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The technological obstructions of asylum
Asylum seekers as forced techno-users and governing through disorientation

January 7, 2019, Greek island of Lesvos: UNHCR's officers were walking tent by tent in the hotspot of Moria to do the monthly verification with the asylum seekers who are eligible for the Cash Assistance Programme. According to UNHCR, the Programme "restores dignity and empowers asylum seekers and refugees"[1]. At that time, around 7000 women, men and children were living in the crowded hotspot: "we have no hot water, and some areas of the camp there is no electricity either. We are all becoming mad, some of us have been stranded here for one year or more", an Iranian man told me outside of the camp. "Now I have to go back to my tent" he added "as the UNHCR is coming to top up my card, they informed me this morning with a text; I hope to be still eligible. It is very difficult to understand how these technologies work". This snapshot from Lesvos, where asylum seekers[2] are given prepaid cards by humanitarian actors while they are exposed to protracted precarity is iconic of "techno-humanitarianism" (Morozov, 2012). This paper focuses on the Greek asylum system and investigates how asylum seekers are turned into forced hindered techno-users, whose access to protection, rights and financial-humanitarian support is obstructed and mediated by different technologies and apps – such as Skype, Viber and Whatsapp. The article shows that asylum seekers as obstructed forced techno-users are expected to act responsibly while at the same time are kept in a protracted state of dependency on humanitarian actors and are repeatedly disoriented.

The Greek refugee system is a case in point for scrutinizing the technological obstructions of asylum: indeed, asylum seekers need to navigate a series of technological mediations for interacting with both Greek authorities as well as with humanitarian actors[3] and "are confronted with multiple technological steps that hamper them from accessing rights. .The article mobilises a transversal approach to techno-humanitarianism and refugee governmentality, building on critical security stud-

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[1] http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/greece-cash-assistance-february-2019/

[2] Throughout the paper, I use the term "asylum seekers" any time that I refer to migrants who intend to claim asylum or who have lodged their asylum application and who, therefore, are controlled and managed by humanitarian and whose legal and spatial restrictions depend on asylum policies. I use the term "migrant" to refer to people who have not (yet) lodged their asylum application.

[3] As I will illustrate more in detail later in the paper, in order to apply for asylum, they need to pre-book an appointment with the Greek Asylum Office via Skype.

ies, migration scholarship and critical works on humanitarianism. A growing scholarship has studied the transformations that occurred in refugee governmentality due to the use of digital technologies (Jacosben, 2015; Jacobsen, Sandvik, 2018; Read et al. 2016; Sandvik et al. 2014) and big data (Amoore, 2020; Metcalfe Dencik, 2019) leading some authors to investigate the technologisation of the humanitarian space (Abdelnour, Saeed, 2014) and to caution against the emphasis on techno-innovation (Scott-Smith, 2016). Here I shift the focus from surveillance and control towards an analysis of how the forced technological intermediations in refugee camps further obstruct asylum seekers' access to rights and financial-humanitarian support. Drawing on the assumption that technology "loops back in the constitution of social order" (Jacobsen, 2015: 148) and "is co-constitutive of the humanitarian environment it seeks to capture" (Read et al. 2016: 7), the piece takes into account the forced encounters between asylum seekers and technologies, and it advances a twofold argument.

First, it contends that asylum seekers are turned into forced hindered techno-users who are governed by being disoriented: indeed, they need to keep themselves up to date regarding the frequent changes about eligibility criteria, technological steps to take and deadlines to comply with. Second, and relatedly, the article argues that the analytics of securitisation and victimisation are not exhaustive for grasping how asylum seekers as techno-users are shaped and disciplined. In fact, people who seek asylum are certainly represented and treated also as risky subjects and as subjects of pity (Newman, van Selm, 2003). Yet, an insight into the technological obstructions of asylum highlights that asylum seekers are expected to act as responsible techno-users and comply with a series of techno-bureaucratic steps while at the same time their dependency on humanitarian actors is reiterated.

Digital technologies, it has been argued by scholars, work as mediations tools which are both tactically used by migrants to make their own way, and enforced by state authorities to spot, identify and control migrants (Nedelcu, Soysuren, 2020). Yet, here I speak of forced technological mediation to draw attention to the asymmetrical power relations between humanitarian and state actors on the one side, and asylum seekers who are requested or pushed to use technologies on the other. By speaking of forced technological mediations I insist on how these multiplicities of technologies contribute to obstruct migrants' access to asylum. In fact, while in critical security studies scholars have widely analysed how digital technologies are used for tracking and controlling refugees, here I investigate how the incorporation of technologies in refugee governmentality contribute to hinder asylum seekers and, thus, render them more precarious.

Methodologically, this paper builds on empirical material collected during my research fieldwork in Greece, in Athens and Lesvos, between 2017 and 2020[4] and on the analysis of UNHCR public documents. During the fieldwork I interviewed Greek institutions (the Asylum Service and the Ministry of Migration), international organisations (UNHCR in Athens and Lesvos, IOM and the Red Cross), international and Greek NGOs (Doctors without Borders, Caritas, Pikpa) and the financial provider of the Cash Assistance Programme, Prepaid Financial Services, which is based in London. During my participatory observation, I interviewed asylum seekers outside the hotspot of Moria in Lesvos and in the city of Mitilini, as well as in Athens, during the card distribution process at Caritas office and in the camp of Eleonas[5]. Drawing on such empirical material, the paper proceeds by analysing digital and financial tools in relation to the restructuring of the asylum regime, conceived as a political technology for containing, disrupting and controlling migration (De Genova, 2013; Karakayali, Rigo, 2010). As part of that, it is important to stress that the hotspots, which are located on five Greek islands[6], have become "cramped spaces" (Walters, Luthi, 2016) where asylum seekers are protractedly stranded. This is mainly the result of the geographical restrictions that had been enforced through the EU-Turkey Deal, which establishes that migrants who land on the Greek islands need to wait there until when their asylum claim is processed (Spathopoulou, Carasthathis, 2020). "Humanitarian triage therefore provides basic needs to a captive population" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016), as long as migrants are entrapped twice there - in the hotspots and on the islands.

The paper proceeds in three sections. It starts by discussing the multiple technological intermediations that asylum seekers are confronted with, focusing on the Cash Assistance Programme and on how asylum seekers are obstructed in accessing asylum and financial support. It explores the widespread disorientation that asylum seekers experience, as long as they need to navigate un-legible techno-scripts that change over time. The paper moves on by critically engaging with the literature on securitisation and victimisation of refugees, and it argues that asylum seekers are not treated exclusively as potential threats or as victims but also as forced hindered subjects; that is, they are kept in a condition of protracted uncertainty and, in meanwhile, they need to find out the multiple

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[4] I conducted interviews with all actors involved in the Cash Assistance Programme, which include the UNHCR, the NGOs Catholic Relief Services, Caritas and the Hellenic Red Cross, and the Prepaid Financial Services. I have also conducted interviews with the Greek Asylum service in Athens. Plus, while I was doing participatory observation in Lesvos and in Athens, I have interviewed asylum seekers. In 2020, due to Covid-19, I conducted few interviews over Skype (with Caritas Greece and with PFS).

[5] I got the authorisation to access refugee camps from the Ministry of Interior.

[6] Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos.

technological and bureaucratic steps they are requested to comply with. In the final section, the article illustrates how forced technological mediations actually reinforce asylum seekers' dependence on humanitarian actors and enhance socio-legal precarity. The article contributes to the debates on securitization and victimization of refugees and asylum seekers, highlighting how asylum seekers are not exclusively criminalised and controlled or protected; rather, they are also turned into forced hindered techno-users and are governed through disorientation. The forced technological mediations reinforce asylum seekers' protracted dependency on humanitarian actors while at the same time they are expected to act as responsible techno-users. Thus, the article argues, a critical engagement with techno-humanitarianism involves interrogating the processes of subjectivation that are play (Foucault, 1988). By subjectivation I refer here on the one hand to the humanitarian narratives around refugees' autonomy through technology and on the other to the ways in which refugees' subjectivities are expected to act as responsible consumers and techno-users from within a condition of spatial containment.

Cash assistance and disruptive technologies:

Greece is the first European country with a EU-funded Cash Assistance Programme for asylum seekers. The Programme was launched in 2016[7] and then implemented in 2017, as a response to the so called "refugee crisis". On paper, all asylum seekers who arrived in the country after January 2015 and who hold the asylum card, are eligible for the financial support: this is uploaded every month on a Mastercard sponsored prepaid card and can be used both to pay in shops and to take cash from ATM machines [8]. However, spatial and mobility restrictions apply, similarly to other contexts where cash assistance programmes had been implemented (Coddington, 2019): only asylum seekers who accept to stay in the accommodations provided by the Greek authorities or by UNHCR could benefit of the Cash Assistance Programme, although, paradoxically, this had been set as a way for improving refugees' autonomy[9]. The Programme is run by UNHCR, which is in charge of collecting the data from the card beneficiaries, in cooperation with two Greek NGOs[10] that are in-

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[7] The Cash Assistance scheme in Greece is part of the ESTIA Programme, funded by the European Commission.

[8] The monthly financial support for each individual is of 90 euros, if they stay in a hosting centre in which food is provided, of 150 euros, if they do not receive food in camps. The amount changes for families, and it depends on the number of family members.

[9] Yet, in response to asylum seekers' struggles that took place between 2017 and 2018, in 2019 the UNHCR broadened the criteria of the Cash Assistance Programme. As a result of that, even asylum seekers who live independently and who can provide an official rent contract or even a self-declaration of their rent can access the Programme.

[10] The Hellenic Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services. This latter has subcontracted the job to Caritas Hellas.

volved in the card registration and in the monthly verification process on the mainland. The Cash Assistance Programme in Greece is not a state-driven project; on the contrary, it constitutes a case in point of "internal externalisation" (Heller, Pezzani, 2016). Indeed, even if the Greek authorities have endorsed it, they are not directly involved in the Programme, which is in fact funded by the EU, managed by UNHCR and supported by a financial provider based in London, Prepaid Financial Services.

The Greek refugees' context is an interesting laboratory of experimentation of EU migration and refugee policies[11], and yet, this is not because of advanced technologies. Rather, its salience and specificity depends on the mix of widely promoted technologies - such as the prepaid cards - and more ordinary ones - such as Skype, Viber and Whatsapp. In fact, even the apps that refugees widely use in their daily life - like WhatsApp - might turn out into obstacles to asylum seekers, when these are used as compulsory technological mediations to claim asylum and to receive financial support. For this reason, I suggest, it is key to analyse the prepaid cards that asylum seekers receive in relation to the apps that that mediate the interactions between asylum seekers and humanitarian actors. The scholarship on cashless programmes focuses on the relationship between migrants, financial tools (debit cards) and humanitarian actors, and points to the forms of discrimination and surveillance that are enacted through these programmes (Jacobsen, Fast, 2020; Tazzioli, 2019; Ulrich, Lambert, 2018a).

By arguing that asylum seekers are turned into forced hindered techno-users I echo works that stress how cashless technologies increase asylum seeker's dependency on the state and on humanitarian actors (Coddington et al. 2020; Jacobsen, 2017). Indeed, as I will illustrate in detail later, far from being empowered through technology and prepaid cards, asylum seekers' dependency on humanitarian actors is enhanced. As part of this literature, scholars have highlighted the destitution effects associated to the implementation of cashless programmes. Kate Coddington has importantly shown how the use of cashless technologies constitutes a form of slow violence towards asylum seekers: indeed, according to Coddington, cash assistance programmes are part of broader state financial tactics which "have become key mechanisms in disciplining migrant populations" (Coddington;, 2019: 531; see also Culcasi et al. 2019). Such a view enables drawing attention to modes of violence which are not narrowed to blatant human right violations. Relatedly, this perspective significantly pushes critical analysis of techno-humanitarianism beyond mechanisms of arbitrary exclusion -

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[11] In fact, since 2015 Jordan - and in particular the refugee camp of Zaatari - has become the key site for high-tech and financial actors to test technologies for refugees (Turner, 2019; see also Jacobsen, 2017). Plus, as I show later in the paper, unlike in Jordan, in Greece the UNHCR did not experiment technologies such as the iris scan.

such as. migrants excluded from the Cash Assistance Programme - considering how cashless technologies shape and discipline refugees' subjectivities. However, I suggest that a focus on state logics needs to be supplemented with an inquiry of the role played by financial and humanitarian actors and nuanced in light of the intertwining of European and national interests[12].

More broadly, an analysis of the effects of destitution allows questioning discourses on refugee empowerment through digital technologies, that are widely promoted by migration agencies and the UNHCR. In particular, this scholarship challenges the idea according to which technologies are implemented in refugee governmentality in an inclusive way, as it illustrates that asylum seekers are discriminated in getting access to the cash assistance or in making purchases. Yet, speaking of destitute asylum seekers means assuming that they have been stripped off, deprived of something, or not supported at all or enough by the hosting country, ending up in a state of poverty (Alssopp et al. 2014)[13]. Instead, here I draw attention to how they had been obstructed and debilitated in their access to the asylum system and to social rights, without necessarily being unable to meet essential living needs or being fully destitute[14].

Relatedly, more than focusing on how asylum seekers have been excluded from digital connectivity and cash assistance, I interrogate how their subjectivities are shaped by these technological intermediations with the humanitarian actors. Asylum seekers are disoriented and disempowered in their access to both humanitarian and financial support, as well as to rights. o.In order to scrutinise the debilitating effects they have on people seeking asylum, cash assistance programmes should be analysed in relation to the other technologies that asylum seekers need to navigate on a daily basis. In Greece, the technological obstacles start for migrants when they decide to claim asylum. Indeed, since 2016 migrants who want to book an appointment with the Asylum Office for lodging their asylum application need to do this through a mandatory Skype system which for many can be difficult to handle. Indeed, for some migrants owing a smartphone and getting access to internet is not so straightforward and Skype calls can be made only during specific time slots - usually one or two

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[12] In fact, the Cash Assistance Programme is funded by the European Commission and the Greek authorities do not directly intervene in it. This has generated tensions between the Greek government and the actors involved in the Programme, regarding the access to the data collected. At the same time, the EU is pushing the Greek to take over the Programme, although this proposal has been postponed many times.

[13] As Allsopp and colleagues point out, there is no clear-cut definition of destitution but it is mostly related to the condition of being unable to meet essential living needs.

[14] While in other contexts, such as the UK, states enact a deliberate politics of refugees destitution, in Greece it is difficult to find out a linear state narrative, due to the role played by actors such as the UNHCR and the EU. Overall, more than analysing the cash programme in terms of asylum seekers' destitution, it is relevant that card beneficiaries complain about the multiple restrictions they encounter in getting access to the financial support and about their own protracted dependency on humanitarian actors.

hours per week, depending on migrants' nationalities[15]. As a result of that, "the line is always busy, it took to me three weeks before reaching the Asylum Office"[16]. Since the onset of Covid-19, the asylum procedure has almost entirely switched online: after pre-booking an appointment via Skype, migrants need to lodge their asylum application online, on the website of the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and Asylum[17].

Athens, April 23, 2019: at the office of the NGO Caritas around 250 asylum seekers from different nationalities are queuing in order to register into the Cash Assistance programme or to do the monthly verification to prove they are still eligible for it. As part of that, Caritas' officers need to check the legal status of the card holders and where they are living; the NGO also call asylum seekers over phone, to verify they are still in Greece. However, as one officer stressed to me, "the main problem for asylum seekers is technology; what is supposed to facilitate them is actually a main obstacle, from the phone calls, to the compulsory Skype call to book the asylum interview, up to the Viber chat system"[18]. For instance, if asylum seekers have technical problems with their prepaid cards, or if the monthly payment is delayed, they can be in touch with humanitarian actors only by sending a text via Viber[19] (**See Picture 1**). Or better, although an emergency landline exists, this is de facto useless "as it is very unlikely that someone will answer the call, as we are too busy"[20]. Both the Viber number and the landline are connected to an online system, Commoncare, and the operators from the NGOs that are in charge of answering asylum seekers' chats do have access both to the UNHCR database, Progress, and the one of the financial provider PFS, to check the card transactions in real-time. However, asylum seekers' personal data, which is contained in Progress, is not directly connected to the national hotline: therefore, the operators who store calls and chats need to import the data manually from Progress into Commoncare[21].

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[15] According to the data of the Greek Asylum Office: http://asylo.gov.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Skype-programme-28-1-19-%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%AF%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B7-7.08.2019.pdf

[16] Interview with an Iranian asylum seeker, Athens, August 2019.

[17] https://apps.migration.gov.gr/selfregistration/login?lang=en

[18] Interview with Caritas officers, Athens, April 23, 2019.

[19]https://www.refugee.info/greece/cash-assistance-in-greece--greece/greece-cash-alliance-hotline

[20] Interview with Caritas, Athens, April 23, 2019.

[21] Skype interview with the Hellenic Red Cross, May 2, 2019.

According to asylum seekers who experienced the Viber communication system with the NGOs, many messages receive a response only after days. This is because the system has been set for sending at the bottom of the queue those card beneficiaries who send multiple messages (**See Pictures 1 2**). Even the monthly verification through phone calls often turns out into an obstacle to refugees. This is not because they do not have a phone - the huge majority does have one; rather, it is because many change their phone number and sim card many times. Thus, instead of claiming that apps like WhatsApp empower asylum seekers (Ulrich, Lambert, 2018b) or, on the contrary, fully destitute them, it is worth noticing that asylum seekers are repeatedly obstructed - in accessing asylum, rights and support - and ultimately disoriented by the frantic changes of deadlines, criteria and procedures. The possibility for asylum seekers of using the prepaid cards depends on their ability to deal with other technologies - in particular apps, such as Viber and Whatsapp. This happens not only when there are technical glitches to be fixed. Rather, technological mediations between asylum seekers and humanitarian actors are fully incorporated in the daily operations of refugee governmentality.

In order to do the monthly verification procedure, UNHCR and the two NGOs involved in the Programme send multiple texts to asylum seekers at different times: the first one is sent to communicate the date of the appointment; the second one, that asylum seekers receive just the day before the appointment, indicates the exact time and location. Thus, asylum seekers need to be always reachable, plus they must have a mobile phone and not change number, something that often happens. What do they received multiple texts deferred in time? This deferred-texts strategy is used for "preventing potential turmoil and disorder"[22] that might be caused by asylum seekers who come to the registration office outside their slots, or by others who might gather there to get the financial support even if they are not eligible. In so doing, asylum seekers are preventively disciplined as potential mobs (Tazzioli, 2017); and, at the same time, they are governed through a multiplicity of scattered temporal deadlines and rules they need to follow. This mix of techno-temporal rules generates a widespread disorientation among asylum seekers: indeed, they are entrapped into a whirlwind of technological steps to take and they need to pay attention to the unpredictable tiny changes about deadlines and eligibility criteria. Even apps - like Whatsapp or Skype - that migrants use on a daily basis become actual obstacles to them, together with the multiple disorienting technological steps that they need to comply with.

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[22] Interview with an officer from Caritas, Athens, April 23, 2019

The fact that asylum seekers are repeatedly disoriented in their attempt to navigate the asylum system is a constitutive feature of the way in which technologies are incorporated in refugee governmentality and of how they work. The widespread disorientation and confusion that asylum seekers experience is not just a side effect of the asylum system. *ii*.As Claudia Aradau has observed "ambiguity has also been deployed both to foster non-knowledge and to (de)stabilize the assembling of ignorance, uncertainty, and secrecy" (Aradau, 2017: 11). Similarly, modes of *governing through disorientation* are constitutive political technologies of the asylum regime. Asylum seekers' disorientation shows that the non-knowledge enhanced through disorientating compulsory technological mediations, unpredictable changes in criteria and deadlines, is not only an epistemic issue but has also tangible effects on their lives. Thus, non-knowledge in this case consists in asylum seekers not being informed about the changing of rules and of the steps they need to take. For instance, as R. an Iranian asylum seeker reported to me in Athens, "I have not received my monthly payment for three months, and thus I contacted the landline number I was given by Caritas, and nobody answered; so I was told by friends in the camp that I should contact them via Whatsapp, but then this stopped working and we could only use Viber. Yet, I realized only after days that you could use those numbers only for sending chats, not for making phone calls"[23].

Asylum seekers as forced hindered techno-users need to navigate *un-legible* techno-humanitarian assemblages made of disciplinary rules that are changed over time. The *un-legible* differs from lack of transparency, as it consists in the active production of opacity through repeated changes that asylum seekers are not informed of. *Un-legible* techno-humanitarian rules consist in the active undoing of legibility, that is in the setting up of procedures that remain constantly opaque, mainly because they are altered in an unpredictable way and, thus, asylum seekers need to constantly update themselves. The reiterated production of un-legible techno-disciplinary rules are constitutive components of ways of governing through disorientation. Thus, the "circuits of financial-humanitarianism" (Tazzioli, 2019) function through a series of dispersed technological steps that people seeking asylum need to repeatedly undertake. The production of un-legible technological procedures through frantic changes made without letting asylum seekers know is associated with the "discrediting of subjects of knowledge" (Aradau, 2017: 10; see also Stel, 2016). Asylum seekers as card beneficiaries have to constantly figure out how to navigate technologies, and at the same time they are deemed to be deceiving, cheating subjects - who try to circumvent any rule.

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[23] Interview with R., Iranian asylum seeker in Athens, July 28, 2018.

Forced hindered techno-users, beyond victimization and securitisation

An insight into the role of digital technologies in refugee governmentality enables engaging with the transformations that occurred in the securitisation of refugees (Hammerstad, 2011; McCluskey, 2019; Huysmans, 2000; Squire, Scheel, 2014) and in technologization of security (Bigo, 2002; Ceyhan, 2002). This paper complicates the representation of refugees as *risky subjects* and *subject at risk* - that is as subjects who are crafted as potential threats and who, alternatively, might be portrayed as subjects of pity to be protected (Baker-Beall, 2019; Dijstelbloem, van de Veer, 2019; Gray, Franck, 2019). Hoffmann has pointed to the overlapping security claims that underpin and justify the implementation of digital technologies in refugee camps (Hoffmann, 2017). Analyses about the victimisation of refugees had been rife in the literature (Fassin, 2005; Mallki, 1996) and scholars have demonstrated how security and humanitarian modes of intervention are strictly intertwined and do mutually reinforce each other. Notably, as Miriam Ticktin has shown, migrants are governed through the "regimes of care" that shape them as "subjects of pity, not rights" (Ticktin, 2011: 61). Aradau has cogently analysed the mutual entanglements between politics of risk and politics of pity, showing how "risk technologies have made possible the specification of the victim […] as inherently and perpetually 'risky'" (Aradau, 2004: 275). Scholars have explored how the crafting of refugees as "risky subjects" and "subjects at risk" is enacted in the daily operations of refugee humanitarianism, through twofold political technologies of "care and control" (Isleyen, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2016; Williams, 2015).

Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Larissa Fast have noticed that the use of technology in humanitarian governance "blurs control and care, emancipation, and domination", as long as new technologies are tested in refugee camps "on the basis of improvements in care" (Jacobsen, Fast, 2019: 156) while at the same time they introduce new modes of control. Yet, security-centered analyses should be nuanced in light of asylum seekers being treated mainly as deportable subjects[24] and, at the same time transformed into surfaces of data extraction and value production (Amoore, 2020; Aradau, Tazzioli, 2020). ‚Securitization and victimisation are not exhaustive analytics for grasping the modes of subjection, extraction and control that asylum seekers are shaped and affected by. Rather, the security-humanitarianism diptych requires to be supplemented with an analysis of how asylum

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[24] This has been particularly the case since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal, in March 2016, which establishes that migrants who land in Greece coming via Turkey can be deported to Turkey.

seekers are shaped as forced hindered techno-users who are deemed to misuse the refugee system - e.g. by claiming asylum to obtain a temporary authorisation to stay.

In Greece security claims are partly mobilised for justifying and promoting the use of prepaid cards and digital technologies in refugee camps and hotspots: the card distribution is indeed supposed to enhance asylum seekers' security - avoiding identity fraud and fights among them - and to prevent potential tumults, as long as humanitarian distribution can be done in a smoother and less arbitrary way, by increasing the distance between asylum seekers and humanitarian actors. Actually, asylum seekers in the hotspots are partly governed by the interweaving of logics of *care and control* on a daily basis. The implementation of digital and financial technologies in refugee camps and hotspots takes place in a securitised space, in particular on the Greek islands where many migrants are en-trapped, due to the EU-Turkey Deal. Within such a context, witnessing to asylum seekers who go in and out the Moria Hotspot in Lesvos[25] surrounded by fences with the prepaid cards in their hands shed lights on the carceral economy in with cash assistance and digital technologies at large are im-plemented as, ultimately, "free services are delivered to an incarcerated population" (Hoffman, 2017: 11; see also Martin, 2020). And yet, it is worth noticing that hotspots have become sites of protracted vulnerability and into unsafe spaces for refugees, also due to the lack of adequate med-ical support (Sozer, 2019; Vradis et al. 2019). In fact, digital technologies are not (mainly) used in refugee humanitarianism for enacting pervasive surveillance and capillary control of asylum seek-ers[26]. In Greece, asylum seekers are not object of constant monitoring and, rather, they tend to be overlooked by state authorities that often do not provide care and basic humanitarian support.

Therefore, security, in its multiple forms - as state security as well as refugee security - does not ap-pear as the main concern or justification mobilised by state authorities. First, in Greece, the political and social reaction to the increasing presence of women, men and children seeking asylum needs to be critically read jointly with and in light of the austerity measures that Greek citizens have been affected by: the temporal conjuncture in 2015 of the economic crisis and of the so called "refugee crisis" transformed the latter into a bench test for Greece (Spathopoulou, Carastathis, 2020). Indeed, the political pressure that the European Commission had put on Greece regarding migrants' identi-fication and hosting procedures in the hotspots contributed to turn asylum seekers into irseconomic and social burdens. In addition to that, it is worth noticing that citizens' perception of people seek-

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[25] The information that I report here concerns the situation on the island of Lesvos before that the Hotspot was set on fire (September 2020) and that the new camp opened.

[26] This does not mean that asylum seekers are not controlled; rather, it is a question of studying the modes in which control is enacted, beyond surveillance, and how it is intertwined with modes of governing through disregard.

ing asylum has changed in the country since 2015. While in 2015 migrants were in transit towards other EU countries, with the closure of the Balkan route in 2016 their protracted presence in Greece appeared as a burden to cope with - indeed, many remained stranded on the Greek islands or gave up their goal of reaching other European countries and claimed asylum in Greece.

Second, at the same time that asylum seekers are victimized as subjects of pity or criminalized and turned into object of suspicion, they are also addressed and blamed as kept people, dependent on NGOs and state aid. "NGOs are pampering refugees"[27], the Greek government significantly declared in 2020, as part of a campaign apt at discrediting both asylum seekers and nongovernmental organisations. Hence, on the one hand, asylum seekers appear as economic and social burdens, and are depicted as parasite of the welfare system and of humanitarian aid; on the other, they are actually turned into nd forced hindered techno-users and requested to perform a series of technological tasks and getting by with deadlines and changes in criteria in order to get access to financial and humanitarian support. That is, at the same time that asylum seekers are blamed for being pampered by and dependent on humanitarian and state aid, they are also forced to use technological mediations.

Asylum seekers, who are constrained by multiple spatial and temporal restrictions as forced techno-users, hustle for dodging some of these obstacles (Thieme, 2017). For instance, due to technical glitches in the database, some card beneficiaries managed to get the monthly financial support twice, moving from one camp to another when the monthly top up was taking place, or by taking the prepaid cards of friends who left the country[28]. As S., an Afghan national stranded in the hotspot of Moria told me, "the amount we receive every month is so minimal that barely manage to cope with essential needs, as to get the food in the camp we have to queue for hours, so many of us prefer to buy it, and most of the time it's not enough or it's always the same; therefore, some people found ways of getting more money". Therefore, asylum seekers are turned into forced hindered techno-users who need to handle things and who are rendered more precarious and are debilitated as long as their access to financial and humanitarian support is obstructed - by the multiple and confusing techno-bureaucratic steps they need to take.

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[27] According to the Greek migration ministry's secretary general, Manos Logothetis "these are people who have gained refugee status and should be fending for themselves […] If they are pampered, how are they going to ever find a job and become part of society, s" (https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/25/we-want-to-stay-refugees-struggle-to-integrate-in-greece-after-camp-life).

[28] This was the case in 2017, when the UNHCR did not have a centralised database, so it was easier for asylum seekers to dodge the system.

The forced technological mediations between humanitarian actors on the one side, and asylum seekers on the other, enhance the multiple hurdles that these latter encounter in receiving protection, humanitarian support and cash assistance. How are asylum seekers affected by that? What are the effects on their subjectivities? These compulsory technological steps in conjunction with deadlines and unpredictable changes in the rules and criteria that generate a widespread disorientation on people seeking asylum which disempower them.

That is, asylum seekers are disoriented and disempowered in their access to both humanitarian and financial support, as well as to rights. Hence, the multiple technological obstructions that asylum seekers deal with end up in debilitating them, as Jasbir Puar has fleshed out in her analysis of modes of governing by harming populations (Puar, 2017). In fact, asylum seekers are confronted with both material obstacles – such as the need of downloading and using certain apps – and with a series of technological steps to take whose rules change frequently over time. In so doing, the compulsory technological mediations of refugee humanitarianism and the changing criteria associated to those, disorient asylum seekers who, as a result, might end up in missing a deadline, or doing the procedure in a wrong way. The turning of asylum seekers into hindered forced techno-users sheds light on modes of governing which do not craft migrants exclusively as potential threats as dangerous individuals nor as subjects in need of protection: more than being totally deprived they are insecuritized by being kept into a condition of uncertainty and obstructed from accessing both asylum and humanitarian support.

Reinforcing dependence:

Asylum seekers are often entrapped in a suspended life: the protracted waiting time of the asylum procedure and the deep uncertainty about the future keep them in a legal limbo (Hyndman, Giles, 2011). However, this protected waiting time is far from being empty: asylum seekers are obliged to take multiple technological steps, comply with changing deadlines and understand how the asylum system work. In some cases, such as the Skype call system to book an appointment with the Asylum Office, technological steps are mandatory for entering the asylum procedure. In some others, technological intermediations are not compulsory but they are the only way for communicating with humanitarian actors - such as the use of Viber to report technical problems with the prepaid card. Which relationships between asylum seekers as forced techno-users and humanitarian actors is produced?

The fact that asylum seekers are given prepaid cards and are requested to use technology for navigating the "asylum's minefield"[29] should not lead us to conclude that they are turned into rs ordinary consumers or neoliberal self-managing subjects. On the contrary, asylum seekers are expected to act as responsible techno-users and yet, at the same time, they are object of multiple spatial restrictions and are entrapped in precarious legal conditions, and many of them might quickly become deportable[30]. A salient example is provided by the increasing use of the app Viber for communicating with asylum seekers. If initially the app was used only by UNHCR as part of the Cash Assistance Programme, after the onset of Covid-19 it had been adopted by the Greek authorities for updating asylum seekers. In particular, Viber has become the main communicative channel between Greek authorities and asylum seekers on the Greek islands: after that the hotspot in Lesvos was set on fire on September 8, 2020, the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum launched "Migration Greece Info"[31], a Viber community for sending info and updates about asylum-related matters[32]. The community chat has also been used for warning asylum seekers from being in touch with NGOs and blackmailing those who refuse to enter the new camp in Lesvos: "the Greek state guarantees your security. Do not believe anyone else. Your life is safe only in the new camp […] From today on, water and food supplies will only be available inside the camp"[33].

Overall, reading the few chats sent every week to the asylum seekers, more than for facilitating access to humanitarian services, the Viber community is used for intimidating asylum seekers or communicating important new rules and restrictions, that will remain unknown to those unable to download and navigate the app. The digitalisation of asylum procedures has been further enhanced in 2020, when the Greek authorities implemented a pilot project on the island of Lesvos for conducting asylum interviews remotely: as it has been documented by Greek NGOs, as part of the online asylum system, asylum seekers receive the date of their interview via text only the day before; during the interview, due to poor internet connectivity, asylum seekers need to repeat their sen-

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[29] As E. a lawyer of the NGO HIAS defined the Greek asylum system during our conversation (August 24, 2020).

[30] This is the case of those whose application for the international protection is rejected.

[31] https://invite.viber.com/?g2=AQBwbnVKr3AUHUv7i1F8blVpQ6t6fqUHHHqTaIVCMvoPy3ty6b4DM6Lio%2Bry-aTS0&lang=en

[32] Such as, among others, exceptional closures of the Asylum Office, logistical information which concerns the new temporary refugee camp in Lesvos, spatial restrictions imposed on asylum seekers and IOM's voluntary return programmes.

[33] Viber chat sent to the asylum seekers in Lesvos on September 29, 2020.

tences multiple times, and their personal data is not "safeguarded through the questionable platform that is used to conduct the remote interviews"[34].

The temporary incorporation into financial circuits does not transform them into bank clients nor into ordinary customers. This emerges also from the functioning of the Cash Assistance Programme. Indeed, the prepaid cards are not associated with individual bank accounts but with the unique UNHCR's financial wallet, and therefore they cannot save their own money or keep an account when they are no longer eligible for the monthly financial support. Relatedly, when they use the prepaid cards, there are few restrictions on purchases (for instance, alcohol as well as online payments, which automatically block the cards). Therefore, more than being turned into consumers, asylum seekers as card beneficiaries become para-consumers and forced hindered techno-users.

Taking into account the use of digital technologies in the field of humanitarianism, UNHCR's programmes to enhance refugees' resilience and entrepreneurship, a growing scholarship has pointed to the affirmation of "humanitarianism as a neoliberal diagnostic" (Reid-Henry, 2014) predicated upon refugees' self-reliance and autonomy (Betts, Collier, 2017; Easton-Calabria, Omata, 2018; Ilcan, Rygiel, 2015). The partial turn in humanitarian narratives from refugees being portrayed as victims or as subjects to protect towards refugees as self-reliant individuals draws the attention to how they "can (and thus implicitly should) adapt to their new circumstances, rather than facilitating demands for human rights, political change, and humanitarian support" (Turner, 2019:3). These analyses capture important features and transformations that have been at play in the discourses, and in the rationale of refugee humanitarianism. Nevertheless, the stress on refugees' self-reliance ends up in representing asylum seekers as consumers overshadows the way in which techno-humanitarianism reinforces asylum seekers' dependency on humanitarian actors and how asylum seekers as techno-users are hampered from getting asylum.

Yet, speaking of protracted dependency on humanitarian actors does not mean s that asylum seekers are just entrapped in a state of indefinite wait. Rather, as forced hindered techno-users asylum seekers are requested to comply with a series of techno-bureaucratic steps and to keep themselves up to date about the unpredictable changes of criteria and deadlines. Jointly, they are object of a moral injunction, as they are expected to act as responsible consumers and techno-users from within a condition of spatial incarceration (on the islands) or by dealing with multiple spatial and social restrictions (on the mainland). The hectic techno-bureaucratic activities that asylum seekers need to

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[34] Report of Legal Organizations on the quality of remote asylum interviews at RAO Lesvos and the conditions they are conducted under, which pose a health risk to asylum seekers and employees
https://rsaegean.org/en/report-of-legal-organizations-on-the-quality-of-remote-asylum-interviews-at-rao-lesvos/?fbclid=IwAR1KI--Fxsyf1tcT2jLuYfcnKAblgWQoA-10oPX6BuPM-nqjMnGmu7nNUJs

perform strengthen the dependency on humanitarian actors and, at the same time, generate disorientation on migrants themselves. However, this reiterated dependency should not be confused with humanitarian support as such: in fact, asylum seekers in Greece are expected to deal with multiple technological intermediations used for communicating with humanitarian actors while, at the same time, they often lack of medical, psychological and legal aid in hotspots and refugee camps (MSF, 2018).

The Cash Assistance scheme is promoted by UNHCR as a financial-humanitarian measure with the ambivalent goal of alleviating asylum seekers' economic precarity, and enhancing refugee's dignity and freedom of choice. More precisely, it is noteworthy that these two levels of intervention are merged one into the other, as long as fostering dignity is equated with enabling asylum seekers to get by: "cash assistance", according to UNHCR, "restores dignity and empowers asylum-seekers and refugees who can now choose how to cover their basic needs" (UNHCR, 2020). Indeed, as UNHCR officers in Athens and in Lesvos[35] stressed to me "the cash assistance is a minimal financial support which allows asylum seekers to get by, but at the same time it also enables them to choose how to best use their money".

Yet, asylum seekers are not depicted as self-entrepreneurs nor as fully autonomous subjects. In fact, the European Commission envisages the Cash Assistance Programme as a modality "for affected populations to meet their basic needs with choice and dignity" (ECHO, 2019: 11); in other words, claims to autonomy and freedom of choice are quite cautiously introduced within the vocabulary of basic needs and survival. Through the Cash Assistance Programme, asylum seekers have not been portrayed as entrepreneurs of themselves: as forced hindered techno-users, they are expected to use the cards in a responsible way being aware that this support will only last temporarily and that the next month it might not be renewed: "asylum seekers wrongly see the Cash Assistance as something which is due to them, as a right" a UNHCR officer in Lesvos told me "but actually we repeatedly tell them that financial support is something they should not take for granted; it is a measure that we don't know for how long it will last, and eligibility criteria might change over time". That is, as Lauren Martin has remarked, asylum seekers as forced techno-users and card beneficiaries are "figured as particular kinds of economic subjects: benefit seeking, persuadable, but most certainly not potential workers or neoliberal entrepreneurial subjects" (Martin, 2020: 13).

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[35] Interviews conducted with UNHCR officers in Athens (April 2018 and July 2019) and Lesvos (January and July 2019).

In particular, Greek context leads us to complicate the widespread discourse on asylum seekers as entrepreneurs and self-reliant subjects: indeed, in Greece asylum seekers are requested to act as responsible techno-users and, at the same time, to abide to a panoply of spatial restrictions, temporal constraints and disciplinary rules. By providing them prepaid cards in Greece, refugees "become more self-sufficient and are supported to take responsibility for their lives"[36], a EU promotional video states. This emerges quite clearly from the "Evaluation of the effects of cash based interventions on protection outcomes in Greece" in which the UNHCR argues that the main goals of the Cash Assistance Programme are "to increase Persons of Concern (PoCs) access to basic needs and reduce their use of negative coping strategies" (UNHCR, 2018: 33). In this evaluation report, UNHCR admits the various problems and limits of the Cash Assistance in enhancing refugees' autonomy. This is firstly because those who receive a regular income are ineligible for the Cash Assistance and this is "a key factor which may affect the potential […] to facilitate PoCs engagement in livelihoods activities towards self-reliance" (UNHCR, 2018: 7). Secondly, the Cash Assistance as a coping mechanism does not facilitate the integration of refugees in the national labour market due to the high rate of unemployment in the country.

At a close glance, even the main goal set by the UNHCR of using the prepaid cards for coping with asylum seekers basic needs - such as food and clothes - is considered only partially reached: according to the post-distribution survey, "the majority of respondents reported spending more than the value of their MPG, which indicates that the MPG transfer value may not be sufficient to fully cover PoCs basic needs" (UNHCR, 2018: 6). In other words, the Cash Assistance is promoted as a mechanism that while on the one hand is expected to restore dignity and autonomy to the stranded migrants, on the other, it is illustrated by UNHCR as a system for assisting asylum seekers in coping with basic needs and by partially even failing that target. Therefore, asylum seekers in Greece are object of a moral injunction to act as responsible techno-users and consumers while, at the same time, they are expected and requested to comply with a panoply of technological steps, para-legal obligations and spatial restrictions. Disciplinary and coerced modes of governing are indeed entangled with neoliberal injunction to empowerment and autonomy (Ong, 2006).

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[36]https://ec.europa.eu/echo/field-blogs/videos/5-things-you-need-know-about-cash-assistance-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-greece_en

Conclusion:

With the outbreak of COVID-19, Greece has suspended the asylum applications for one month[37] and asylum seekers had been subject to further mobility restrictions that also affect them as card beneficiaries. Indeed, at the end of March 2020 the Cash Assistance had been suspended on the islands for few weeks "to prevent people from going into nearby towns and villages and creating queues" (RRE, 2020: 5). At the same time, until September 3, 2020 asylum seekers on the islands were not allowed to leave the hotspot-area. In May, an ATM machine was installed outside the hotspots of Lesvos and Samos, and, as confirmed by NGOs[38], asylum seekers' prepaid cards had been reset for taking cash only from that machine, and to do that during specific time slots. The financial provider PFS has defined this possibility of switching on and off the functioning of prepaid cards as a "good and fair way of controlling refugees"[39]. Thus, both access to cash and to mobility have been increasingly disrupted, also through the mediation of technology[40], and asylum seekers' dependency on humanitarian and financial actors.

Thus, scholars have stressed the ambivalent role of digital technologies in refugee governance, showing how they are used by states and non-state actors to control asylum seekers and how, at the same time, they also empower migrants. This piece has reformulated analyses on "control and empowerment" (Nedelcu, Soysuren, 2020) by gesturing towards an understanding of how forced technological mediations rather obstruct asylum seekers who are thus debilitated and disoriented in their attempt to get humanitarian support and protection. Hence, the multiple technological steps that asylum seekers need to navigate enhance the socio-legal precarity of people seeking asylum, byt hampering them from getting financial and humanitarian support and from accessing the channels of asylum. As part of that, asylum seekers who are turned into forced techno-users also need to keep themselves up to date about the frantic changes of disciplinary rules and bureaucratic steps they need to take. A focus on techno-humanitarianism leads us to complicate the representation of asylum seekers as either subjects to protect or security threats and, consequently, leads us to question victimisation and securitization as overwhelming analytical grids for addressing how they are

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[37] This happened in April 2020, after that the Greek authorities suspended the asylum applications in March, as a deterrence measure against migrants who entered Greece via the Turkish land border.

[38] Skype interview with Caritas, June 8 2020. The information has been reported also by the NGO Happy Family, based in Lesvos: https://ohf-lesvos.org/?mailpoet_router&endpoint=view_in_browser&action=view&data=WzE0NiwiOWVmZTRkZGZiNWE4Ii-wwLDAsMTI1LDFd

[39] Skype interview with PFS, June 25, 2020.

[40] The prepaid cards reset in a way that enables asylum seekers to take cash only from specific ATM machines

subjectivised. In fact, asylum seekers are not only controlled or victimised: they are crafted as forced hindered techno-users, who need to keep themselves up to date with compulsory technological steps, and they are targeted by the moral injunction to act as responsible para-consumers.

Building on that, the paper has shown the pitfalls of neoliberal narratives that depict refugees as entrepreneurs of themselves: on the contrary, their dependence on humanitarian actors is reinforced along the lines of a peculiar assemblage between disciplinary rules, compulsory technologies and a moral injunction to be responsible techno-users and consumers. For this reason, it is important to situate a critical analysis of techno-humanitarianism within the exclusionary legal and political architecture of the EU's asylum regime. Asylum seekers are shaped and targeted by ambivalent claims and political technologies: they are expected to act as responsible consumers being at the same time constrained and stranded. Thus, how to formulate a critical analysis of techno-humanitarianism not narrowed to control and surveillance nor to refugees' empowerment through technologies ? How shall we come to grips with the enhanced precarity of asylum seekers who are obstructed from accessing rights and financial support? These questions might be at the core of a research agenda on the political economy of techno-humanitarianism that this paper hints at. This would involve investigate the "new processes of data extraction" (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2019: 146) and the ways in which asylum seekers as forced hindered techno-users are hampered and might be legally destitute and, yet, they are anyway source of value production.d*e*

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