, and alternative depictions of refugees, where refugees would have a safe place to present and perform their own unmediated stories within a creative and relatively egalitarian framework.

## **2.6 Spectatorship and audiencing.**

Film is the creative encounter of the creator, the participants and the audience. Spectatorship studies investigate from different perspectives, multiple aspects of the relationship between the spectator and the film. Film spectatorship is the experience of viewing and hearing films, considering the social or psychological contexts in which such viewing occurs (Plantinga, 2009a). The question of spectators’ agency is central in audience studies since they negotiate meaning, take pleasure from viewing, or determine the meaning/fulness of the film (Aaron, 2007).

Different theories have described this relation. In screen theory, the spectator is either encompassed within the “film-text” following the literature reader -response theory (Iser, 1974), or is bringing with her/him unconscious desires according to the psychoanalytic approach, has a glance influenced by gender (Mulvey, 1975), or creates an ideologically governed subjectivity as Althusser suggests (Aaron, 2007). Barthes claims that each film,

similarly to a text, carries multiple signifiers that spectator comes to reveal, exactly as the reader of a text is doing (Barthes, 1974 as cited in Aaron, 2007, p.14). Thus, the focus is on film -text that textual analysts are trying to explore through the structures of film signification (narrative, genre, sound, mise en scene, editing) the signifiers inherent within the film text. According to screen theory, the spectator is passive and is a subject either of hegemonic/power relations or to fantasy, desire, dream and pleasure that conform to the dominant ideology (Plantinga, 2009b).

In cultural studies, the viewer comes from a specific sociocultural context that determines his/ her stance towards the film. It is not only the film that determines the viewer's response but the contextual factor that supports textual influence. Film has no immanent meaning for the viewers and even though they are influenced by social, cultural, historical or ideological factors they can resist and actively counter the dominant discourses. From this point of view, there is a degree of freedom and agency for the spectator even though there are sociocultural restrictions (Aaron, 2007).

Films and particularly documentary films can affect audience in multiple ways, they can alter the perceptions of the public and change the lives of the persons that appear in films (Plantinga, 2009b). There is always an interpretive community which interprets what has been articulated in films. Obviously, there is not only one single reading of the film as it is open to multiple interpretations and multiple receptions (Rutten and Verstappen, 2015). How the audience interprets a film depends on its content as well as the audience's cultural or social place (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Moreover, the audience brings its own ways of seeing the films as well as its knowledge in the process of making meaning of a film. "Audiencing is a process by which the meaning of a visual image, is negotiated, renegotiated, or rejected by particular audiences and under specific circumstances" (Fiske, 1994 as cited in Rose, 2016, p. 55).

Hence, the audience is not only an interpreter but also an active participant in the audiovisual discourse of the documentary, bringing its past and present experiences (Jongbloed & Gómez, 2021). Films as visual representations of experience, have the ability to make the spectator see and feel like the participant (Reissman, 2008). This means that there is an identification process when watching a film. According to cognitive



theory, which we will follow in this work, the spectator can recall her /his experiences when watching a film and compare the film with their own memories.

Cognitive film theory foregrounds mostly the film -text and the spectator and emphasizes less the viewing context. "The preexisting knowledge is something that each spectator brings when watching a film and there is also "an emotional response that results from this narrative understanding" (Jongbloed & Gómez, 2021, p.485). This narrative understanding is a cognitive process for the spectator in order to understand the characters, or the plot of the film and also requires having an emotional response to the film. Narrative structures and emotions are inextricable parts of the way individuals understand the world and communicate with each other. Cognitive theory has shown that human minds and bodies are predisposed for narrative structures and for certain emotional structures as well (Bondeberg, 2014).

There is a viewing process consisting of watching -remembering and comparing. Watching is to see and hear the audiovisual stimulus which generates a response. Remembering means that the spectator compares their own experiences with what happens to the lives narrated in films and could lead them to some kind of familiarity with the characters in films. Finally, comparing, means that this familiarity could produce an empathy towards the "other" (Jongbloed & Gómez, 2021).

The empathic process of the participants is measured when it comes to the question if the documentaries have affected them, or if they have created specific emotions and empathy for the characters presented on the screen. There are cases where the audience can share emotions with the characters or be identified with their stories and translate them into their own cultural and social reality. However, it is not always necessary for the spectators to be involved emotionally to the audiovisual stimulus, or to be empathetic towards the characters, or project their own experiences to them. In other cases, the audience can feel emotions for the characters, but without establishing significant emotional connections. (Jongbloed & Gómez, 2021). Nevertheless, cinema is a universal common language for different audiences to share, even though each spectator creates his/her own particular meanings.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Research objectives and research questions**

The objective of this research was to explore in four short documentary films, the individual stories of adolescent and young refugees, employing narrative and visual analysis. We wanted to examine how through these audiovisual narratives young refugees constructed, negotiated and performed their identities by showing different aspects of their lives, experiences, values and trajectories. Subsequently, the aim was to investigate what was the spectators' response to refugees stories and how they were affected by these stories. The creators of the shorth documentaries were amateurs, refugees and locals, and were realized using the affordances of a documentary film.

Their stories were being examined taking into account the sociohistorical context of their production, considering the dominant discourses about the refugees at the time of their creation and dissemination, shortly after the so-called "refugee crisis". Additionally, by exploring the impact of these documentaries to the viewers, we wanted to examine whether they managed to affect the audience by showing a different image, other than the one that the mainstream media and the public discourses on refugee issue had shaped.

The questions that this study poses are the following:

1. How young refugees construct, negotiate and perform their identities in the films?
2. What are the recurring themes emerging in the narratives of the young refugees concerning their lives?
3. How has the audience responded to refugees' identities as presented in films? Have these films affected viewers' perceptions on refugees?

### **3.2 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach has been selected in order to understand how creators, participants and the audience, interact, construct and share meaning, ideas and emotions. This approach highlights the multiple realities, perceptions and views of the participants using various sources of data. It also provides an adaptability and flexibility of the design to the research process and the findings (Creswell, 2014).

The documentary films that were selected for analysis and audiencing were character-oriented and presented a clear and coherent narrative form. The oral and the visual content of the films was focused on refugee youths' self-representation, experiences and aspirations providing a framework for a narrative approach.

### **3.3 The site of the image**

Since the documentary is a visual product, there are three sites as Rose suggests that need to be examined: the site of the production, the site of the image and the site of the audience (Rose, 2001, Rose, 2016). Firstly, the site of the production of the image highlights the context within which documentaries were produced, the overall frame of their creation, the aims of the project "Home new Home" under which films were produced. In case of preexisting or "found visual material" which means that is not an inquiry product of the researcher, contextual information will assist the researcher to reveal its provenance and the purpose of its production (Pawels, 2011). Secondly, there was an analysis of the individual stories the documentaries presented, using narrative thematic approach and a narrative visual approach considering that these short documentaries are audiovisual narratives. The meaning of each story was examined, what it included, how the component parts (image, words, and music) were engaged to produce the overall meaning of the film. The selection of the title and its signification, the story, the plot and the setting as structural parts of each film, were reported. Finally, the audiencing process was studied, the responses of the viewers, the impact of the films to the audience as well as the personal experiences that each viewer brought to the film.

### **3.4 Documentary selection**

There was a selection of four documentary films for screening which have been produced in Greece during the second period of the project in 2017. At this period, in the aftermath of the "refugee crisis", the project "Home new Home" had been expanded and the refugee issue was on top of the public discourse agenda. We have watched all short documentaries of the project of this period either in public screenings or through the platform "Home new Home" that was then accessible to the public.

The films that were selected, refer to adolescents and young refugees of Afghan and Syrian origin considering that most of the documentaries' characters created at this specific period of the project, were coming mainly from Afghanistan and Syria. The (auto)biographical presentation of characters, first person narratives presented as chunks of life histories, were also a criterion of our choice. The clear narrative structure and coherence of the films as well as the clear sketching of characters were acknowledged useful for purposes of analysis. Furthermore, the response of films to our research questions was another criterion for the selection of the films. Lastly, we wanted films to be created both by refugees and non-refugee creators in order to identify common themes but also differences in the approach and depiction of the characters in the films.

### **3.5 Narrative and visual narrative analysis**

"The temporal and/or casual ordering of events, complication, human characters, goal directed action or experientiality, the ability to capture human reactions and emotions in the face of life events make the oral narration a narrative" (De Fina and Georgopoulou, 2012, p. 8). In the human sciences, a narrative analysis refers to a group of approaches that can be used in diverse kinds of texts that have a narrative form.

In this research we approached young refugees' narratives as "socially situated interactions embedded in interpersonal, cultural, and historical contexts" (Chase, 2018, p.937) considering them as sequential and meaningful (Squire, 2008). Using a narrative approach, we examined the process of identity construction and the strategies used by the

narrators and their audience “to achieve, contest, or reaffirm specific identities” (De Fina, 2015, p. 352).

Riessman proposes four analytical approaches to the study of narratives. Thematic analysis, is focused on what is told or visually shown and less of how is told, or what are the structures of speech that the narrator selects. Language in this approach is considered as a resource and not as a topic of analysis. Structural analysis, is also concerned with content as in thematic analysis, but in this approach, emphasis is given on how the story is told through its narrative devices as the plot, characters, dialogues, and visuals. In this approach language is important as object of investigation. In interactional approach, the focal point is on the dialogic process between the listener and the teller, recognizing that meaning is co-constructed in the process of storytelling. Finally, in performative analysis, storytelling is seen as a performance of the self, that is embodied, situated, material and discursive. In this approach the storyteller involves the audience through language and gesture (Riessman, 2008).

Using the theoretical framing of the social sciences Riessman supports that images could be contextualized and interpreted according to the theoretical questions of these sciences (Riessman, 2008). Visual narrative analysis scrutinizes how individual and collective identities are composed, performed, revealed or concealed visually alongside with oral narratives. Stories are not only told but they are acted out. People, when they tell their stories, they are also performing them in front of the investigator, or the director (Reissman, 2008). Reissman describes dialogic/performance analysis as a broad and varied interpretive approach to oral narrative that makes selective use of elements of both thematic and structural analysis to interrogate how talk among speakers is dialogically produced and performed as narrative (Reissman, 2008).

Following Riessman's approach and considering the situational framework of experience centered approaches we used thematic narrative analysis in order to trace the recurring themes in young refugees' narrations. Because of the variations in language use in films (English, Greek or Farsi) we thought that this was an accessible and reliable method to focus on meaning and the sociohistorical context that was depicted in films. The use of thematic narrative analysis emphasizes the content of the narration, the meanings

produced, identifies the underlying issues and assumptions, names them (codes) and is useful for interpretive purposes.

However, since the films contain the visual and the audio mode, we adopted a visual narrative analysis in order to show how the story is constructed in the visual mode and how the narrators perform their identities in front of the camera and depict their life conditions. The visual as well as the audio modes of the films are essential for the production of meaning and provide important information, which completes and composes the overall meaning of the film. As de Fina and Georgopoulou are suggesting, there are choices that come from different approaches and a combination of narrative approaches can contribute to a meticulous investigation of the narratives and the ways meaning is constructed (De Fina & Georgopoulou, 2012).

### **3.6 Audience research methodology**

Taking into account that the film is the creative meeting of the creators, the participants and the audience, we conducted audience research to explore how the films were perceived by the audience having in mind that meaning is constructed also through the perception of films by the spectators. For the audience research a focus group methodology was followed that was considered suitable to trace not only the personal views of the spectators but also to examine how meaning was co-constructed through the dialogue, oppositions and interactions of the viewers/participants.

Focus group research has proliferated especially during the last decades in most humanities and social sciences and is a qualitative research method (Kamberelis, et al., 2017). "Focus group discussion is an informal discussion among certain individuals about specific topics selected by the researcher" (Becket et al. 1986, as cited in Wilkinson, 1998, p. 182). This method looks at individuals' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or opinions and explores how meaning can be collectively constructed. It is also an effective method to explore how peoples' understanding, opinions and views can be negotiated in social

contexts through interaction. In particular, "focus groups enable the researcher to gain a sense of the texture of talk whether this talk is conceptualized as a 'window' to underlying beliefs and opinions or seen as a form of social action in its own right" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 187). The generated data are interactive and qualitative, considering that it is small-scale research with a small sample of people but offers a lot to the analysis of interactions and collective meaning making. In focus groups research, sometimes sensitive information can be more easily expressed. This dialogic process between participants can result in the production of more fully articulated accounts. The researcher will have the chance to understand how views and opinions are constructed, articulated, defended, or modified during conversation with others (Wilkinson, 1998).

Moreover, this is an egalitarian method because the researcher/moderator acts more as a facilitator who encourages and stimulates group's discussion with the aim to create a kind of "synergy" between team members. The dynamic aspects of interaction within the group are what counts most in this method, because in this way it could reveal underlying opinions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings (Parker & Triter, 2006). Thus, creating a sense of belonging it increases the possibility for more spontaneous answers, and can make participants feel safe to share personal information (Onwuegbuzie and Dickinson, 2009). We need to consider that focus group discussion is more friendly to participants and creates a helpful environment for discussion, making it efficient for collecting data from multiple participants. More importantly, it includes a wide range of communicative processes like storytelling, arguing, disagreement, persuasion, challenge, joking e.tc (Wilkinson, 2004).

In this context, this interactive methodology gave us the tools to see how the audience collectively negotiates meaning, interacts with each other, have different views or considers the views of the others. Additionally, it provided the affordance to take into account how interaction between members of the group can affect the outcome of the conversation and assist in the creation of understanding and meaning. The views of the spectators before the screening and the spectators' reactions after the screening were also examined. The main objective in this focus group research was to explore whether these films could become spaces for critical thinking and reflection about refugees' lives.

### **3.7 Methods**

#### **3.7.1 Method of film analysis**

After watching the 37 films of the specific period of the project and taking notes of each of them, there was a selection of four, under specific criteria that were mentioned above. At the next stage we examined and transcribed the filmic elements to be analyzed, aiming to understand how these elements interact in order to produce meaning. Three filmic elements have been analyzed: the oral narratives of the participants as a form of narrative text, the visual elements that constitute the visual narration and specific audio elements apart from the diegetic<sup>4</sup> sounds of the film. The ways that these elements intersect, co-construct meaning, and what discourses were producing was the objective of the investigation.

The selected films were analyzed taking the scene as a unit of analysis. A scene is considered a complete unit, a self-contained segment of storytelling, usually consisting of a sequence of events and dialogue taking place in a specific location and time. It often involves one or more characters and is usually shot in one continuous shot or comprised of a sequence of shots. Scenes are the building blocks of a film's narrative structure and serve to advance the plot, develop characters, and evoke emotion in the audience. The combination of scenes establishes the larger narrative.

Data were collected and discussed using thematic analysis as the main method of analysis for an overall perception of the meaning of each narration. The structural elements of the narrative of the film (setting, story, plot, characters, climax, coda) were also considered whenever these were serving the process of interpretation and exploration of meaning in the films. We traced the codes through the different constituent elements of the film and then the emergent themes that each of the films presented inductively. There was a comparison of the themes to identify repetitions, relations, or conflicting elements. In addition, it was important to understand how the narrators used particular themes within

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<sup>4</sup> Diegetic sound is any sound that emanates from the story world of the film. Non-diegetic sound (narration or voice over, music, or sound effects) also called commentary or nonliteral sound, is any sound that does not originate from within the film's world. The film's characters are not able to hear non-diegetic sound. All non-diegetic sound is added by sound editors in post-production/editing.



their stories and how these themes were connected to the broader cultural and social context and emerged through the interactions between the director and the imagined audience. Finally, it was essential to explore how these stories were performed in front of the camera. Visual elements of the film in some cases were in accordance with the oral narration while in other cases they were working in an autonomous or complementary way. By this process we tried to interpret the underlying meanings, the metaphors, the motifs and the symbols that exist in the films.

### **3.7.2 Participants in the audience research.**

The next stage was to proceed to the audience research aiming to conceive how the audience responded to the selected films. The environment that this research took place was on the internet via Webex digital platform. It was the most efficient way to make the screening, overcoming obstacles of synchronization due to different working hours of the participants, distance and covid 19 pandemic<sup>5</sup>. The group consisted of four members who were selected to cover a range of viewers, two women and two men of different age groups. The number of the group that has been selected was considered appropriate because of the time limitations, and the length of the dissertation. More specifically, the members of the focus group were: one young woman K. of 21, a university student and a young man M. 28 years old, who was a refugee from Syria who has been living and working in Athens for 8 years. The other two participants were high school teachers. The woman C, a Greek language teacher 56 years old, and the man F. a mathematics teacher 58 years old. None of the participants had ever watched these films.

We had chosen these specific persons considering them as possible viewers of this film project. The researcher wanted to establish a homogeneity as well as an heterogeneity of the group. Age was a factor that created heterogeneity as well as educational background and experiences. The homogeneity element was their interest to watch films of a project with an orientation in refugees' personal stories, as well as their interest in "the refugee

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<sup>5</sup> The focus group discussion took place in January 2022.

issue". We watched together the films that were at this time accessible through the platform of the project « Home new Home».

Before the screening, the researcher/ moderator explained to the audience the aim of the screening and the theme of the project" Home new Home" without any further information. Four short documentary films were presented: "My name is Asef", "We are not shadows", "In Between", "Undercover Rapper", films that will be presented and analyzed in the following part of this study. After the screening, viewers were given some information about the project: what was the aim, who organized it and how it was organized, information about the participants in the films.

Then, the researcher/moderator asked the spectators how they saw refugees as represented in films, and if these films affected them, in what ways and whether they changed in any way their previous perceptions on refugees. We also explained them the focus group methodology and how we were going to follow it. There were rare interferences in the discussion, leaving the audience to have an unobstructed conversation. We interrupted only when we believed the discussion was getting out of the topic, or when some members of the group wanted some encouragement to express their own views. The duration of the focus group discussion was 1 hour and 5 minutes.

### **3.7.3 Data collection**

The collected data from the focus group discussion were analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was based on two different perspectives: on the individual perspective giving emphasis on individual responses and on the interactional perspective in order to explore the discussion flow and the level of interaction between members of the focus group. The level of interaction between members of the group was an indicator of the way meanings were negotiated, if there were dissenting views, how they were expressed and if some views have influenced members of the group. Finally, we examined whether and how the researcher's /moderator's interventions assisted the flow of discussion and the expression of meanings.

Recapitulating, the use of narrative thematic and visual analysis for the examination of the stories presented in the films, was selected as the appropriate methodology for documentary analysis considering them as audiovisual (auto)biographical narratives. These narratives present different aspects of identities and life experiences of the characters presented in films. Through narrative thematic and visual analysis, we traced recurring themes in films concerning refugees' life, considering the oral the visual and the audio elements of each scene that was taken as our unit of analysis. In addition, the use of the focus group discussion was selected as the appropriate methodology to perceive how the audience negotiates the meaning of the films not only individually but also collectively and what was the connection between the findings of film analysis and the findings of the audience research.

### **3.8 Research ethics**

The organizer of the project "Home new Home" was informed about the aim and the content of the research and gave the researcher his consent via e-mail. The project's website is so far accessible to the public, but the documentaries are not available for viewing without a password. They were accessible to the public until 2022. For this reason, we were allowed to use the password form the organizer for the purpose of this study.

As far as the audience research part of this dissertation, all the participants were informed about the content and the objectives of this research as well as the focus group approach we adopted. Furthermore, they were notified and accepted the recording of their conversation for the purpose of this research and their written consent was secured through the consent form they were given. The participants in the focus group discussion were aware and all of them accepted that parts of their conversation would be used in the research data presentation.

### **3.9 Limitations**

This research presents only a restricted part of a big project that offers a variety of individual stories with refugee characters. Because this was a “found material” it was quite challenging as well as demanding to select short documentaries appropriate for research under specific criteria. It was not the writer of this study that posed the questions, or framed the individual stories that were presented in the films. We needed to find the appropriate method to approach a material that had not been researched before.

Moreover, because of the circumstances that have been explained in the audience research part, we had to make the screening and the focus group discussion on Webex digital platform and not in a physical setting. Even though we included in our research the interactions of the viewers during the discussion, doing the research outside a spatial context, deprived us from the possibility to trace the extralinguistic elements of the communication and their possible affect in the discussion. Not to mention that the number of the participants in the focus group discussion could have included two to three more participants for a more thorough approach, but this would be time consuming and would produce a large amount of data that would exceed the limits of this dissertation.

It should be noted here that the films were available for viewing and not for downloading from the program's website. This fact deprived us from the possibility to download the films, in order to analyze them by the use of an editing program or a software tool for qualitative data analysis like NVivo. For this reason, we had to make this process “manually”, recording the various modalities (speech, image, sound) that compose each scene of the films in a table as shown in the appendix.

Finally, technical and aesthetic issues of the films were not addressed in this research, due to lack of time, space and expertise.

## **4. The overall context of the project "Home new Home"**

### **4.1 Discourses about refugees during "the refugee crisis".**

The documentary project titled "Home New Home"<sup>6</sup> has started in 2015, in the aftermath of the outbreak of mass refugees' and migrants' arrivals in Europe, the so-called "refugee crisis"<sup>7</sup>. During 2015, Europe has accepted over a million refugees and migrants by the sea, through the Mediterranean route. At this time, more than one million asylum applications were made, and an estimated number of 350.000 to 450.000 people could be granted refugee or similar status. This was the greatest flow of population to Europe since World War II (Dumont & Scarpet, 2015). Greece, as a country at the borders of Europe, was the first to deal with the overwhelming population of refugees arriving in Europe and tried to welcome, support and process this population. Under these circumstances the "refugee issue" became dominant in public discourse, following the specific events and the positioning of each country either as a frontline country or a destination one.

Depending on the specific events that have taken place during this period it seems that in the beginning of the crisis there was a more tolerant and supportive attitude towards refugees, invoking the shared European values of humanity and solidarity. But this changed during the unfolding of the crisis, when in September 2015 there was an extraordinary proportion of people reaching Europe via Turkey to the Greek Islands and especially to Lesbos. Due to this situation, Hungary decided to close its border on September 2015, and other European countries, like Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia and Northern Macedonia decided to adopt a hostile and intolerant stance towards refugees, following their own xenophobic and nationalistic agendas (Consterdine, 2018).

Additionally, the media coverage on refugees' arrivals in Europe during and after 2015 was extensive. The dominant narratives in mainstream media in Europe for refugees were

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<sup>6</sup> The Greek presentation in the project was consisted by a wide network of partners and supporters, such as the Municipality of Athens and Lesbos, Open Schools program, Regional Development Fund of Attica, Anna Lindh Foundation, Goethe Institute, UNCHR, Greek Parliament and others.

<sup>7</sup>The term was used to describe the 2015-2016 massive asylum seekers and irregular migrants flows to Europe but "mostly refers to the social and political responses to this humanitarian emergency" ( Paschou et al. 2022, p. 139). It was widely used by the media and adopted in official documents e.g. "Refugee crisis 2015-2016. Special Secretariat of Communication planning, migration, and refugee policies, February 2017.

contradictory, depended on the political decisions on member states, on the specific geopolitical circumstances in each country and landmark events<sup>8</sup>.

At the beginning of the summer of 2015 a rather sympathetic media standpoint toward refugees was gradually replaced by hostile attitudes and a suspicious media framing. This way, the difficulties, and insecurities that refugees were encountering in camps and ‘hot spots’ were extensively presented in Greek and international media. In comparison to other European media at the beginning of the crisis in 2015, Greek media focused more on the humanitarian response rather on the securitization narratives (Paschou et al. 2022), giving emphasis to refugees’ voices as vulnerable persons in need.

An extended analysis of 1,200 news stories focusing on visual representation of refugees from broadsheet news outlets in eight European countries, including Greece, throughout July, September and November 2015, depicted refugees either as powerless victims with no agency for their lives, or as violent and threatening for the European lifestyle and values (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). Even in cases where media in Europe adopted an altruistic perspective on refugees, they did not avoid their representation as “a mass of unfortunates” who resembled infants in need of protection, invisible and speechless as political actors, objects of our responsibility. Deprived of its historic complexity, the category “refugee” has become the indistinct other, who appears “dehumanized with no history, no gender, no age” (Baldini, 2019, p.133).

Public attitudes towards refugees during the “refugee crisis” as expressed in everyday stances, practices and in social media, were analogous to the political and media discourses and were influenced by the course of events, the specific socioeconomic circumstances as well as the historical background of each European country (Consterdine, 2018). In 2015 there was a wave of solidarity to refugees all over Greece. But as the time was passing and the Greek government could not manage the massive flows alone, in combination with the closure of the Balkan route and the effects of EU-Turkey statement in March 2016, led to a decline of the solidarity stance (Papataxiarchis, 2022). The prolonged stay of refugees on the Greek islands and the difficulties of the

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<sup>8</sup> The 3 year old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi who washed up drowned on a Turkish shore in early September 2015; the fence built at the Hungarian-Serbian border mid- September; the welcoming German stance; the terrorist attacks in Paris in November and the Cologne incident of women’s assault by foreign-looking men on New Year’s Eve (Triantafyllidou, 2017).

Greek state to protect and accommodate them properly, has created tensions to local societies and shifted the humanitarian attitudes into hostile and intolerant. Thus, refugees became again threatening and their political agency to demand better living conditions and the right to quick asylum procedures, brought back again the xenophobic feelings that preexisted.

It became evident, that dominant political, media and public discourses during the period of the refugee crisis presented refugees in contradictory stereotypical ways. Little space was given in the media for refugees' own voices and individual stories not only in international but also in the Greek media (CCME and WACC Europe, 2017). The unique identity of persons fleeing from war and life-threatening experiences in their homeland, became the identity of the refugee who seemed to have abolished every other personal identity.

#### **4.2 Structure and aims of the project.**

Within the abovementioned communicative order, the project entitled "Home new Home"<sup>9</sup> started in Lesvos in 2015, during the peak of the refugees' arrivals to the island. There were organized workshops where participants (refugees/ migrants, volunteers and locals) were trained by directors in documentary techniques.

The successful course of the first period and the subsequent creation of an intercultural network between locals, refugees and migrants led to the expansion of the project. During the following year the project expanded in 5 cities, Mytilene, Izmir, Amman, Tire, and Ramallah who were hosting refugees from Syria and other countries. The huge participation in Lesvos, led the Greek Ministry of Education to support the project and characterized it a pilot one. Hence, the organizers decided to expand the project in Athens. In March 2017, an International Seminar was organized in Athens to support the

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<sup>9</sup> From the project's web page: The project titled "Home New Home" aims to address the refugee crisis and record it in short documentary films, as well as to highlight the views of citizens from six welcoming countries that serve as temporary homes in the refugees' way to a better future. Syrian, Afghans, Iraqis and Palestinians refugees and citizens from the welcoming countries took part in workshops on how to make a short documentary. Home new Home <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/el/>

action not only in practice but also theoretically and to show values and best practices of solidarity for the refugees in society.

The focus of this dissertation will be on the period of the expansion of the project, in 2017 dealing with films that were created in Greece, accessible to the public through the web page of the project available until 2022. In this period of expansion and maturity of the project, the "refugee issue" was at the top of the agenda in public discourse, shortly after the peak of the "refugee crisis".

Most project participants were amateurs who had no previous experience in documentary creation. They were either refugees, migrants, volunteers, or citizens coming from the local population having a connection and a personal interest in refugee and migrant experience, like schoolteachers. The writer of this dissertation was also a participant in this project during the second period. Due to her own experience that defined the choice of this topic, she was able to better understand how the project worked, which was the process of the documentary creation, the scopes of the project and the participants' interest in it.

The aims of this project were three-fold. The first was to address the refugee crisis and the dominant media discourse and give an alternative narration that focuses on characters and their individual stories. As the project organizer Kostas Spyropoulos<sup>10</sup> reported they wanted stories based on characters, that would be presented in an "*authentic way, with an unmediated glance to the refugee issue*". "*The massification of refugees was putting aside the internal contradictions and oppositions within the refugee population. Refugees were either heroes or victims, curse, or threat for the host countries not only in Greece but in Turkey and in Palestine as well*" "*The characters would narrate their experiences in a self-reflective and confessional mood, in order to enlighten complex problems that would scratch the surface of the obvious and the stereotypical that the public was used to due to their media representation*"<sup>11</sup>.

The second aim was to educate participants in the cinematic narration. The purpose was not to raise professional aspirations for the creators, but to give them the means and the

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<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with the organizer Kostas Spyropoulos (June, 2022)

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*



method to generate their own "authentic material", to develop and work out a creative idea into a film in a coherent way.

The project was based on participatory video methodology giving emphasis in the process of the creation. Almost every part of the process was participatory and collective. Starting from the formation of the initial idea and the education on documentary techniques, each team was discussing with the consultant director their ideas, the script and the filming process. Laboratories of practical film making, provided self-reflection and a space for the participants to express and shape their creative ideas. On a later stage of the documentary formation, each creative team was discussing separately with the consultant -director.

The third aim was to promote an international network in order to create active and conscientious citizens for the reception of refugees, and to encourage an intercultural dialogue by the use of documentary filmmaking. Finally, the dissemination of the program was realized through press conference, media, congress organization and mostly the organization of public screenings in cinemas, in cultural or educational centers which sometimes included a conversation with the creators and in some other cases with the participant/s. A webpage was created and the films that were produced in Greece were presented in Vouli channel. Some of the creators participated in national or international documentary festivals where some of the films were awarded. Part of the press<sup>12</sup> saw the project as a deeper glance in refugees' lives and an opportunity for the society and the state to draw important conclusions about how the management and integration of refugees should be organized.

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<sup>12</sup> Home new Home <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/el/media-el>

## 5. Documentary presentation

In this part there will be a short presentation of the documentaries<sup>13</sup> referring to the title, the character, the setting and the plot of each film.

**5.1 "Hello Asef"** (2017. Duration 14.22 minutes. Director: Asef Faizi. Consultant director Maria Pesli. Editing: Danai Manousaridi).

This is a short autobiographical documentary created (direction and script) by Asef Faizi, a young Afghan refugee in 2017.. The title of the documentary "Hello Asef" is related to the greeting (Salam Asef, Hello Asef) that refugees and volunteers of the camp address to A, but it is also a greeting to the creator's future self through a letter supposedly written by refugees and young people that they address to him. A reflects on his present situation and aspires for his future, writing a self-empowering letter<sup>14</sup>.

This double meaning of the title is reflected on the film's narrative that is essentially divided in two core narratives. A, narrates his life at the camp of Malakasa where he has been living for 16 months. At the beginning of the documentary he explains that he created this film to speak about refugees' lives who came in Europe fleeing war, to live a normal life with safety and have access to education. He also appeals to the governments of Europe and Greece to be concerned about refugees' basic needs and especially these of young refugees. In a self-reflective mood he intertwines his narration with shots of refugees' everyday life at the Malakasa camp which is the setting of the film. In the second part of his film, he reads a letter to his future self, reminding him of his need that brought him in Europe and his aspirations to become a writer, to escape war and the limbo in the camp, gain freedom and knowledge and live a better life away from his traumatic

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<sup>13</sup> Because the films are not anymore available from the webpage without a password, and for reasons of ethical research practice we decided to keep the privacy of the films' participants, hiding their faces and names, considering that their life conditions may have changed in a way that they would not like to be exposed through this work which will be available on the internet.

<sup>14</sup> As it is presented in the webpage of the project: "Hello Assef" is a poetic wandering in the present and the future of the creator who seeks in his future self the answers to the impasses he experiences today as an Afghan refugee. Images of everyday life from the temporary accommodation structure of Malakasa, together with fragments of discourse on war, freedom, justice, personal dreams, create a symbolic field of search and redefinition of identity, individual and collective." Home new Home (2017) <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/el/news-el/9-news-el/133-screenings-goethe-el>

past experiences. The visual elements of his everyday life in the Malakasa camp are complementing and commenting his oral narration. The language of the narration is in Farsi with Greek subtitles.

## **5.2 “We are not shadows”.**

(2017. Duration 15 minutes. Directors: Yegane Hassani, Arezo Ghorabani, Massomah Noori, Massomah Haiwari. Consultant director: Pesli Maria. Editing: Danai Manousaridi)

This is the collective work of four teenage Afghan girls<sup>15</sup>. Two adolescent girls are presenting their experiences, aspirations, and agency, negotiating their female identity through the cinematic language that becomes their stimulus for self-expression and self-empowerment. The language of the film is in Farsi with Greek subtitles.

Two of the film creators present themselves on camera narrating their lives in Greece during their stay firstly at the Hellinikon camp and then at the Malakasa camp, where they were moved after the closure of the former. The title of the film denotes their desire to make women visible, denying their shadowy presence.

The first narration is that of Y, a 16-year-old Afghan girl who came with her parents from Iran where she was brought up, living there as a refugee. Her arrival in Greece is an effort to gain a better, safe and free life in Europe, but mostly an attempt to fulfil her dream to become a mathematician. This adolescent girl's intention by doing this documentary, was to expose to the public the problem of suppression that most Afghan women are facing not only in Afghanistan, but also in the narrow space of the camp in even harsher terms. Furthermore, she wants to express her personal aspirations and ambitions to study mathematics. However, as she mentions, her goal to make other women speak about their situation did not bring the expected results. Most of the Afghan women asked to speak,

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<sup>15</sup>As it was presented on the project's webpage: “is a whisper between four teenage Afghan girls that found voice and face, image and sound, and refers to a topic - taboo that entire generations of women of all ages experience in Afghan communities: the deprivation of their rights and their fear of talking about them especially in front of the camera.

Home new Home, <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/el/news-el/9-news-el/134-screenings-ypourgeo-el>

denied exposing themselves on camera. In this documentary she decides to show her face on camera something unusual and rather unacceptable for women in Afghan society.

The other narration is incorporated into the main narrative of Y. A teenage Afghan girl A unfolds her story about her new life in Greece and refers to her decision to take her headscarf off, since her arrival in Europe. This fact is described on film as an act of self-liberation. The narrative is complemented and enlightened by images from the daily life of the refugees, and especially of the women at the two temporary accommodation structures where filming took place. The language of the film is Farsi with Greek subtitles.

### **5.3 "In Between"**

(2017. Duration 20.40 minutes. Directors: Katsos Nikos, Stefanou Christos. Script: Katsos Nikos, Liakopoulou Maria, Stefanou Christos. Consultant director: Pesli Maria Editing: Nikos Katsos and Christos Stefanou.)

The story of a teenager, the 14 years old O from Afghanistan, who lives at the refugee reception center of Elaionas with his mother and two sisters is demonstrated in this film. This is the collective work of three educators, with experience in refugee education and previous knowledge in film making. The title of the film "In Between" underlines the transitional situation of O between his new reality as a refugee at the camp of Elaionas in Athens, and the expectation of a new life in Europe while waiting for 14 months for their reunification with the other members of his family in another European country<sup>16</sup>. It also indicates his transitional stage between his traumatic past experiences and his desire to overcome them and fulfill his aspirations for education and a better life.

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<sup>16</sup> The presentation of the film in the webpage of the project writes: "O is a fourteen-year-old refugee from Afghanistan. Together with his family they escaped from their homeland where they were being persecuted and started the journey to Western Europe. They managed to reach Greece, but in the summer of 2016, the border was closed. His family was separated. He now lives in a refugee reception center in Athens with his mother and sisters while awaiting the decision on family reunification. But life doesn't stop. Simply going into a standby mode is not an option for O" Home new Home <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/el/28-movies-el/60-between-el>

O narrates his adventures of a long and perilous journey with his mother and brothers from Afghanistan to Europe to avoid persecution and death in his country. Using different transportation means, walking into the heavy snow, passing through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey they reached Greece. He describes his mother's exhaustion, that brought her close to death during their journey. The film documents his every-day life in the camp, presents dialogues with his mother and sister, shows him while he is working at the market, displays his performative narration at the theatre and depicts his daily routes in the city of Athens. His past experiences in Afghanistan are vividly described as well as the traumatic event of his father's death. His desire for education and his aspirations to go to the medical school and become a doctor like his father, is a core element of his narrative. There are two narrative axes in this film. The first is an observational record of his daily life in the camp and his journeys through the city that describes his present self, while the second focuses on the narration of his traumatic experiences in Afghanistan that reveals the reason why his family was forced to flee Afghanistan. The narration is in Farsi and in English with Greek subtitles.

#### **5.4 "Undercover Rapper"**

(2017. Duration 15.40 minutes . Director: Eirini Bazara. Consultant director: Govotsos Aggelos. Editing: Kostis Kontogeorgos.).

The story of T<sup>17</sup> , a young refugee from Aleppo, Syria is presented in this short documentary. He describes his life and adventures in Syria during Al Bashar administration, he talks about his love and involvement in rap music, his volunteering work in Greece with the Syrian refugees and expresses his aspirations for education and better life as well as his fears for the future. The main theme of the film is T's love and

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<sup>17</sup> T a 26-year-old Syrian refugee comes to Greece with a special passion, to express himself and communicate his thoughts and ideas, through rap music. His so far, "adventures" in Syria before and after the war and his journey as well, of seeking a prosperous country, to survive and live well. His interest for the common and his direct involvement through his role as a translator while he is in Greece, makes him particularly loved and sensitized, not only by his own problem of seeking a peaceful country to create but as well by other refugees that comes in contact and helps them.

From the project webpage: Home new Home, <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/en/59-movies-en/81-rapper-eng>

devotion for rap music, his ambition to have the opportunity to study music and develop his musical skills. Secondly, he speaks about his desire to work professionally as an archeologist since it is the science he studied and talks about his waiting for over a year to be recognized as a refugee. The title of the film suggests how himself played secretly with his group rap music while hiding from the Bashar Al Asad regime in Syria. Shots of T while rapping at his apartment, and interviews in characteristic places of Athens complete his profile and familiarize the viewer with his new reality in Athens, his new reality in Greece. The language he uses for his narration in the film is English.

## **5.5 Findings /results**

### **5.5.1 Collective and individual identities**

Attempting to answer the first research question, namely we examined how young refugees construct, negotiate and perform collective and personal identities through their narrations in films.

In the film "Hello Asef", A clearly states that he wanted to speak on behalf of the Afghan refugees that live in the temporary accommodation center of Malakasa. As a young man living in the camp, he underlines that he has the same thoughts as other Afghan people. His aim is to present to the public their present condition, the reason why they are in Greece. Moreover, this film is utilized as the floor to convey a message to the Greek as well as the European governments, to pay attention to young refugees' needs.

*(00.02.04) Creating this documentary was a great experience for me. Because it gave me the opportunity to show a part of the lives of refugees away from their country.*

*(00.02.25) I ask the honorable government of Greece and the European Union to be concerned for refugees' basic needs and especially for young people needs.*

*(00.05.06) This means that I think that my thoughts are the same with the other young people living far from their country (Hello Asef)*

The scenes that accompany A's narration give the picture of Afghan refugees' living conditions and everyday life at the camp.



*Image 1. Dawn at the Malakasa refugee camp (Hello Asef)*

In the same film he claims that he wanted to draw the attention of the administrators to the problems faced by refugees:

*(00.05.20) I hope that the thing I had in my mind managed to show, to people who are responsible for the refugees to pay more attention to their situation.*



*Image 2. A. speaks on behalf of his community for their problems.*

The only scene where the creator appears and speaks on camera, is an attempt to give emphasis, make his requests in person and expose himself as a representative of his community. Furthermore, the title of the film "Hello Asef" and the greetings that other refugees and volunteers address to him on camera, is an indication of the appreciation he enjoys within the community of the camp and their support for his effort to create a film and show to the public the conditions of the refugees at the camp.



*Image 3. People at the camp greeting A. (Hello Asef)*

The letter he addresses to himself, in the long waiting period at the Malakasa camp, is a story that he needs to tell his future self in order to move on, to remember his values, define his political stance, and pursue his dreams. He invented this letter, posing questions to his "future self", as a process for self-support and self-empowerment.

*(00.09.05) Do you remember you wanted to know the world and the people?*

*And now? Are you still interested to know different cultures?*



(00.09.40) *A what politics mean for you anymore? You told me that we can help people, whatever their place.*

(00.10.13) *And what about your book?*

(00.11.44) *What has become your dream for peace? How is your people now?*

*(Hello Asef)*

The story of Y, in the collective work of four teenage refugee Afghan girls, is also a documentation of Afghan refugees' lives and of Afghan refugee women specifically, at the refugee camp of Hellinikon and of Malakasa.



*Image 4. Temporary accommodation center at the old airport of Hellinikon ( We are not shadows).*

The title “We are not shadows”, it can be considered as a declaration of the creators' intentions to make women visible by making this film. The whole film is not only a personal account of narrators' condition, but it also refers to the everyday life conditions of Afghan women at the camp.



*Image 5. "We are not shadows": The title of the film.*

The creators decided to speak with Afghan women at the camp about the problems they face, but they refused to expose themselves in front of the camera because of fear and prohibitions posed by their society.

*(00.05.35) We decided to talk with women that we know they have problems.*

*(00.05.45) We decided to talk with some women at Hellinikon camp and at Malakasa. They accepted to talk in front of the camera.*

*(00.05.57) When we asked them to speak about their women rights, they were afraid. (We are not Shadows)*



*Image 6. Everyday life of Afghan women at the Malakasa camp  
(We are not shadows)*

The fact that they did not manage to convince women to speak on camera, did not hamper them to create the film. On the contrary, it urged Y and A, to take full responsibility and talk on their behalf, projecting a self-liberating identity through personal exposure. Hence, film making became a process that encouraged the teenage women creators to perceive themselves as the voice and the face of Afghan women who are muted and faceless within Afghan society.

Besides the role these girls play for the women community, they demand their own right to self-determination and freedom from the constraints that society tries to impose on them. These acts of self -emancipation bring disequilibrium and anxiety, an identity trouble and doubts, as in the case of A that she decided to take her headscarf off as soon as she arrived in Europe. With the immediacy of her adolescence, she directs her questions to the viewers and invites them to take a stand providing an interactive framework for the imagined audience.

*(00.10.43) In Afghanistan they say that if you are above 9 years old why not to wear a headscarf? In Europe they say if you are a real Muslim why don't you wear a hijab? Do you think is right? As my friend says, Afghani women cannot speak in front of the camera. (We are not Shadows)*



*Image 7. A. reflects upon her decision to take off her headscarf.*

During the process of interviewing and film making, young refugees are projecting a resilient and agentic identity demanding for a better life and future, being able to overcome the traumatic past experiences. We watch in film "in Between" O saying:

*(00.19.11) Today, whenever I tell people the story of my life, they feel sad. I tell them not to feel that way because life is short, and they should always be happy.  
(In between)*

At the final scene of the same film, O is presented walking happy and confident on a pavement in Athens with bitter orange trees. He is depicted cutting a flower from a tree, smelling it and blowing it in the air, giving the viewer a sense of optimism and hope about O's future, while background music is heard.



*Image 8. O. blows an orange flower. (In Between)*

The individual identity is projected and appraised for some characters of the films with special talents. T, in the film "Undercover rapper" presents himself as an undercover rapper who fled Syria because of the danger of being persecuted or killed. Some of his songs referred to the situation in Syria and this put him in danger. He created a group together with two Iranian refugee rappers, in Aleppo and won an online rap music competition.

*(00.00.47)-Director's voice: Maybe you can tell us what the songs are about.*

*(00.01.00) -T: One song is a normal rap song. It was prepared for a competition. Because each year, like last year, we had a group the Hp'z group, and we won the Empire Iraqi Rappers. It is a live competition. We have won the first position!*

*(00.01.10)– T: It was in the final team our team with another team from Saudi Arabia. And the other one is about what's happening in Syria today.*

*(00.01.20) We are moving undercover, because as I told you in Syria they were Killing rappers.*

The film becomes the field for these youth to construct a positive sense of themselves, to redefine their goals and perform their preferred identities. T as a rapper, he has the chance to support this strong aspect of his identity in front of the camera while seated on his desk. Moreover, he has the floor to express his world vision.

*(00.12.03) I don't believe in nothing. I believe in music.*



*Image 9. T. while rapping seated in front of his PC (Undercover rapper)*

### **5.5.2 Liminal state**

The findings reported here present the recurring themes that emerged in the narratives of young refugees concerning their lives. There are common themes in films that are part of everyday life of refugees, as well as unique issues representing the uniqueness of each character posed at each documentary.

The liminal state that all characters are in, is vividly depicted in the visual part of the films as well as in their oral narratives. Adolescent and young people live in a double transitional phase. Firstly, adolescence and early youth is a transitional developmental stage, where new identities emerge and secondly these youngsters are in a transitional condition because of their refugee status, a fact that creates feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

Either being in a refugee camp or living in a house all young refugees are in a waiting period for the examination of their asylum application, or their reunification with their families. This long waiting period - in all the cases exceeding one year- at the transitional place of a refugee camp, brings insecurity and uncertainty and this sense is expressed and confronted by all the characters of the documentaries.

This "in between" situation, is strongly expressed either in the narratives of young asylum seekers and more effectively in the visual representation of their everyday lives, especially of those who live in refugee camps. These refugee camps were created during this period to cover the emerging needs of the newcomers, giving evidence of the emergent situation that Greece faced in 2015-2017<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The Greek Government adopted rough and cheap solutions to house the large number of refugees that have arrived since 2015. Containers were set up in areas without infrastructure or appropriate configuration to be suitable to receive refugees.



*Image 10. Elaionas camp in Athens (in Between)*

Refugee camps became a no escape place as refugees had no choice but to stay there until the examination of their asylum application. In the film “We are not shadows” Y comments with bitter irony on her stay at the Hellinikon camp which is essentially the old Athens Airport.

*(00.02.55) it is absurd because you go to the airport to fly somewhere else. Still, refugees are obliged to stay there, without the right to choose.*



*Image 11. Everyday life at Hellinikon refugee camp. (We are not Shadows)*

Living in a refugee camp, means life in a limbo situation. In the camp of Malakasa, a remote isolated place 40 km away from the city of Athens, people sense feelings of loneliness, isolation and sadness. Y. implies these feelings in her narration and are depicted symbolically in the film by showing an old red empty plastic chair outside her family's container.

*(00.04.21) I spent most of my time in the house. (00.04.24) I have nowhere to go in my free time. (We are not Shadows)*



*Image 12. Y's temporary house. (We are not shadows)*

Feelings of desperation, precariousness and fear for the future, are also described in A's film and are showed in a quite expressive way in his shooting at the Malakasa camp.

*(00.02.41) The scenes I shot in the camp show everyday activities of the people. At least they are safe, but they feel desperate, because their future is unknown (Hello Asef)*

The dominant sense is that that they have "stuck" and cannot move forward. Their life seems to be in suspension. Physical safety has been achieved but because they are in this limbo phase they experience insecurity, without the agency that ordinary people have.

*(00.05.49) I know that days are passing difficult and there isn't any good perspective for the future. (00.05.52) -There is no way to move ahead. You cannot start anything. (00.06.04) Everything has stopped. You came here from Europe to be safe. (Hello Asef)*





*Image 13. Shots at the Malakasa camp (Hello Asef).*

The visual part of A's narration (Hello Asef) are scenes from an ordinary day at the camp. It is important to mention one characteristic scene of long duration, a long full shot, that shows a boy spinning endlessly around his axis, holding a torn plastic cloth that is hanging from an old metal construction. It is a visual metaphor of the impasse the narrator experiences at this phase of his life.



*Image 14. A boy swirling holding a torn plastic cloth.( Hello Asef)*

The limbo phase they are in, is underlined by the older characters of the documentaries (A and T) who due to their age are more self and socially aware. So, they wonder about their life and ask themselves whether there is a radical change as they expected. In the film "Hello Asef", A wonders about the safety of refugees' minds, underlining the contradiction between the safety he feels for his body and the sense of unstableness he senses for his mind, posing this question through a letter written for him. Scenes from the daily routine at the camp's environment, complement and comment the narrative.

*(00.06.07) However, what has changed in your lives? Yes, you are safe in the body. But do you feel safe in your mind? (Hello Asef)*



*Image 15. Waiting at the queue for food at the Malakasa camp (Hello Asef)*

Even if the situation is better for T, the Syrian refugee, because he does not live in a refugee camp, the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about his future and his professional certification are clearly articulated.

*(00.03.56) I finished everything, and I came here and I am waiting for more than one year to have my papers and until now I don't have my papers.*

*I cannot work either with my specialty and I am not recognized refugee yet. I still have the International Protection Applicant Card*

*(00.04.21) I am telling you, more than one year here I am waiting for my papers, and I can't even work with this. And I am very afraid now. (Undercover Rapper)*



*Image 16. T. expresses his indignation for not been documented as a refugee.  
(Undercover Rapper)*

Scenes from the everyday interactions between O and his family members at their container house in Elaionas camp, are depicted and give the viewer a sense of his reality in the film "In Between". The directors are shooting O without any narrative comment but the ordinary dialogues with members of his family.



*Image 17. O. sitting on his bed at his container house in Elaionas camp  
(In Between )*

"Liminal phase", which is the transitional period between one stage to another, namely a marginal period (Turner, 1994 as cited in Ghorashi et al. 2018), is not only reduced to uncertainty and insecurity but can bring resourcefulness and new fields of action provided that there are some kind of opportunities offered and somehow favorable conditions. This is obvious in the film "in Between" where O does not choose to be in "a standby mode" while waiting at the refugee camp of Elaionas his reunification with his brothers in Europe.



*Image 18. O. at his workplace. (In Between)*

The vicinity of the camp to the metro station and consequently to the center of Athens, gives him the opportunity to work, to move easily through the city of Athens wearing his earphones and listening to his favorite music, to attend three schools and be involved into a theatrical performance at the "Alfa" theater, let alone his participation in the "Home new Home" project.

*00.13.04 When I came in Greece I became friend with many people, with Afghans, with volunteers from all over the world and with an Irish girl. (In between)*



*Image 19. O. while singing on the stage of the "Alfa: theater in Athens. ( In Between )*

The camera follows him in an observational mode in his daily activities which are clearly implying the directors' intention to present his motive to gain knowledge and experiences.

*(00.11.32) -I feel better when I'm outside, because I'm alone, I go walking. I like to be busy because its good and I can take experiences, like experience from theater, from the job, from everywhere. (In Between)*



*Image 20. O waiting for the train, wearing his earphones (In Between)*

In some cases, we can see young refugees offering service to their community and actively participate in volunteering activities. T while waiting to be officially recognized as a refugee, offers volunteer work as radio journalist in Shaabab radio<sup>19</sup>. He takes interviews

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<sup>19</sup> Shabab Radio was a cross-cultural web radio station, created in 2016, with informative and entertaining programs in Arabic, Farsi, English and Greek, broadcasting from Athens, Greece.  
<https://soundcloud.com/shababradio>

from refugees that focus on their problems during their stay in Greece. In the film he is portrayed as a politically active young man who tries to raise awareness of the dire situation of his birth city Aleppo and Syria.

*00.06.40 I met a guy that was working in a digital radio, and we call it Shabab radio. Shabab radio is radio channel taking care of refugees, focusing about the problems that refugees are facing here.*



*Image 21. T. interviewing Syrian children. (Undercover rapper)*

Moreover, this transitional period may offer a change for the renegotiation of life trajectories and identities. In the film "Hello Asef", is apparently visible the creator's intention to reflect in a poetic manner upon his past and future life, his values and aspirations. Writing a letter to his future self he empowers and commits himself to a better future. The visual part of this narrative shows different parts of the camp, from different angles using visual metaphors. A pigeon that is flying away from the wired fence of the camp and the sun as seen through the torn plastic fabric.



*Image 22. Two teenage refugees in front of the wired fence and a pigeon flying (Hello Asef)*

*(00.12.48) I want to see you soon Asef, where your heart wants you to go. where you will never be thirsty. Where knowledge is like water that fights humans' thirst. Where light covers everything. There where all colors are reflecting the colors of mankind. There where red color means only love and nothing else.*

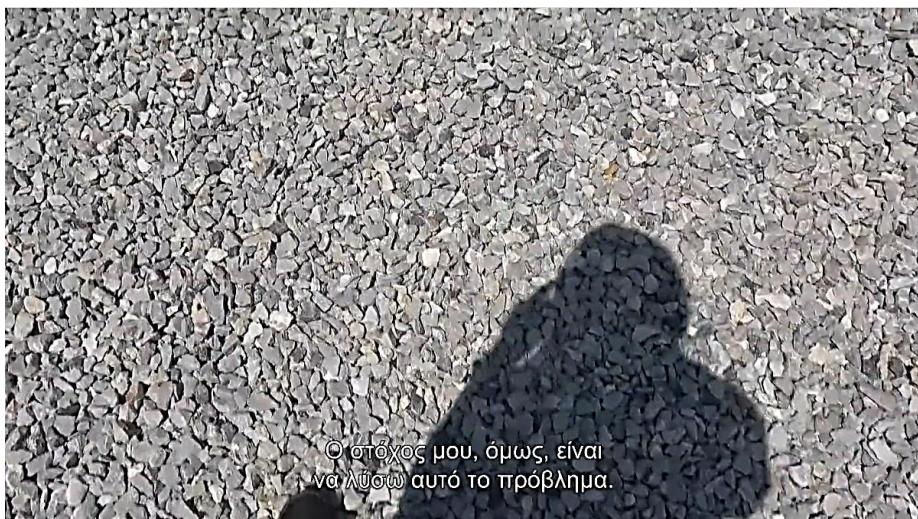


*Image 23. The sun behind a torn plastic cloth at the Malakasa camp. (Hello Asef)*

### **5.5.3 Empowering and expressing themselves through art.**

The participation of all young refugees in the project "Home new Home" or other artistic projects, is a common theme in all films and the findings emphasize that this became an expressive as well as an empowering process for all the characters at this period of their life. We have already seen O narrating his personal experiences as refugee in a theatrical performance at the Alfa theater and Tariq rapping in front of the camera in a long shot performance. The participation in the project "Home new Home" of all young refugees in the documentaries, became a self-fulfilling activity that assisted them to gain confidence during this "standstill" period of their lives, probably pulling some of them out of unpleasant feelings of desperation and inertia. They experienced new things, gained knowledge, met new people, and collaborated. But most of all, this became a process for self-determination and identity construction. Y and A by doing this film escaped the impasse of their life at the refugee camp and tried to negotiate the problem of freedom that many Afghan women and themselves are deprived of.

*(00.06.33) At first, I did not want to speak in front of the camera. But my purpose is to solve this problem (We are not shadows)*



*Image 24. Y's shadow on the gravel while filming. (We are not shadows)*



#### **5.5.4 The request for freedom.**

The request for freedom is one of the recurring themes, a core issue that is presented in all short documentaries. Either as a good they have been deprived of and the reason they were forced to leave their homeland, or as a right they want to gain and enjoy in their new life in Europe.

For young refugees presented in films, the lack of freedom is a reminder of their bad experiences in their homeland. In the film "We are not shadows" freedom is the vital element of the film narrative and concerns Afghan women's freedom. The narration of Y reveals the suppressive circumstances for women in Afghanistan and in the camp, where a "small Afghanistan has been created" because of the fear provoked to parents due to new circumstances. "Permission", the word she mentions in her narration, refers to the complete lack of freedom of women and the full control of their movements and decisions by their families. The scene that accompanies the narration shows in a medium shot, a woman shadow dressed in black behind a half-drawn curtain looking from the window outside.

*(00.04.33) The word that I used to hear since a little girl was "permission."*

*(00.04.38) You must ask permission to go out, permission for the clothes you wear, permission to choose your friends, permission for everything.*



*Image 25. A girl wearing a headscarf opens the curtain (We are not shadows)*

The desire for self-liberation is salient at this point of the film and justifies the motivation for making this short documentary. Since the other women of the camp refused to speak about their problems on camera because they were afraid of their families, she gave herself "permission" using the word in a reverse way at her favor this time, in a self-liberating act to speak freely in front of the camera.

*(00.06.33) At first, I did not want to speak in front of the camera. But my purpose is to solve this problem. Why an Afghan woman or an Afghan girl cannot speak in front of the camera? To speak freely about their problems? So, I decided to give myself this permission. (We are not Shadows)*

As she turns the camera on her face, in a medium close up shot, this young Afghan adolescent proceeds to an act of emancipation and makes a courageous effort to renegotiate her woman identity breaking the traditional norms of her society.



*Image 26. Y. turns the camera on her face! (We are not shadows)*

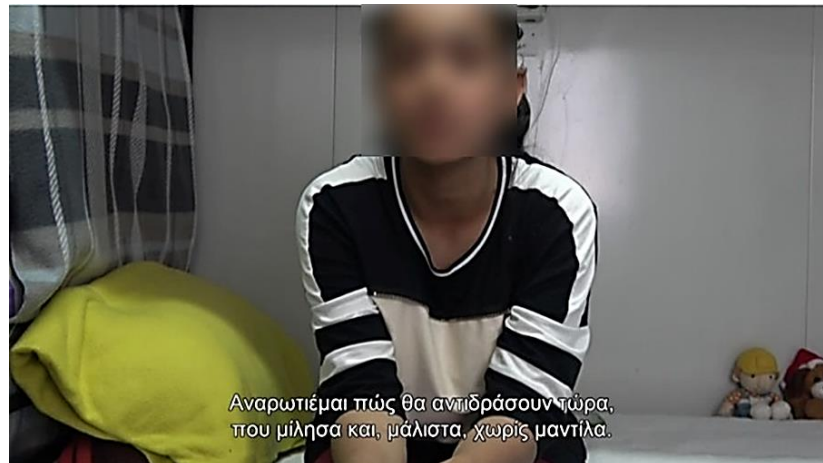
Then, daringly reveals to the viewers Afghan women's lack of freedom, their constant surveillance, their deprivation of basic rights and their treatment by men and families as objects, or commodities. The age of adolescence has the inherent need for questioning, challenging, or breaking the established norms and traditions and this need urges Y. and A. to demand their right to free expression and self-determination.

*(00.08.05) A woman and a girl cannot go outside the camp, without a man to look after her.*

*(00.08.14) Unfortunately, in Afghanistan women do not have the right to choose anything. They cannot go to school, they cannot choose a husband, they cannot work. In addition, it is important to say that they cannot take a divorce. In Afghanistan, women are used as commodities. They are selling their daughters for money, for a piece of land or anything. If an Afghan woman decides to do what she wants, disobeying her husband or her family, she is punished or stoned till death. For example, they are not allowed to talk in front of the camera. Or to become actresses of cinema or theater. They cannot speak openly in the press for their realities. (We are not Shadows)*

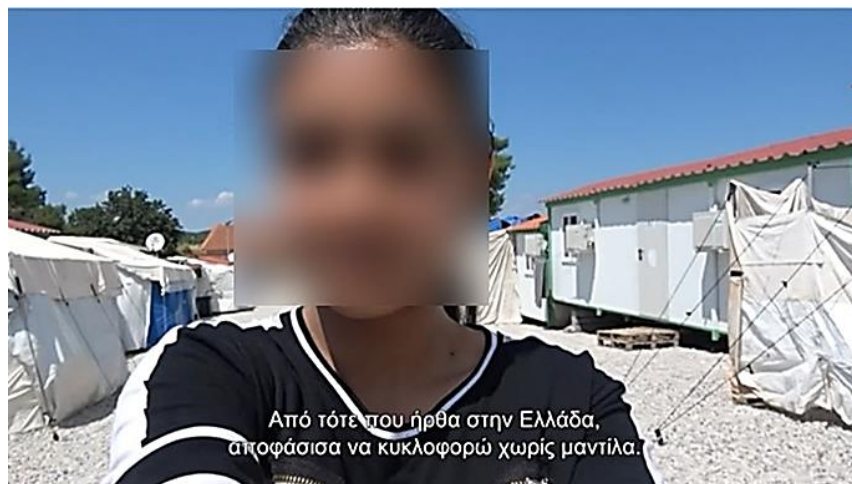
In the same documentary, A another teenage Afghan girl, using the same camera framing as in the previous scene with Y, shows her face on camera, since she had already decided to take her hijab off as soon as she arrived in Greece, breaking well rooted traditions and practices in Afghan society and disregarding the symbol of Muslim women. She wonders how the community will react. Her short narration describes this act of self-expression and liberation. In the film -she is also one of the creators- she decides to share and consolidate her decision to take off her hijab that is traditionally a woman's identity symbol in Muslim society. Facing an internal conflict about her identity whether she is a real Muslim woman she asks the imagined audience whether this was the right decision. She does this with all the momentum but also the doubt of her adolescence.

*(00.10.43) In Afghanistan they say that if you are above 9 years old why not to wear a headscarf? In Europe they say if you are a real Muslim why don't you wear a Hijab? Do you think is right? As my friend says, Afghani women cannot speak in front of the camera.*



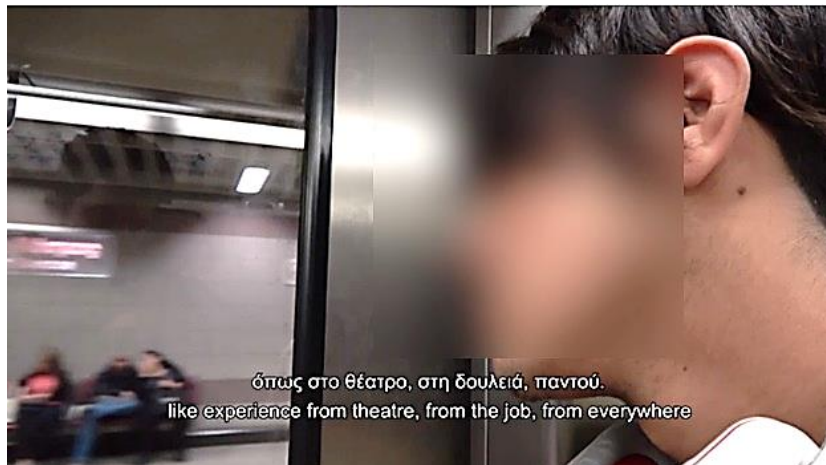
*Image 27. A. wonders about the reaction of her community on her decision to take off her hijab. (We are not shadows)*

*(00.11.05) I am wondering, how are they going to react now that I spoke in front of the camera and even without a headscarf? But I don't care what they say. This is my life! I will live it my way!! (We are not shadows)*



*Image 28. A without her headscarf speaks on camera (We are not shadows)*

The idea of freedom in also vividly appeared in other films. O (In Between) enjoys his newly gained freedom to move freely in the city of Athens, to participate in a theatrical performance, to work, be able to go to school.



*Image 29. O in the metro wagon talks about his new experiences (In Between)*

Moreover, T's desire to be free to create rap music pushed him to act as an undercover rapper and finally to leave his country. His desire to be officially recognized as refugee will give him the opportunity to gain his freedom and leave for another European country to elaborate his musical and scientific skills. (Undercover rapper).

Finally, in A's self-reflective account, the idea of freedom is present as a desirable condition and an important value he was deprived of in his homeland.

*(00.10.27) Do you remember saying that peoples' thoughts are important even if they are not free? (00.11.08) Thoughts and new ideas are they still mean silence? (Hello Asef)*

A wonders if there is still censorship and enforcement through weapons in a letter to his future self.

*(00.11.06) Asef are they still imposing people with guns what to stay in your country?? (00.11.08) Thoughts and new ideas are they still mean silence?*

The narrative is visualized by a long shot showing the horizon at dusk through barbed wire, expressing in a symbolic way the deprivation of freedom he encounters at the present stage of his life.



Image 30. *The purple color of the sky at the sunset behind the wired fence.*

*(Hello Asef)*

The concept of freedom represents “the light” for him. At the end of the film a boy with a broken arm is filmed standing against a wall, smiling, where feathers are painted and the word freedom is written in red color. The present and the aspired future are symbolically depicted in this scene.



Image 31. *A boy with a broken arm stands against a wall where freedom is written (Hello Asef)*

*(00.13.15) I want to see you soon A, where light covers everything. There where people are free to express their thoughts.*

### 5.5.5 Traumatic past experiences

One of the themes that are touched upon in the documentaries, are narrators' past experiences in their homeland which have shaped their character and determined their choices. Narrating their experiences in front of the camera gives meaning to their past and redefine their present life. Most of their experiences in their homeland are difficult and some of them traumatic. After all, it was the difficult and dangerous life they had in their homeland that forced them to leave.

In the film «In Between», O describes dramatically and thoroughly the traumatic events of his life. Himself in a performative way, narrates on camera his family decision "to save themselves" and escape from Afghanistan. They made an exhausting and perilous journey through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. They needed to travel by car, hidden in trucks or on foot, lost each other and walk through the heavy snow. He describes his mother's faint and the sense of insecurity and fear he felt.

*(00.00.06) We decided to save ourselves and we started our journey to Europe. During our trip we had hard time. Sometimes we were travelling by car, and sometimes on foot or hidden in trucks. We got lost a few times, but fortunately we could find each other again. (In Farsi)*

*(00.00.34) The most difficult situation was when we come to Pakistan (in English) and from Pakistan to Iran and from Iran to Turkey. It was so difficult situation. The snow was high and when you put your foot is like this (making a gesture) under the snow. And then my mother was like this (imitating his mother), like dead. And then my brothers took my mother under the shoulder and my small brothers took all the bags. (In Between)*



*Image 32. O. narrating performatively his mother faint during their journey to Europe (In between)*

The word “adversity” pronounced in an intense manner, condenses his family’s as well as his own situation in Afghanistan. This means that they were deprived of things that were important for them like education.

*(00.06.31) (In English) In Afghanistan we had adversities, do you understand? Adversity! We were not lucky!*

*(00.06.46) And we could not go to school! (In Between)*

Bad experiences are not only a part of their life in their homeland. O had a painful experience in Greece as well, when he fell in love with a girl but finally, she was deported with her family, in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, he turned to music to alleviate his sorrow.

*(00.09.32) When I came to Greece, after one month I find a girl. I find a girl and I told her: I love you! The girl after two days she gives the answer. And the answer is I love you too. Then she left here. She went back to Afghanistan. She was deported to Afghanistan. Herself, her father and a baby.*

*(00.10.10) I don't find her I am so sad, and for two three months like crazy.*

*(00.10.21) And then, I say. It's my promise to I don't like the girls, to speak with the girls. (00.10.27) Just learning to pass my time and happy dancing and (in Greek, μέσα πώς το λένε αυτό;) earphones.*



O: (In Greek).στα ελληνικά πώς το λένε;

-Director's.Voice: (ακουστικά)

-O: And I put εγώ "akoustika" and I get crazy, very, very crazy with music. (In English- In Between)

Recalling his days with his father in Afghanistan, is the bright side of his life with him. During his father's summer vacations, he remembers spending nicely their time together:

(00.17.13) (In Farsi) *My father was a doctor in Kandahar. Every year he returned home for 15 days, and we had a nice time together.*

(00.17.25) *We went to the park for a walk, out to dinner and did whatever else we wanted. Sometimes he taught me English. (In Between)*

These memories, however, are overshadowed by the dramatic event of the death of the father, which scarred the life of the whole family. The scene that accompanies O's narrative, is a close up shot on his mother's and O's hands while seated on the floor together with O and showing his father's papers and the back of a photograph with a hole, probably caused by a bullet.

(00.17.38) *One day, just after his vacation has finished, as he was going back to work, they (the Taliban) threatened to kill him.*

(00.17.52)*He asked them the reason why and their answer was because you work with foreigners. Then he told them: "As long as blood runs in my veins, I will never give up. Europeans, Americans we all come from the same earth".*

(00.18.02) *The next time, as he was returning home, they killed him on the street. (In Farsi) (In Between)*



Image 33. *The back side of a photograph with a bullet? hole (In Between)*

The chasing of the family and the severe injury of his mother by the Taliban's bullets complements the circle of the sad events of his life that he shares with the directors and the viewers:

*(00.18.10) When this happened, we had to move to another house. As they had told my father, they would kill his whole family.*

*(00.18.24) We hid in another house, but after a month they found us and shot my mother. One bullet found her in the heart and the other in the kidney. We ran at the hospital that time. Fortunately, my mother survived. (In Between) \_ (In Farsi)*

T in the film "Undercover rapper", in the scene at the Exarchia square where he is interviewed by the director, answers why he decided to cover his face and become an undercover rapper. The choice for shooting T's interview at the Exarchia square in Athens, an area that represents the rebellious spirit of radical political activists, is in line with the spirit of resistance that T brings with his rap music and his life choices:

*(00.09.05)-Director's voice: Well, when you decided to cover your face singing without showing it?*

*(00.09.22)-T: Look, at the beginning as they say in the Middle East the Arabic Spring. The Arabic Spring is when the people started to do demonstrations. Starting in Tunisia, to Egypt, from Egypt to Libya, and after it comes to Syria.*

(00.09.40) *Imagine little kids see in television to write "freedom, or stuff on the wall. So, they write on the wall it was an ancient city of Syria called Arak. And because they write this, 3 or 4 guys from the police of Syria, they took the children, and they sent them to a detention center. And they took their nails off, just because they did.*

(00.10.00) *And after each city in Syria they have like an old man everybody respect them. They listen to their decisions, and they represent people in the government. They went to the police station, to talk, why you did this. And they killed them!! Even the guys that go to take the children! If children did this! They where in the cities that they were under control of the free army. They have been killed!*  
(Undercover rapper)

Continuing his narration, he states with intensity that rappers have been murdered in Syria, even in areas controlled by the Free Army, justifying his choice to hide his face while rapping. He also qualified that he had two options:

(00.10.41) *So, I had two options! Or to be in danger and to rap against my government and have the possibility to be dead at any time O.K Iam not going to tell you that I wasn't afraid. Yes, I was afraid to rap normally on the camera, or I would do it like this, or I hide my image or my id on you tube. (Undercover rapper)*



*Image 34. T explains how he became an undercover rapper at Exarchia square, Athens (Undercover rapper)*

Standing in front of a closed door at the central building of the University of Athens, T talks about the difficult situations he faced in his country, avoiding naming them:

*(00.05.18) Before I come here, I was already waiting for, to continue in high studying and in a big, big school in Italy, but some bad things happened and they took me to prison for six months and after to the army. And a lot of stuff happened.*

In the same scene while answering another question, wants to mention in passing the killings of his friends during a bombardment in Aleppo:

*(00.05.48) -Director's voice: Your friends are in Holland you said?*

*-T: My two last friends! Because in 2012, 15 of my friends, they made some air strike and 15 people were dead except me and my brother and two friends.*



*Image 35. T. talks about the killing of his friends. (Undercover rapper).*

The difficult experiences are not explicitly expressed but in some cases they are implied. So, A's distressing experiences are expressed in a poetic manner in the film "Hello, Asef". He asks himself in a letter written to his future self about the rough conditions he had to endure, the perilous journey by the sea, the harsh situation in Afghanistan and the feelings of disappointment and frustration he senses.

*(00.07.03) I know that you had to deal with the wind, the cold and the frightening sea.*

*(00.07.06) I have seen your empty hands and your heart full of love.*

*(00.09.30) Your journeys in poor countries do they still reminds you what humanity means?*

*(00.11.23) Your children in your country instead of going to school are they still bomb baits?*

*(00.11.34) Are their parents still hurting for them?*

Some shots from the camp at sunset, a man sitting in front of the container's window frame the narrative, complement and completes it with the current experiences of his everyday life at the camp of Malakasa.



*Image 36. A man sitting in front of window in a lighted room at the Malakasa camp. (Hello Asef)*

### 5.5.6 Educational aspirations, fears and barriers.

One of the strongest recurring themes concerning young refugees' future life goals that is projected in all the narrations of young refugees in films, is their desire to have access to education and knowledge. Educational aspirations express a strong agentive identity giving them a strong incentive for social progress. Y in her self-introduction in the film "We are not shadows" she explains the reason she and her family decided to come to Europe.

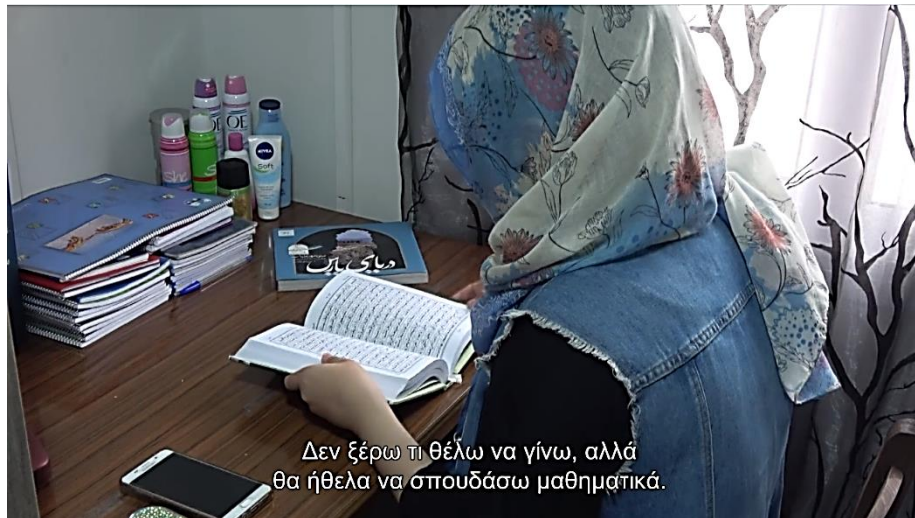
*(00.01.36) "I am Y. I am from Afghanistan but I was born and brought up in Iran. I went to school there. I wanted to continue my education in Iran, but I could not do that because I am an Afghan Refugee. (00.02.24) So, we had to leave Iran and come in Europe".*

Denouncing in her narrative the deprivation of Afghan women of their right to education, Y projects in the film her biggest dream that is to continue her studies and become a mathematician. This is a scene where Y seats in front of a book at her desk at the Malakasa camp.

*(00.11.59) My biggest dream is to continue my education in peace and without fear.*

*(00.12.11) I don't know what I want to be, but I would like to study mathematics.*

*(00.12.20) That is my biggest dream! (We are not shadows)*



*Image 37. Y at her desk in front of a book at the camp of Malakasa*

At the same scene she expresses her biggest fear that will frustrate and demolish her hopes and expectations for education and a better life.

*(00.11.47) The only thing I am afraid of is if they force me, to go to Afghanistan and to live there one day.*

In some parts of the narrative, the satisfaction of the young refugees for the opportunity they have for education even in this transitional phase of their lives, is openly stated. O expresses this satisfaction in front of the theater audience during his performance at the “Alfa” theater (In Between).

*(00.13.43) When I was in Afghanistan I could not go to school, even though I wanted it so much. It was so dangerous that for a few years I couldn't even go out of the house. Now I go to three different schools. I love to learn new things and to meet new people. (in Farsi)*



Image 38. At the stage of the "Alfa" theater with the translator. (*In Between*)

The need for education is strongly projected, even if the goal can be difficult like to be a doctor or engineer. But this goal, even for a 14-year-old teenager, can become a decision, shaped and consolidated with arguments during his narration.

*(00.06.46) And we could not go to school and now we are so want to try, in the future somethings better! Like a doctor, engineer.*

*(00.06.59) My position in is doctor!*

*(00.07.04) Maybe a doctor or something else, but my hopes my dreams are doctor! because now I feel everyone, because now my mum is sick,*

*(00.07.20) And also, I promised my father, because my father is doctor. (In English) (in Between)*

O prepares himself for that, by studying biology and discuss about this with his teacher who is one of the creators of the film.

*(00.07.38) I want to learn human parts of the body, just I need for experience. Experience to read, read, read. And when I grow up to become a doctor*

This is a scene (a medium low angle shot) where O is seated in a desk inside a sunny room, wearing a red blouse with letters and being in a good mood. This scene depicts his optimism for his future and his good mood.



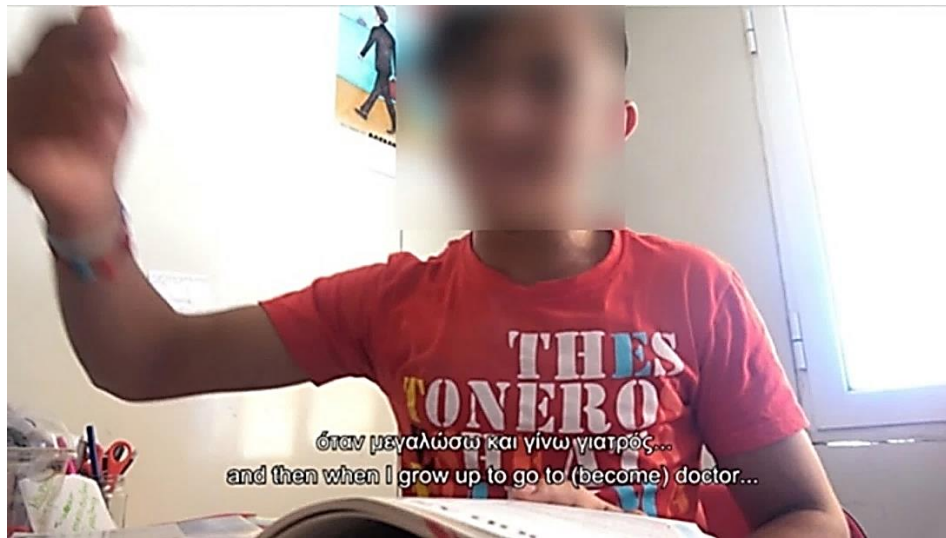


Image 39. O. speaking about his educational aspirations (*In Between*)

The developmental stage each of the narrators is in, determines the type of expectations they have and shape their aspirations differently. The Syrian refugee has already a completed educational biography holding a university and a master's degree and now he is trying to establish his educational status and build his professional future in Europe. Still, he encounters barriers that make him feel afraid and anxious.

*(00.04.25) And I am very afraid now. I have my master's degree. I have a lot of friends, they've travelled to Germany, they don't have the same master's degree as me, but they have graduated from the University from different sections. And there the Universities didn't accept their certificates. They say they have to send them back to Syria, to translate it in Syria from Arabic to German, if you are in Germany and have a stamp from the Ministry of Migration and a lot of stuff. ....*

*(00.04.51) And I came here escaping from war, I was in the army too. If someone went to ask the stamp from my name, they would kill him, or they would do something bad, because I'm wanted there.....*

*(00.05.03) So I'm afraid that the Greek Government won't recognize my master. Because is in Arabic not in Greek. (Undercover rapper)*

However, they project their determination to follow their dreams even though they are confronted with the harsh reality and they need to compromise, even if they are overwhelmed by uncertainty about their future.

*(00.05.18)- T: Before I come here, I was already waiting for, to continue in high studying and in a big, big school in Italy but some bad things happened and they took me to prison for six months and after to the army... and a lot of stuff happened.*

*(00.05.34) -Director's Voice: So, do you want to go to Italy?*

*(00.05.36) -T: this was before. I want to go to Italy and continue this.*

*- Director's Voice: What do you want now?*

*(00.05.44) T: Now, I don't want to do nothing. I want to take my papers and go to Holland and then I'll see what I want to do.*

*(In Between).*

The visual mode of the narrative at his part of the film, shows T standing in front of a closed door at the central building of the University of Athens. This is a symbolic expression of his present condition being practically unable to prove his qualifications, representing the barriers that hamper him to fulfill his educational and professional objectives.



*Image 40. T. in front of the closed door at the University of Athens*

The aspirations and hopes can be specific and articulated with precision and determination.

*(00.13. 40) I Have to learn the language. This is very hard. Greek is very hard.*

*(00.13.49) As I told you before, I want to learn music now. I want to do music.*

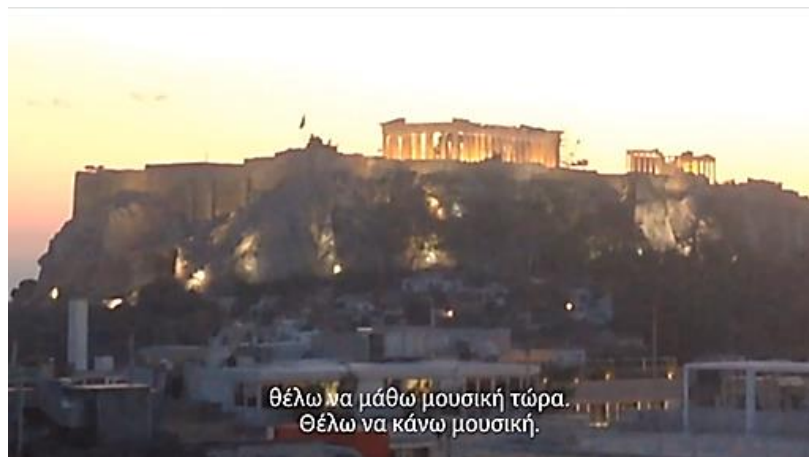
(Undercover Rapper).

The visual representation that accompanies the narration of T in the film «Undercover Rapper» is a visual comment on his words that convey its distinct meaning. The sunset through a barbed wire when he says that he wants to learn Greek, but it is very difficult, it is a connotation of the struggle he has to give in order to participate in the Greek culture by learning the language.



*Image 41. The sunset through barbed wire (Undercover Rapper)*

In addition, the expression of his desire to study music, the coda of his narration, shows a picture of Acropolis at the sunset, implying his desire to be attached to the new city where he now lives, or could also imply the director's wish to create a familiar environment to embed T's narrative.



*Image 42. Acropolis at sunset (Undercover rapper)*

The desires are not always expressed in a direct way, but can be implied, narrated in an abstract and poetic way as A does in his film “Hello Asef”. The aspiration to write a book and “the thirst for knowledge” is one of A’s values.

*(00.10.13) And what about your book?*

*(00.10.48) I remember you saying that you were thirsty for knowledge.*

*(00.12.48) I want to see you soon A, where your heart wants you to go. where you will never be thirsty. Where knowledge is like water that fights humans' thirst.*

*(Hello Asef)*



*Image 43. A pigeon flying away from the camp (Hello Asef)*

### **5.5.7 Religious attachment**

Young refugees religious attachment as a constituent element of their identity is another recurring theme in films. Religion, as projected in the visual narrative is a constituent part of their identity. However, this theme is projected only in the films created by refugee creators and is expressed exclusively in the visual narratives of the films "Hello Asef", "We are not shadows" without any oral reference to their religion. The establishing scene of the film "Hello Asef" starts with some high angle long shots of the camp of Malakasa at dawn where the muezzin's voice is heard.



*Image 44. Dawn at the Malakasa camp. (Hello Asef)*

The narrative follows a temporal sequence and the morning gathering at the improvised mosque in the second scene, implies the beginning of the day which includes the morning prayer.



*Image 45. Muslim men seated at the improvised mosque at the Malakasa camp. (Hello Asef)*

Additionally, in the introductory scene of the film “We are not shadows” women are shown from different angles piously praying and one of them reading the Koran on her mobile phone.



*Image 46. Reading the Koran from a mobile phone. (We are not shadows)*

They are seated on the floor at the “woman’s place” at the improvised mosque of Malakasa. The muezzin’s voice is heard and following the same motif as in the film “Hello Asef” denotes the start of the day and the beginning of the film narrative.



*Image 47. Muslim women are praying at the improvised mosque at the Malakasa camp. (We are not shadows)*

In another shot, a close up shot, shows the hands of an elderly woman holding prayer beads on her hands , whereas a scene from the camp of Hellinikon shows a man praying .



*Image 48. A woman holding in her hands prayer beads. (We are not shadows)*



*Image 49. A Muslim man praying at the Hellinikon camp. (We are not shadows)*

The scenes of the prayer are the visual mode of depicting refugees' religious activities and are not accompanied by oral narratives. In the morning prayer scene, no other sound is heard except the sound of the muezzin's voice. The following scenes that show the improvised mosque, invest Y's narration about the situation of women in Afghanistan.



*Image 50. Morning at the improvised mosque of Malakasa*

The final scene of the film "We are not shadows", presents different shots from the clouded sky at sunset where the muezzin's voice is heard in the background. The closure of the film shows shots of the clouded sky at the sunset. The religious element is obvious, giving at the same time meaning to the temporal sequence. The perception of time for the



directors seems to be defined by the time of prayer. The scene metaphorically indicates the faith to God and the hope that Y's aspirations will be realized.



*Image 51. Different shots of the final scene with the muezzin's voice in the background.  
(We are not shadows)*

The faith of O in God is also obvious in the film "in Between" created by non-refugee directors where he explains the strength he showed during their journey to Europe as providential.

*(00.01.08) You can feel strong because the God put something else maybe in your head and you feel strong.*

In another part of the same film, a dialogue is recorded between O and one of the creators, who is a teacher, regarding how biology perceives human and the latter raising his objections whether man is also an animal. This dialogue indicates O's belief in the spiritual nature of human implying that is a creature of God.

*(00.08.20) -Director's Voice: For biology human is an animal.*

*-O: But why? Why for biology human is an animal? but we are humans! why? that's a question! tell me ...You are a biology teacher!*

*-D. V: You don't think that human is an animal?*

*(00.08.38) -D. V: What is a human?*

*(00.08.41) O: Human! you are. Iam a human! What's the difference between animals and humans? You tell me. Can you tell me something about this?*

*-D. V. You tell me!*

(00.08.52)-O. No, I ask you.... What is the difference between human and animals?

(00.08.55)- D.V I say human is an animal. What do you say?

-O. I say it is not! Impossible!

-D. V Why?

(00.09.01)-O. Impossible! All the things God knows! We do not know about this. We are humans!

(0.09.09) -O. I need to search about it!...

### **5.5.8 The importance of the family**

Finally, family is a common theme in short documentaries is referring exclusively to adolescent refugees' life. Family in their narratives is presented as a source of love and support. The members of the family need to stay together in difficult situations, and we have seen that O (In Between) had crossed three countries with his family, supporting each other and now together with the rest of his family are waiting to be reunified with his brothers in Germany. The reunification with his brothers in Germany is something that all family are longing for and his mother mostly. This is clearly presented in a dialogue with his mother while waiting to call his brother in Germany. Everyday family interactions and ordinary dialogues between family members show him within this context. The container they are living in at the Elaionas camp, has become a temporary home for him and his family and camera follows him while he is at his place with his mother and sisters.



*Image 52. O's mother and sister in their container-house at the Malakasa camp (In Between )*

He recalls the beautiful moments he has spent with his father, he appreciates his legacies, wishing to follow his profession as he had promised him. In addition, O after the end of the play at the theater is thanking warmly and respectfully on camera his mother.

*(00.14.33) (in Farsi) I want to thank my mother for permitting me to play theater. I am very pleased. She is the one and only in the world. I love her so much, although sometimes we fight, and she gets angry with me. I am grateful she gave me the opportunity to discover new things. (In Between)*

Eventually, there is an expression of appreciation and gratitude from Y to her parents who support her aspirations for education and a better life (We are not shadows). It should also be noted that the parents allowed these teenagers to participate in the project.

*(00.11.19) I am glad that I have a family who understands me and followed the traffickers to come her, for my education, for my future and now faces these problems (We are not shadows).*

## **6. Differences and common themes between films created by refugees and films created by non-refugees.**

All the presented films in this study touch core issues that are relevant to the transitional stage of young refugees' life, as well as the transitional phase they are in due to their developmental stage. The inner and subjective dimension of their migratory experience has been highlighted. The sense of uncertainty and precariousness due to their refugee status and the liminal stage they are in, is common in all films. A sense of agency is prevailing and also an urge to move forward to their new life, to take all the chances and show resilience and hope. Their past experiences in their homeland are mostly presented as traumatic and unbearable, in some cases threatening for their lives. Educational aspirations are strongly presented, are ordinary in all films and constitute one of the main reasons of their refugeeness, a strong motivation to gain a better life and support their expectations and objectives for their future. In all the documentaries analyzed, the characters are projected as active agents that have a positive stance to life no matter their painful experiences and past and present adversities.

The political stance of the creators, to speak as advocates of their own community is clear only in the documentaries that were created by refugees (Hello Asef, We are not Shadows). The camera in the hands of the refugee directors become their expressive and liberative tool to bring to the public their refugee life and the problems they envisage, the oppressive status of women in Afghanistan and in the camp of Malakasa. Life in the camp of Malakasa, which is located away from residential areas, is vividly and thoroughly depicted in the visual part, completing the oral narrative, portraying the sense of loneliness and isolation as well as the inertia and the impasse the persons are experiencing.

In addition, the narrative structure of the films created by refugees focuses on a temporal sequence of narration. The narrative is an oral narration of personal experience, a life history in fragments almost without any dialogues. The first and the last scene of each film coincides with the beginning and the end of the day. The religious element described in the films, projecting the scenes in the improvised mosque during the morning prayer and the muezzin's voice at the sunset, underlines their religiosity as well as the time definition in their culture which is in accordance to the time of the prayer. Religion is a

point of reference in all films that refugees have created, an element of their personal and cultural identity, is the stable space of comfort, security and hope. Moreover, there is scene where a man plays Afghan flute, which brings to light Afghan people's musical tradition and offers an emotionally effective element to the film. The setting of both films is their everyday life setting which is the camp of Hellinikon and of Malakasa.

On the contrary, there is a variety in the narrative modes and expression in the films whose creators are not refugees. The narrative of the film includes narration, dialogues, observational mode, switching between many scenes and shooting locations, flash backs and a variety of framing, types of shots, shooting angles, and camera movement, presenting a more refined film language, especially in the film "In Between". In the dialogues presented, sometimes the voice of the director is heard while asking, and ordinary conversations of participant's everyday life are presented. The stories of the participants are constructed interactively through dialogue and improvised during the process of interview and shooting. Moreover, in the film "Undercover rapper" the director participates in the film either as voice when she asks T about his artistic nickname and his involvement in rap music, his life conditions in Syria and his future plan. The director also participates on camera when she is walking with T at the streets of Athens, with all the creative team members while they are escorting T at the final scene where they see the lights of Athens from above.

Directors' identities in some scenes become apparent, for instance when one of the directors in the film "in Between" asks O as a biology teacher, what is human for him while he gives a scientific explanation and asking O to support his own stance with arguments. The other director of the film "Undercover rapper" is likely to have been fascinated by T's artistic nature which we could assume has to do with her own artistic interests. The settings of the films are different and multiple, denoting not only the ease of movement of the participants but also of the creators. The narrative is not following a temporal sequence, and they want to convey the message of resilience, creativity, and agency that their participants demonstrate, breaking the stereotypical images of refugees in the public discourse of that time. Participants needs seem to be respected and it is evident that the creators have created a relationship with the participants and also a safe space for their self-presentation. Film making is a highly interactional process, even though it entails power asymmetries, that reshapes and renegotiates perceptions and self-

representation of both creators and participants. There is an effort to depict an accurate image of themselves, however the presentation is always mediated by the directors' needs, point of view and personal stance on the refugee issue. The framing of the project as well as the objectives were clear for the creators and the consultant directors. The latter tried to be non-directive but to empower and to interact with the amateur creators and provide them with the basic technical skills for documentary production.

## **7. Audience research and impact of documentaries**

### **7.1 Findings /results**

#### **7.1.1 Refugees' identities as perceived by the audience.**

In this part we are going to explore the ways the audience responded to young refugees' identities that were presented in films. The reactions of the spectators after the screening of the films were different. Most of the spectators were surprised saying that the films presented a distinct image of this that they had previously in mind. Yet, all the spectators acknowledged young refugees' optimism and agency even though it looked rather unexpected for some viewers, or something that the filmmakers expected the participants to show:

*-C: "There was actually a lot of information! I was taken by surprise! Even though I considered myself knowledgeable and sensitized about refugees' condition, this was a totally different picture of them, not better or worse, but different. I was really amazed!", "I was astonished that they were so optimistic, studious and fighters. We Greeks are different people. We are not such fighters and optimistic!"*

*-K: "I was expecting to watch about their hardships and difficulties that brought them in Greece",*

-F: *"They weren't narrating what themselves wanted to tell, but more or less what the directors wanted to hear. But the directors should have help them with the appropriate questions".*

M, a refugee himself, could very well comprehend refugees' agency and optimism in their narratives at this stage of their stay in Greece:

-M.: *"These young people need to move forward, and they must support their choices, but they need assistance from the Greek state and the Greeks".*

This viewer underlined the tough situation in Greece and the difficulties himself encounters to obtain the Greek citizenship, the problems he confronted and still confronts to learn the Greek language and work at the same time to support himself and his family in his country. He thinks that the young characters in films want to go ahead as well as himself does:

-M: *"They want to go ahead, to progress, to go out of the camp and start a new life".*

In the context of focus group discussion participants' own experiences played an important role in the perception of the films' characters. M. the refugee viewer, bringing his own experiences and identifying with them could realize refugees' difficulties:

M: *"It is not easy for a young person who comes as a refugee to support him/herself in the host country, to learn the language, or study at the same time".*

Moreover, M comparing his own life as a refugee with the expectations of young refugees being in a transitional phase at the camp, insisted:

M: *"These youngsters need your help, the Greek state's help, otherwise they won't be able to go out of the camp. They need to have papers and go on with their lives".*

Hence, M being a refugee himself, he used the context of this focus group discussion to speak on behalf of other refugees in a politically active stance, reminding us of the political active attitudes of the characters in refugee creators' films.

The other spectators also brought their own experiences, and this influenced the ways they perceived refugees' identities. C expressed her suspicion about refugees' real identities

and justified it bringing an example of a person she knew that he managed to work as a teacher in USA using false papers. F. on the occasion of C's words, referred to his own experience when he was working away from his home, where he was constantly feeling as a stranger, comparing himself with young refugees who would always be perceived as "xenoi" (foreigners, strangers) in the host country.

Moreover, F's personal experiences influenced the way he saw the characters in the films as not aware of their new reality. Hence, he noted giving the example of his migrant students, that they were not informed about the papers they needed to have and that he continually urged them to complete their paperwork and establish a better relation with the system of bureaucracy in Greece.

Finally, K understood young refugees' agentive identity characterized by expectations and dreams something quite familiar to her, something that probably reminded of her own expectations and dreams as a young woman.

### **7.1.2 Audience response to young refugees' educational aspirations**

Young refugees' optimism and educational aspirations a recurring theme in all films, were not understandable by some audience members and this became a contentious issue of the focus group discussion. Their big dreams originate, as C claimed, from their bad relation to their new reality.

*C: "they have very high dreams, and I cannot tell how they are going to realize these dreams in Greece. Dreams are for free", " but there should be a realism in dreams!"*.

The other participant, F. took the thread from C, but he gave another explanation claiming that this was the result of naïve questions posed by the directors:

*F: "They should ask them how are you going to realize your dreams? How are you going to do these things that you want? They should have asked them questions that could make them realize what their new reality is. When you have a child, you*



*ought to put him/her into reality. So, they needed guidance to adjust to this reality".*

Only the agency and the effort of the two adolescent Afghani girls to escape their fate of illiteracy in Afghanistan and the choice of one of them to take her headscarf off and present herself in front of the camera in the film "We are not Shadows" was received in a positive way by F:

*F: "This film had a purpose and showed us the contradictions and the reality here and in their country that these girls were envisaging. These girls are in contact with the reality ".*

Educational perspectives and desires were very intensely posed within the frame of documentaries by all young characters. Yet, their aspirations were considered improbable:

*C: "One of the characters said he wants to be a doctor. How is he going to accomplish that? Does he know that he needs approximately 1900 points to go to medical school in Greece? Maybe he means he wants to go and study in another country, like Germany or Italy. How are they going to manage in this country that is bankrupted, and young's unemployment rate is 25%?"*

Doubts and suspicion were expressed about their educational background as well as their age:

*C: "How do we know that he is telling the truth? Are there any proofs for that? I also have doubts about their age!! And I don't know if they actually have papers! It's a weakness to believe everything they say!"*

C could not believe that the Syrian refugee in the movie "Undercover rapper" was telling the truth about his studies and high educational background having a master's degree and asked for evidence:

*-C: "Yes but we have no confirmation about his degrees! You cannot acknowledge to him something that he cannot prove its existence to you".*

It becomes clear from the above mentioned that for adolescent and young refugees, educational aspirations seem inaccessible and unrealistic by some members of the audience and when they claim about their qualifications one of the viewers expressed her

doubts emphatically. Nevertheless, it seems rather contradictory that the viewers who have expressed these opinions, are high school teachers whose role is to cultivate educational aspirations for their students.

At this point, there were conflicting opinions and perspectives from other members of the group. There was a strong intervention from K addressing to C in a rather intense tone:

K: *"Why should they tell such lies? This is not a TV show!!"*

C: *"Because they want to have a future!"*

K's answer was an indirect criticism about the acceptance of media practices to use refugees' stories to increase their viewing. For the young viewer K their dreams and aspirations were perceived as the prominent elements of their identity:

K: *"it is not their hardships that characterized them but their dreams and agency". They have interests they want to do things and they look familiar to me".*

This was a different perspective that recognized their agency, dissenting the other viewers' perceptions.

M the refugee participant, speaking about his own experiences and hardships, he identified himself with the educational aspirations that all young refugees have expressed in films. He focused more on his own difficulties to have access to education as an adult. He added that he was working hard to support himself and his family in his homeland and finally he managed to have a rather profitable work as an artisan, however he does not have the opportunity to go to school and learn Greek.

M: *"Yes, I understand. But the one who wants to stay here (In Greece) will surely understand what he wants to do. But we have a problem with the papers and the rest, he does not have time to do anything."*

-C: *"What do you mean he doesn't have time?"*

-M: *"He must go to school, learn the language"*

-C: *That's what I'm saying that dreaming is okay, it's for free. But...*

-M: *"No, there is nothing for free. If I want to go to school now, I must quit my job and go to school. And I do not have any help to learn the language. The state does not help!"*

-C: *"That's what I meant!!"*

However, the way they presented their interests like reading, music, theater or keeping and extending their networks via internet, their expression through art evoked a sense of familiarity from the young student and these narratives were not considered unrealistic, but as an expression of their new reality:

K: *"They are looking for a better life, have a lot of interests (reading, music, theater), they are connected to their friends on the internet, and they need to make a new start and chase their dreams even though it is not sure if they are going to succeed. Here, I have to disagree with Mr F who said they are not in contact with the reality. This is exactly what they want to show in those films, their new reality!"*.

### **7.1.3 Documentaries' impact to the audience perception of refugees**

The findings presented here are relevant to the question whether refugees' identities as presented in films had influenced the spectators' perceptions on them. The answers indicate different aspects and degree of impact of these films to the audience. C noted that is difficult for those who have already an established view on refugees to change their opinions and perceptions just by watching these films. Nevertheless, those who are in favor of refugees, by watching these films could probably seek ways to help them:

-C: *"if someone has an already established opinion it would be difficult to change it only by watching these films. If someone does not like refugees won't change his/her stance, having in mind that there is not any sensibility at all about the suffering, the drownings, the pain. On the contrary, if someone is already sympathetic to refugees, she will consider ways that she could help these youngsters, to assist them to open their professional horizons. However, people do*

*not change by watching films! Not even the harsh reality has managed to change them!"*

However, she suggested that those films would benefit students providing them a good opportunity to become more sensitive and active with refugees, justifying her view saying that:

C: *"Children are more sensitive and do not have established views as grown people have".*

Another spectator F. presented a more practical approach considering films as a field for the creation of job opportunities for refugees:

F: *"Professionals should watch the films and help these young people to have a job or learn a profession. That's how these films would be useful for them."*

Nevertheless, the same spectator thought that most people do not change their perceptions but seek the security of their familiar experiences, and they are not interested in other people's experiences:

F: *"In other words, they all want the security of the experiences they already have. They are rarely interested in knowing the other's story."*

However, F thought that those films became the stimulus for further thinking and analysis:

F: *"I saw these films as a good reason for reflection, thinking and further analysis"*

K the young student expressed her sympathy towards young characters, identifying herself with them. She recognized that she could share with the characters the feelings of precariousness they experienced in the transitional period they were in realizing that it would not be unlikely to find herself in their position.

*"These films brought these young people closer to me and I realized that they are just like me, like every other young person that lives next door. I felt very close to the girls even though we have different life experiences and religion. I realized also that if things changed suddenly in my country, because of poverty or war, I could come to their position, and this is something that I want to keep in my mind".*

Moreover, K said that viewing the films enabled her not only to understand each narrator as a person, to realize their position, their insecurities, the fears and the hardships they were facing at the camp, but also to comprehend where their optimism comes from. She considered their optimism their dominant characteristic and this realization seems to have shaped a different perception for young refugees.

*K: "I understand that they need to be optimistic, and this is a way to comfort themselves and get over the obstacles. It is true that they evoked me optimistic mood that's the dominant feeling and I had a sense of familiarity with them. I felt that through each of these narrations I encountered each person with whom I felt very close. I saw their fears, and the anxiety for the future they had".*

M the refugee spectator stated in a straightforward and clear manner the need for refugees to be supported by the state and the locals. Having similar experiences with the film characters, he understood well their needs and wanted to articulate them:

*M: "these young people in films need a lot of state assistance and support to create a new life but they also need to go to school and have a job. Greece does not offer these opportunities.*

The films also had an emotional impact on the spectators. C maintained that she felt a kind of bitterness because these young refugees are not realists and adaptive, they do not know the difficulties they will come up and this could cause them suffering.

*C: "They do not understand the actual conditions! How will they land to the reality? How much pain must they suffer before they realize where they are? It a bitterness all this, the bitterness of the impasse. They have not understood in which country they arrived!!"*

F replied that the films provoked only emotions, without naming them, but what would be actually useful for them, is reason so that they could move steadily forward:

*F: "We need to adjust to the reality we need reason not emotions to evaluate the situation around us, where we live, where we are, where we step and to take the next small step, in the direction we want".*

He added that he wanted to find answers in these films whether now is better than before when they lived in their countries, and he would like to see a second film about their lives some years after, in order to learn if their dreams have fulfilled. Giving emphasis to their present situation and not to their past experiences as narrated in films, this viewer seems not to acknowledge the reasons that pushed them escaping their countries. However, he avoided speaking personally about the impact of the films on him, he claimed that he needed to know whether the films would have a positive affect for young refugees to fulfill their goals.

F: *"I would like to learn whether their lives have changed after these movies if these movies have offered them something, if the film has helped them to attain their goals, if it has opened new roads in their lives"*.

## **8. Discussion**

### **8.1 Constructing and projecting identities through film narrative.**

This research aimed to explore the individual stories of adolescent and young refugees presented in four documentary films and how through these audiovisual narratives they constructed, negotiated and performed their identities by showing different aspects of their lives, experiences, values, aspirations and fears and the audience response to these narratives.

First person documentaries where young refugees are narrating their stories, is a way to communicate their experiences as well as a process for their identity negotiation. Storytelling and autobiographical narration in video recording can become a political act of self-awareness and self-affirmation, producing a "self-shooting reflexivity" (Dowmunt, 2013). Refugees' stories in those films are negotiable accounts that are context shaped and context /shaping connected with local purposes and practices (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015), contrary to the media and public discourses that encounter them disconnected of the historical and political frame that has produced their refugeeness (Malkki, 1996). Hence, the narrative accounts -verbal and visual- of the characters in the films are based

on how they perceive and project themselves and the world around them in the new circumstances they are living in as refugees. These young men's and women's present status motivates them to realize and reflect on their past and present experiences shaping a social awareness which is expressed in films as a political stance.

In the documentaries created by young refugees "Hello Asef" and "We are not shadows" we see the narrators speaking on behalf of their community at the camp of Malakasa, where they live at this period of their life. In these cases, they are using the film as a vehicle to convey their message to the audience. Some researchers argue that personal biographies could contribute to political advancement and constitute political discourse, "particularly when conveyed in public autobiographic discourse" (De Fina, 2018, p.51). By this approach, young refugees decide to highlight their problems, in their new life transitional stage presenting themselves as advocates of their own society. This is a common stance especially when refugees are given the opportunity to speak to the public. Arvanitis supports that considering themselves privileged they think that it is their obligation to advocate for other refugees (Arvanitis, 2020).

In this context they ask the European governments to listen to refugee problems and the administrators are called to understand their needs. Young adolescent women on the one hand intend to show Afghan refugees' life at the camps of Hellinikon and of Malakasa, while on the other they are determined to make Afghan women's problems of suppression visible to the public. One of the characters shares his personal biography with the audience of the "Alpha" theater (In Between), while another highlights the problems of refugees in Greece in order to raise awareness on the "refugee issue" at this specific period of time while working as a volunteer in a digital radio (Undercover Rapper).

Furthermore, film making becomes a process for young people coming from marginalized groups, to have a positive sense of the self (Halverson, 2010) and become a factor that facilitates their identity development (Hull & Katz, 2006) producing counter narratives through their stories that resist injustice (Chase, 2019). Adolescent creators project a liberated woman identity, breaking the rigid patriarchal stereotypes for women of the Afghan society. In other cases, it provides young refugees—the chance to construct a perception of their life's trajectories their educational aspirations and professional goals. Youth-produced videos serve as tools of identity exploration and in action representation

of themselves (Halverson, et.al 2012). Reissman mentions that by studying the identity construction we need to know how participants want to be known, how they are “doing their identity” (Reissman, 2005, p.5) underlining the performative dimension of identity construction. Therefore, identity is in the doing, rather than in the thinking, a process rather than a fixed notion of the self (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015).

The performing of the self on camera is obvious in scenes where the narrative is the body posture, gesture, gaze, style and music in a performative presentation of self (Undercover rapper, In between), or in film where the performing of the self, conveys a message orally or visually and becomes a process of formulating a notion of themselves (We are not shadows). Taking off the hijab and exposing their faces on camera, perform and present acts of self-determination that contradict the role that Muslim society requires from women and girls to play, namely, not to be exposed publicly, be properly dressed and be modest (Lipson & Miller, 1994). The process of presentation and renegotiation of identity is a painful and conflictual process as the young Afghan adolescent perceives it and this is depicted on film.

Through their presence and narration in films we see that young refugees demonstrate and construct a positive and active sense of self. Either as participants or as directors, film making becomes the chance to construct and perform their identities in the specific context of time, place, present status and the process of film making.

## **8.2 Audience response to refugee identities as presented in films.**

In the focus group discussion, most of the spectators appear to have different perceptions about refugees' identities, than those the short documentaries presented. Even though they could not tell with accuracy what their perceptions were, however, we can suppose that they were expecting that young refugees would be pessimistic and hopeless and would focus their narration mainly on their traumatic experiences, and victimhood.

The researcher/ moderator explained them that the aim of the project was a counter-presentation of refugee's identities than the one that the domestic or international mainstream media presented, nevertheless it seemed that some members of the audience



had adopted the dominant public discourse about them. This can be justified by the feelings of surprise they had and their rather awkward response to their optimistic and resilient identities.

At this time, in 2015 during the so-called "refugee crisis", they were represented in the media either as passive victims without agency, or as villains, a threat to the European security and values (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017) and this was also the stance towards young refugees (Wernesjö, 2019). As victims, innocent, vulnerable, "speechless emissaries" (Malki, 1996) seem to have lost any other previous identity and became "refugees". Thus, this new homogenous identity has transformed them into "hapless victims" (How, 2021). Vulnerability and the creation of a "spectatorship of suffering" through media images, may evoke sentiments of solidarity, based however on power asymmetries between the affluent West and the developing South (Chouliaraki, 2013). This way, the west has created the victimized and traumatized other who must reaffirm his/her vulnerability every time that he/she presents him/herself in order to acclaim assistance and solidarity. Passiveness, vulnerability, and exclusion seem to be a part of their refugeness.

These young refugees, boys and girls that were presented as diverse stories and unique voices in documentaries, were accepted by some members of the audience that shared with them some kind of affinity and identification due to age, or similar experiences. However, they were depicted by some other viewers as undifferentiated, outside the ideal and normal context of adolescence or young adulthood. Their positive identities and the agency they showed in documentaries' narrations was not easily received and this kind of active expression was probably "the director's idea" and not their own attitude towards their new reality.

This stance could also reveal an anxiety about young refugees' future and a need for their guidance. Thus, while youth can be carrier of expectations, at the same time it embodies the concerns and fears that are rooted in the society (Lems et al. 2019). In the perception of some viewer, young refugees realize and understand nothing about their new reality and are considered ignorant of the situation in Greece. The image of the victimized, helpless and ignorant child separated from the historical, social and political background "rests on the western opposition between affect and reason" (Malkki, 2010, p. 67) and these young

refugees are perceived as lacking a reasonable approach to reality. Hence, “on the one hand they are carriers of unmediated, universal, timeless, affective, moral, incontestable truth, while on the other hand they are away from factual, temporal, historical, political, ambiguous, contestable, specific, rational truth” (Malkki, 2010, p. 70).

Furthermore, for young refugees it is more common to be deprived of their educational aspirations and dreams although these characteristics are inextricably linked with adolescence and youth. Doubts were also expressed by one of the spectators about the truthfulness of their stories. These perceptions converge to the public discourse that have risen during the “refugee crisis” in most European countries. Suspicions about their age and motives, a “culture of disbelief”, has emerged concerning young refugees who were deemed to be providing false identity information, because they wanted to pass as legitimate in the asylum process (Finch, 2005 as cited in Wernesjö. 2019). The “children of the crisis” as were depicted through public discourse, could fake their age and identity aiming to welfare benefits and asylum process (Lems, et al., 2019).

Their engagement with creative activities while waiting was perceived and accepted as their creative and active side by the younger audience members. Still, the collective identity that young refugees projected through films as advocates of their own community, displaying to the public the impasse they were living in, was not perceived by most members of the spectators. The only exception was the refugee viewer who himself tried to convey young refugees’ message on their behalf, reaffirming the role of representative of the refugee community when the opportunity was given. He focused on their actual needs to move forward and get out of the camps comprehending their difficulties during the liminal period they were experiencing and asking from the administrators and the locals their assistance.

Moreover, the request for freedom was only acknowledged to the female characters of the films (*We are not shadows*) as realistic and remarkable and was not perceived as a recognizable request from the other film characters.

### **8.3 Aspirations and fears**

Adolescent and young refugees are in a double transitional stage being at the same time refugees and young. At this stage of their lives the decisions they make and the available opportunities affect their lives and shape their future. Desires, hopes and aspirations are an inextricable part of their youthfulness and all the characters presented, are conceptualizing their future as having access to education, learning opportunities and knowledge.

As alluded in the findings, in their aspiration for a better life and wellbeing, education is considered a particularly important factor and a strong motivation for them to fight for. The teenage characters want to have access to higher education, while the adults want to gain knowledge and continue their studies. Their expectations are high. Y wants to be a mathematician (*We are not shadows*), whereas O (*In Between*) decides to become a doctor like his father and because he wants to take care of his mother. Often the narrative structure of films underlines the point they want to highlight. In this sense, the first and the last part of Y's narration (*We are not shadows*) is her dream to continue her education and this underlines the importance she ascribes to this. The desire of recognition of his certifications and a job that will meet his qualifications is a claim that the Syrian youth makes on camera (*Undercover Rapper*). Their fears are mainly connected to the deprivation of their educational and professional opportunities. The narration of Y starts with the reason her family decided to leave Iran where they were refugees, and this was the restrictions to have access to education.

The visual part of their narratives on their educational aspirations describes visual metaphors; a pigeon (*Hello Asef*), an open book (*We are not shadows*) or the presentation of the character in front of a closed University door when T talks about his fears that this postgraduate title will not be recognized (*Undercover rapper*).

Challenging the dominant discourses, young refugees appeared in these documentary films, active agents of their lives, independent, with educational requests, away of representations of victimhood or untrustworthiness (Arvanites et al,2019). Their hopes for a better, safe and free future where they can fulfil their educational aspirations, are part of their refugee identity and the reason why they had to leave their country. However these

aspirations were treated as inaccessible and unrealistic by the older members of the audience.

Young refugees' aspirations for higher education create the opportunity to overcome their marginalization, utilizing a range of strategies to achieve their educational goals (Shakya et al., 2010), create a space for them to imagine new possibilities (Ghorashi, 2018), motivates them to envision their future in a positive way (Ryu & Tuvila, 2018), can become the necessary pathway for their independence (Arvanitis, 2020) and ascribe to them the freedom and the capability to have these aspirations (Hart, 2016). Moreover, research on immigrant aspirations, considering educational resilience that immigrants develop, demonstrated that their optimism is connected to the goal of socioeconomic improvement and can be a reaction to the socioeconomic barriers they face (Salikutluk, 2016). This optimism is also motivated by significant others and social relations, by migrants' desire for personal development, their urge to actively contribute to the host society and it is connected to pre-migration educational expectations making their reasons for leaving their homeland worthwhile (Lynnebakkea & Pastoor, 2020). However, there is not always a connection between educational aspirations and educational achievements and some studies support that there is an information deficit which proposes that the lack of knowledge about the education system in the country of settlement can explain why minorities have unrealistically optimistic or pessimistic aspirations (Kao & Tienda, 1998 as cited in Lynnebakkea & Pastoor, 2020, p.3).

Concerning the focus group discussion, refugees' educational aspirations were recognized as a core issue in the films that brought conflict and contradictory attitudes. These aspirations were comprehended only by the younger members of the audience who recognized them as a self-empowering as well as a strong stimulus to move forward and gain a better life, ascribing to them the freedom to have dreams and the capability to realize them. Yet, these aspirations and dreams were treated as inaccessible and unrealistic based on lack of information and knowledge of the actual conditions by the older members of the audience.

## 8.4 Life in transition

Refugees' transitional stage is obvious in all films. All the characters are waiting for their papers for a long time that exceeds one year. This long waiting period is rendered in detail by filming in the camps (Hello Asef, we are not shadows, In Between) where the picture of everyday routine is given. Children playing, men and children at the recreation room, or taking care of the household, people waiting at the queue for every day's food, reading, being busy with their mobile phones, the time of everyday prayer at the mosque. Having a sense that they are "stuck" in this long "temporary condition", their migratory experience becomes an everyday oscillation between despair and hope, inertia and action. This phase is a limbo phase, a period of liminality, meaning a transitional period between one stage to another, a "In between" stage as it this the title of one of the films. "Liminal entities are neither here or there; they are betwixt and between possessing nothing being ground down to a uniform condition" (Turner,1977, p. 85). The impasse they are in, is expressed with feelings of precariousness, uncertainty and fear for the future, where time is suspended "the time have stopped", living in a space of restriction, especially for those living in remote camps "we have nowhere to go". Ghorashi notes that refugee camps in secluded or remote areas provoke feelings of sorrow, stress, grief and loss and the waiting time when is related to the experience "of directionless stasis" could become destructive (Ghorashi, 2018, p.374).

This long waiting period gives them a sense of helplessness and generates feelings that they do not have control over their lives: "there is no way to move ahead "we cannot start anything" (Hello Asef). A wonders about time, while his own is suspended "are you still thinking of time<sup>20</sup>?" Waiting is not a neutral situation but reveals power relations and sociopolitical regulations. Making someone waiting is a regulation of other's time and implies that his/her time is less worthy than the time of those who had imposed such waiting (Khosravi, 2021). This "perpetual suspension and the predicament of being 'stuck,' in a prolonged wait for a job, a house, an education, marriage, a visa, or asylum, makes people feel out of sync with others and surrounded by a growing sense of disconnectedness" (Khosravi, 2021, p.14).

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<sup>20</sup> A in an interview after the screening of his movie at Goethe institute (Athens, 17/10/2017) said that "I did not want just to kill my time at the camp". <https://www.homenewhome.gr/index.php/el/qna-el/qna-athens-el/192-q-a-asef-el>

Nevertheless, this transitional stage is experienced in contradictory manners by young refugees. Hence, this in between space brings not only frustration, anxiety, and insecurity but also engagement in new activities. In some cases, this transitional phase is perceived as a phase where there is time to reflect, renegotiate their past experiences, review their life trajectories, be engaged in meaningful activities and finally reconstruct and enrich their identities. These activities could be their participation in artistic projects, engagement with volunteering work for their community, going to school, learning a new language, taking care of the household and the children, repairing, or extending the house they live in, writing, playing and listening to music.

All these activities are articulated in narratives but mostly are depicted diligently in the visual part of the documentaries. O (In Between) presents his story performatively on stage at the "Alfa" theater. And of course, all the characters either as creators or as participants are taking part in the project "Home new home". Being outside societal structures and routine activities at this transitional stage of their lives, allows them to make plans for the future and think beyond the limitations of the "normal" structures where vitality, imagination and creativity emerge (Gorashi, 2018). Therefore, "liminality can bring not only ambiguity, displacement and disruption but also new possibilities" (Arvanitis et al. 2019, p. 136).

However, their liminal state condition, their feelings of fear, precariousness and insecurity as the negative aspect of their life in this transitional phase, were recognizable by the younger members of the focus group and mainly by the refugee viewer who were able to be identified with them having similar experiences. Yet, the positive aspect of this transitional condition that is their communicative mood and their creativity, were acknowledged by the younger viewers as well.

These films, choosing a different perspective that focuses on character's potential, capabilities, and aspirations bring through refugees' biographies, a different perception to the narratives of victimhood that usually escort their public presentation. Changing the questions and giving emphasis to their dreams and abilities we take different answers that underline their agency and feed the power of their imagination (Ghorashi, 2018).

## **8.5 The concept of freedom**

The experiences in their homeland that they recall in their narratives, some of them self-defining events, are connected to traumatic and stressful events, death, deprivation of basic rights, and danger for their life. Escaping their homeland in a perilous journey was a matter of survival “we decided to save ourselves” and of gaining a better life. Better life means freedom and safety, so the deprivation of freedom identifies their past experiences, to their present condition and future aspirations. The idea of freedom as well as its opposite unfreedom is evident in all the films in various depictions and in different contexts. This is a prevailing idea in all films and entails different practices that are relevant with their everyday life.

For refugees, freedom means escaping from a condition of unfreedom in their homeland and a claim of social and legal assurance of their freedom in the host country. However, even in Greece, freedom is not given especially for young refugees living in the camps far away from the city. This ideal connected with other values like justice and peace, is strongly projected verbally and visually escorted with feelings of loss and frustration (Hello Asef). Ghorashi in her research with asylum seekers in the Netherlands supports that dependency has strong influence on them provoking feelings of losing control over their lives and frustration (Ghorashi, 2018).

The lack of freedom is also depicted as the lack of free expression, something that pushed young refugees to flee their homeland in order to be able to express themselves their own way (Undercover Rapper). In the new circumstances that refugees live, freedom for them means freedom of mobility, a right to have access to opportunities that the host country can provide them. In this manner, those who have accessibility to the city can have chances to develop their capabilities, gain new experiences and a more active attitude towards their new life, walking through the streets of the city, meeting new people, having opportunities for education, job and self-expression (In Between). Thus, freedom for refugees means “capability to be or do certain things and to choose between different ways of living” (Chase, 2019, p.4).

It is the strong belief in freedom that makes the Afghan teenage girl to doubt the status of dependency and oppression of Afghan women in their homeland and in “the small Afghanistan” as she characterizes the camp. She says that women have to “take

permission" for their movement and their relationships and courageously decides to give herself "permission" to speak on camera. Y is wondering "why can't I be free?" and A the other teenager, claiming her dependency and her self-determination, decides to "unveil" herself when she came to Europe, contrary to the strict rules of her society, presenting a self-perception which is agentic, dynamic, and non-compromising. Nasiri supports that from refugees' point of view, border crossing and the creative process of movement is a claim for freedom and equality and this claim is completed through acts of resistance against border making, "struggles for justice as well as other emancipatory practices by which they claim an equal place in the world" (Nasiri, 2023, p.75).

Nevertheless, this strong value which was evident for all refugee characters in films was not discussed by the audience with only exception, the film "We are not shadows". The presentation of the Afghan women was perceived by some members of the audience as a self-liberating act, that resisted the patriarchal framework of their community.

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## **8.6 Stable references in a transitional phase**

Apart from their future aspirations which constitute a point of reference in their life, family and religious ties are portrayed verbally and visibly in films as two stable points of reference in refugees' fluid transitional world that provide safety and support. Family creates a security nexus for adolescent refugees to explore the outside world, to have experiences and find opportunities, it is a supportive factor for their educational aspirations. The mutual support that family provides made the difficult journey to Europe to have a successful end, to confront death and face traumatic and threatening situations. Reunification is something that all family members look forward to and it keeps its members together in the insecure phase they are in (in Between). At this point it should be considered that only for the adolescent characters in film family constitutes a referential point in their narratives. Family life is captured in many shots in the film "in Between" and depicts their everyday routine in the waiting phase of family's reunification.

Research has shown that family can provide coping strategies for refugee children and adolescents to deal with adversities and uncertainty while living in a transitional stage with



their parents (Grigoropoulos, 2021). It is also one of the protective factors for adolescents to endure uncertainty and have resilience during the waiting period until their resettlement (Sleijpen, et. al, 2017).

In addition, even though there is no reference in religion in refugees' oral narrations, the visual part of the two films created by refugee creators (Hello Asef, In Between) shows many shots of the Muslims' prayer and of the place of the improvised mosque at the Malakasa camp. The establishing scene in both films start with the morning prayer presented either aurally with the muezzin's voice or visually, indicating the beginning of the day and the time sequence in the film narrative. All these depictions reveal the importance of religion in their everyday life at the camp, denoting creators' affiliation in Muslim religion and faith, and projecting their religious identification. Religion is also a substantive element of their cultural identity. Faith in God is also evident in their world view and their perception of God's important place in their life as the source of support for his creatures, which is showed in another film created by non-refugee directors (In Between).

It is evident that religion constitutes a stable fundamental role in their lives and the improvised mosque at the camp constitutes a central gathering place, where refugee men and women pray and communicate. We should emphasize that the piety of women as is depicted in the film "We are not shadows" is more intense. This indicates the need for refugees to refer to faith in God and defines Muslim refugee's world view and way of thinking. The distress provoked by hard life conditions and past experiences seem to be relieved during the prayer.

It has been supported that religion plays an important role to the resilience of young adolescent refugees having a positive influence and encouraging them to endure difficult situations (Hasan, Mitschke and Ravi, 2018). Especially women show their trust in God as a resource and a motivation toward perseverance (Akash, 2015 as cited in Hasan et. al., p. 4). Religiosity supported Palestinian women living in refugee camps to be accustomed to life in the camp. Attending places of worship can be a place of contact, of sharing beliefs and similarities (Schweitzer et al., 2007 as cited in Hasan et al., 2018 p, 6). Religion apart from playing an important role in Muslim refugees' identification, brings hope for the future, can be a source of comfort, help refugees to be resilient, to cope with

change, acquire a sense of stability and be empowered (Hasan et.al 2018). However, it is not easy for them especially for those living in big European countries to show their religious affiliation because of feelings of distrust and threat displayed by the host societies. It is this marginalization that intensifies their religious engagement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010).

Still, there is a counter-narrative that is expressed in one of the films (We are not shadows). It is a narrative and visual presentation of an adolescent Afghan refugee who decides to take off her hijab, the symbol of Muslim woman identity. She faces an internal cultural and identity conflict of whether she is a real Muslim. Presenting it as an act of self-liberation and probably an effort to fit in the European society, with this short narration she poses a core question about the internal conflict that Muslim women face in western societies. On the one hand, wearing the hijab can make them victims of racism or discrimination and for this reason they are asked, or they may wish to take it off to fit to the European societies. On the other hand, because of the discrimination and the denial of their woman identity, they need to wear it as an act of self-identification, active agency, political resistance against the attempts of the host society to silence them (Paz & Kook, 2020). Moreover, is an expression of independence and control over their bodies and life choices, especially in the precarious conditions of their refugeeness, as research on Muslim refugee women in Germany has demonstrated (Paz & Kook, 2020).

All the stories presented in the four films depict the time, the place and the circumstances of the participants' life stage and self-image. Film making becomes an empowering process at this transitional phase of their lives, to collect the fragments of their experiences and rebuild them through oral and visual narrative, to present their ambivalent feelings, their fears, their reflective mood, their dynamism and energy, their resilience and aspiration, their agency in authoring their identities. Film making and narration becomes a process of the construction, negotiation and performance of the self in a positive way. It creates the space to empower them to reconsider past and present hardships, alleviate frustration and sadness, depict instability and transition in a creative manner, aspire their future, express life trajectories and expose the important referential points in their lives.

## **8.7 Impact of documentaries to the audience**

From the abovementioned we can understand that meaning is constructed in the interaction between the audience and the media content. We need to underline the active engagement of audience in meaning making of the films the “viewer’s agency”, that is able to construct a story out of the representations of a film (Bordwell, 1985) Interaction between audience members had played a role to the negotiation of meaning, but each member of the focus group more or less brought to the discussion already shaped views on refugees as well as their own stories as the findings suggest. In this research, spectators seem to have adjusted their experience of watching these films to their own reality, point of view and perception.

According to cognitive theory, members of the audience interpret film stimuli based on their existing knowledge and beliefs and integrate them into their cognitive frameworks (Jongbloed & Gómez, 2021). The way people understand a film is not only a matter of personal experiences, but it is a product of institutional forces and a matter of commonly shared beliefs and values (Ros, et al.,2018). Individuals adjust personal experiences, and information to preexisting cognitive schemata and mental sets. Their attention focuses on information that is relevant to them and aligns with their beliefs, attitudes and social position and this can explain the themes that were visible to the researcher in the film analysis and these that were perceived by the audience. Personal experiences, attitudes and ideological stances influence them in the way they interpret and evaluate the films. Individual profile, cognitive abilities, media literacy skills, as well as age are factors that play a role of the ways the audience responds to film. Hall believes that audiences engage in the negotiation of meaning, influenced by their own cultural frameworks and social positions (Hall, 1993) and this became obvious in our focus group research.

Particularly age plays is an important factor of how people perceive things, and it became clear that the younger members of the focus group attained relatedness with the characters of the film and the fact that they belonged to the same age group helped them to have some kind of identification. M who is himself a refugee and therefore shares similar experiences could perfectly understand their stance and identities. “Identification with media characters may be usefully defined as an imaginative process invoked as a response to characters presented within mediated texts” (Cohen. 2001, p.250).

The findings suggest that younger people do not have the same distance when watching a film with older members of the group who keep a distance from the characters and have a less emotional response, or a response that aligns to their age, perceptions and the social role they assign to themselves.

## **8.8 Emotional impact of films to the audience**

The experience that the spectators had while viewing these films, was an addition to their real-life experiences and knowledge. Within a cognitive perspective, cognition and emotion work together. Away from the Cartesian logic supporting that cognition and feelings are two separate domains, cognitive theory considers that emotions organize perception, direct attention, and enable person to organize details into significant wholes (Carrol, 1999). Emotions and cognition are aspects of the way our brain works. Cognitive theory does not perceive emotions as formless but give emphasis on their structure (Plantinga & Greg, 1999). As Plantinga mentions emotions "can provide information about a film character, are linked with cognition and for this reason affective experience, meaning, and interpretation are firmly intertwined, and finally emotions as experienced in films have powerful rhetorical functions and contribute to a film's ideological effects" (Plantinga, 2009a, p.107).

The spectator's emotions "can be either identical with the hero or the main character of the film or can be entirely different, because each person has his / her own independent life" (Munsterberg, as cited in Plantinga & Greg, 1999, p. 15). In this focus group we saw both attitudes towards film characters' identities. Each member of the audience adjusted his/her emotional responses to the way they perceive the reality of the characters and their own independent affective life. The viewer of a fiction film understands that cannot affect character's life, but in documentary films this is different as it brings real life situations and real persons that exist. Emotions can be a motivation for potential action. Grodal supports those feelings of reality or unreality, or feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity influence the response of the audience to film characters (Grodal, 2009). Thus, the response of some members of the audience was to be active and do something about

refugees, to make people aware about their problems, even though some of them resisted some of the realities that young refugees expressed and projected their own feelings of frustration to the way they saw the characters of the films.

The evidence from this study suggests that the viewers were not passively susceptible to documentaries' influence. According to Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding (Hall, 1993), the meaning is actively constructed and negotiated by the recipients within the framework of specific sociocultural contexts. The creators of the films have sent to the audience messages within the frame of this period and sociohistorical context. However, it appears that some of the spectators have been in some ways influenced by the contradictory media representations of refugees during the "refugee crisis". Even though the films narrative created some stimuli for further thinking could not change some of the viewers perceptions on refugees.

Each of the members of the audience decoded in different ways the messages according to their experiential, social and emotional background. However, the films evoked feelings of sympathy, incentives for a more active stance and a broader perspective on the refugee issue than the one that media have shaped.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention that in this research there haven't been explored the aesthetic views neither of the creators or the audience, nor the level of audience's cinematic knowledge and experience which is also a factor that can influence film perception and meaning negotiation.

## **9. Conclusion**

The international project "Home new Home" that started in 2015, provided the framework for the development of short documentary films created both by refugees and non-refugee creators. In this study four short documentary films that were produced in 2017 in Greece, were selected and analyzed considering the overall context of their development, their content and their impact to the audience. Contrary to the mainstream media and public representations of refugees either as villains or victims, we described that these

(auto)biographical- first person short documentaries created individualized accounts of young refugees' lives.

Using a narrative thematic and visual approach in the analysis of young refugees visualized autobiographies, we studied their stories as a privileged field for identity construction, negotiation and performance. This work has revealed that these young men and women presented themselves as advocates of their own communities. The examination and analysis of films' recurring themes that emerged in all adolescent and young refugees' narrations considering their lives, pointed that their past traumatic experiences and frustrations did not define their attitude in a negative way. The findings demonstrated that being in a transitional phase of their life provoked to them anxiety, fear and precariousness, yet they tried to move forward, to aspire for a better and safe life, to seek for freedom and educational opportunities and respond in a positive way to the difficult conditions in the host country. Asking for a safe personal space within their families, religion, or personal interests and participation in artistic activities, they introduced themselves as active agents of their own lives. As it was suggested in the short documentaries, their participation in the documentary project, the process of film making and the interactions with the directors created an affirmative self-image that empowered them and strengthened their identities.

These films with the individualized stories that presented, attempted to produce counter-narratives to the narratives produced by mainstream media. This research sought to approach the impact of these films to the audience. Following a cognitive approach for the audience research and using focus group methodology, it was proved that each member of the focus group brought his/her own perceptions, stories, stances and emotions to the films. The audience was affected in diverse ways and brought new knowledge to most of the viewers, considering refugees' living conditions and their active profile as without any sense of victimhood. Young refugees' high educational aspirations and ambitions were not acceptable by the senior members of the audience that perceived them as unrealistic, whereas the young participants showed understanding and identified themselves to the characters. Moreover, the media representations seem to have affected the audience as they have already formulated a specific image for the refugees that was challenged in these films. All the participants seemed to agree that refugees were represented "in a different way than they expected" and this may indicate the efficacy of these short

documentaries to the audience. There was also criticism for the directors' choices supporting that young refugees' optimism was something that the directors wanted to show and was not representing their stance. Different opinions and disagreements were expressed referring to their optimism and agency. Most of the viewers did not perceive young refugees' narratives as an attempt to become advocates of their own community except for the refugee viewer who acted similarly to the refugee characters in the films during the focus group discussion. Yet, they seemed to understand the difficulties they encountered and some of them were familiarized with them. Age differences and life experiences seem to have formulated the different attitudes towards the characters in the films. Nevertheless, the documentaries created emotions to all the spectators and brought to the discussion ideas for potential action in favor of refugees.

The research on documentaries and digital visual material produced by refugees in the context of art-based projects, could offer valuable resources for the research of individual young refugees' stories as counter-narrations to the dominant hegemonic narratives. The specific documentary project could provide abundant material for further investigation into refugees' identities and lives. It could highlight their attitudes and emotions during the specific period and through their individual stories could provide an alternative approach to the study of migration.\_

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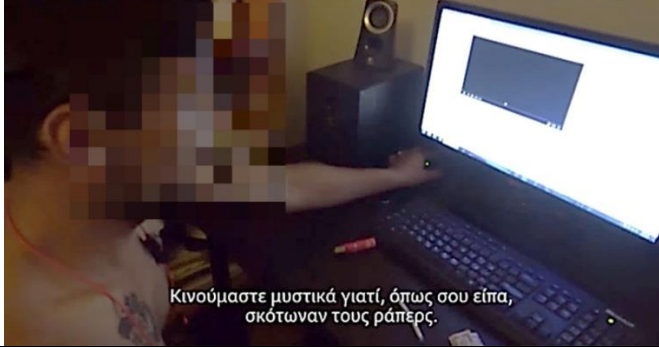




## Appendix : Indicative scenes

HELLO ASEF Salam Asef	2017 Director/script : Asef Feizi	Consultant director: Pesli Maria	Editing: Danaï Manousaridi
Words /narration English	Scene – cinematography	Sounds – music	Shots/images
00.02.41 The scenes I shot in the camp show everyday activities of the people. At least they are safe, but they feel desperate, because their future is unknown.	Hand camera and close up on a hand that is drawing a crying eye.	Voice over. Asef's Narration. Non-diegetic sound. Background diegetic sound from the shooting at the natural setting.	 <p>τις καθημερινές δραστηριότητες των ανθρώπων.</p>
00.04.07 A letter to Asef . Hello Asef. I have written to you this letter. Maybe one day you are going to read it. I hope to see you in better conditions	A close up of the hands of a man who holds a pen and a notebook writing	The narrator's voice and background sounds of the shooting	 <p>Ελπίζω να σε δω σε καλύτερες συνθήκες.</p>
00.10.19 Are you still thinking of time ?	Long shot. Hand camera from different angles in a room. There is a yellow note book , a book on the table with a white pigeon on the front cover and a pen.	Narrator's voice. Voice over ( non diegetic sound)	 <p>Σκέφτεσαι ακόμα το χρόνο;</p>
00.12.00	A man sitting on the bed is playing Afghan flute. He stops playing and gets up of the bed letting out a deep sigh. Medium shot	The sound of the Afghan flute is heard ( diegetic sound)	

IN BETWEEN 2017	By Nikos Katsos and Christos Stefanou Script: Katsos Nikos, Liakopoulou Maria, Stefanou Christos	Consultant director: Pesli Maria	Editing: Nikos Katsos and Christos Stefanou
Words/ Narration	Scenes /cinematography	Music	Images
00.01.08 You can feel strong, because the God put something else maybe in your head and you feel strong.	1 <sup>st</sup> scene A close up of his face	O's narration at the natural setting. (diegetic sound)	
00.10.49	10 <sup>th</sup> scene. O. on a bus listening to music wearing earphones and watching from the window. Medium shot	Rap music in farsi Medium shot (non diegetic sound)	
00.15.29 Omid's mother. "My God, help us"!	13 <sup>th</sup> scene. His mother has peeled the fruits and O. holds a box with cookies sitting on his bed. Medium shot	The sound of the shooting. Omid's mother voice. (diegetic sound)	
00.16.20	15 <sup>th</sup> scene O. sitting on his bed at the container house at the camp. He holds his head with his hand. Medium close up.	Children's voices at the background (diegetic sound)	

<p><b>WE ARE NOT SHADOWS</b></p> <p>2017</p>	<p><b>Collective Script/ directors</b></p> <p><b>Yegane Hassani</b></p> <p><b>Arezo Ghorabani</b></p> <p><b>Massomah Noori</b></p> <p><b>Massomah Haiwari</b></p>		<p><b>Counsaltant director Pesli Maria</b></p> <p><b>Editing: Manousaridou Danai</b></p>
<p><b>Words/narration</b></p>	<p><b>Scenes /cinematography</b></p>	<p><b>Sound /music</b></p>	<p><b>Images</b></p>
<p>00.01.36 Iam Y. Iam from Afghanistan but I was born and brought up in Iran.</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup> scene Medium shot. A young girl seated on a bus is watching outside</p>	<p>Narrator's voice over (non-diegetic sound) Sound of the shooting setting on the background (diegetic sound)</p>	 <p>Είμαι από το Αφγανιστάν, αλλά γεννήθηκα και μεγάλωσα στο Ιράν.</p>
<p>00.03.02 Still, refugees are obliged to stay there, without the right to choose.</p>	<p>10<sup>th</sup> From a big window view of the stairs and people going up and down,</p>	<p>Narrator's voice over, non-diegetic sound. Sound of the shooting setting on the background (diegetic sound)</p>	 <p>Οι πρόσφυγες, όμως, αναγκάζονται να μείνουν εκεί...</p>
<p>00.04.54 Permission is the word that every girl and woman hear in Afghanistan.</p>	<p>11<sup>th</sup> A woman gets out of her house. Another woman follows her holding a big bag in her hands. Long shot</p>	<p>Narrator's voice over ( non-diegetic sound).Sound of the shooting setting on the background (diegetic sound)</p>	 <p>Άρνηση είναι η λέξη που όλες οι γυναίκες και όλες οι κοπέλες του Αφγανιστάν...</p>
<p>00.09.07 She is punished, or stoned till death</p>	<p>15<sup>th</sup> Women talking at the camp. Long shot</p>	<p>Narrator's voice over , non-diegetic sound. Sound of the shooting setting on the background (diegetic sound)</p>	 <p>πληρώνεται και λιθοβολείται μέχρι θανάτου.</p>

<b>UNDERCOVER RAPPER 2017</b>	<b>Eirini Bazara /director</b>	<b>Consultant director: Govotsos Aggelos</b>	<b>Editing : Kostas Kontogeorgos</b>
<b>Words /narration</b>	<b>Scenes/cinematography</b>	<b>Sound</b>	<b>Images /shots</b>
00.01.00 It was prepared for a competition. Because each year, like last year, we had a group the Hp'z group, and we won the Empire Iraqi Rappers. It is a live competition. We have won the first position	Medium high angle shot. Tariq is sitting on the couch in his appartement.	T's voice ( diegetic sound).	 <p>και κερδίσαμε το Empire Iraqi Rappers. Είναι ένας ζωντανός διαγωνισμός</p>
00.01.20 We are moving undercover, because as I told you in Syria they were killing rappers. 00.01.23 This is the song we won the competition	T is in front of the Pc screen listening to his group rap song in Arabic	Rap music. T's voice (diegetic sound)	 <p>Κινούμαστε μυστικά γιατί, όπως σου είπα, σκότωναν τους ράπερς.</p>
00.04.11 My applicant card doesn't allow me to work as an archaeologist here.	T with the director walking and speaking Hand camera. Medium shot	Diegetic sound of the music.	 <p>Η αίτηση δεν μου επιτρέπει να εργαστώ ως αρχαιολόγος εδώ.</p>
00.06.40 I met a guy that was working in a digital radio, and we call it S Radio . S. radio is radio channel taking care of refugees, focusing about the problems that refugees are facing here.	T in S. radio office speaking about his work as a volunteer.	T speaking T's voice	 <p>Γνώρισα έναν τύπο ο οποίος δουλεύει σε ένα ψηφιακό ραδιοφωνό, το Shabap Radio</p>

...

Author's Statement: I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.