Decolonizing feminist theories and mapping surging feminist knowledges

Maria Tamboukou, Leverhulme Major Research Fellow, University of East London, UK
Orcid iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6380-4415

Abstract
In this chapter I draw on a Leverhulme funded research project of listening to migrant and refugee women's narratives of displacement and travelling, by looking back at the ways I have experimented with epistemologies, methodologies and theories that could advance a decolonizing feminist approach. In charting analytical lines that have emerged from my immersion in the soundscapes of uprooted women's stories I discuss the following themes: a) decolonizing ways of knowing and understanding; b) decolonizing relations within heteropatriarchy; c) decolonizing freedom and d) decolonizing human rights discourses and practices. What I argue is that uprooted women's narratives have created an archive of existential experiences that act as counter memories, of who they are, how they act and what they can become. I have also seen these stories as affirmative and generative of new knowledges to come— a field that I configure as *feminist surging knowledges*.

Key words: archive, decolonization, narratives, uprooted women, feminist surging knowledges

> My husband had many problems in Iran, so he left and came to Greece on his own. He picked up his things and left at midnight from our house. We didn't hear from him for a long time but then he phoned me and told me that he had arrived in Greece. Seven months later he suggested that the whole family should leave and join him in Greece. My father did not agree, and he did not want us to make this journey […] he told me, 'if you decide to leave you can never come back here.' But despite all this, I did set out for my journey […] It was such a difficult journey and one of the biggest difficulties I had was the men's gaze towards a woman who was travelling alone. If you are a woman alone with a child and nobody can help you, this is terrible. (Ilya's story)

Ilya is a young woman in her early thirties, who travelled from Iran to Greece with her daughter to reunite with her husband. Her story struck me from the very beginning as a struggle in an entanglement of antagonistic heteropatriarchal power relations: her father, her husband, the state, the smugglers and the men's intruding gaze. I met Ilya at the Kara-Tepe refugee camp in Mytilini, Lesvos, in April 2019, while conducting research for the Leverhulme funded research project, *Revisiting the nomadic subject* (Tamboukou, 2021). In this project I have explored the use of 'the nomadic subject' in feminist theory and politics. The main

research question that I have raised is whether nomadism has become a concept politically loaded and irreparably infected with the unbearable heaviness of those who are not able to move and cross borders and boundaries—the dark side of the moon of privileged mobility.

Throughout my work I have repeatedly drawn on the nomadic subject as a useful configuration of female subjectivity. (See Tamboukou 2021) Nomadism as a spatial concept denoting uncharted movements seemed to facilitate non-static ways of theorizing the subject and his/her relations to the world and to others. But it seems that the nomads of the real world and their torturing wanderings today, have challenged the romance of unregulated movement and force us to radically rethink the very concept of nomadism itself.

Drawing on the power of stories to intervene in the web of human relations by grounding abstractions, creating meaning and opening up new ways of thinking, I have interviewed 22 migrant and refugee women about their experiences of being on the move. Out of the 22 narrative interviews, which were all recorded with the consent of the participants, 6 were conducted in Farsi, 5 in English, 4 in Arabic, 3 in French, 2 in Greek and 2 in Pashto. The Arabic, Farsi and Pashto interviews, 12 in total, were conducted with the presence of an interpreter. In the process of these interviews, I have encouraged my participants to tell stories about their decision to leave, as well as about their experiences of travelling without feeling obliged to limit themselves within discourses of victimization and vulnerability. Following lines from Arendt's philosophy (1998), I have asked them to recount their lives in the light of 'who they are', as unique and unrepeatable human beings, and not as 'what they are' —objectified 'refugees', 'victims', 'stateless subjects'.

This research was designed from the beginning as a transdisciplinary project bringing philosophy, politics, history, feminism and narrative theories into migration studies, an area which is traditionally viewed mostly, as a field of applied sociological and anthropological research. I have to admit that I was hesitant about this endeavour, particularly in the light of the immensity of the European refugee crisis and its traumatic and violent effects in the lives of so many forcefully displaced people across the globe. How could a transdisciplinary approach, encompassing philosophical questions and concerns amongst other components, be of any relevance to the lives of women who have faced acute phenomena of gender based violence amongst other disasters that have befallen upon them? I kept asking myself. My fieldwork in the refugee camps of Lesvos and Athens intensified my anxiety and yet the questions I raised did strike chords in displaced women's feelings. The extract below from a message I received from a NGO worker who facilitated my research in Athens is a grounded sign that transdisciplinary inquiries can traverse social and cultural borders and boundaries, trigger feelings and understandings and perhaps initiate new images of thought:

> Just wanted to say that I'm reading your book […] and I am deeply amazed, and I just want to continue reading […] the way you opened up every story and analyzed them, using historical facts, is just too good. Really interesting. Even though I know Somi's story, and also the story of all the other women, because I've worked with them so much and heard so many stories, but I've never heard them the way you analyzed them. It's really deep. And I'm just really grateful that someone would put this much time and energy, traveling, listening, interviewing, researching (personal communication, 22-02-2022)

In looking back at my research, in this chapter I consider the salience of stories in decolonizing feminist theories. In challenging the nomadic subject as an influential figuration in feminist theories, I have responded to Linda Martín Alcoff's argument that feminist philosophies keep creating 'false universalizations' (2017, p.33), by deploying transdisciplinary perspectives in making sense of displaced narratives. My argument is that uprooted women's stories become components in a field that I want to configure as 'feminist surging knowledges'. Here I draw on Cavarero's notion of 'surging democracy' (2021), the idea that politics should be seen as generative and affirmative, rather than merely oppositional and/or contrarian: 'The concept of surging democracy engages with a variety of historical phenomena that regularly occur wherever people, by gathering in public spaces to protest or demonstrate, experience their ability to engender power' (2021, p.1). The spontaneous experience of feeling joy while being together creates conditions of possibility for the emergence of democracy as a plane of non-violent creativity —a political expression of 'a diffuse, participatory and relational power' (1), that is shared horizontally rather than vertically among political actors that come together as unique existents.

In the same vein, what I want to argue is that as we move beyond the contrarian aspects of decolonization, we can discern the horizon of *surging feminist knowledges* that escape the epistemological and disciplinarian violence of the colonial archive and enter the process of consolidating new ways of seeing and understanding the world in its polyvalent human and non-human relations. In this context *surging feminist knowledges* are mapped on planes of collective creativity, where instead of simply challenging the subject of knowledge through the questions of 'who knows' and 'whose knowledge counts', we should rather ask 'with whom am I knowing and with what effects?', as Gaile Pohlhaus has powerfully suggested that (2017, p.50). Taking Ilya's story as my starting point, I thus chart four transdisciplinary planes for *surging feminist* knowledges to be traced: decolonizing ways of knowing, decolonizing relations, decolonizing freedom and decolonizing rights.

Decolonizing ways of knowing: learning to listen

Chandra Mohanty's influential essay 'Under Western Eyes' originally published in 1984 drew attention to the role of Western feminist scholarship in reproducing exclusive hierarchies of knowledge and has initiated a rich body of literature in decolonial feminist studies.(See McLren 2017) In a close reading of Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders* influential book (2003), Pohlhaus (2017) has suggested the idea of 'knowing without borders' through the decolonizing process of 'epistemic gathering', where we create conditions of possibility for creating knowledges with others, as we have already seen above. Following Pohlhaus' suggestion that 'knowing is not something that we do on our own' (p.50) I have tried to experiment with transdisciplinary methodologies that could advance a decolonizing feminist approach—knowing without epistemic and disciplinary borders. In doing so, I have particularly focused on the importance of listening to stories as a way of learning and understanding with others. Reflecting on the politics of listening through the prism of feminist Indigenous philosophies, Allison Weir points to 'the need to engage in a politics of self-

transformation through listening, to become capable of a politics of mutual recognition' (2017, p.258).

Indeed , my encounter with Ilya emerged in the narrative scene of telling and listening to stories of displacement. I remember the occasion vividly: when making contacts with civic organizations in Mytilini, Lesvos, I got in touch with Caritas Hellas, amongst other groups. After talking to the organizers about my research, they invited me to give a talk to a group of women who were participating in the programme 'Transition: Co-operation, Empowerment and Social Integration for migrants and refugees in Greece'. Their idea was that once women had met me and listened to my talk, they could decide whether they wanted to participate. I accepted of course, but I was both excited and deeply problematised. Being aware of the huge debates among feminists around the discourses and practices of empowerment (see Kabeer, 2005), I was wondering about how I could talk to these women being true to them and to myself.

My situated position as a feminist narrative researcher took me out of this impasse: 'I have always believed that no matter how abstract our theories may sound or how consistent our arguments appear, there are incidents and stories behind them which, at least for ourselves, contain as in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say' Arendt has written (2018, pp.201-2). Stories, in Arendt's thought, ground abstractions, flesh out ideas and thus create a milieu where thought can emerge from the actuality of the recounted event. Within the narrative sensibility of my research, I thus decided to share Nadia's story with the women of the Kara-Tempe camp, as a narrative of perseverance and hope.

Nadia is a young Afghan woman who was separated from her mother and sister when she was fifteen years old, while trying to cross the Turkish-Greek borders. She worked at the Istanbul textile industry for three years under conditions of modern slavery, before she was able to travel to Greece on her own. When I interviewed Nadia in Athens in the summer of 2018, she was working as a volunteer for refugee civic organizations, she was completing a scholarship course on English for academic purposes and was already successful in a follow-up scholarship to study for a degree in tourism and hospitality. More importantly she had found her mother and sister through the Red Cross tracking process and she was waiting to reunite with them in Germany.

At the time of the interview, Nadia had expressed the desire for her story to be shared with other refugee women, as an Arendtian way of inserting herself in the web of human relations through narratives. 'With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth' Arendt has written (1998, p.176), highlighting the importance of others to inspire, albeit not to condition or determine this second birth, which is existential and political: 'its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative'. (p.177)

My talk at the Kara-Tepe refugee camp was arranged for April 10, 2019. At the time of my talk, Kara-Tepe was a medium size refugee camp run by an organization linked to the Municipality of Lesvos, and could only accept a restricted number of refugees, usually those who were in particularly vulnerable conditions. Each family lived in a container, while several

civic organizations had their offices and facilities there, including a women's friendly space, where my talk was hosted. I had already visited the Kara-Tepe camp in March 2019, when I gave a seminar in 'the force of life histories' to a group of service providers, including teachers, advisors, psychologists and health carers working in different state and civic organizations in Lesvos, so I was familiar with the premises and procedures. This time was different, however, as I was going to address the 'subjects' of my research in an attempt to trigger their will to participate and thus coax their narratives. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have shown, coaxing is a component of the auto/biographical act (2001, p.50), since the coaxer, alongside the story-teller and the listener are three figures that constitute every story action in Ken Plummer's dissection of life narratives. (1995, pp.20-21) And yet, coaxers can easily slide into the position of a coercer, since 'coaxers and coercers are everywhere' (Smith and Watson 2001, p.51), while 'the roles of a coaxer in assembling a life narrative can be more coercive than collaborative' (p.55). It was the process of walking a thin line between coaxing and coercing that I was contemplating, while preparing for the Kara-Tepe event.

It was a rainy afternoon, and I could see that the organizers were apprehensive and worried about women's participation: 'We don't expect many women' they told me straight away 'and because of the rain we expect even less'. There were two groups of women when I entered the container, no more than eight altogether, and two to three prams. 'Well, if we have twelve attendees, that would be excellent' the organizers told me. I mingled with the women and with the help of the interpreter I started chatting with them. There were some younger women, who could also speak English, so we were laughing our mutual embarrassment away. But as it was getting closer to 3pm, more and more women started coming in the container. We were initially sitting in a kind of circle, but I had to stand up to give space for more chairs and prams to be accommodated. By 3.10 pm the container was literally packed, and the door was open for a large group of women who were standing outside to be able to listen, as the rain had fortunately stopped. The desired number of twelve had blown up to sixty plus, when I started narrating Nadia's story. As the story was unfolding, I could see it in the women's shining eyes that they were listening. As they were gradually drawn into the space/time of the narrative, they were becoming part of its process and practice: they were nodding their heads; they were smiling and when the talk was over, a young Afghan woman with a beautiful pink scarf stood up and said: 'Let's clap for Nadia'. When the applause was over, she stood up again and said: 'and now, one for Maria'. 'A story told is a story bound to circulate', Trinh T. Minh-ha has beautifully written (1989, p.134).

I was terribly moved by this warm response and after surpassing my initial fascination, wondering and puzzlement, I encouraged these women to ask questions. And they did: there were all sorts of questions, mostly about getting access to educational opportunities, but also more personal ones, around my project. They wanted to know about my website and about my research more generally. Some of these women were very well educated: there were lawyers and doctors and nurses and teachers amongst them. There were several young mothers and some older women as well. The organizers advised me to ask them whether they wanted to take a group photo for the Caritas archives, but beyond the formal photo there were many women gathering around me, taking selfies. What was mostly moving at these moments of group selfies was the touching. They would touch my shoulders and hold mine and each other's hands in an embodied cadence. Drawing on Hortense Spillers' account of the flesh (1987), Tim Huzar has suggested that touching can become a modality of knowing

beyond representation—an apprehension that brings together the body and the flesh in an entanglement of opening and closing, vulnerability and care: 'who it is that is in the flesh is not represented but apprehended, and in this apprehension, in this inclined touching an ineluctable reciprocal relation is made apparent, where the one apprehending is also apprehended, made apparent as a unique existent who lives in the flesh' (Huzar 2021, p.8). The moment of touching was indeed one of the most forceful moments in my experience as a feminist activist and I will never forget it.

Narratives have the power to involve us in the dynamics of thinking differently and as Ruth Salvaggio has pointed out, feminist theorists have used stories to unsettle theoretical abstractions and move into 'a place where truth and narrative intermingle in the endless telling of stories' (1999, p.39). The refugee women that I met at the women's friendly container of the Kara-Tepe refugee camp had marked their own situated position. When they decided to come to the talk, they brought their own experiences, educational and cultural backgrounds, interests and dreams. They decided to listen and what they made of Nadia's story was different for each of them. As Salvaggio has pointed out: 'by telling our specific stories, by allowing a multiplicity of stories to be told, we can articulate our specific historical and cultural positions and use them to negotiate both our differences and connections' (p.53).

As Trinh has poetically put it then women's stories have circulated 'like a gift; an empty gift, which anybody can lay claim to, by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess. A gift built on multiplicity. One that stays inexhaustible within its own limits. Its departures and arrivals. Its quietness.' (Trinh 1989, p.2) In receiving the free gift of migrant and refugee women's stories what I have argued in this section is that the sound of narratives could become a trope that can take us down the path of decolonizing our ways of knowing and understanding and this includes thinking differently about relations, as I will discuss in the next section.

Decolonizing Relations

There were many and significant differences even among the small group of twenty-two women who participated in this study, including age, ethnic origin, race, religion, social class, educational background, personal status and disability amongst others. Their social, political and embodied differences confirm Mohanty's argument that the projected unity of experiences among women, even among critical feminist approaches, is in itself a false universalization, 'an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination'. (2003, p.31) Situated within different contexts, all stories however recounted fugitive narratives from heteropatriarchy. To put it simply, all women were running for their lives, escaping violence at the hands of men, whether soldiers, rapists, traffickers, smugglers, or their fathers, husbands, brothers and uncles, and sometimes even their 'rescuers'. Uprooted women's common ground of struggling against heteropatriarchy confirms Kelly Oliver's suggestion that, 'focusing on women refugees as a group with shared interests, and yet acknowledging vast differences in cultural, social, historical, and material conditions among the world's refugee women, demonstrates the need for transnational feminisms that go beyond national sovereignty, beyond universal human rights discourse,

and perhaps even beyond feminism itself' (2017, p.179). What I would add here is that a transdisciplinary approach to the analysis and understanding of uprooted women's experiences can become a useful tool in transnational feminist research.

But what also emerges from uprooted women's stories is that subjects and relations are not pre-existing but rather emerge through complex entanglements. In this context, the heteropatriarchal family as a unity of kinship relations was irreparably challenged in migrant and refugee women's narratives. It is from family members that they were escaping — whether uncles, fathers, brothers or in-laws — but it was also with family members that they were trying to reunite while on the move, usually their children, mothers and in some fewer cases, husbands. Families were thus configured through relations of exteriority: what connected them with the outside, was perhaps more important than what was unfolding within their boundaries. Women's agential movements were therefore conditioned, but not determined by their families. Moreover, their subjectivities as cartographies of multifarious subject positions emerged through relations within 'communities of choice' (Friedman, 1989), within a context of relational ontologies, epistemologies and ethics.

What has also struck me from the beginning of this research was the various media and policy reports representations of uprooted women as 'women travelling alone'. The case study of Farah illustrates such language paradoxes: 'Farah is an Afghan refugee *travelling alone* through Europe with her eight children, seven of whom are girls under the age of 17' (United Nations Refugee Agency et al, 2016). The discourse of loneliness is a Western construction deeply rooted in the Enlightenment idea of an autonomous individual, often represented through the image of the adventurous wanderer/traveller/nomad/flâneur or even flâneuse in its various feminist appropriation and renditions (see Wolff, 1990). Uprooted women's stories have radically and decisively challenged such Eurocentric constructions of individuality by forcefully expressing the notion of 'transindividuality' as a modality of being- in the world-with others. In Étienne Balibar's influential reading of Spinoza, 'transindividuality' (1997) is understood as the mutual constitution of individuals and collectivities within specific socio-political, historical, economic and geographic situations. Balibar's notion of transindividuality chimes with feminist and Indigeneous relational ontologies, but the latter include the Earth, as well as non-human entities. What my analysis of uprooted women's stories has shown is that subjectivities do not pre-exist relations, but rather emerge through their dynamic relations, although they are never fully realized within these relations. It is on a plane of rethinking relations, beyond the heteropatriarchal family that decolonized practices of freedom were also enacted, as I will discuss in the next section.

Decolonizing freedom

In proposing the notion of relational freedom, Allison Weir has suggested that 'we are free only in and through our relations with others, including all creatures in an animate universe.' (2017, p.268) Such situated practices of freedom challenge liberal individualistic approaches that are still dominant in Western political theory. While lamenting their vulnerability and the loss of their loved ones, migrant and refugee women have also transposed their stories in political narratives of resistance. It is through 'narration as action' (Tamboukou, 2018) that migrant and refugee women rewrote their exclusion and marginalization, defended their

decision to transgress authoritarian border regimes of the nation state sovereignty and opened up possibilities for transnational connections. In this context, there were two planes on which I mapped fugitive narratives in the context of relational freedom: labour activism and education.

As it has been widely acknowledged and documented, uprooted women's labour has contributed significantly to historical and contemporary formations of racial capitalism. (see Guttiérez Rodríguez, 2018). In this research I have looked closely at gendered and racialized labour relations under conditions of forced displacement. Nadia's experience of working in the Istanbul garment industry under condition of modern slavery has initiated a genealogy of gendered memories of work in the garment industry under conditions of forced displacement that I have expanded elsewhere in my work (see Tamboukou, 2022).

> I thus started working in the textile workshop of a family but in the beginning, they didn't pay me. I was working twelve hours there, from morning until evening, for seven, eight and sometimes nine to twelve hours, doing overtime, because some of the work they had was urgent to finish. I was working with the other workers of the textile, but in return I didn't get anything. I think it was for 5-6 months that they didn't pay me, because I was living with them for free. I didn't have any money and they were helping me with food and accommodation. And after five or six months, I think it was six, they talked to me and said, 'we will give you 500 Turkish lira per month'. I was so happy, because I was alive and I needed to survive, so I was happy for that, otherwise I was not happy in my life, because I was living with strangers. 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)

But what I have also argued is that it is from the conditions of their exploitation that migrant and refugee women's deep and passionate involvement in labour activism has also emerged, and it is still alive and kicking. In tracing agonistic genealogies of gendered and racialized labour relations, I have challenged the construction of the uprooted woman as a helpless victim in need of protection and humanitarian aid, but have also pointed to her marginalization within the histories and structures of the labour movement, which reaches our own days. Migrant and refugee women's struggles bring forward new modalities of relational freedom and force us to revisit the Western foundations of social movements and agonistic politics. Hanna's experience of founding a powerful migrant women's organization to battle against African women workers' exploitation is exemplary of this politics of resistance:

> One day when I was at one of these European Women's organization meetings, I started wondering. I began to think, look at that, why can't we as African women, have something like this to talk about our problems? Why? I was alone in the streets at night and I said to myself, why can't we do that? If we have our own organization, we can talk, we can do anything we want to do. (Hanna's story)

Not only did Hanna establish a feisty United African Women Organization (UAWO) in Athens, which has been in the forefront of defending migrant women workers' civil and employment rights, but has also initiated a series of successful educational and cultural events, taking

education beyond the walls of the academy and into the heart of migrant and refugee women's community. 'Sisterhood and Struggle: Writing Black Women's Political Leadership' was amongst these important events, which took place in Athens, in October 2019. It included workshops, women's circles, reading groups and public talks and its aim was 'to address issues concerning the politics of space, and function as a platform to access knowledge and histories of political struggle often unacknowledged in many activist spaces in Greece and elsewhere.' (UAWO-Greece, 2019) The central speaker of this three days' event was Carole Boyce Davies, who excavated a long genealogy of marginalised Black women's activism. When I visited Athens for the first leg of my research in December 2018, I had the chance to meet some of the wonderful women from this organization. What struck me at the time and continues to do so, is that these important intellectual events are happening outside the formal structures of academic institutions in Greece—perhaps this is why they are so vibrant and interesting.

Re-imagining the self through education has indeed been a strong theme that has woven together the various stories of my research. Education has been mapped not only as a site of struggles, but also as a realm of 'radical hope' (Lear 2008) that continues to open up future imaginaries. The 'right to education' under conditions of forced displacement has further pointed to the cracks of the dominant human rights discourses, as I will further discuss in the next section.

Decolonizing Rights: Carceral Humanitarianism and 'Rescue Politics'

Is the human rights framework a useful approach to understand and support uprooted women's condition? McLaren has asked (2017, p.2), juxtaposing the individualistic and universalizing premises of the dominant human rights discourses to collective struggles and social movements. As Oliver has persuasively argued the abstract concept of human rights, which has its roots in the Enlightenment idea of cosmopolitanism is seriously challenged by the uprooted women's condition (2016, p. 55). By being grouped together under the label of 'vulnerable subjects' these women were homogenized under the gaze of the western humanitarian eyes. In Oliver's analysis then, the refuge woman is a creation of the political technologies of what she configures as *carceral humanitarianism*:

> contemporary detention centers and refugee camps are part and parcel of a system of carceral humanitarianism and 'rescue politics' that turns refugees into criminals and charity cases simultaneously, which, in turn, becomes the troubling justification for 'rescuing' them in order to lock them in, increasingly in dangerous, disease-ridden, sorely inadequate conditions. (2016, p.6)

Rescue politics (Tazzioli, 2015) is then part of the predicament of the refugee woman and not its solution, as it is often presented within dominant 'human rights' discourses, institutions and organizations. Since it is nation states and their border practices that 'create refugees and then pay humanitarian aid organizations to take care of them' it is within transnational decolonizing practices that we need to rethink the condition of the refugee woman, Oliver has argued. (2016, p.13) Linda's story is exemplary in this context:

> So when we reached there [Lesvos], they left the group with other people and they only took me to their offices. They prepared coffee, they called a doctor to examine

> me, they offered me cigarettes and they even called my family, to say that I had reached Greece and I was fine. They told me I was safe and that I shouldn't be afraid and then they asked me: 'What are you going to do now? Are you going to leave? I said 'I don't know' and then they told me 'since you know Greek, you should stay here and work as an interpreter'. I still said 'I don't know what I am going to do' and it is true: I had nothing in my mind. (Linda's story)

Linda is a Syrian woman in her early forties, who left Syria to join her brother, who was working and living in Turkey, but disillusioned with the situation in Turkey, she decided to jump in a boat and go to Greece. Linda recounted the process of her decision to settle in Lesvos in a cinematic narrative mode: scene after scene, line after line. The advice she got in her first encounter with the border authorities carry signs of Oliver's *carceral humanitarianism*: 'asylum seekers become targets of the new humanitarian military—in the case of Syrian refugees, navies and coast guards operating in the Mediterranean Sea. Their rescue at sea becomes a way of containing their unauthorized movement. Once rescued, migrants are sorted, contained within fences and checkpoints, and monitored' (2017, p.185).

In reviving her dialogue with the border authorities in Lesvos, it was as if Linda was contemplating her decision once again. At the time of the interview, in April 2019, she had already worked three years in Lesvos as an interpreter, she had fallen in love and got married and she was living in a rented flat with her partner. She had settled, or had she? When I visited Lesvos again in June 2019 and we met, she was trying to get an official recognition of her sociology degree in Syria, while also thinking about moving to the mainland with a rough entrepreneurship project in mind. Linda had become 'a border woman', living in in-between places, that leave open possibilities for future real and imagined journeys.

In configuring the notion of *carceral humanitarianism,* Oliver has further remarked that the traditional categories of *indigeneous* and/or *settlers,* as they are deployed in some strands of decolonial feminisms are not always adequate in understanding 'the special plight of the refugee woman' (2017, p.180). Moreover, even intersectionality cannot fully respond to the condition of leaving home with nothing in Oliver's analysis. (194) Adding to the inadequacies of the intersectional approach, here I would also point to the difficulty of pinning down uprooted women in a single occupation, social class, family position, or even physical appearance, given the fluidity of their mobile condition and the recurrent changes of their status. In recounting the moment of going through the procedures of the Red Cross photograph recognition, Nadia was devastated not to be able to identify her mother: 'I looked at all the photos, but I couldn't see my mother. Yes, it was more than three years that we had got separated. In the same way that I had changed, physically and mentally, they had also changed. So, I didn't recognise my mother.'

Throughout this study I have not only grappled with the complexities of migrant and refugee women's condition, but I have also tried to make 'cartographies of struggles' (Mohanty, 2003). What I have argued is that these women have enacted the Arendtian 'right to have rights' (1943) by grasping their passages and moving in-between worlds. While doing so, however I have also recognized my own partial view and situated perspectives throughout this study. It was my own engagement with nomadic theories since the days of my PhD that eventually came to haunt me in a critique of the concept that I have used throughout my work

of writing feminist genealogies. It was my involvement in the second wave feminist movement in Greece that created conditions of possibility for being trusted, when organizing the fieldwork of this research and being introduced to women who were willing to share the gift of their story with me. I hope that the acknowledgement of my partiality, as well as the mapping of my positionality can contribute to the wider project of decolonizing feminist theory and politics, deploying transcdisciplinary perspectives, as well as forging transnational relations and connections.

Surging knowledges in transdisciplinary research

In this chapter I have looked back at my research with displaced women's stories of travelling framed within a feminist transdisciplinary approach, encompassing epistemological, theoretical and methodological approaches from philosophy, sociology, labour history, political theory, critical geography, migration studies and narrative research. I cannot hide my trepidation when presenting my research in different audiences or writing articles for journals embedded in different disciplinary fields. I can definitely say that this has been a research adventure in unknown territories, but it was after all a risk worth taking in terms of how my own understanding and ways of seeing have radically changed.

I can only imagine what the protagonists of the narratives I have discussed would think of seeing their stories through my multi-focal analytical lenses, but also in concert with other women's, in a Bacchant chorus of what Bonnie Honig has configured as 'a feminist theory of refusal' (2021). What I do know however is that all of them wanted their stories to be out in the wide wild world, which is what I have tried to do, by highlighting the importance of listening to these stories in grounding abstract theorizations and sketching feminist political imaginaries.

And yet these pigments of lived experiences of displacement, violence, fugitive routes and new beginnings become counter memories, of who they are, how they act and what they can become. I therefore see these stories as contributing to an on-going process of intense memory work against a wider background within which they only figure as victims and powerless subjects. But I have also seen these stories as affirmative and generative of new knowledges to come—feminist surging knowledges.

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