

linguistic, performance-based, textual, and visual genres, such conventions guide performers and audiences in execution and interpretation, comprising also the fluid frameworks through which a performance is judged (in)coherently or (un)successful. In the theater of the law, such conventions have a powerful role. Diverse participants act—often simultaneously—as performers and audiences, seeking to interpret, play on, anticipate, analyze, shape, or conform to the expectations of others. The “social aesthetics” of eligibility decisions, then, comprise the forms and conventions through which workers and aid applicants together produce a “whole picture” of a case.

My analysis here expands the framing of social aesthetics to explore its role in knowledge practices. As Kant outlined long ago in his *Critique of Judgment*, the Greek root of “aesthetics” refers not simply to visuality but to the broader domains of feeling or sense and their role in knowledge and judgment. This more holistic notion of aesthetics is often eclipsed in its English variant (which tends to refer to the arrangement of visual terrains) but is very much present in contemporary Greek. As Nadia Seremetakis (1996: 5) writes, the Greek verb *aesthanomai* [αισθάνομαι] means—often simultaneously—“I feel or sense, I understand, grasp, learn or receive information” and “judge correctly.” The mutual performances entailed in aid encounters draw on a panorama of sensorial and stylistic cues in the formation of knowledge and judgment. Moreover, as Herzfeld (1997) highlights through his discussion of “social poetics” (a not dissimilar model of dialogical social performance), sensorial dimensions are never unmediated but are themselves saturated with essentialisms, stereotypes, and other normative qualities that participants also regularly invoke. As Herzfeld (1997) shows, such stereotypes are not simply normative but also create space for modes of agency that are strategic and even ironic in character. At the ARS, stereotypes around gender, race, class, and country of origin do not simply furnish forms of constraint but also provide tools for the “tactical deployment of ideal types” (47).

Dimitris’s “whole picture” serves as a kind of template that designates particular applicants as (in)eligible. Didier Fassin argues that practices of aid distribution produce a “figure” (Fassin 2007: 512) of the deserving aid recipient, framing him or her as a victim in need of being protected or saved (see also Ong 2003; Ticktin 2006). He suggests that successful aid candidates “willingly submit to the category assigned to them: they understand the logic of the construction, and they anticipate its potential benefits” (Fassin 2007: 512). By attending to the social aesthetics of vulnerability, however, I seek to complicate and deepen ethnographic understandings of aid distribution.

Chapter 4

Images of Vulnerability

In spring 2008, I sat chatting with the gruff, chain-smoking lawyer Dimitris as the afternoon light filtered through the city smog and the dusty windows of his office. The ARS was quiet, having closed for the day, and we were discussing the determination of client eligibility. I asked Dimitris what he considered most important in making eligibility decisions, and he pulled out some paper and compiled a list. Some factors were relatively concrete and empirical, including the applicant’s country of origin, Dimitris’s research and notes from meetings with the applicant, and advice of his coworkers. Yet the list overwhelmingly reflected much more nebulous elements: the applicant’s effort to communicate, to gain trust, to express his or her situation, and to be sincere; the applicant’s display of the appropriate degree of emotion; and both Dimitris’s and the interpreter’s opinions and emotions. Finally, however, Dimitris emphasized that eligibility depended primarily on the *sinoliki ikona* [συνολική εικόνα] (whole picture) of the case, comprising, in his words, both subjective and objective elements.

Taking Dimitris’s commentary as a provocation, this chapter considers how *pictures* of cases are produced and how they render persons (in)eligible for ARS services. Dimitris’s notion of a “whole picture,” which takes shape through the shared efforts of both lawyers and aid candidates, highlights how eligibility determinations are supremely composite and dialogical, grounded not so much in formal articulations of law as in the sociabilities and sensibilities of NGO encounters. Eligibility decisions emerge through dialogical forms of “mutual co-authorship” (Brenneis and Duranti 1986) between workers and aid applicants. Brenneis (1987) coins the term “social aesthetics” to indicate the informal, often implicit conventions through which performer/audience interactions unfold (see also Cavanaugh 2009). Traversing

First, I show that, rather than seeking to “fit” existing templates of victimhood and vulnerability, aid candidates actively participate in producing and even reshaping the pictures through which their eligibility is assessed. Second, I demonstrate how they engage in refusal as well as submission, as they—knowingly or not—(mis)read and (re)interpret the expectations of audiences, consisting variously of lawyers, medical assessors, peers, journalists, asylum adjudicators, and even ethnographers (Cabot 2013b).

Aid candidates and service providers thus together shape, refigure, and even resist dominant images of deservingness, victimhood, and vulnerability from within systems of aid distribution. Recent literature locates the agency of migrants and asylum seekers largely in the realm of political action, platforms where “alien” subjects make claims to civil entitlements (Alexandrakis 2013) outside infrastructures of support and care (see Feldman and Ticktin 2011). Miriam Ticktin (2011: 19) distinguishes “political” action, aimed toward radical change that disrupts the status quo, from the “antipolitics” of humanitarianism (see also Ferguson 1994; Fisher 1997). She argues, following Giorgio Agamben (1998) that, in claiming to stand outside politics through the moral imperative to offer care and support, humanitarian organizations often reproduce structures of power and violence; the migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees they serve often remain caught in these dynamics of exclusion. Therefore, she argues compellingly, rather than enabling radical change, aid organizations often reinforce the “established order.”

The establishment and perpetuation of order is, however, inextricably wedded to indeterminacy. Sally Falk Moore (1978: 39) writes that “cultural, contractual, and technical imperatives always leave gaps” requiring adjustments and reinterpretations, which are themselves full of ambiguities, inconsistencies, and often contradictions” (see also Friedrich 1986). Here I track the indeterminate effects and potentialities of encounters in sites of “antipolitics.” I argue that even as they reinforce frameworks of exclusion, aid encounters give rise to a circumscribed agency. These modes of agency may not be intentional, proactive, or revolutionary in the sense of “political” action. Indeed, they may be better described as a kind of tactical maneuvering (see also Ahearn 2001; Coutin 2000; Mountz et al. 2002; Ortner 2006). De Certeau writes of “indeterminate trajectories,” “sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing techniques of system” (De Certeau 1984: 34). Here I examine maneuverings that make use of gaps in ordering practices—and the gaps generated through ordering practices—with unpredictable but sometimes powerful effects.

The dialogical qualities of eligibility practices and the maneuverings they entail do not, however, imply a symmetrical relationship between aid applicant and aid worker. While the picture of a case is always coproduced, it emerges across axes of radical inequality based on gender, race, class, country of origin, and other less obvious forms of exclusion. At the ARS, gaps in power also reflect gaps in knowledge. Some aid candidates display only partial awareness of lawyers’ expectations, while others may have more sophisticated or reliable knowledge acquired through social networks, literacy, or exposure to refugee regimes in countries of origin and transit. Workers and aid applicants meet across spatial, temporal, and evidentiary gaps entailing profound epistemological lacunae. Applications for assistance are grounded on events that happened in the past, in another country, which may or may not be substantiated by documentary evidence (Bohmer and Shuman 2008). Others, for whom assistance would mean recognition as victims of trafficking or torture, may have cases that NGO workers find suspicious, risky, or dangerous, owing to the illegalities associated with their claims. Eligibility practices are persistently haunted by “epistemic anxiety” (Stoler 2008; see also Bubant 2009): pervasive uncertainties that manifest in an endemic climate of mistrust and which, for workers, reflect the epistemological problem of how to know, really, about those whom they must judge.

At the ARS, aid candidates who appeared to be “vulnerable” in the eyes of the law—*trafficking victims* and *unaccompanied minors*—were particularly prone to generating epistemic anxieties among workers. In rights-based discourse, “vulnerability” is often a floating signifier, denoting individuals who are particularly “at risk” of having their rights violated, or for whom the stakes of rights violations are particularly high. Not based on the framework of asylum law, eligibility for vulnerable individuals at the ARS is grounded on two legislative apparatuses with international, EU, and Greek levels of application: the rights of the child and anti-trafficking measures. Largely through the illegality, danger, and fear associated with these claims, and the extraordinary power asymmetries that shaped these candidates’ encounters with workers, those thought to be trafficking victims and minors often eluded the efforts of workers to know and understand their cases and render reliable judgments. While social aesthetics were important in ARS eligibility practices more broadly, they had a particularly crucial role in the assessment of vulnerability, as “vulnerable” cases persistently exposed the limitations of formal, bureaucratic modes of assessment. As workers sought to piece together pictures of “vulnerable” persons, however, these pictures often took on

a life of their own, becoming phantasmagorical. Thus, knowledge of the other became even more indeterminate, comprised of shadows and projected images that may, or may not, reflect the real.

My analysis ethnographically tracks the dialogical production of “pictures” of trafficking victims and unaccompanied minors. First, I discuss the narrative and performative dimensions of the interview process and the role of social aesthetics in eligibility determinations. Then I turn to a case involving Dimitris and an applicant named Sarah, whom he initially identified as a possible trafficking victim but later considered to have a possible case for asylum, though ultimately her eligibility remained unresolved. Finally, through a consideration of ARS encounters with unaccompanied minors, I examine how pictures can take on a life of their own through rumor, fantasy, and nightmare. I show that social aesthetics, and the unstable, indeterminate forms of knowledge that they produce, have a crucial role in eligibility assessments, reflecting the epistemic anxiety endemic to vulnerability claims and asylum-related adjudication practices. Pictures of aid candidates ultimately emerge as blurry or unclear, evading visibility and knowability, yet they also highlight the importance of indeterminate forms of agency, through which aid workers and “vulnerable victims” may undermine systems of exclusion from within.

Storytelling and Information

ARS work entailed a strong reliance on bureaucratic practices in order to rectify epistemic anxieties by generating information about aid candidates. A *sindefksi* [συνέντευξη] (interview) between applicants and workers (most often lawyers) was the primary event in eligibility determinations. Guided by a series of questions on an interview form, the interviewer, the applicant, and in many cases also an interpreter together coauthored a life history. Serving a crucial role in the assessment of asylum claims at both state and nongovernmental institutions, life history interviews can be highly consequential elements of intense scrutiny (Good 2011), with extraordinarily asymmetrical (Blommaert 2001), even “coercive” qualities (McKinley 1997). Through the interview process, however, the bureaucratic penchant for producing and assessing information became tightly entwined with the “art” of storytelling. Benjamin (2002: 144) writes that storytelling, grounded on “experience that passed from mouth to mouth,” carries authority over radical difference and

distance. “Information,” in contrast, lays claim to “prompt verifiability”; it must “sound plausible,” appearing “understandable in itself” (147). However, in both the eligibility assessments that I describe here and, more broadly, in state adjudications of asylum claims, a hybrid form emerges: the story itself serves both to produce and to substantiate information about the candidate.

In asylum claims, life histories may or may not be supported by documents or verifiable by country of origin reports (though such external indicators of legitimacy certainly have an important role). ARS workers proceeded under the assumption that an applicant may not be able to produce reliable documents, and thus the *story*—as both performance and textual, narrative artifact—became the primary object through which a person was deemed (in)eligible. As the “picture” of the case emerged, questions of form, plausibility, performance, and the applicant’s comportment—in short, the social aesthetics through which the story unfolded—took center stage. Social aesthetics thus generated new ways of knowing—or, as it were, *ways of seeing*—when bureaucratic forms of knowledge production failed. The social aesthetics of eligibility are, in this sense, inextricable from what Annelise Riles (2001: 19) calls the “aesthetics of failure”: the ways in which “bureaucratic practices point again and again toward their own incompleteness.” When the interview process generated further epistemic gaps, social aesthetics came to furnish primary ways of knowing and judging.

While social aesthetics allowed NGO decision makers to “fill in” epistemic gaps, they also generated new forms of uncertainty. Research on the role of narrative and performance in legal settings highlights how the aesthetic dimensions of speech often encode and reproduce normative frameworks of knowledge, interaction, and judgment (Conley and O’Barr 1998; Mateesian 1993, 2001, 1997). However, as Hirsch (1998) and, more recently, Richland (2010) have shown, normative elements of speech, performance, and interpretation can also enable flexibilities. Even when social aesthetics drew on normative, even stereotyped, notions of race, class, and gender and moralized conceptions of truth, deservingsness, and credibility, those on all sides of the aid encounter finessed or adjusted dominant conventions and the power relationships that they evoked.

The social aesthetics of eligibility were intimately tied to the design aesthetics of documentary and bureaucratic forms (Riles 2001, 2007). Modeled on a format designed by the UNHCR, the ARS interview form—printed in English—asks for detailed family and kinship data; religious, ethnic, and linguistic background; work history in Greece and before arrival; routes of

travel to and entry into Greece; reasons for leaving one's country; and, finally, the question, "What do you think would be the consequences of your return to your country-of-origin at this time?" At the very end of the form is the heading "assessment" and, under it, space to record comments addressing (1) main elements of asylum seeker's claim; (2) general credibility; (3) contradictions; (4) officer's thoughts on asylum seeker's claim/other points; and, finally, (5) decision.

Life histories, as narratives and, indeed, as lives of particular people, take shape within existing, though always dynamic, webs of human relationships (Arendt 1998 [1958]; Greenhouse 1996). Likewise, despite the bureaucratic, informational thrust of eligibility interviews, applicants' life histories emerged through the active work of all parties involved (see Coutin 2003: 87): interviewers, interviewees, and often interpreters as well. Although these life histories frame the aid applicant as both the subject of the story and the storyteller, the social aesthetics of the interview process render questions of authorship and agency dynamic and unclear.

When called on to perform their life histories, many asylum seekers actively attempt to conform to the expectations of their audiences. In the next chapter, I write in detail about Mahmud, an elderly man from Sudan who explained to me, in our own ethnographic interview, that in his asylum hearing he had been "a very good actor." He then reproduced a performance asking the state asylum committee to allow him to stay in Greece—a simple old man wanting to live in peace. With a chuckle, he indicated the single tear he had mustered during his asylum interview. To the adjudicators he presented himself as a vulnerable person in need of protection; to me he highlighted his caninness, fluency regarding asylum law and its adjudicative demands, and capacity to play with or even "game" the system. This does not make Mahmud any less a "real refugee," but rather underscores the intensive work applicants put into becoming recognizable as such and how they shift and adapt their own self-presentations depending on the interactional context. Ethnographic knowledge, like legal knowledge, also takes shape through the dialogisms of social aesthetics.

The same is true with the narrative dimensions of life histories. Through observations of eligibility interviews and ethnographic interviews that I conducted both inside and outside the ARS, I noticed that, over time, many asylum seekers incorporated particular narrative elements into their life histories. These included emotionally charged tropes of flight and violence, which often figure centrally in how displaced people narrate their lives

(Améry 1980; Ballinger 2003; Danforth and van Boeschoten 2011; Malkki 1995a). Of course, such narratives often reflect broadly shared experiences, yet asylum seekers must also *learn* to present such experiences in a manner compelling for particular audiences. Some life histories produced in eligibility interviews emerged as "refugee stories," with recognizable arcs that traversed a format of flight and arrival: a particular "problem" in a home country, an escape followed by a protracted period of travel, and finally arrival in Greece. More experienced asylum seekers and recognized refugees often told more polished stories, most likely having told them many times before, to both NGO workers and representatives of the state. These more polished ways of narrating and performing also leaked into ethnographic interviews with me, as I too was interpreted as an audience seeking a "refugee story."

Many of the life histories that unfolded in eligibility interviews were, however, messy, vague, scattered, demanding that lawyers actively re-narrate the accounts of claimants as they emerged both orally and on the interview form. Applicants' diverse ways of remembering and narrating were, in turn, inflected through interpreters' diverse styles of translation. The interview form, with its formulaic questions, thus produced highly variable responses, which rarely fit neatly into the arc of flight, travel, and arrival. By rephrasing questions, changing interview prompts, and giving examples, interviewers struggled to tame narratives so that they could locate them in space, situate them chronologically, and contain them on the form itself. Yet disciplining these life stories was difficult, as they persistently fell outside the form, often literally, in the scribbles, crossed-out sentences, and margin notes of interviewers. Practice and repetition helped not just applicants but also interviewers refine interview styles, producing cleaner, more logically progressive, and visually pleasing texts on the interview form.

The vast majority of ARS aid applicants were, however, found to be ineligible. ARS institutional norms often streamlined eligibility assessments, making rejections appear simpler, self-evident, *matters of fact*. Rejections were often grounded on the content and structure of the narrative, the performance, or a dissonance between the two. In July 2005, I observed an interview between a Bangladeshi man and a lawyer named Effie. The applicant spoke at times on his own in English and at other moments with the assistance of the interpreter. To her question why he came to Greece he cited "economic problems"—"don't get a job." At the end of his interview, Effie asked him if he wanted to add anything and he stated in English: "I am a refugee. Economic refugee." For Effie, the decision was obvious: ineligible, on the

a kind of pantomime); whereas if someone appeared to be afraid of him [he drew his shoulders up and glanced around warily], he sometimes granted their case greater merit. These commentaries underscore the centrality of social aesthetics in state adjudication procedures as well.

Bureaucratic practices and forms often enabled ARS workers to streamline and reinforce eligibility decisions, particularly when the performance or narrative of the interview deviated strongly from workers' own sensibilities. Many cases, however, were borderline, with some elements that were compelling and others that did not quite work; both the applicant's account and the worker's expectations then had to be adjusted in order to produce a decision. These applicants often had to re-perform their stories, while NGO workers actively elicited and re-crafted these narratives before issuing an eligibility determination. James Clifford (1988) highlights how borderline cases render "powerful ways of looking" problematic; from one side, the case may appear one way, while from the other side it may look like its opposite. Much like moments of "moral breakdown" (Zigon 2007) discussed in the last chapter, borderline cases incite forms of epistemic crisis, rupturing routinized, bureaucratic habits of seeing and judging, making the structures and assumptions that undergird the eligibility process "present-at-hand" (Heidegger 1962): objects of reflection and debate.

Borderline cases, particularly when combined with tropes of vulnerability, are important vehicles for rending and reconstituting habits of seeing and the "pictures" that they generate. I now turn to the borderline case of Sarah and the multiple encounters through which her eligibility was assessed. Dimitris and I sought to piece together a picture of Sarah and her case, as she told and retold her "story" to acquire legal assistance that she urgently needed: at times, she looked like a trafficking victim, and at other moments, like an asylum seeker, yet throughout, vulnerability and victimhood remained at the aesthetic core of her case. Dimitris's assessments of Sarah's case not only reflected on its workability but indicated profound dilemmas of epistemology and judgment: How to know, *really*, the truth of her account? And how to render a decision based on unreliable knowledge?

Sarah

It was a warm afternoon in April 2008, and most of the ARS lawyers were absent owing to work commitments outside the office. Louis, the Congolese

grounds that the law does not recognize "economic refugees"; instead, this man was a migrant. His ineligibility thus depended on the poor correlation between his story and narrative tropes that would have been more appropriate to his claim, as his insistence on economic problems rendered his application, for Effie, manifestly invalid. In his final statement, he leveraged a partial discourse of refugeeness by invoking a widely circulating phrase, "economic refugee," which is, nonetheless, woefully inadequate for his purposes here, suggesting also a lack of knowledge regarding the formal definition of the term "refugee." He was not able to interpret accurately his audience's expectations, and presented ineffective narrative material as a result.

Lawyers found other cases to be ineligible on questions of character or "general credibility," and stereotypes around country of origin mattered deeply in these assessments. For instance, NGO workers sometimes described West African applicants as engaging storytellers who are also utterly untrustworthy. Stories often referenced popular culture notions of a wild, strange, "primitive" "Africa," yet to lawyers they often appeared *too* fantastical, particularly when combined with performances that (for lawyers) may not have presented the appropriate emotional valence. Take, for example, the woman from Nigeria who—with wide eyes, big gestures, and loud voice—told the interviewer that her father had tried to sacrifice her. Or the Ghanaian man who asserted in an even tone that he came to Greece because the villagers in his town were going to cut off his head and bury him with the tribal leader. Such stories not only bore content and narrative structures that, for workers, skirted the edges of the possible, but they also suffered from performances that may have appeared too dramatic, not dramatic enough, or over-all poorly rehearsed.

While this chapter focuses on adjudicative practices at the ARS, the importance of social aesthetics is by no means restricted to the NGO sector. In July 2011, I spoke with two state asylum officers who, in different ways, underscored the crucial role of aesthetic factors in their assignation of refugee status. One officer explained that in order for him to tell whether someone "really had a problem," he had to rely on *zondani epafi* [ζωντανή επαφή] (live contact): "It is not something that you can learn from papers . . . files." Another officer highlighted that while *andifasis* [αντιφάσεις] (contradictions) in a story were officially important criteria, for him, *andidhrasis* [αντιδράσεις] (reactions) had even more significance. He went on to explain that if someone carried him- or herself confidently and casually he may not take that person seriously [he slumped and pretended to be listening to ear phones in

Dimitris on his mobile to discuss Sarah's case, but the office manager explained that he was up in northern Greece for a big trafficking hearing. The office was closing and would not open again until Monday, but I thought about Sarah throughout the weekend.

Possible Victims

Sarah's direct and unselfconscious description of an experience related to trafficking was incongruous with the ARS's dominant institutional assumptions regarding trafficking victims. In coherence with EU law, the legal protection provided to trafficking victims in Greece is contingent, first, on their admission or confession to being a victim, and second, on their willingness to testify against their traffickers. On numerous occasions, ARS workers explained to me that owing to fear of traffickers, representatives of the state, and NGO workers themselves, victims rarely tell the truth in eligibility interviews, making a moment of confession very rare. Such assumptions frame possible trafficking cases as intrinsically problematic, based on the "double bind" (Bateson 1972; Fortun 2001) of a *true* victim with a credible case who does not speak the truth. This dilemma heightened the epistemic anxieties of eligibility determinations, making the identification of victims a kind of guesswork.

Owing to the (presumed or actual) rarity of direct confessions, applicants deemed eligible through the ARS trafficking program were usually characterized as those whom workers suspected of having been exploited. Employees who carried out client registration—Louis, Melike, and Hadi—screened for such possible victims according to gender and country of origin. Generally, they identified most women from Nigeria and some women from Ethiopia, Ghana, and elsewhere in Africa as possible victims, even before they were interviewed. Women from Balkan and former Eastern Bloc countries were also marked according to trafficking criteria. Yet, with the exception of Georgians, who lodged significant numbers of asylum applications during the period of my research, most women from non-EU European countries did not apply for asylum, but rather followed pathways of economic migration; many African women, however, did apply for asylum and were frequent visitors to the ARS. These screening criteria reflected informal guidelines that had emerged through conversations among ARS workers and administrators, as the organization sought to focus on groups deemed particularly at risk for trafficking.

gentleman who manages the waiting room, asked if I could help him find someone to do an interview with a woman from Ghana. I mentioned her to a couple of lawyers who were still in the office, but they were engaged in other meetings. A little while later, I spoke with Louis, again; it was almost 3 p.m. (the ARS closes to the public at 3:30), and he explained that she had been waiting all day. I told him that because no one else was available, I would meet with her myself.

After a few minutes, she arrived at the upstairs office where I was sitting. I was struck immediately by her pleasant smile, but when she introduced herself as Sarah I understood why Louis was concerned about her; her hands trembled slightly and her voice shook. She sat down, saying that she had been ill, that the day was very warm and her head was hurting. When I asked to see her appointment card, she told me that she did not have an appointment, but that she had come to see "Mr. Dimitris." She took out a piece of paper: a deportation order, stating that she must leave Greece voluntarily on May 17, in approximately a month. This meant that her asylum claim had been rejected, and her only option was to apply to the Council of State to ask for her case to be reexamined, an expensive and labor-intensive procedure.

She did not know her ARS registration number, so I plugged her name into the database but found no trace of her file. She said that she had done an interview at the ARS months ago and had even gone to the hospital for an examination, because "Mr. Dimitris" had insisted. Improvising, I decided to collect some information to give Dimitris when I next saw him, and taking out an interview form, I asked her to tell me briefly what she had told Dimitris (while Sarah remembered him, he may not have remembered her). Without hesitation, she explained that she left Ghana with the help of a man who promised to arrange a job for her to "work in a house" in Europe. He told her to call a number when she arrived, and when she got off the boat—at a place she did not know—she called the number, and a man came and met her; he took her to a house with other African women, where he told her, "There is no house work for you." She concluded, again without hesitation: "They wanted to send me into prostitution. I tell them that I will not do that kind of work—women from Ghana don't. He beat me. I escaped."

I was startled by Sarah's brief but shocking story, delivered with such directness. This appeared to be an unambiguous description of sex trafficking, which would make her immediately eligible for ARS assistance. I took her phone number, put copies of her documents in a folder, and told her that I would call her once I had more information. I tried unsuccessfully to reach

At this time, Greece was at the center of European anxieties about trafficking, as it was one of the few EU countries that the U.S. State Department had identified as a "tier 2" country with regard to its counter-trafficking measures.² In fall 2006, I attended a conference in Athens on the challenges of trafficking. The conference was funded by the Council of Europe, and the importance of the event attested to the significance of these funds and the importance of trafficking in negotiations of Europeaness. At a luxurious hotel near the city center, speakers from throughout the EU, both practitioners and scholars, spoke on trafficking and its challenges for civil society, EU member states, and governing bodies. As interpreters translated these talks into Greek and English, I heard the repeated sentiment that there is no place for trafficking in a "civilized" Europe. EU legislation identifies two general types of trafficking: labor trafficking and sex trafficking (also a form of labor). Frequently, however, "trafficking" is conflated with "sex trafficking," making sex a discursive and imaginative sphere in which the theme of "trafficking" often circulates. This is particularly evident in the video that played in the hotel lobby throughout the conference. Opening with a shot of a white thigh against a black backdrop, the camera pulled back to display bodies moving in shadow on a bed. Then the video cut to a lithe woman crouched in a dark room, her face buried in her hands, her legs and arms posed to cover her naked body. This incongruously sexy, tightly produced clip was later to be played on television all over Europe to encourage people to say "No" to trafficking.

Trafficking and its tropes of vulnerability and victimhood evoke the contradictory aesthetics of pleasure/pain, danger/enticement, and darkness/mobility (Vance 1992), which, in turn, are entangled in desires for migration and consumption (Agustin 2007; Rofel 2007; Tadiar 2005), patterns of migration and labor (Agathangelou 2004), and notions of civility, wealth, and Europeaness. Indeed, with its program on trafficking, the ARS itself engaged in an important form of consumption, tapping into funds coined in the halls of Brussels for protecting the civility of Europe. Trafficking, however, also evokes the tantalizing attraction of what is hidden, imagined, and unknown, reflecting the mystery attached to zones of criminality but also an epistemological umbra: trafficking is relegated to the shadows of the law, widely discussed but rarely observed directly, and victims are characterized as silent, ashamed, or afraid to speak the truth. Social aesthetics surrounding the identification of "trafficking victims" thus intersected with broader aesthetic constellations, as lawyers sought to perform a kind of epistemological unveiling: to find victims, expose traffickers, and, in a sense, render naked these

Country of origin and gender were concrete, if extraordinarily stereotyped, elements in initial screening, yet lawyers described their methods for identifying possible victims largely in terms of feelings, impressions, narrative cues, and visual tropes—social aesthetics through which trafficking was signaled but rarely confirmed. When discussing a woman from Nigeria with whom he had just done an interview, Dimitris explained that she was likely a trafficking victim, though she had not said anything directly. When I asked why he thought so, he explained that her Nigerian origin was a signal but so was how she was dressed—she wore tight pants and a revealing shirt and had long nails and carefully braided hair. Similarly, Nikos, another lawyer, observed with evident embarrassment, "Some of these women take such good care of themselves." A pronounced or "exotic" (and deeply racialized) beauty thus came to signal possible victimhood.¹

Indications of possible victimhood also acquired narrative shape through mundane sections of the interview form (the question why someone came to Greece was not particularly useful in trafficking cases, as victims were assumed not to speak the truth). Dimitris alluded to vague details regarding transit to Greece and spoke of "women coming here who have no idea where they were, no idea about the names of the streets in places where they have stayed, or even here [in Greece]." Another lawyer, Kyriaki, referred to the work history portion of the interview, explaining that women who say that they work in nightclubs or "do hair" are often victims. She also explained that some trafficking victims say that they are living with friends they met when they arrived in Greece. Interviewees' stories, and their details or lack thereof, were thus crucial identifying criteria.

The gendered and racialized social aesthetics associated with trafficking cases reflected political and moral economies embedded in Europeanization and international human rights, including a general increase in EU funds addressing trafficking as an area of urgent concern. In September 2006, when I began my primary fieldwork, the ARS board of directors had recently hired three lawyers to form a "team" on trafficking, consisting of Dimitris, Kyriaki, and Phoevi. While they did fundamentally the same work as other ARS lawyers, their hiring was initially supplemented through an EU counter-trafficking program. At an organization that consistently has difficulties paying its staff, this award was significant, making trafficking a central theme in meetings, divisions of labor, and of course, eligibility determinations. One of the directors of the ARS reportedly commented on more than one occasion that trafficking would provide the "future" of the organization.

shadowy economies. As the trajectory of Sarah's case makes evident, the methods through which lawyers identify, assess, and assist "victims" often invoke broader relationships of power (McKinley 2009), yet the social aesthetics of eligibility may simultaneously destabilize these frameworks of exclusion and violence.

"What if there were a different story?"

When Dimitris returned almost a week after my meeting with Sarah, he explained that he had initially taken her on as a possible trafficking victim, but her case "was not going anywhere." She had given him very vague information, which was a problem, because the police want names, locations—details she had claimed not to know or remember. He also presented me with her file. There were few details on Sarah's original interview form—not much more than the brief account she had given to me—but the file included photocopies of her identity card, the rejection of her asylum claim, and notes from various medical examiners. The latter attested to respiratory problems, mental anguish (anxiety and inability to sleep), and back and knee irritation that may have been caused by trauma. Citing his familiarity with such reports, Dimitris emphasized that the medical examiner's language framed her injuries as rather minor; indeed, while medical examiners are not officially entitled to rule on a claimant's credibility, their certificates often render implicit judgments (see Fassin and d'Halluin 2005; Fassin and Rechtman 2010). Dimitris explained, however, that the biggest problem was that he had scheduled Sarah for an appointment with the police committee that handles trafficking, but she had not appeared. This had undermined her credibility with the police and put his in jeopardy. Given the urgency of her situation, however, Dimitris agreed to reconsider her case, because, he explained, he still had the feeling that she did, indeed, have a "real problem." He asked me to reinterview her.

A few days later, Sarah returned to the ARS, and I initiated a formal interview, asking her to tell me in detail why she had left Ghana. I advised her not to leave anything out, even if she had already told Dimitris. Our discussion lasted nearly two hours. Below I outline in broad strokes the narrative that emerged.

Sarah left Ghana because of a problem with her husband, whom her father had forced her to marry because her family was very poor and her husband wealthy. "I didn't like him. He would beat me in order to be with me."

Her husband was a businessman, and every day he went to work, sometimes going on long trips. She started selling vegetables because she did not want to ask her husband for anything, not even money, but he did not like her selling vegetables and would sometimes come to the market and beat her, just like he beat her at home. When I asked if anyone else knew that this was going on, she answered that her father knew, but he was not willing to help, and her brothers are younger and unable to help. But one day, when her son was sick, she took him to see a doctor and, by chance, she met a man at the hospital who seemed to offer a solution. She was crying, and he talked to her, telling her that he helps women go to Europe "to work in the house." She decided to go, paying him \$1,000, which she had saved from selling vegetables and hidden away. She left her son with her cousin in Accra and departed on a ship that later arrived in Greece.

She then repeated her account of what happened on arrival, but with a few more details. When she arrived, she did not know where she was. She called the number the man in Ghana had given her, and an English-speaking West African man met her (she thought he was Nigerian). He took her to a house with other African women, who she thought were also from Nigeria. There, "they told me I would have to prostitute myself, and I said no. He beat me." That night, she pretended she was sleeping, and when everyone else was asleep, she opened the door—the key was on the inside—and ran away. She got on a bus, where she met "a black woman," who told her where to find other Ghanaian people. She then met a man and his wife from Ghana, who gave her a place to stay, and "everything, everything."

She spoke with the directness I had noted in our first meeting, in a voice that was clear though often shaky, without changing her pleasant expression, though at times she raised her voice in a way that appeared to indicate heightened emotion. Sarah thus convinced me that I could provide Dimitris with what he needed to help her. When I later presented him with the interview form and the summary I had typed up, he examined it for just a few minutes, frowning in concentration. Then he stated simply, "I don't believe her." This, he explained, was owing to a contradiction in her story: "Would her husband, who tries to control her, who knows that she does not like him and beats her, let her go to work? And if he did let her work, wouldn't he watch her money and very closely?" Dimitris wanted to know where she had saved the money and how had she hidden it. He concluded, "I do not think that this story works."

But after a brief pause, he suggested, "What if there were a different story? Let's say her husband has more than one wife. Sarah falls into

disfavor. Her husband is not pleased with her any more. To take care of her child, and herself, she goes to work in the market and gives her husband the money. Until one day she decides to leave." That, he asserted, was a story that could work and would explain why her husband allowed her to sell vegetables. This was not a trafficking case but an asylum case, he emphasized: "A special social group—women. Husband forces her to be a slave!" When I asked Dimitris how he had thought of such a story, he told me that he had done extensive research on gender mainstreaming and had read about similar, successful cases of women from Ghana. The task, then, was to get Sarah to tell the "truth"; Dimitris told me to invite her back and we would both interview her.

Credibility, Trust, and Truth

In our exchange, Dimitris expressed doubt about Sarah's *aksiopistia* [ἀξιωματικότητα] (credibility, which translates directly as "deserving of faith"), questioning her trustworthiness and cooperativeness, and the truth of her story. In his assessment, she had not provided details to assist the police and her story was not adequately consistent—factors with significant repercussions for the workability of her case. Moreover, her trustworthiness (or lack thereof) had important implications for his own credibility. Nonetheless, he also cited an overarching impression that she had a "real problem," suggesting that she might indeed have a credible case. The contradictions thus provided a way for him to imagine a different, "true story," which would allow him to find her eligible.

In our many conversations, and during the many times I watched him work, Dimitris advocated an approach to eligibility that was practical and strategic. I never heard him comment on the "character" of a potential client, as some other lawyers did, and seemingly outlandish stories did not appear to try his patience; rather, he often treated them as sources of humor amid otherwise joyless work. At times, I even saw him push the boundaries of eligibility, taking on a number of cases other lawyers had dismissed on grounds of credibility and feasibility. When it came to trafficking cases, however, Dimitris's criteria appeared to me to become notably more restrictive, perhaps reflecting the particular challenges of the criminal trials they entail. Unlike an asylum applicant, who is interviewed at a closed meeting by a committee of adjudicators, a trafficking victim must appear as a plaintiff or witness in criminal court; trafficking cases, therefore, proceed not unlike

rape trials in the United States, in which the "victim" must undergo rigorous (often demeaning) questioning (see Matoesian 1993). These cases, arguably, demand especially thorough preparation by the lawyer and the plaintiff; Dimitris explained that he had once prepped a client for 24 hours before a hearing. Dimitris, moreover, had a reputation to protect. In just a short time, he had attained remarkable success in bringing criminal cases against traffickers and acquiring legal protection for victims. As the victims' capacity to perform in these trials matters deeply, client credibility and cooperativeness themselves become issues of legal pragmatism, directly related to the potential success of the case in court.

At the ARS, concerns about trust/mistrust, credibility, and truth (or lack thereof) unfolded through dialogical forms of sociality between lawyers and aid applicants. J. K. Campbell (1964) shows that trust (*embistosini*) and faith (*pisti*) (along with their opposites ill-faith, doubt, and suspicion) circulate within a constellation of values that govern relationships between kin and non-kin, insiders and outsiders, natives and foreigners. For Campbell, trust encompasses the "values and attitudes that make possible communion among kinsmen" (95), whereas suspicion and doubt form the dispositional ground on which relations with outsiders unfold. While Campbell's field context (rural Sarakatsani sheep thieves) is wholly different from the urban NGO where Sarah's case was negotiated, his analysis points to the difficulties underlying the establishment of something like trust among Greeks and foreigners, particularly amid radical inequalities and in a cultural and institutional context where the "stranger" is so often a target of suspicion.

Yet Campbell's analysis also suggests that despite their exclusionary character, suspicion, doubt, and mistrust also enable important forms of sociality across difference. In her ethnography of patients and therapists in Thracian psychiatric clinics, Elizabeth Davis (2010) shows that suspicions of deceit often foster socialities and even "intimacy" (131). Likewise, at the ARS, lawyers generated circumscribed forms of intimacy with aid candidates: somehow, they had to encourage potential clients to tell them the "whole story," a workable story, or the "truth." This, however, required that lawyers convincingly perform their own credibility to aid candidates and thus attempt to gain their trust. Lawyers often cited lack of trust on the part of applicants or, more strongly, fear or anger, as reasons behind an incomplete or apparently false story; this was particularly pronounced with regard to suspected trafficking victims, given the fear and mistrust ascribed to them. In Sarah's case, not just her own credibility and the truth of her story were at stake, but Dimitris

victimization or stated directly when she suspected exploitation. Instead, she emphasized rapport building, vagueness, and indirection in establishing trust and eliciting the "truth." Phoebi told me that she admired the effectiveness of Dimitris's paternalistic approach but that it would never work for her, explaining that he could get away with it because "he is a man and he is kind." Dimitris himself emphasized that his approach was based on gender stereotypes and the violence they entail, explaining that many exploited women have learned to respond best to fear; moreover, he added ironically, "I look like a pimp," suggesting that this form of performance was especially suited to his comportment and appearance. For Dimitris, however, the crucial issue was that an urgent problem required urgent action: "This is your one chance to help this woman. When she leaves, she will never come back. What are you going to do?"

Such tactics were not just based on the "pictures" of victims that lawyers entertained. They also reflected lawyers' attempts to understand their own image in the other's eyes and the power relationships—gendered, raced, classed—that shaped how aid applicants interpreted lawyers' own performances. The performative work through which ARS lawyers approached aid candidates reflects deeply gendered norms of behavior amid the complexity of Greek gender politics (Dubisch 1986; Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991; Paxson 2004; Placas 2009). While Phoebi and Kyriaki invoked a sense of intimacy grounded on gender symmetries in their encounters with potential victims, Dimitris performed a gruff, confident, even paternalistic Greek masculinity (a disposition that he often presented to me, the *Amerikana*, as well). Through the social aesthetics of aid encounters, amid gendered and culturally inflected behavioral norms, lawyers strive to imagine clients' subjectivities and the most effective way to approach them. However, although Dimitris responded to his own picture of Sarah, his tactic for engaging her implied a fairly narrow range of acceptable responses. He asked Sarah, in a sense, to take her cue: to perform the very catharsis and confession he sought to elicit.

Sarah, however, did not respond. Dimitris proceeded by speaking clearly and sternly, asking, "Did your husband have more than one wife?" Sarah's jaw hardened, and when she answered, she looked at me, not him: "I don't know." Dimitris then continued, in a coaxing voice, "Sarah, a woman knows if her husband has found another." She remained silent. Finally, after continued unsuccessful attempts to elicit information more in line with the alternate scenario that he had imagined, Dimitris grew somber.

implies that her own mistrust, shame, and fear of him (of us) may be a root cause of her contradictory story.

"Credibility," however, also depends on whether applicants are able or willing to meet decision makers' expectations regarding how they should behave and the story they should tell. As I have noted, candidates for legal aid are best served when their comportment and self-presentation fall in a particular range of aesthetic conventions corresponding to notions of gender, country of origin, and phenotype and race; when interviewees diverge from this spectrum, problems often result. In Sarah's case, this is markedly evident, owing to the extraordinarily gendered context in which her "picture" emerged. While Dimitris did not say so directly, another contributing factor in her lack of credibility may have been the unselfconscious, direct way in which she "confessed" to having been trafficked, which diverged dramatically from the expected shame and silence of trafficking victims. The "other story" that Dimitris suggested, in fact, refashioned the "picture" of Sarah in a way more appropriate to ARS institutional conventions: not as a trafficking victim but a victim of persecution, who was, nonetheless, a spurned and abused woman ashamed to speak the truth. The conventions that would augment Sarah's credibility remained entangled in a social aesthetics of shame and fear tied to her exploitation as a woman.

"I have told you all that I know"

Dimitris's goal for our next meeting was to convince Sarah to trust him and tell the "truth," to garner a confession he could use to find her eligible as a victim of persecution. She came in the following Monday, and she and I went together to the office across the hall from Dimitris. He arrived a few moments later, greeting her warmly and offering her his hand, then took a seat next to her, his elbows on his knees in a gesture of informality and intimacy, while I sat at the table across from her. Then, speaking softly, he asserted, "Sarah, I don't believe that you are telling us the whole truth."

I recognized this as a tactic Dimitris employed to encourage trafficking victims to confess. In an earlier conversation with me, he explained that, by telling a victim he does not believe her, he attempts to push her to an emotional catharsis wherein she admits she needs help and provides him with information he can use to help her. He credited this tactic for his impressive success in trafficking cases, but it was controversial among some of the women lawyers. Kyriaki stressed that she never forced anyone to admit

Dimitris: Sarah you are not helping us.

Sarah: I have told you all that I know.

D: You have to trust us, but you do not. Heath wants to help you. I want to. But for me, we will not support you. You are not telling us everything.

S (finally): But I don't want to lie. I have told you all that I know.

In the end, Dimitris told her that he could not support her with the story she had given us. He told her pointedly to go home and see if she could remember more, and if she did, she should come back the following week at the latest. If not, she would have to find a private lawyer.

The lawyer Effie commented early in my fieldwork that "it takes a while to convince someone they are a victim." In our final encounter with Sarah, Dimitris, unable to elicit the performance and story he seeks, was ultimately unsuccessful at this task. Sarah continued to claim a charged and problematic category of protection ("trafficking victim") and refused to adapt her performance and story in a way that might make her eligible as an "asylum seeker," the category Dimitris has, in a sense, offered her. In so doing, she both fails and refuses to become a victim.

Despite her multiple previous visits, Sarah never did come back to the ARS. We do not know if this was because she would not tell Dimitris the "true" story (owing to shame, fear, or mistrust), she missed her cue, so to speak, or she simply did not have an acceptable story to tell. Sarah's choice not to perform the role that Dimitris has asked her to undermines the efficacy of her request for legal aid and his attempt to find her eligible. Yet her refusal also destabilizes the very notion of victimhood, exposing the complicity of practices of aid distribution in buoying up that category. She explains that to perform the role that Dimitris asks her to, she would have to tell a lie; this "lie" might not simply have factual grounds but, perhaps more crucially, would entail a simplification and reiteration of her life history, experience, and subjectivity in a manner to which she, as she makes very clear, does not want to submit. Her refusal grants us a window into unpredictable, circumscribed forms of agency through which aid candidates push back against dominant images of deservingness and vulnerability.

Minors

When I first met Angeliki in September 2006, I was struck by her gracious and spontaneous smile and laugh. We were the same age (then twenty-eight), and at that time she was completing a "practical" at the ARS, an unpaid internship that would make it possible for her to practice formally as a lawyer. We discussed her work in depth, and when I asked for her thoughts on client eligibility, she answered that for her it was about helping people who "really have need": not just "refugees," but also women who were trafficking victims, humanitarian cases, and, most important, unaccompanied minors, precisely because they are so "difficult to protect." "Many of the children become lost," she added. When I asked her to clarify, she explained that minors often "disappear" from housing facilities or simply do not return to the ARS. She told me that no one was sure how they disappear exactly, but that some are taken by traffickers, while others simply leave Greece.

Social aesthetics not only were crucial in eligibility determinations, but also had an ongoing role in mediating encounters between workers and "vulnerable" clients." Some workers deemed unaccompanied minors the most vulnerable of victims, but with their tendency to disappear, minors were also seen to be "difficult to protect," manage, and discipline. The ARS had a blanket policy of treating minors as eligible, but social aesthetics came into play in determining who was or was not "really" a minor. Moreover, for those who appeared to meet these qualifications, the problem for workers was how to keep them from disappearing: how to gain their trust and convince them to accept help from the ARS. Just as Dimitris attempted to gain Sarah's trust and convince her to help him help her, workers strove to communicate to minors their good intentions. Minors, however, persistently demonstrated forms of agency that were inappropriate or problematic to workers, appearing as precocious or difficult "children" who persistently undermined attempts to protect them.

Since 2008, there has been a proliferation of both Greek and pan-European exposés and critiques regarding reception of unaccompanied minors in Greece.³ According to these critiques, the widespread practice of detaining minors in locked facilities along with adults not only flagrantly disregards the requirements of international law and "rights of the child" legislation, but, according to advocates, makes minors vulnerable to further forms of exploitation (physical, sexual, and otherwise). In particular, a highly publicized report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Greece in 2008 (Papageorgiou

and their smooth faces and strong features served to further infantilize them through widespread stereotypes regarding the youthful appearance of Asians. Finally, ARS methods for dealing with minors also intersected with anxieties regarding trafficking since, as Angeliki notes, minors (both boys and girls) were often thought to fall victim to labor and sex traffickers. Through ethnographic material relevant to these deeply gendered and racialized categories of minors, Afghan boys and Somali girls, I consider how social aesthetics served to mediate but also generate further epistemic anxieties among workers, while minors themselves often borrowed and played on the expectations and assumptions of workers.

Disappearances

The primary theory among ARS workers regarding the widespread “disappearances” of Afghan boys was that they usually left Greece and went elsewhere in Europe. A number of workers told me that young Afghans left to find better job opportunities, since their primary reason for being in Europe was to support their families through sending remittances home. In some cases, “home” was Afghanistan, but many had families living in diaspora in Iran and Pakistan. Indeed, many young Afghans expressed these sentiments explicitly in their meetings with workers, highlighting their need to find work, though they also frequently cited a desire to study, learn English, and travel. Nikos explained to me that in his meetings with young Afghans, they appeared always to be extremely *piresmeni* [πρεσμενί], “under pressure,” owing to this burden of providing for their families. ARS lawyers thus often depicted young Afghans as recalcitrant and difficult to pin down but also, in many cases, as worthy of respect: as intrepid, enterprising, and Europe-bound, with their quick command of Greek learned in the detention center or housing facility. Effie emphasized the toughness and flexibility of Afghan boys, explaining their resistance to NGO interventions in terms of contrasting conceptions of what a “child” is, and survival strategies developed through years of living independently. She highlighted that these “boys” were really men: “they prefer to circulate and make connections. They will find a way somehow.”

As workers sought actively to imagine the experiences and sentiments of these disappearing Afghan minors, however, the “pictures” they assembled often took on nightmarish qualities, tinged with workers’ own anxieties. ARS workers referenced reports that these boys engaged in sex work to acquire

and Dimitropoulou 2008) centered largely on the many young Afghans who arrived on islands in the Aegean. In summer 2008, these mounting concerns culminated in the opening of a *kentro filoksenias* [κέντρο φιλοξενίας] (hospitality center) for minors on Lesbos, in the town of Agiassos, with 90 beds, where residents could enter and exit freely; this center was closed in July 2011, owing to lack of funds. As recent reports attest, the treatment of minors in Greece remains a point of critique and concern, despite the reform measures currently underway in the Greek asylum adjudication and reception processes.

In addition to these anxieties among policy makers and advocates about the inhumane reception of unaccompanied minors in Greece, ARS workers were extremely concerned about what happened to them once they were released from detention. Occasionally ARS lawyers had the opportunity to meet with detainees thought to be minors, particularly when they conducted “missions” to border sites to notify detainees of their rights (including the right to apply for asylum) and review their options for legal assistance. On these missions, lawyers strongly encouraged those who appeared to be minors to come to the ARS on release, with promises to look into possibilities for housing, education, and other services. When minors did visit the ARS after being released, or in cases when they avoided apprehension altogether and were directed to the ARS by acquaintances, workers tried to provide not just legal help but also assistance in finding safe places to stay in one of the few state-run centers or at facilities managed by other NGOs.

Like discourses around trafficking, the social aesthetics that shaped ARS encounters with minors were steeped in stereotypes around gender and race. While trafficking is powerfully feminized, discussions about minors both at the ARS and in Greece more broadly most often focused on boys. This is, in some ways, a case of numbers, as many more “boys” or young men were detained than young women or “girls.” However, this emphasis on alleviating conditions for boys in Greece also translated to a lack of infrastructure for housing girls. Whereas boys could be housed all together, the lack of gender-specific facilities for girls made young women appear to be a kind of *problem*: not just vulnerable, but also potential sources of temptation for boys and men. Such gendered qualities intersected with notions of race and country of origin. Many of the young girls who visited the ARS were Muslims from Somalia, and their swathed bodies and dark faces became powerful tropes of vulnerability for workers, who often identified them at the entryway or in the waiting room through mere appearance. Boys were mostly Hazara Afghan,

funds for the clandestine passage to other parts of Europe, from Patras to Italy, then to France, and perhaps eventually to England. These accounts were widespread even outside the ARS, likely attesting to a certain substance underlying them. An Afghan asylum seeker who worked for another NGO, explained to me in a low voice that I “wouldn’t believe the kinds of things people asked Afghan boys do for money”—women and men, he explained, young and old—all of them Greek.” The sexual lives of Afghan boys thus became charged, if dangerous, topics of conversation, gossip, and rumor.

Irrespective of the substance of these rumors, they reflected the anxieties of NGO workers themselves and their fears that when Afghan boys chose to travel and work, they were also exploited and victimized. These rumors provided workers with a kind of knowledge about these young men, but they also reinforced and legitimized NGO practices that, in turn, drove these clients even further away. Such stories constructed these young people as vulnerable victims in need of being cared for and closely watched. Moreover, this meant that workers often did not take seriously the stated goals of many of these young men, which emphasized the need to work and stay mobile. Thus, the “pictures” through which workers approached these clients in many cases perpetuated a cycle: as workers sought to protect young people by increasing the surveillance around them, “minors” themselves often resisted coming to the ARS, expressed fear and mistrust of offers to find them housing, and frequently “disappeared.”

In spring 2008, in a highly publicized event, a boat carrying over 200 persons, most of them Afghan and many of them very young, arrived on the Aegean island of Leros. As Leros, at that time, was unaccustomed to such arrivals, Angeliki went as a representative of the ARS to aid in the reception process. After she returned, we met in a large group for dinner, with a couple of fellow workers and some of her friends, including a young American man visiting Athens for the first time (hence, our conversation was in English). They had all just gone to see the *Kite Runner*, and they were discussing how beautiful Afghanistan must be (though the movie had been shot in Kashgar, a dramatically mountainous region of China). One of the other lawyers commented how the Hazara boy who was raped in the film resembled many of the boys who come to the ARS.

Over dinner, Angeliki discussed Leros, and she described the experience as “shocking”: “I have never seen so many minors.” She went on: “Imagine the situation in Afghanistan. It must be so bad that the impossibility of food and money must make it necessary to send your children to Europe alone.”

She explained that all the “minors” had said they wanted to go to London: “I asked them: you want to go to England? No, London [they answered].” She laughed, and then mused that this was probably what they had been told to say by smugglers who arranged their passage. Finally, she explained that less than half of them agreed to apply for asylum in Greece; the others wanted to leave, to go elsewhere in Europe. As she went on, discussing the dangers of their leaving for other places in Europe, I again recalled her comment from the year before, about those minors who are “lost”: “Do you know how much a ‘ticket’ to Italy costs? 3000 euros. No one ever speaks. But I don’t want to know how they get the money. And what they do to pay it. Some of them probably work for life for the traffickers. It sometimes happens.”

She shook her head with apparent disbelief, and her voice held a faint note of panic. She went on: “My dream for all these children, my dream is just that they could go to school, not just work, even though they are here for work. But they need somewhere to live. And they are not here with their parents. They are all in some way victims.”

Angeliki’s commentary highlights these young people’s apparent vulnerability, past experiences of violence, the adult-like duties with which they have been charged (i.e., to work and support their families), and their persistent tendency to be “lost” to fates which she does not even want to imagine. A key point here is that “no one ever speaks,” which highlights the climate of silence, mistrust, and epistemic anxiety that is so powerful at the ARS. Lacking forms of direct or reliable knowledge, Angeliki assembles “pictures” of these Afghan boys and the dangers that they face. But these images emerge as ghostly, nightmarish, without solidity or certainty, colored with her own anxieties, fears, and desires. Her assertion that she wants them to be able to go to school, not to work, conveys a desire for them to be *children*. Yet her insistence on their victimhood contrasts with many of these young Afghans’ own scrappy attempts to find work, make better futures, and support their families by leaving Greece—in short, to disappear or become “lost” by remaining undetected and unseen by both authorities and NGO workers.

In encounters between ARS workers and Afghan boys, social aesthetics and the “pictures” that they generate were often expressed through rumor, which served as a kind of folk psychology, a method of rendering the other knowable. Like ARS institutional knowledge around trafficking, these rumors regarding the lives of minors may have had some substance, yet they were also laden with fantasies, nightmares, and anxieties that threw the “vulnerability” of minors into sharp relief. Rumor, however, should not be seen as

irrational and wild; instead, it accomplishes important epistemological work and provides forms of social—and in this case, institutional—commentary. Luise White (2000: 58) writes that rumor “is not events misinterpreted and deformed, but rather events analyzed and commented upon.” Rumors regarding minors provided an important, if unofficial, repertoire of institutional knowledge-making tools. Yet these rumors perhaps said less about minors themselves and more about workers’ own sense of vulnerability in attempting to provide assistance across gaps of power, knowledge, and trust.

Interestingly, the “pictures” through which NGO workers sought to make sense of “minors” were often strategically invoked by these young men themselves, attesting, again, to the dialogical qualities of social aesthetics. While many of the young Afghans identified as “minors” resisted this categorization, others actively sought to acquire some of the benefits it was said to provide. A number of the young Afghans I met in Greece told me that when they were first detained on entering the country, they claimed to be younger than they really were. This appeared to be a fairly widespread practice, which in a number of European countries has led to the use of medical age assessment tests, making age itself a question of credibility. A young Afghan housed in a camp outside Athens told me that he was “really twenty-one,” but he and everyone else he knew there had said they were under eighteen, because when he arrived in Greece acquaintances had told him to do so. He explained that it was not difficult to be believed, because with their Asian features or—as he put it—with faces that are “Chinese,” people tended to think they are younger anyway. While some young Afghans refused the pictures that made them visible as victims, others drew cannily on gendered, racialized aesthetic norms to present themselves as compellingly vulnerable. We must remember, however, that social aesthetics are always flexible, playing on audience and performer expectations: his account may also have been a way to appear older and more grown-up to me.

There were other moments when performances of vulnerability failed, yet such disconnections and misreadings can also challenge and rupture aesthetic norms. The strategy of understating one’s age, in particular, sometimes took a comical turn, as when I watched two Afghan men recently arrived in Mytilene, with visibly gray hair and beards, present themselves as seventeen-year-olds to an ARS lawyer who was interviewing them in the courtyard of the infamous Pagani detention center. The ad hoc interpreter, a detainee who had volunteered to assist with his limited English, was himself a very youthful-looking person who explained that he was thirteen (a claim the

lawyers believed without question, owing likely to his small stature and beardless face). When the interpreter asserted, gesturing to the men, “They are both seventeen,” the lawyer laughed in spite of himself. The interpreter himself began to laugh, but then added with a smile and a shrug, “Why not?” Certainly, these men had produced an ineffective (if entertaining) performance, without the appropriate aesthetic qualities. The interpreter’s question, however, underscores the arbitrariness underlying the “pictures” of vulnerability entertained by both asylum seekers and ARS workers. Young Afghans persistently resisted, played upon, and reconfigured the pictures through which workers attempted to make them knowable.

Smira

On a blustery Wednesday afternoon in November 2006, I met with my friend and colleague Maria, an American Fulbright fellow conducting research on access to healthcare for migrants in Greece. Maria worked twice a week at the Athens office of Yiatri tou Kosmou (Médecins du Monde), which had an office about ten minutes by foot from the ARS. Over tea and *metaxá*, Maria told me that she had made an appointment at the ARS for a young Somali woman whom she had met at work that day. The appointment was scheduled for Friday, and Maria asked me to keep an eye out for her and make sure she was seen by someone; I would recognize her, she explained, because she wore two jewels in one of her front teeth. Maria emphasized that the girl was fourteen or fifteen—a minor—and that she would really like to hear the outcome of the appointment.

Friday morning, I peered into the waiting room to find Omar, the Arabic interpreter, chatting with a striking, robust-looking young woman, with two jewels in her left front big tooth. She wore a head scarf and a black wrap, but with a long jean skirt peeking through, and she was standing with a similarly attired woman who appeared to be older. I smiled and introduced myself, and she told me her name was Smira. In surprisingly good English she confirmed that, yes, an American girl had helped her [at Yiatri tou Kosmou]. Omar, meanwhile, gestured for my attention and whispered meaningfully in my ear: “she is a minor.”

As we were talking, Eleni, one of the social workers, came into the waiting room and asked to speak to me privately. She asked: “Do you know these ladies?” and I explained to her about my conversation with Maria. Eleni then asked Smira if she might meet with her in a few minutes, and Smira assented.

Eleni invited me to come to her office while she prepared for the meeting, musing quietly to me that the girl seemed surprisingly open and smiling—and that this was rare since minors often do not trust the ARS. She explained that finding safe accommodation for Smira was a priority, but it is difficult to house young women: most unaccompanied minors are male, and women cannot stay with them, but it would also be problematic for her to live with a family, since the other women might be jealous and men could see her as a temptation. Eleni called a refugee camp in Thessaloniki to find Smira a bed, and as expected, the camp administrator said no, they were full. But in an unexpected stroke of luck, he called back a few minutes later and said they would make space for Smira.

Smira, with her long black attire, was recognizable to both Omar and Eleni as a particularly rare, even sacred category of minor: a young Somali woman. She represented “someone in need” who had come to the ARS before “becoming lost,” and thus she could perhaps be protected or even saved. Yet the possibility of protecting her was doubly complicated by the infrastructural challenges of housing young women, and more broadly, by the deeply sexualized accounts of these challenges, as their bodies (and gender) are seen to make them even more vulnerable. In this first meeting, however, things went surprisingly well. Smira conveyed a sense of trust toward ARS workers. With the positive response from the camp in Thessaloniki, the primary task for Eleni was to convince Smira to accept her help.

Eleni, the lawyer Stavros, and I then met privately with Smira to conduct an interview, as her companion waited outside. Smira described the older woman as someone staying in the same place with her, a “Somali hotel.” While the typical interview form was used, the purpose of this meeting was not to assess eligibility, since, as a minor, Smira was already eligible. Rather, the goal was to acquire the details of her case and find out more about her situation in Greece. Eleni began by saying that they were going to interview her to see what kind of help we could give her, but Smira interrupted: “I do not want to live alone. I lost my sister when we came to Greece. We were arrested, and when we got out, I couldn’t find her. I am living with good people now. I want to go to England or America where I have family. If you can’t help me with that, I don’t want your help.”

Eleni responded by giving her a tissue and telling her more about the camp, describing it as a nice, comfortable place, where she would have food and be able to go to school. But Smira remained silent, looking at her with a hard expression. When Eleni emphasized that we could not and would not

make her go to the camp, Smira appeared to relax, and she explained she was living in a community of Somali people who are Muslim. She added that “women and men were sleeping separately—about 40 people total.” She liked it there. Eleni asked her just to think about the camp. In a manner similar to young Afghans, Smira thus also asserted her desire to remain mobile, but in her case it seemed to be less an issue of work than of family; having lost contact with her sister, she did not want to be alone. The camp—where she knew no one, and where she would be without country-people or family—clearly appeared as a place where she would be “alone,” and she preferred an unofficial hotel with other Somalis.

Stavros asked her for details about her family in England, and she explained that she had an aunt and brother there; her parents had died when she was seven. He promised to look into possibilities for family reunification and made an appointment for her to come back to the ARS on Monday. Eleni, meanwhile, asked her again to think about the camp. For both ARS workers, it was particularly crucial for Smira to return to the ARS since, among the few papers she presented during her interview, they found a record of her being hospitalized at the border, near Alexandroupoli. She had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. Follow-up care would be crucial.

On Monday, however, when Smira did not arrive at the agreed-on time, Eleni expressed both disappointment and worry, though not surprise. “We lost a minor,” she sighed. She went on to say that in her work, people are like *fantasmata* [φαντάσματα]; “ghosts” or “phantoms”; they disappear, but sometimes on the street she sees people and thinks she recognizes them. When I spoke with Omar, however, he explained he was not worried—that Smira probably just did not want to come back; she wanted to go to England, and Somalis, he explained, have extremely organized smuggling networks to facilitate the movement of compatriots. He offered to bring me with him that afternoon to see if we could find some information; he knew a couple of “Somali hotels” we could check.

After he finished work at 3:30, we walked about ten minutes to a small street near Omonia Square, which he described as the “worst street in Athens,” and stopped in front of a dilapidated building. A few men were hovering outside the entrance smoking, and Omar greeted them in Arabic. He motioned toward me, and I, taking my cue, introduced myself to the men, one of whom took us inside. The building was carpeted, and fairly bright, and struck me as, indeed, surprisingly pleasant for an unlicensed hotel. Omar spoke with a few of the residents and explained that we were looking for a girl

named Smira who had jewels in her teeth. They talked among themselves for a minute but appeared to reach the consensus that they did not know her. We left, and Omar promised to follow up more on his own, but for now, the search was over.

The next morning at the ARS, I spoke about Smira's case with two of the lawyers. I passed on Eleni's comment that we had "lost" this minor. One lawyer, however, who has an impressive penchant for combining cynicism with levity, answered: *Ela* (come on). "For every one you lose there are ten more." This comment, while clearly ironic, also reflected the very real anxiety that we had indeed "lost" Smira, a minor we had had the chance to protect, and that in losing her we had left her vulnerable to other fates. Yet Omar's insistence that she was likely fine, that she (quite understandably) trusted people she knew more than the NGO, serves as a reminder that protection often runs counter to these young people's goals. Smira flatly refused "help" that did not meet her terms, and when Stavros and Eleni were unable to convince her to return, she "disappeared."

Such "disappearances" were persistently linked to the powerful forms of agency that unaccompanied minors asserted in choosing whom to trust and where to go, which, for many ARS workers, were incompatible with images of victimhood, vulnerability, and childhood. Yet Omar's account highlights how "disappearance" can simply mean a different trajectory, another life, into which ARS workers—and ethnographers who work with them—can only acquire glimpses. However, a crucial factor in aid encounters, and also for an ethnographer working on questions of asylum, is that no knowledge of the other is reliable. Even in piecing together information and knowledge from a variety of sources, the image we assemble remains indeterminate and unclear, which I learned in a profound and painful way a few months after my encounter with Smira.

It was early March 2007, and I was in the neighborhood where Omar and I had gone to look for Smira back in November. Rahman, the Bangla interpreter, had taken me to meet the head of a Bangladeshi migrant organization in Athens. As we walked, he described to me with dismissive irony the primary work of the organization: "They drink coffee and discuss. And when someone dies they arrange to have the body sent back to Bangladesh or buried in a Muslim way." As we walked and talked, a young man passing us grabbed my arm, and I recognized him as a man Omar and I had met at the Somali hotel months before. He began speaking to me agitatedly, in very broken but nonetheless intelligible English. It took me a while to make out what

he was saying, but when I did, the meaning was crystal clear: "That girl, that girl you look. She die." He told me that someone had been trying to raise the money to give her a proper Muslim burial in Greece. Immediately, however—before I had fully registered what he said—he began to explain that he had questions about his papers and wanted my help.

I called Omar as soon as I could. He initially dismissed the information, explaining that he thought this young man was trying to find a way to establish a kind of connection or intimacy with me, for his own interest—or perhaps it was someone else who died. But over the next few days Omar spoke to his many contacts in the Somali community, and he learned that indeed a girl of a similar description, with jewels in her teeth, had died of tuberculosis. The Somali community was trying to bury her. Smira, for me, remains a ghost.

Images and Indeterminacy

The cases of Sarah and Smira, like those of "disappearing" Afghan boys, highlight how so-called vulnerable persons persistently exceed the ways in which law, humanitarian aid, and ethnographic practice seek to assess and codify, even under inexorable conditions of inequality and violence (Biehl and Locke 2010). Social aesthetics both reproduce and undermine dominant frameworks of knowledge-making and judgment, often at the very same time. Migrants' persistent tendency to get lost and disappear, like Sarah's own disappearance, highlights how knowledge and "live contact" are persistently thwarted through the very methods that service providers and adjudicators use to render the other knowable. This is a form of tragedy: a failure of knowledge, law, sociability, and labor. Yet the fraught and circumscribed forms of agency that emerge within systems of aid distribution may also destabilize normative frameworks of assessment from within.

I too cannot know, *really*, what happened to Smira and Sarah. Problems of language, mistrust, power, and violence on all sides also thwart ethnographic knowledge. They are "ghosts" for me, yet in their ghostliness they also speak to a radical indeterminacy entailing both violence and agency. The cases of Smira and Sarah undermine not just notions of victimhood but also the image of an idealized liberal subject, who is able to choose, and in choosing, seek freedom. Their refusals to return to the ARS and submit to the category of vulnerability, with the protection it conveys, are indeed choices; yet their intentionality remains—and must remain—outside the picture. The

futures they have chosen may include suffering, loss, what some might call “exploitation,” and even death.

Slavoj Žižek (2000) describes how the image of the other always remains fuzzy when looked at straight on. Rather, such images become clear only when looked at “awry,” distorted by one’s own desire and perception; in the image of the other, the subject always “sees itself seeing” (10). Through the social aesthetics of eligibility, those on both sides of the encounter respond to pictures in which they are both seen and seeing. Yet trouble cases like these leave us with images that are blurry, indeterminate, unclear.⁴ These pictures index a failure of knowledge, humanitarian aid, and rights-based protection, but they are also sites of opening: into indeterminate trajectories through which “victims” (knowingly or not) undermine the structures of power and violence in which they have been caught.

Chapter 5

Recognizing the Real Refugee

On an uncommonly warm early May weekend in 2007, I joined a group of lawyers and advocates from Greece and throughout the EU at the biennial meeting of a network of asylum advocacy NGOs. We traveled in buses from Athens, across the flat territory near Thebes, then up through the mists of Mount Parnassos. There, in an airy conference center near the small town of Delphi and the archaeological site, this international group outlined the advocacy agenda for the following six months through working groups and meetings and over dinners, lunches, coffees, and cocktails.

At a closing dinner on the last night of the conference, at the overly bright Omphalos Taverna, I sat at a table of delegates over a glass of wine, watching the presentation of toasts and awards after a heavy, too-oily meal of tourist-friendly Greek fare. The finale of the evening was a campy performance involving togas and singing, in which members from various NGOs honored a longtime colleague whose retirement was imminent. On requests for a speech, this man himself took the floor, and expressions suddenly became serious. He was an older man with white hair and spectacles, but tall and hale. He began by mentioning his years in the asylum advocacy field—the successes and satisfactions, but also the ongoing frustrations, of his work. Then he turned somber, explaining that he wanted to recount a meeting with a particular refugee that had remained important for him throughout his career. And so he began a striking narrative.

Shortly after starting to work at an advocacy NGO in London, he went to the home of a Somali woman, who was in need of assistance for herself and her children. Winding his way through a London slum, he arrived at a dank apartment building. He knocked, and a voice invited him inside, but when he entered, he did not see anyone. A voice then called to him from another