



With the support of the  
Erasmus+ programme  
of the European Union



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada



# **Gendering Violence and Precarity in Forced Migration: Asylum Seeking Women in the Eastern Mediterranean**

**Evangelia Tastsoglou**

Saint Mary's University

“Asylum Regimes, Bordering Practices and Asylum Seekers’ Experiences: Gendering Violence  
and Precarity in Forced Migration”

International Workshop (WASEM Project and JMEUCE)

# The Research Team

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Evangelia Tastsoglou, Saint Mary's University; Canada

**Academic Collaborators:**

Dr. Sandy Petrinioti, Panteion University of Athens and Saint Mary's University; Canada

Dr. Chara Karagiannopoulou, Panteion University of Athens; Greece

Dr. Jane Freedman, Centre de Recherches Sociologiques et Politiques, Université Paris 8; France

**Advisory Board (Athens):** Lefteris Papagiannakis (Athens Municipal Council), Maria Stratigaki (Athens Municipal Council and Panteion), Nadina Christopoulou (Melissa)

**Advisory Board (Halifax):** Jeannie Flynn / Shiva Nourpanah (NSACSW); Kathryn Bates-Khan (YMCA);

**Research Assistants:** Eva Kazakou; Eva Spanou; Rania Soultani; Larissa Sweeney; Marinela Semanjaku; Emma MacIntosh; Sarah McLeod; Deemah Omari; Melika AzizHaghighi; Atefeh Agivian; Alice Fevre

***Research Project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC IDG 430-201800746; 2018-2022). In kind support from: Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, Canada; Module on the Study of Migration and Displacement, IDIS Institute, Panteion University. For knowledge mobilization support for the Halifax International Workshop: Saint Mary's University and JMEUCE***

# Project Context

- **Focus:** GBV and precarity in forced (or “mixed”) migration
- **Place:** The “Eastern Mediterranean route” and Greece as a European borderland
- **Time:** Second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century – confluence of 3 crises
- **Theoretical Approach:** Feminist and intersectional perspective
  - Theoretical frameworks of GBV, precarity and intersectional discrimination
- **Methods:** Mixed – Empirical qualitative research
  - Textual data from Greek / EU documents, NGO and IGO reports
  - 20 key-informants – semi-structured interviews
  - 35 asylum seeking women from 4 linguistic/ethnic groups - semi-structured interviews
  - Analysis of data from the Greek Asylum Service

# Research Objectives: Research, Policy, Training and Knowledge Mobilization

Research	Policy	Training and Knowledge Mobilization
Explore the experience of GBV against women forced to flee their homelands in search of a safe place and arriving in Greece, at the external, common border of the EU	To contribute, through collaborative, multi-sectoral and international research and knowledge mobilization, to the work of law and policy makers and service providers in addressing policy and service gaps both in the EU and in Canada	To foster international research collaboration across borders and between institutions
Identify and analyze the interplay of GBV and precarity as experienced by the women in Greece and through their journey	To sensitize policy makers and practitioners, in Greece, the EU and Canada, about the traumatic experiences of asylum seeking women and girls and the causes of their victimization, and contribute to more effective policies to mitigate these traumas	To train and mentor MA and PhD students from SMU and Panteion universities in theoretical, methodological, legal and policy analysis and in working in library and in field research settings
Focus on how law / policy / practice is linked with the GBV experience in contexts of arrival, reception and stay		To communicate and discuss project results to interested stakeholders (scholars, students, research participants, NGOs, local and national government reps, the UNHCR) in Athens and Halifax through a systematic knowledge mobilization plan
Focus on the women's resilience, resistance and strategies of survival		

# Concepts and Theories - GBV

- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** violence against a person on account of their gender
- **“Violence” inherent in “gender”:**
  - **GBV emerging from structural, material and discursive gender inequalities rather than I dynamics**
- **Gender inequalities mutually constitutive** with class, race, age and other relevant social divisions producing respective inequalities
  - Structurally based unequal gender power, working intersectionally, **affects women, men, boys, girls, LGBTQ2**
  - Focus of this research is **women as principal victims of GBV** (UNHCR, 2020)
  - **Women in non-essentialist terms**, including individuals with female gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender
- **In migration** (forced, and “mixed” / “irregular”):
  - **GBV is built into structures**, institutions, laws and policies
  - **Takes particular forms in the stages of** the forced migration journey:
    - **spatial; temporal; legal-status associated; non-linear**
- **Asylum-Seekers:** beyond the Convention, not only refugee claimants. **The disadvantaged “other” on the basis of citizenship / legal residence**

# Concepts and Theories: Precarity, Precariousness and Precarization

- **Rich history of “precarity”**

- **Across disciplines and geographical locations**

- From a labour condition exacerbated by neo-liberalism, and inflected by gender, race, ethnicity, and other forms of social divisions, to other states and processes of insecurity (precariousness) brought about by **political decisions** involving hierarchization and othering with gender expressions.

- **Precarity as politically induced vulnerability**

- In a migration context:

- **national (and EU) migration laws, policies and practices by border guards and officials**
    - **“relational vulnerabilities” “embedded in asymmetrical social relations”**

# The Regional Context

<b>Migrations in the Mediterranean on the increase for over a decade</b>	<b>2015: 853,650 arrivals in Greece and 1,011,712 for the EU (in total) (IOM)</b>
Dozens of international and Greek humanitarian actors, “a humanitarian marketplace of global significance” (Cabot, 2019)	North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary shut down
EU-Turkey Statement (March 18, 2016) decreased the flows to the islands but made journeys more perilous	5 Aegean islands, “hotspots:” where asylum-seekers were confined waiting for adjudication
The EU recast Regulations, Directives, border enforcement, asylum procedures, budget allocations and “partnerships” with third, “migrant transit” countries	A constant “state of emergency” since 2015 in handling all refugee flows
Thousands of refugees “entrapped” in Greece	The drama of arrival, counting, identifying, fingerprinting, “sorting” etc. hides one aspect of the migrant experience of precariousness: GBV

# The Precarity and GBV Nexus: A Sample of Findings\*

- A gender dimension to both precarity and violence experienced during the journey and upon arrival
- Interrelationship between precarity and GBV, with precarity increasing the GBV risk or contributing to reproducing it; and GBV, in turn, amplifying precarious living for survivors
- **Five points of interface** between GBV and precarity (first phase, research with with key informants):
  - transit and border crossing
  - asylum determination process
  - living conditions upon arrival
  - service provision
  - protection from GBV
- The specific policies and practices affecting precarity and GBV in the lives of asylum seekers derive from EU and national legal regimes of securing external borders and institutional regimes of asylum seeker control and containment
- These legal and institutional regimes are ordered in gendered and intersectional ways and grounded on larger systemic inequalities

\*From: E. Tastsoglou, X. Petrinioti and C. Karagiannopoulou. "The Gender-Based Violence and Precarity Nexus: Asylum-Seeking Women in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Frontiers in Human Dynamics- Refugees and Conflict*, Special Issue on "Gender, Violence and Forced Migration." 2021. Doi: 10.3389/fhumd.2021.660682.



# References

- Cabot, H. (2019). The business of anthropology and the European refugee regime. *American Ethnologist*, 46(3), 261–275. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12791>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2020). *UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence*. UNHCR/HCP/2020/01.



With the support of the  
Erasmus+ programme  
of the European Union



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada



# Thank you!

**Evangelia Tastsoglou**

**evie.tastsoglou@smu.ca**