

Mobility assemblages and lines of flight in women's narratives of forced displacement

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Abstract: In this paper I take the notion of the *mobility assemblage* as a theoretical lens through which I consider entanglements between refugee and migrant women on the move, intense experiences of gendered labour, and affective encounters in crossing borders and following lines of flight. The analysis revolves around the life-story of a young refugee woman, who recounts her experiences of travelling to Greece. What emerges from her narrative is a whirl of *lines of flight* that deterritorialize her from patriarchal regimes, harsh border practices, labour exploitation and the pain of separation on a plane of remaking her present and re-imagining her future.

Key words: mobility assemblages, gendered labour, lines of flight, migrant and refugee women, narratives

Storylines in the middle

I had very hard days there and life was very difficult for me; nobody understood my feelings and I didn't know where my family was ... (Nadia's story)¹

At the end of summer of 2018, I met Nadia, a young Afghan woman, who generously shared with me her story of travelling to Greece on her own in search of her mother and sister whom she had been separated from in around 2014. This is a story of displacement and travelling with 'a happy end' and yet the force of this and other stories is neither in the beginning, nor in the end, but rather in the middle. (see Tamboukou 2015, 44) The fragment from Nadia's narrative thus emerges from the thickness of in-between storylines. It is a reflection of the dark times she went through while being a child textile worker in the Istanbul garment industry, for three years: between 2014, when she was violently separated from her mother and sister, till the spring of 2017, when she managed to cross the borders and go to Greece.

In this paper, which draws on a Leverhulme funded research project around women's experiences of forced displacement (Tamboukou 2018), I take the notion of the *assemblage* as a theoretical lens through which I consider entanglements between uprooted women, intense experiences of gendered labour and affective encounters in crossing borders inhabiting borderlands and following 'lines of flight'. The latter is a notion from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1988) conceptual vocabulary that denotes literal and metaphorical escape routes which destabilize systems and structures of power within assemblage analytics, as I will further discuss. The paper unfolds in three parts: first I make a cartography of gendered mobilities, within the so called 'refugee crisis' in the Aegean, then I present and explicate the notion of the 'assemblage' in the context of this paper, and finally I weave Nadia's story within assemblage analytics. My argument is that the notion of what I have called 'mobility assemblages' facilitates a nuanced understanding of the complexity of entanglements between patriarchal relations, forced labour and 'the coloniality of power' (Quijano 2008), while also allowing for 'lines of flight' to emerge from women's narratives of forced displacement.

Mapping 'the crisis'

In January 2016 women and children on the move outnumbered adult men for the first time, comprising 60% of migrants crossing into Europe.² This unprecedented 'crisis' of women's mobility in the wilderness has triggered my research project of asking migrant and refugee women to tell their story of being on the move. (see Tamboukou 2018) Following lines from Hannah Arendt's (1998) and Adriana Cavarero's (2000) philosophies, I have encouraged them to tell stories of *Who* they are, as unique and unrepeatably human beings, and not of *What* they are — objectified 'refugees', 'victims', 'stateless subjects'. My argument is that the existential experiences of women on the move create a rich archive that can challenge and transpose the way we think, understand and conceptualize processes of subject formation within feminist theory and beyond.

Here it is important to observe that 'crisis' is in itself a debated and contested notion in current bodies of feminist literature around migration. (See Zavos 2017; Carastathis et al. 2018) As Donna Gabaccia has argued, 'historians of migration view human movement as an ordinary, rather than exceptional, dimension of human life and as an almost universal human

experience' (1999, 1115). In this light, the notion of 'the crisis' is a discursive formation that creates a sense of panic and uneasiness, a socio-political context within which harsh bordering practices are being implemented.

Moreover, Stephen Castles has maintained that conflict and forced migration form a continuum that is linked to the social transformations of globalization. (2006, 7) According to Castles, the distinction between migration as voluntary movement and asylum as coercion does not stand, since migratory movements across the globe have historically been triggered by wars, regional conflicts, national and international politics, as well as local and global economic dynamics. Taking Castle's migration/asylum nexus' further, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez has developed the analytical framework of 'the coloniality of migration' (2018), looking into socio-economic and political connections between asylum and migration in the process of their mutual constitution. In doing so she has drawn on Anibal Quijano's (2008) notion of the 'coloniality of power', a system of racial classification that has historically underpinned the establishment of European nation states. This system has developed its own coding and racist nomenclature and has been institutionalized and strengthened through mobility regulations and harsh border practices. It is within such economic, political and colonial assemblages that I have mapped migrant and refugee women's experiences of travelling to Greece. What I argue is that their stories encompass components of what I have called 'mobility assemblages', a notion, which I now want to present and explicate as a useful lens for making sense of mobility under conditions of forced displacement.

Mobility assemblages

There is currently an increasing interest in 'assemblages' in social analytics and beyond³, but the notion is often used in a vague way and certainly not always within the philosophical context of its emergence, namely Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical work (1988). This wide and diverse use of the term has led to many misconceptions to the point where anything can become an assemblage (see Kinkaid 2019, 3), but there are also approaches that claim that 'there is no single "correct" way to deploy the term, nor any one theoretical tradition or style hold an exclusive right to it.' (Anderson and McFarlane 2011, 124) Given that assemblage analytics is often used to highlight material and symbolic entanglements of components through which provisional entities and relations emerge and intra-act, imposing conceptual boundaries upon the term would simply defeat the purpose of its use and deployment.

Although I concur with Anderson and McFarlane (2011) against the imposition of any orthodoxies around assemblage thinking, I also feel the need to chart my position in the field. In this context, my take of the assemblage draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *agencement* (1984, 1988) that Brian Massumi has translated as assemblage,⁴ as well as on Manuel Delanda's redeployment of assemblage theory as 'a novel approach to social ontology' (2006, 1). Karen Barad's (2007) notions of 'entanglements' and 'intra-actions' are also part of my conceptual toolbox, as I will further discuss.

Unlike institutions, structural systems, identities and axes of difference—which are the usual terms deployed in analysing the social—assemblages do not have any fixed organization, structure or centre; they are rather networks of connections, always in flux, assembling and reassembling in different ways. Assemblages are thus emergent features of relationships and can only function as they connect with other assemblages in a constant process of becoming.

Following Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation, DeLanda charts two axes along which the concept of the assemblage can be defined. The first refers to the variety of roles that the parts of an assemblage can play, while the second axis refers to processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation that the parts of the assemblage are constantly immersed into: the former 'stabilize the identity of an assemblage by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity' (2006, 12), while the latter destabilise the whole.

Let us then see how DeLanda's reconfiguration of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *agencement* might be used to illuminate mobility assemblages and account for the complexity of their relations and functions. To start with the first axis defined above, what can the material and expressive roles of mobility assemblage nexus be about? Of course there can be a great variety of references here and the examples cannot be exclusive, but to start with components playing a material role, DeLanda notes, that 'at the very least [they] involve a set of human bodies properly oriented (physically or psychologically) towards each other' (2006, 12). Face-to-face conversations are a classic example, but also 'interpersonal networks structuring communities' and hierarchical organisations governing cities or nations states are also used as illustrations (2006, 12). In this context, components of mobility assemblages that play a material role include amongst others, a rich network of human bodies and their interaction as well as a range of state and civic institutions in all levels of social and political hierarchies around mobilities and border practices.

Giving examples of components that play an expressive role is rather more complicated, since in DeLanda's approach, expressivity is not reducible to language and symbols (2006, 12). Bodily expressions are sometimes as important as the content of discursive exchanges, choices made regarding the topics of discussions, as well as the network of symbolic power relations revolving around conversations and interlocutors. There is finally a matrix of social behaviours and attitudes ranging for example from expressions of solidarity in interpersonal networks to expressions of legitimacy in hierarchical organisations (DeLanda 2006, 13). It goes without saying that mobility assemblages are rich in cases of social and cultural expressivity, particularly so I would add, when its analysis proceeds via the narrative route, as in the case of my research project, where I have asked migrant and refugee women to recount stories of being on the move (Tamboukou 2018).

In relation to the second axis, which refers to processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, things become etymologically more self-explanatory. Territorialisation and deterritorialisation both derive from the latin word *terra*, meaning earth. Both terms therefore relate to processes of grounding or uprooting. In this light, processes of territorialisation 'define or sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories' (DeLanda, 2006, 13), but they also work towards solidifying the often-moving grounds of the assemblage thus 'increasing its internal homogeneity' (2006, 13). Processes of territorialisation are therefore always antagonistically related to processes of deterritorialisation, which 'destabilize spatial boundaries' (2006, 13) and once again create earthquakes in the grounds of the assemblage. Here again the long history of women's desire to escape, get away and travel is an excellent example of this war of discourses and processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation. (see Tamboukou 2003, 2010)

It is this sensitivity to how orders change that assemblage thinking facilitates. Migrant and refugee women's stories of escaping patriarchal and war machines show that as Deleuze and Guattari have argued, society is not so much defined by its macro structures and their dialectic oppositions but rather by what has escaped them, its 'lines of flight' (1988, 216). Moreover, mobility assemblages also include micro-relations. In the case of this paper, desire and affects that mobilize the movement of bodies, geographical proximities that facilitate border crossing, unexpected political developments as well as specific climate conditions. In the context of my research, migrant and refugee women talked about how they had to leave war-stricken countries, but their stories were also about escaping violent partners and domestic violence. In a way the disastrous war conditions they lived through, paradoxically also opened up escape paths. Their decision to travel was not always reactive or negative, they often expressed their desire for a better future. Tanya, a young Iranian woman started her story saying that 'I left Iran because I wanted to develop my skills and that's why I wanted to come here'.⁵ Although she added that fearing her ex-husband's violent behaviour was also a reason, she put her desire 'to develop herself first'.

Geography also played a role, the fact that the Greek islands are very close to the Turkish coast, so that getting on a boat did not seem such an impossible act, despite the many drownings that have also happened. What is actually surprising is how many women dared get on a boat despite the horrific drownings they had definitely heard about. This is how Zahra, a young Afghan woman, travelling with her elderly mother and her nephew put it boldly in her story: 'we got on the boat and they told us, Greece is on the other side; they showed the operation of the boat to one of the passengers and they told him, "can you see those lights on the other side? Just drive the boat there". It was terrifying.'⁶

Drawing on some narrative moments from migrant and refugee women's stories of travelling to Greece (see Tamboukou 2018), what I have tried to show is that assemblages encompass very diverse elements and stage unexpected encounters across multiple differences and contradictions. It is thus important to note that assemblages are characterized by 'relations of exteriority'. As Anderson and colleagues helpfully explain, when we think of relations we usually have in mind individuals, organizations, structures and other things that relate through some form of exchange or contact, but we also accept that individuals and other entities are fully determined by their relations to the point that when relations change, their components also change. (2012, 177) By suggesting the idea of 'the exteriority of relations' however, Deleuze has argued that things are conditioned, but not determined by their relations, that relations may change without their constituent components changing and that finally entities are never fully realized within their relations. (Deleuze and Parnet 1997, 41)

It is here that Barad's notions of 'entanglements' and 'intra-actions' become particularly important in my configuration of mobility assemblages. Drawing on atomic physics, Barad (2003, 2007) has introduced the neologism of 'intra-actions', juxtaposing it to the usual notion of interactions. While interactions occur between already established and separate entities, 'intra-actions' occur as relations between components. Entities – both human and non-human – actually emerge as an effect of these intra-actions, without having stable points or positions: 'individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating', Barad has argued (2007: ix). It is important to note here that although *assemblages* are not part of Barad's conceptual vocabulary,⁷ her

notions of *entanglements* and *intra-actions* constitute a significant contribution to assemblage thinking from the field of feminist science studies. As Anderson et al. (2012, 81) note however, in focusing on entangled intra-actions, Barad downplays the autonomy of the components that intra-act. Yet, her approach, is important in how agency is theorized within assemblage thinking. Why is that? For Barad, it is 'phenomena' and not parts that are the primary ontological units. It is through their entanglement and intra-actions within the configuration of a particular phenomenon that things are constituted, words take up meaning and 'agential cuts' emerge: 'it is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency', Barad notes (2003, 817). What are the implications of working with assemblage theories then? A central task of the analysis would be to make specific cartographies of situated phenomena and problems, trace the connections they make in order to configure emerging new formations, but also follow their 'lines of flight'.

Following lines of flight in stories of displacement

When I was very young, we moved from Afghanistan and we travelled through many countries; so, we went to Iran and then from Iran we went to Syria and then in Syria the war started. Our life was very normal in Syria and we were happy; so when the war started there, it was unbelievable. My mother used to tell us about the Russian war with the Afghani Mujahidins. She was young then, but this war was very similar to the war in Syria. So that was the reason we travelled from Syria to Turkey [but]

when we went to Turkey the circumstances were not good for Afghan refugees [...] these were very difficult days, and then we decided to travel to some European country, because my mother could not go back to Iran or Afghanistan.⁸

From its very beginning, Nadia's story continually crosses national, geographical, language and conceptual borders: it starts from her mother's decision to leave Afghanistan, it passes through Iran, Syria and Turkey and then violently splits between two European countries that Nadia, her mother and her sister found themselves in, desperately seeking to find each other after their cruel separation. Violence and war are thus the underpinning conditions of their forced displacement, but alongside the fear of war, patriarchal and capitalist power relations are also entangled: Nadia refers to the war in Syria as a mnemonic referent of her mother's lived experiences. It was the war in Syria that made them move to Turkey, a country seen by many migrants and refugees as a passage to Europe. Nadia explained that her mother's decision to move to Europe was 'for my future, for my younger sister's future'. Throughout her story, she also repeatedly said that her mother could not go back to Iran or Afghanistan, noting that it was because of her uncles, her father's brothers that 'my mother escaped from the country'.⁹

It is obvious from Nadia's story that there can be no clear separation between coercion and voluntary movement, escaping persecution or moving forward in hope for a better life. And although her story is just a singularity, a component within wider and diverse assemblages, Castles' (2006) careful research of gathering and presenting facts and figures of forced migration fully supports and historically contextualizes her lived experiences. Nadia's story however, exceeds Castle's asylum/migration nexus binarism and goes beyond Gutiérrez Rodríguez's structural framework of 'the coloniality of migration'. Theorized through the

lenses of assemblage thinking, Nadia's displacement emerges as a complex entanglement: some of its components certainly include macro formations, like wars, local conflicts, forced labour, global trade, patriarchal regimes and harsh border practices, in short the macro-relations that Castle's asylum/migration nexus and Gutiérrez Rodríguez's framework of the 'coloniality of migration' have already identified. But even when they do include macro formations, a closer attention to the functioning of these assemblages shows that they are not as stable and coherent as they appear to be, when analysed as structures or systems. As I will show below, Nadia was trapped in the claws of the Istanbul garment industry as an unaccompanied child for three years and yet she did manage to make her crossing to Greece. Her escape does not mean that macro formations like wars or capitalism are downplayed as powerful institutions within assemblage analytics. As Anderson and his colleagues have noted, assemblage thinking offers 'a sustained account of the different ways in which orders endure across differences and amid transformations, in addition to a sensitivity to how orders change and are reworked' (2012, 173).

Moreover, Nadia's story of displacement also includes crucial micro-relations, her constant references to how she was supported by 'other families' for example: 'There were many Afghan people, who used to live more than 40 years in Syria; so we were living in the same area, where more Afghan people used to live. When we left Syria, we went to Turkey with those families.¹⁰ There is a sense of collectivities and camaraderie that runs like a red thread throughout Nadia's story. This communal sense gets lost in the gendered discourse of what constitutes a family. It was precisely because of their travelling with other families that Nadia got separated from her mother and sister. According to her story, the smugglers persuaded her mother to let her elder daughter travel in a different car as they were approaching the borders: 'there were 3 vehicles they used and they put each people in different vehicles and they asked my mother, because in the other family there was no child, there were no young people, so they said 'if you could allow it, we can keep her in the second one'.¹¹ But on arriving at the border, the police came and only the first car managed to go through. Nadia's car ran away, but she lost contact with her family. It was the beginning of the darkest period in her life that lasted for almost three years: 'It was very difficult, one of the worst parts of my life is that time, when I was in Turkey alone and I didn't have anyone with me and I was very young'.¹²

We see here that 'the families network' that supported Nadia's mother in taking the decision to move to Europe was also the reason of their separation. Or was it? One could never know how group relations and non-blood 'family' bonds were used by the smugglers to create 'crises' and end up with getting the fees, but also young girls in their hands. The smugglers' machine is indeed a component of the mobility assemblage that creates relations of interiority and exteriority with other components, both material and expressive. Such components include amongst others, the border police, traffickers, as well as the demands of the garment industry for cheap and/or forced labour. Indeed, not knowing where to go, not having any money or relatives in Turkey and having been left in the smugglers' circles, Nadia found herself working in a family textile workshop in Istanbul:

They were so powerful people, the people who smuggled you, they were mafia and they had guns, they had power, in front of them, I was nothing [...] and then when I went to the other family, this family were nice and I started working in their textile,

I worked with them until I came to Greece and yes, in the first months they didn't pay me anything; I was working 12 hours there, from morning until evening, like 7, 8 sometimes 9, 10, and even 12 at night for extra work [...] it was I think for 5-6 months, that they didn't pay me because I was staying with them without anything.¹³

It was only after half a year that they started giving her 500 Turkish lire per month, which was less than half the minimum wage in Turkey. Nadia's account reverberates with many reports of migrants and refugees working under very harsh and unfair conditions in the extensive network of garment workshops in Istanbul. According to an article of 'Women in the World', published in November 2016 the minimum wage in Turkey at the time was 1,300 lire per month, but many girls interviewed, reported earning half that, or often not being paid at all.¹⁴

Turkey is the world's third-largest supplier of clothing after China and Bangladesh and the industry has been growing rapidly in the last thirty years. However, sweatshop working conditions have been recorded and exposed from the very beginning (see Dedeoglu 2008). In recent years and particularly from 2016 onward, there were further reports about the harsh exploitation of refugees, many of them women and children: 'child refugees in Turkey making clothes for UK shops'¹⁵ was on the BBC news in October 2016, followed by many journalistic, institutional, trade unions and NGOs reports across the globe around issues of labour exploitation. 'Women make up the majority of the textile workforce and are therefore particularly at risk, as are children who are also being used in large numbers', a report from the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre highlighted, in developing an action directed to international leading brands in terms of their responsibility vis-à-vis phenomena of modern slavery.¹⁶ Nadia's story was simple and straightforward about the condition that underpinned such oppressive labour conditions:

when they [refugees and migrants] came for the first time in Turkey, they used to live in mosques, they took showers, they slept there and after some time if they had money, they travelled to Greece. If they didn't have, they started working in the same area, so there were many job opportunities, you could easily find, because there were thousands of thousands of textiles, where people, refugee people used to work.¹⁷

Despite its oppressive conditions, the Istanbul garment industry thus became a component of the mobility assemblage, offering refugees meagre and yet actual possibilities of collecting money to pay the smugglers for their passage to Europe. When their attempts to cross the borders were 'unsuccessful', their labour force would also return to the sweatshops of the garment industry as it was the case with Nadia: a vicious circle of exploitation, entrapment and escape. Affective forces were also intertwined in this assemblage. As a defenceless child worker at the heart of this oppressive regime, Nadia was appreciative of the fact that the family who run the textile workshop were 'nice' to her. In her story, she tenderly remembers how the patron's wife became her confidante: 'she was very kind [...] and she was always talking to me like her younger sister, sometimes I cried with her, mostly I cried alone'.¹⁸

According to Dedeoglu's longitudinal study, garment workshops in Istanbul are usually based in 'gecekondu' neighbourhoods where abundant cheap migrant labour is available' (2018, 3). Apart from making the link between the garment industry and migration, Dedeoglu has also noted that 'the family ownership is a noticeable feature of these ateliers, supported by family

labour and initial capital pooled through familial solidarity networks' (2018, 3) Within these networks, the mothers or wives of the workshop owners perform diverse caring roles ranging 'from direct contribution to production, to cooking for garment workers and cleaning the workplace' (2018, 3). Dedeoglu has further observed that apart from 'trimming and cleaning garments at home [these women also] organize their neighbours and relatives when extra labour is needed' (2018, 3). What we also hear in Nadia's story is the diversity of the emotional labour these women were doing, ranging from comforting family members to advising young migrant and refugee workers. As a young girl, a child worker in effect, Nadia thus found herself entangled in uncanny 'family relations', under conditions of what I have called 'home-based work without home' (Tamboukou 2019), a new component in the long history of industrial homework that reaches our days in unexpected formations. Moreover, in trying to make sense of the riddle of how Nadia got emotionally attached to the patron's wife, the question of how relations are being formed, becomes particularly pertinent. Here, Barad's notion of 'intra-actions', as relations between components through which new entities emerge, help us attend to the plurality and diverse nature of gender and labour relations through which entities —like Nadia's friendship to the patron's wife— emerge, within the current geopolitical context of 'the refugee crisis in the Aegean'.

Being a network of workshops, usually run by extended family networks, the Istanbul textile industry is very diverse however. Speaking to *Amnesty International* about her experiences, Abigail, a young woman from Cameroon, who had fled her country to escape gender-based violence, talked about how she was sexually abused by her employer in an Istanbul sweatshop, where she had found temporary work.¹⁹ Labour relations are thus entangled with gendered experiences, including sexual abuse. Nadia told me how helpless and desperate she felt, when she understood that the family who run the textile workshop wanted to marry her to their son, who was much older than her and had a mental disability. According to Nadia this idea came from the fact that the family had seen how much she cared for their vulnerable son, while working with him side by side: 'they were so cruel to their brother [...] so during working hours, I was helping him a lot, because I had seen him, how the other brothers tortured him, because he didn't understand'.²⁰ Interestingly enough, it was the patron's wife who first alerted Nadia to the family's secret plan and advised her against it.

Gender, disability, family cruelty, care work, women's solidarity and forced labour are entangled in Nadia's story, creating an assemblage wherein coercion, agency and freedom are impossible to be disentangled and separated. And yet it was from the interstices of entangled oppressive regimes that Nadia's desire to escape sprang and materialized, as a Baradian 'agential cut' par excellence. My point here is that within a structuralist model of analysis, agency would emerge as a conscious realization of oppression and exploitation, linked to a determination to oppose it. Within assemblage thinking however, it is the components of exploitation that make relations of exteriority with components of other assemblages, imaginaries of escape and freedom in Nadia's case. It is through such relations of exteriority that 'an agential cut emerges'. What I therefore suggest is that Nadia's story leaves traces of 'lines of flight', pointing to agential cuts and non-linear causalities that assemblage analytics can reveal and analyse. Her attempt to register herself as a child asylum seeker marks the beginning of her escape: 'so people when they are refugees in Turkey, they go and register themselves at the UNHCR offices, but my bad luck was that there was no

UNHCR in the city I was staying [...] I needed to go to Ankara, which was 6 hours far from Istanbul'.²¹

Nadia recounted in detail how she managed to persuade her patron to allow her to travel to Ankara with another family, since she was young, and she couldn't travel alone. She also remembered her deep disappointment at being denied registration on the grounds that she was an unaccompanied minor:

I travelled at night with the family and we went to find the UNHCR office, it was early in the morning, 6 o'clock [...] and we stood in the queue and at 10, 11, my turn came and when my turn came, they asked me many questions and they were asking for my guardian because I was under age and I was very young, so I said 'I don't have anyone' and they said, 'how did you come here?' [...] and they kept asking questions and taking breaks [...] and they called me in a different room and then asking questions and then asked me to wait, so they made me wait until the evening, but in the end, they didn't give me any document, yes, they didn't give me anything.²²

The temporal rhythm of Nadia's story becomes an echo of the agonizing waiting, the endless questioning and then the bitter disappointment: 'It was very sad, because going to Ankara, was for nothing'. Not getting any documents was for Nadia a symbolic violent practice of having been denied an identity, deprived of her civil rights: 'without identity, you don't have any right, you are nothing ... in Turkey my life was like that of an animal, I was living an animal life, I didn't have any family or friends, and no identity'.²³ What Nadia forcefully asserts here is her right to have a recognised identity, which is in fact a struggle for emancipation: 'if I had something which said, my name is this and my age is this and I am from that country [...] I would have proof of my identity and my age, so nobody could force me for anything'.²⁴

As Etienne Balibar has aptly noted 'the whole history of emancipation is not so much the history of the demanding of unknown rights, as of the real struggle to enjoy rights which *have already been declared*' (2002, 6, emphasis in the text). Emancipation is the effect of the autonomy of politics for Balibar, conceptualized as the 'unfolding of the self-determination of the people' (2002, 3). His conception of politics reverberates with Jacques Rancière's configuration of politics as the recognition and establishment of 'the part that has no part', the poor, the women, the workers, the immigrants, the refugees. Indeed, for Rancière, politics essentially involves opposition to 'the police order' that underpins and sustains the distribution of the sensible; politics emerges as a challenge to the 'distribution of the sensible' by those who are excluded, 'the part which has no part' (2004, 29–30). Thus 'the distribution of the sensible' has a double sense in Rancière's work: it is both a form of symbolic violence, but also a form of resistance, in the sense of the possibility for redistribution, which is inherent in the very notion of distribution.

Nadia's story of her failed attempt to register herself in the UNHCR offices in Ankara weaves together the duality of the Rancièrian 'distribution of the sensible'. She travels to Ankara to assert her right of having a recognized identity, challenging 'the distribution of the sensible', that erases her rights as a citizen and as a worker. When this first attempt fails, she feels crushed, but she does not give up. It is from the darkness of having no documents and no rights that her determination arises in her story: 'when I went back, I kept one thing in my

mind: "I will not stay in that country, I don't have anything", I need to go, I have to go [...] I can't stay here'.²⁵ Nadia's resistance is discerned in her imagination of 'lines of flight'. As the story unfolds, imagining a different future for herself becomes the vector that will ultimately bring her to Greece, the first step to stand on her own, educate herself, work for the refugee communities in Athens and ultimately reunite with her mother and sister in Germany.

'Having', 'not having' and 'the will to have' rights are constant referents in Nadia's story that keep her hoping even in the darkest moments: 'how much money do I have with you? I work here' she kept asking the patron's wife. At the same time she was making inquiries about the smugglers' fees from other refugee girls that she had met in the workshop, trying to get an idea of the practicalities of arranging her crossing into Europe: 'our textile was like a family textile and most of the girls working there, were from the same family [...] and the rest of us were refugees and strangers, so I started talking with some of the girls'.²⁶ In search of a passage, Nadia deployed a whole set of 'technologies of resistance' (Tamboukou 2003, 94). It was not only the problem of knowing about the cost, but also and perhaps more importantly making sure that 'the family' she worked for would not stop her: 'it was very, very difficult to release myself from them'.²⁷ Nadia remembered the dark moments she went through: 'I was not eating properly, I was so depressed and mostly I was crying'.²⁸

'Grief is a state of being exposed in one's constitutive dependence' Katerina Kolozova has noted (2014, 49) in a fine summary of Judith Butler's work on the significance of grief. (2009). No matter how mobile or transient the self is, it works hard on preserving its continuity, on going on living; In telling the story of how she realized her escape from Turkey to Greece, Nadia staged this solitary scene of grief that actually created the conditions of her emergence as a subject determined to leap into an unknown future: 'everyone was busy with the stitching in the textile and I was walking around, so nobody could see me, and my eyes were always full of tears'.²⁹ Nadia's desire to flee the capitalist and patriarchal regime of the Istanbul garment workshop motivates her actions and sustains her struggle to persevere and insist:

The patron's wife told me 'it's not easy, what you are thinking [...] if any of them know you don't have any money, you are alone, young, they will maybe kidnap you or take you somewhere else'. I said no, if your husband talks with a family and they can help me, I will pay of course [...] and then she said 'Ok, I will talk' [...] and there was a nice family, there was a mother with two sons, six children, yes, two elder sons and four daughters, two daughters were very young, two daughters were working with us and the mother was also working and yes, I came to Greece with them.³⁰

Nadia's desire to leave, cross the borders and look for her lost family ultimately becomes an existential force through which she emerges as a subject. This *passage* to the self, goes through the ruptures and gaps of dominant structures and institutions of power. It is such plurality of relations within complex social formations that assemblage analytics have brought to the fore. Assemblage analytics do not attempt to downplay fierce regimes of domination that derive from powerful institutions, but they do trace and map agential moves and non-linear causalities: Nadia's failure to register created existential conditions of possibility for her ultimate escape. Her journey to Ankara was unsuccessful and yet it solidified her decision to go away and mobilized her desire to travel to Greece.

Thinking women's mobility with assemblages

In this paper, I have suggested the notion of the *mobility assemblage* as a useful lens for theorizing entanglements between women's mobility and gendered labour relations under conditions of forced displacement. What I have argued is that assemblage approaches highlight processes of social, economic and political formations in the context of the current geopolitical context of 'the refugee crisis in the Aegean'. By focussing on processes rather than pre-existing entities, such as social and political bodies, institutions and structures, assemblages facilitate the analysis of multiple, diverse and complex relations at play and in effect interrogate the way we understand and analyse relations and their terms. As a consequence, assemblages further challenge linear conceptualizations of agency and causality and they offer a more nuanced understanding of change.

It is in the context of assemblage thinking that I have situated refugee women's narratives, particularly focusing on a young woman's story of travelling to Greece. What emerges from her narrative is a whirl of existential forces that deterritorialize her from patriarchal relations, harsh border practices, labour exploitation and the pain of separation on a plane of remaking her present and re-imagining her future. Her story throws light on her emergence from the interstices of black holes and dark times and leaves traces of her 'lines of flight', her perseverance and determination to live in-the-world-with-others.

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¹ All names are pseudonyms, Nadia's story, Athens, Greece, summer of 2018.

² See, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/human-rights-of-refugee-and-migrant-women-and-girls-need-to-be-better-protected> - Accessed, September 15, 2019

³ See Kinkaid 2019 for a recent overview of the field with a focus on feminist critical thinking in geography.

⁴ *Agencement* comes from the verb *agencer*, which means 'to put together, organize, order, lay out, arrange'; these notions are probably more complicated than just assemble and although the word *assemblage* exists in the French language, Deleuze and Guattari use it less often and not in a philosophical sense. Since there is no equivalent term in English of the French word *agencement*, its use [and abuse] will remain an issue. (See Phillips 2006).

⁵ Tania's story, Lesvos, spring 2019.

⁶ Zahra's story, Lesvos, spring 2019.

⁷ When Barad refers to assemblages, she takes them as collections of pre-existing and determinate individuals and objects, and she always juxtaposes them to apparatuses (2007, 444. n32).

⁸ Nadia's story, Athens, summer 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nadia's story, Athens, summer 2018.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ <https://womenintheworld.com/2016/03/21/on-the-run-from-war-syrian-girls-labor-in-turkeys-notorious-garment-industry/>

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-37716463> [Accessed, October 10, 2018]

¹⁶ <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/modern-slavery/syrian-refugees-abuse-exploitation-in-turkish-garment-factories> [Accessed, October 10, 2018]

¹⁷ Nadia's story, Athens, summer 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/9071/2018/en/> [Accessed, October 10, 2018]

²⁰ Nadia's story, Athens, summer 2018.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.