UNIT 7: PRECARIOUS LIVING

2021

Interior and Spatial Design

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# PROJECT BRIEF

Six week research project
Location: Greece
Category: Refugee Crisis

What does it mean to belong? What is real? What you perceive as real? Does your environment shape your reality? How do you evaluate it and act? What exists and what is insinuated? What is promised and what is owned?

During the 6 weeks of the unit, I was to explore, concentrate and expand these questions and other relevant matters and investigate their relevance with 'space'. According to UNHCR, in 2020 there were at least 80 million forcibly displaced people in the world (UNHCR, 2020). Using one of the refugee Hotspots located in the Greek Islands (Leros, Lesvos, and Samos) as starting point, I was tasked to proceed into an informed exploration, appreciation, and understanding of the ongoing refugee crisis and decide a parameter of the issue that I would like to focus on, explore and communicate. This parameter could be systemic (e.g. diaspora, political/economic implications/data, etc), personal (e.g. a personal journey), or spatial (e.g. movement, location, occupation, etc). I would develop various ways of thinking theoretically and spatially about the crisis, which explored concepts of home and belonging, culture and identity as well as ethics and politics.

My exploration would be communicated through a compositional illustration and a 3,000-word journal.
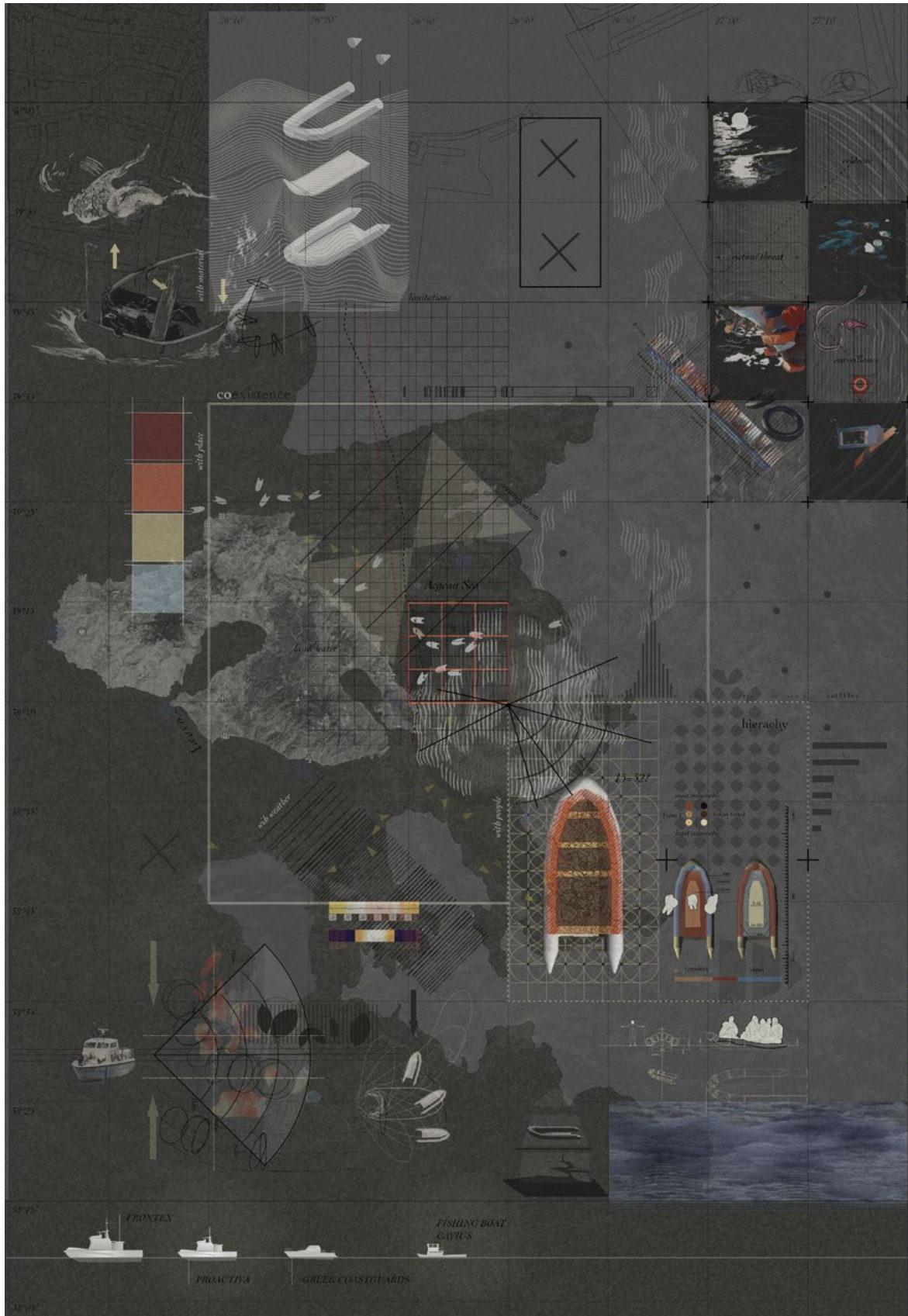
"Coexistence"
(Final Compositional Illustration)

DESIGN JOURNAL

Introduction

Precarious Living is a unit that inspires multi-dimensional debates of present-day humanitarian issues alongside public interventions concerning the refugee crisis and migration. I was introduced to diverse theoretical and spatial ways of thinking through guest lecturers, interactive workshops and group discussions, that led to many multi-layered conversations encompassing the ongoing refugee crisis in Greece. Using my role as a designer, this encouraged me to think critically and emphatically about the process of documenting and communicating informative research in response to this sensitive extensive subject.

We more frequently hear about the poor living conditions in Moria camp, but I found myself inquisitive regarding the struggles of passage and hardships that refugees had to overcome upon arrival– the menacing conditions and realities on an unseaworthy vessel in the Mediterranean during this first yet most hazardous stage to safety. Although not necessarily confined by walls or doors, refugees of different diasporas are overcrowded within a small vessel of wood or plastic up to days or weeks. After comprehensive research on boat-migration crisis, I realised that there are many degrees of involuntary and explicit violence interlinked with refugees' problematic relationships with coastguards, smugglers and even governments, which are unspoken and undocumented. As reported by organisations like UNHCR and Sea-Watch, many were unable to complete this "short" crossing. Using one of the Northern Aegean islands–Lesvos as my starting point, I aim to translate my progressive journey exploring the theme of coexistence during sea travel in my research for mobility, vulnerability, identity, and lastly ambiguity, thematically through layers of analysis, observations, and story-telling illustrations.
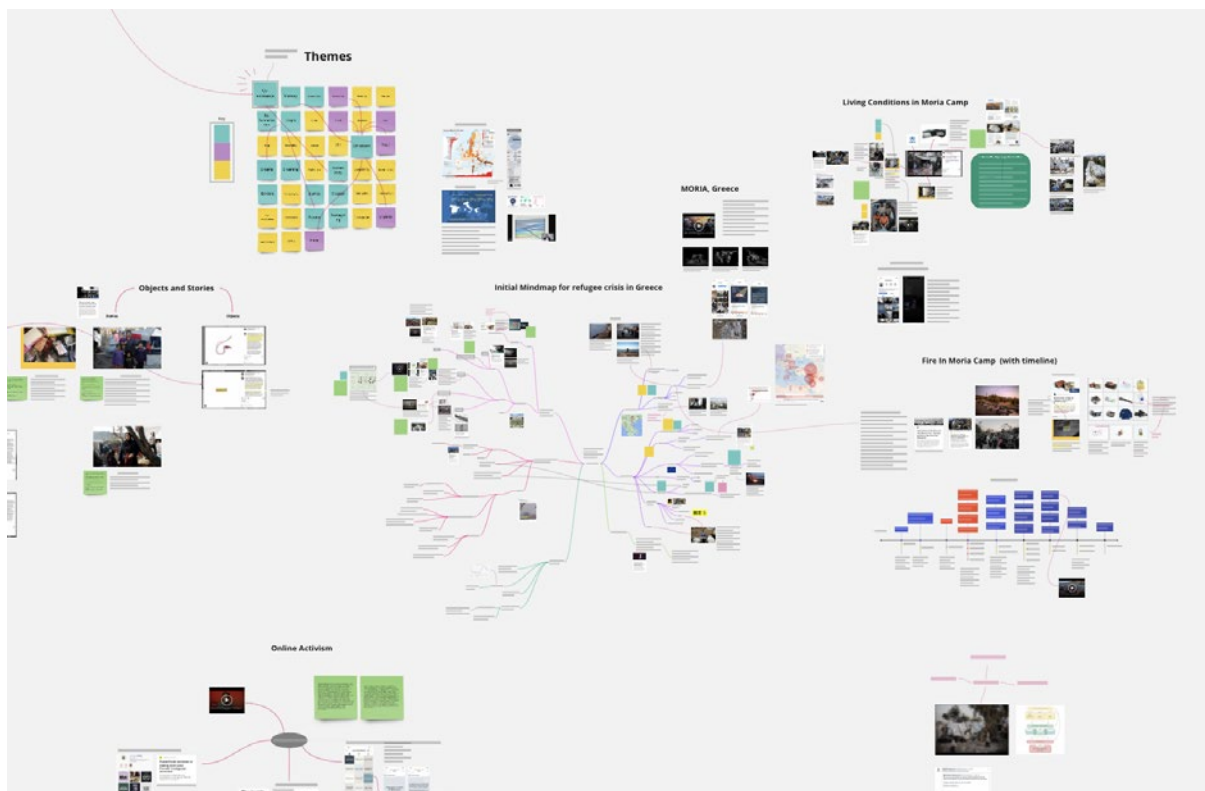

Figure 1: Chan, K. Initial Mindmap for Refugee Crisis in Greece.
5 March 2021. [Miro]

Starting Point: Coexistence at Sea

What does coexistence mean? Applying the definition of "a state in which two or more groups are living together while respecting their differences" (Khaminwa, 2003), I used the passive term "coexistence" in reference to refugees' interaction with each other, and with place–the Mediterranean. To start with, I found that the topic of coexistence strongly correlates to refugee gendered mobility, age and nationality at sea. In connection with both social constructions and geographical borders, although seas to my mind, are social human foreground for dynamic interaction between various societies, desperation and vulnerability are determining forces of some human movement around the refugee crisis in the Greek islands (Elliot, 2020). I believe that coexistence is symbolic with the refugees' start of their perilous journey across the sea to a new life.
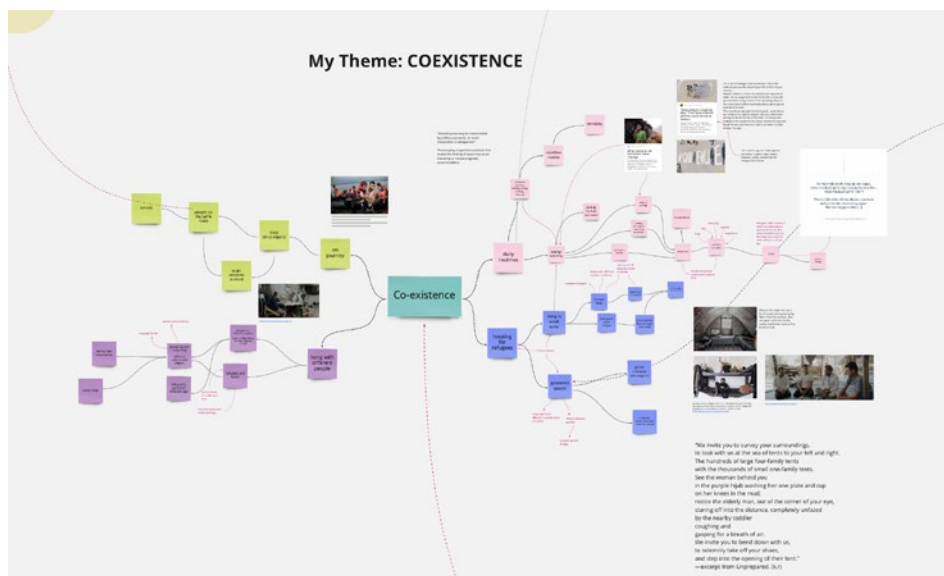

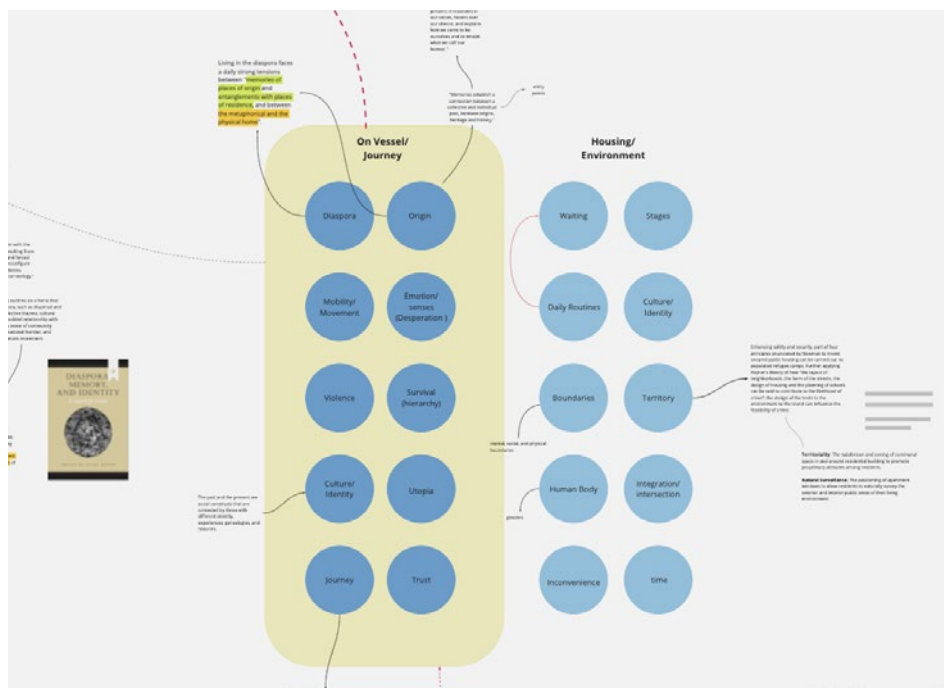Figure 2: Chan, K. Mind map of theme: Coexistence. 9
March 2021. [Miro]

Figure 3: Chan, K. Keywords of focus for coexistence
on Miro. 11 March 2021. [Miro]

Coexistence with People: Gendered Mobilities and Hierarchical Vulnerabilities

Bearing in mind the employment of gendered modalities of movement are not homogenous categories, in my analysis of gender composition of flows across the Mediterranean throughout the recent years, I have noticed a masculine balance in demographic mobilities according to regular UNHCR reports (UNHCR, 2021). From the corresponding research, I have identified the origin of this adult male pattern, mainly acting as a pilot for family reunification. This promotes fear to the Greek locals and respective government attributable to the burden from a potential increase in populations due to the arrival of the remaining refugees. After coming across an absence of credible information for gendered spaces at sea, I very much concur to Professor Eleonore Kofman's criticism that "gender was for a long time, invisible in academic research on forced migration and refugees". Having said that, spatial studies of gender in conveyance and refugee protection, to date, have been conclusively centred on conversations around the refugee camp (Beswick, 2001; Khawaja et al. 2008; Turner, 1999). The need for socially disaggregated data (gender, age, marital status and nationality) is also highlighted by Uteng and Cresswell in their book 'Gender Mobilities', encouraging the production of this data to better comprehend the politics of differentiated mobility (Cresswell, 2011). I feel that the lack of administrative and substantive data is concerning as this issue seems to be almost illusive with a lack of clarity and veracity, frustrating society from better understanding the overall depth of this issue; making it difficult to form solutions or alternatives.
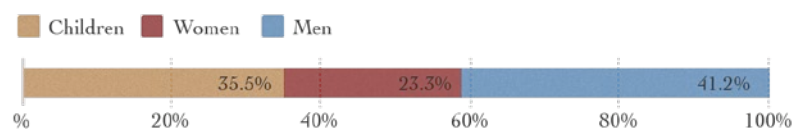

Figure 4: Chan, K. Illustrative statistics of demographic on sea arrival to the Greek islands based data by UNHCR (2020). 15 March 2021. [Adobe Illustrator]
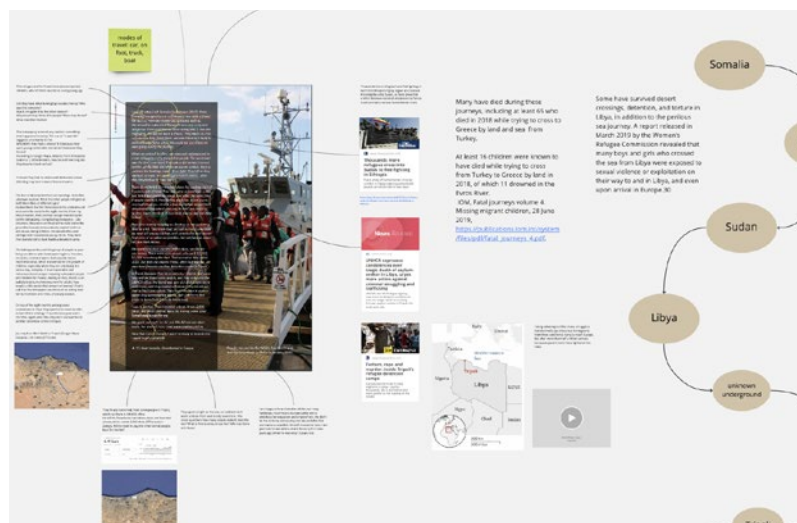
Figure 5: Chan, K. Analysis and mapping of a passage from Desperate Journeys by UNHCR. 9 March 2021. [Miro]

An interesting question was raised by Associate Professor of Gender Studies Elissa Helms (2015) on her post: "why is it that men travelling on their own can't be legitimate refugees and that empathy and victimhood can only be extended to women and children?", which speaks to stereotypes that men are commonly presumed to be the "actors of consequence" (Helms, 2015) on top of their responsibility to protect the nation and their families. To link gender to my analysis, research and surveys conducted in books such as *Gendered mobilities and vulnerabilities: refugee journeys to and in Europe* and *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* have both testified to higher levels of violence against women than men; manifesting that female refugees of all ages face assault, exploitation, and sexual harassment on every stage of their journey. Largely in Greece, the fluctuation of female mobility has been more intimately associated with family; generally travelling and taking care and elders. Distinctly, I was drawn to the perspective generated from research performed by Pickering and Gerard (2011) based on women who survived travelling from Libya to Malta, proposing that the conditions of boat and level of security transits are exclusive the quantity of material and social resources to which women had access for smugglers. To my view, this behaviour perhaps implies that some smugglers prioritise financial resources influenced by networks of family, kin, over gender and age with regard to individual migrants' safety.

Overcrowding and lack of personal space is always a substantive issue. Comparing two heavily pregnant refugee participant's perspectives (Dekha and Ayan respectively), to an extent, the issue of hierarchy can be viewed as conditional. Dekha describes the conditions of the boat as somewhat "safe", whereas Ayan felt that "women were at the bottom of social hierarchy", subjected to burns and injury from being too close in proximity with the hot engine. Despite that asylum seekers in general are seen as vulnerable (Cabot, 2014), I would argue that there is a concept of vulnerability (Fineman 2008, Neal 2012, Turner 2006) and hierarchy of mobility. According to Dekha, amongst 50 people on board, there were only six children and four women. Furthering the concept of vulnerability, this also assists in Ayan's perspective in highlighting the vulnerability of children and women to the male populace on board, as the majority would almost always overpower the minority in a majoritarianism manner. I view this as a normal aspect of modern society, however, having been translated to this tight, capricious environment, this in my personal opinion, is infelicitous and unreasonable in its own right to everyone inhabiting the space.

Extract from Sea Prayer by Khaled Hosseini

Your mother is here tonight, Marwan,
with us, on this cold and moonlit beach,
among the crying babies
and the women worrying
in tongues we don't speak.
Afghans and Somalis and Iraqis
and Eritreans and Syrians.
All of us impatient for sunrise,
all of us in dread of it.
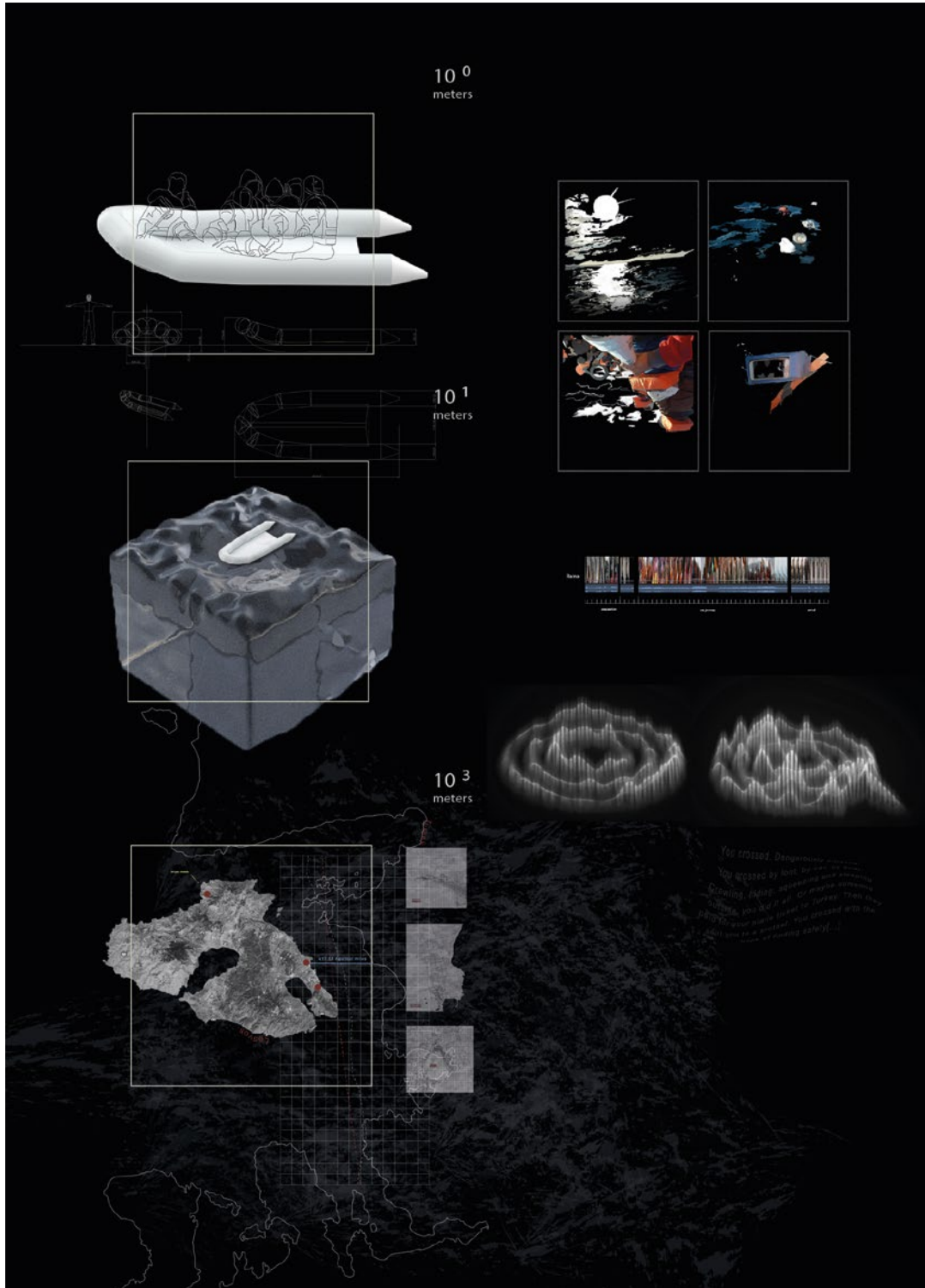*All of us in search in home.*

Figure 6: Chan, K. First draft of compositional illustration of Coexistence at sea. 13 March 2021. [Adobe Illustrator, Fusion 360, Rhino, procreate and Adobe After Effects]

Inspired by the power of ten, the illustration stage by stage zooms out from Lesvos, focuses on one vessel then the refugees; underlining the dangers and distance of their vast journey at sea.
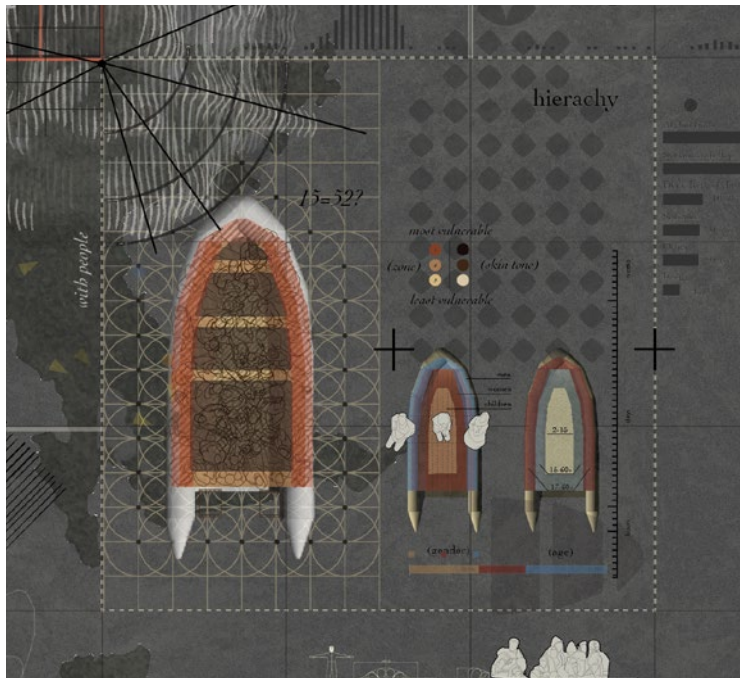
Figure 7: Chan, K. Close up of investigation of hierachy and organisation politics in compositional illustration. 22 March 2021 [Adobe Illustrator, Rhino]

Figure 8: Chan, K. Colour-coded diagram of refugee's seating arrangement within refugee boat. 17 March 2021. [Illustrator]

Mapping and Exploring Gendered Mobile Spaces

Initially, I interpreted the unpredictable seascape as the most treacherous scene in the course of a refugee's sea journey, but the lecture series unveiled additional psychological and physically violent barriers besides nature. By 3D modelling a refugee vessel on Rhino, I not only understood the structural materiality of a dinghy to a greater extent, but also recognised the desperation for escape after assessing the risk and precariousness of crossing nearly 300 nautical miles in fragile plastic and low quality engines. Concerned with this as a space of speculation, consecutive colour-coded systematic diagrams of seating arrangements were applied over renders to study the organisational politics and perhaps "mobile commons" (Trimikliniotis and Parsanoglou, 2014) in relation to gender and age. This engendered me to explore the potentialities for these precarious spaces to be transformed so as to assume intimacy and become affective spaces. From comparing images and videos of sea journey from Raina and Hassan, I quickly established a link between my previous research that existing multiplicity of movements do not reside under one single logic, yet, an informal system of vulnerability seems to occupy the mobile space within the overloaded capacity; predominantly with men and women on the bounds safeguarding children.
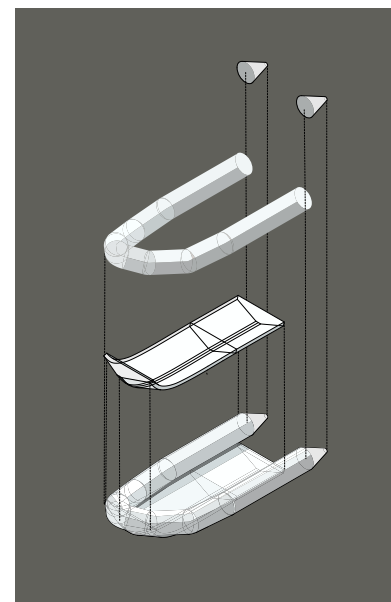

Figure 9: Chan, K. Axonometric drawing of refugee vessel. 16 March 2021. [Adobe Illustrator and Rhino]
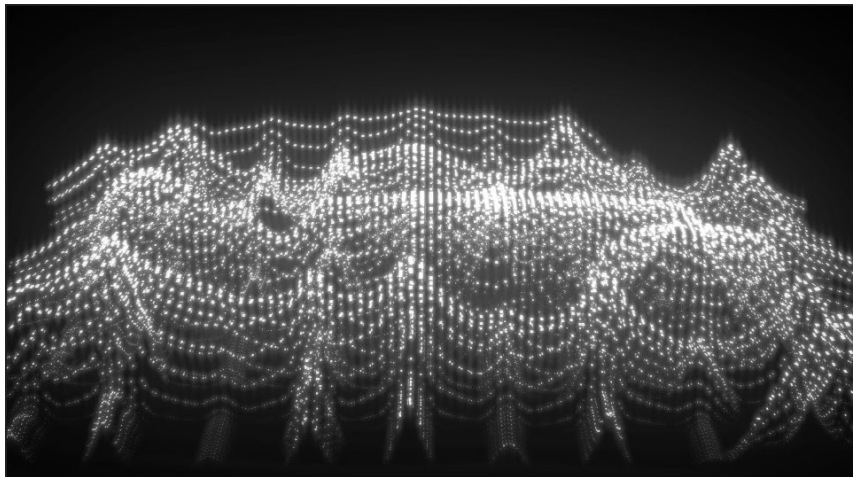
Figure 10: Chan, K. Interactive recording of audio-driven 3D
motion graphics animation (based on video: Escape from Syria:
Raina's Odyssey). 11 March 2021. [Adobe After Effects]

To further understand micro-spatial inhabitation in mobile spaces, I experimented with audio-driven 3D motion graphics to visualise labyrinthine senses at sea; visually capturing chaotic, coexisting sounds of crying, talking, screaming and waves crashing. Matching vivid scenes from poetic descriptions by refugees (in harmony with the extract from Sea Prayer), the use of dark tonality and intermix of horizontal and vertical projection perceptively fabricate the sense of discomfort, distress and directional uncertainty in an unknown environment during nightfall (time of day when smugglings are most likely to occur).
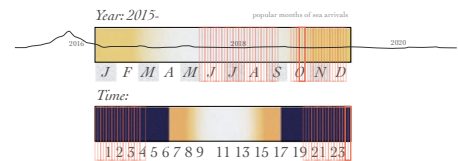
Figure 11, 12, 13: Chan, K. Experimentation
of 3D motion graphics. 11 March 2021.
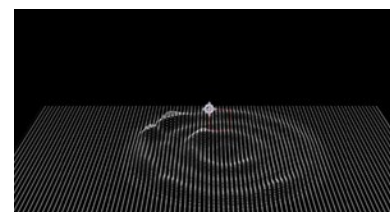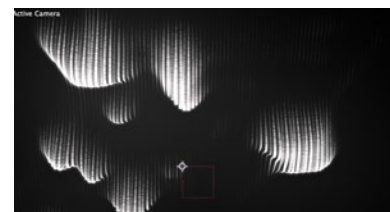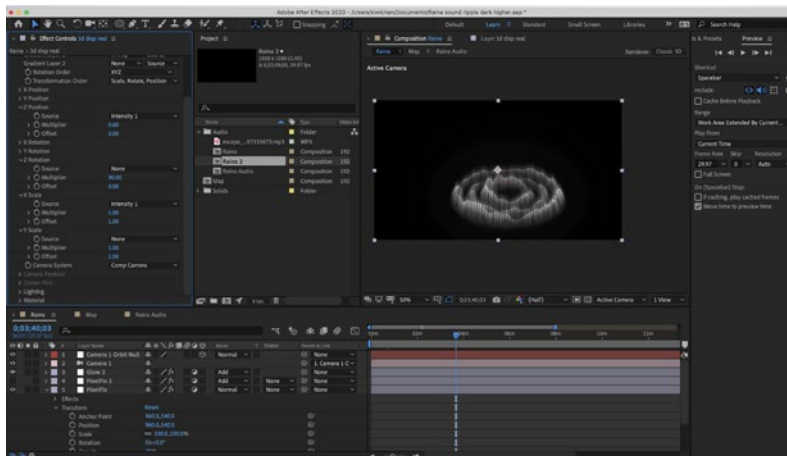[Adobe After Effects]

Figure 14: Chan, K. Layering mixed-media data on top of ripple animation. 18 March 2021.

Figure 15: Chan, K. Illustrative storyboard and timeline with text. 17 March 2021.
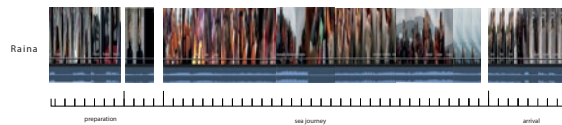

Figure 16: Chan, K. Assembled timeline from Escape from Syria: Raina's Odyssey using. 14 March 2021. [Adobe Premier Pro, Illustrator]

Diagramming has the ability to be descriptive, explanatory, normative, interpretative, prescriptive, and projective (Garcia, 2010) and to achieve this, the assembly timelines alongside storyboards built a sequence of events outlining sea rescue and shipwreck from the refugee's viewpoint. In parallel with Bernard Tsuchmi's approach and Perry Kulper's drawing , I found the explorative technique of oscillating between hybrid of software, visualisations, geographic data and other disciplines extremely powerful in contextually stitching together different voices, as cooperatively, they epitomise as a metaphor to represent different voices in concert, forging a stronger message as a whole for my international audience of other spatial designers besides the public. This multi-disciplinary approach to mapping also led me to a creative and critical conceptualisation of architecture, in terms of its power to redescribe and superimpose body, movement, event and narrative.

Figure 17: Chan, K. Textural illustration of Aegean Sea (on Adobe Illustrator). 8 March 2021.

Coexistence with Place: Water as Ambiguous Space

Accounting for only 0.7% of the surface of global oceans, the Mediterranean Sea disproportionately manages 30% of maritime trade traffic and 25% hydrocarbon traffic (Mclntosh and Pontius, 2016). While described by Balibar (2004), as "a Euro-Mediterranean ensemble by or alliance" and Anderson (2014), as a multi-million "illegality industry", the Central Mediterranean growingly continues to be a popular yet deadest mobile midway that contributes to a strategical role in the gravitational movements of neoliberalism. Featuring the theory of Mediterranean Thinking formulated by Miriam Cooke (1999) and Mediterranean phenomenon in which cultures, ideas and identities are met and blended, I see this body of water in Mediterranean Sea as an ambiguous space of coexistence; "a space in which other ontologies, geographies, poetics and politics are simultaneously mobilised, set in play, enacted and re-signified by the movements of foreign bodies in small boats" (Perera, 2013).

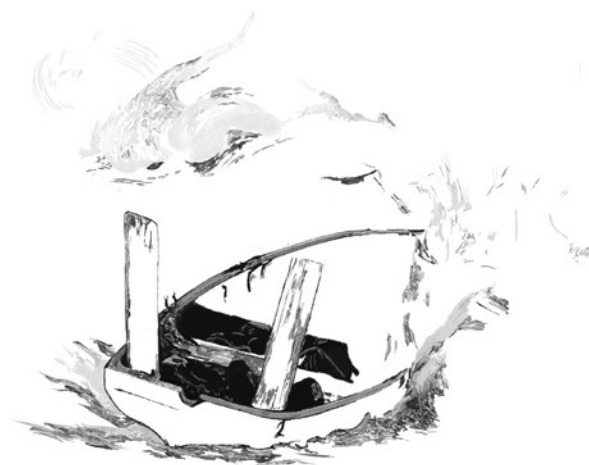Figure 18: Chan, K. Mapping of Aegean Sea. 12 March 2021. [Adobe Illustrator]

Figure 19: Chan, K. Sketch of Famous Sea Tale of Cannibalism–R v Dudley and Stephens on the Mignonette (1884). 17 March 2021. [on Procreate]

Some may deem the "high seas" as the only spaces that are that "free" or "unbounded" within the confines of modern systems of nations, but relating to Leopold Lambert's perception in *Weaponised Architecture*, I think the Mediterranean can be perceived as a violent connecting point, homogenising between border and non-border. Recalling significant moments of sea tales in its extensive history, migration follows an incomprehensive passage marked by slavery, drowning, brutality, as Iain Chambers (2010) writes in 'Maritime criticism and theoretical shipwrecks'. Given that some may distinguish it as 'visual politics' (namely Tom Snow in "Refuge in a Moving World"), I drew upon the death of 3-year-old Syrian, Alan Kurdi as a troubling key symbol for innocence and powerlessness that resulted from political identity and being statelessness at sea.

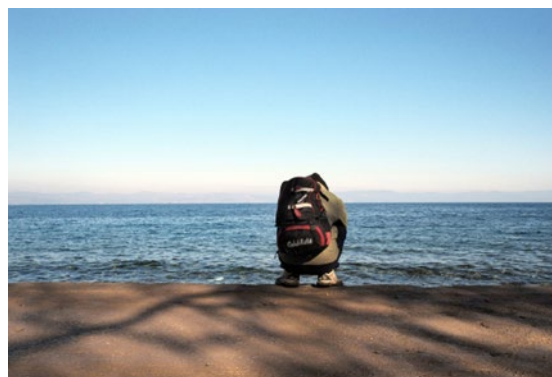Figure 20: Greece. August 2009. Island of Samos. Patrick Zachmann. Artstor

Figure 21: A refugee looks at the Aegean sea shortly after disembarking from a dinghy on a beach on the Greek island of Lesbos, after crossing the Aegean sea from the Turkish coast. Iva Zimova. Artstor.

Referring to Turner's theory that nautical voyages have metaphorically signified liminal periods where beings are "betwixt and between" real lives and identities, this led me to realise the blurring of refugee identity can be interconnected to liminality given its ambiguous implication (Mannik, 2016). As Said (2001) notes, 'nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage', to me, the single notion of belonging (to a nation) is perceptively brought under diaspora, however through mobile movements in the Mediterranean, refugee bodies put forward "new spatial and political materiality, and inscribe embodied counter-geographies and relations" (Kapur, 2003; Hyndma, 2004). I comply with the argument in the book *Migrant by Boat*, connoting this ambiguous nature further facilitates refugee's "identity crisis" due to many negative discriminative associations of refugees, especially from media descriptions such as "tide", "flood", and "waves" (Pugh, 2004). Furthermore, reinforced by western fixation with binarism and categorical order in the nation-state model, refugees come to personify an "objectified, undifferentiated mass" (Mannik, 2016) that is in and out of nations in the time of movement; in essence, they are "stateless" and marginalised as "others" that do not belong anywhere (Allatson and McCormack, 2005), making them susceptible to dehumanisation. I believe this to be unjust and inhumane. Despite third parties labelling these individuals as migrants or even derogatory term "boat people", they are no less nationalistic than any patriot from any country; bringing, upholding their values and culture together in remembrance of their true heritage despite effects of trauma and war.

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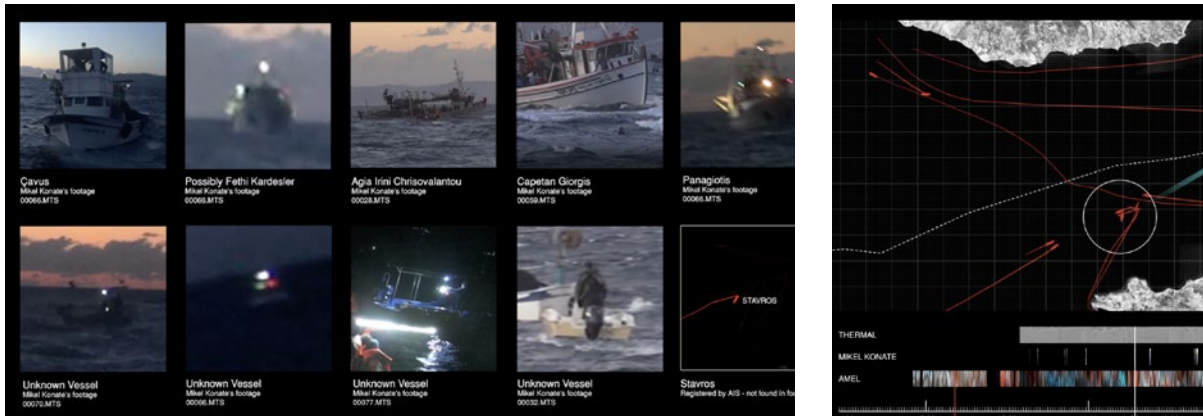
Figures 22, 23: Screenshots of Forensic
Architecture's Investigation. Forensic
Architecture. 2020.

Tales of Rescue

After being revealed by Forensic Architecture's self-initiated investigation of a shipwreck at the threshold of Lesvos in 2015, I started to become more aware of the lack of transparency and accountability within the territorial securitisation and militarisation in the Mediterranean. Combining situated footages recorded by survivor–Amel Alzakout and other sources (filmed by press, activists and more), their visual synchronisation of geolocating and 3D Modelling methodologies analytically reconstructed and disclosed the reality of security operations. I found lecturer and founder of Atlantic Pacific–Robin Jenkins' first-hand experience during his international boat rescues to be in alignment with Forensic Architecture's dispute; exposing that Greek, Turkish (and Libyan) coastguards as well as EU border agencies routinely shroud in secrecy to abstain from public scrutiny and potential compromising of 'successful' operations; almost as if they operate under a veil of silence behind the shield of 'EU security' (Ghezelbash, Moreno-Lax, Klein and Opeskin, 2018). Having analysed various case studies, it was axiomatic to me that these cases are only few of many that opens up false accreditation for 'successful' rescues along with the possibilities for these groups to be held accountable for the countless lives lost at sea.

Figures 24: Images from Robin Jenkins' Lecture
on Humanitarianism. Robin Jenkins. 2021.

In conjunction with tales of rescues, the ongoing investigations of Captain Pia Klemp and nine other crew members of IUVENTA is another example of criminalisation of solidarity: they are potentially facing up to 20 years of imprisonment in Italy for allegation of aiding and abetting illegal immigration, in other words, personally rescuing hundreds of migrants from unseaworthy overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean. In view of human right violations has become a commonplace at Europe's doorstep, her TEDxBerlin talk– "Why I fight for solidarity" brings into question if basic acts of kindness such as rescuing and providing shelter for people in imminent danger should be subject to political discussion or even crime, seeing as they "simply did what had to be done–rescuing people where they can be rescued". Despite that civil society organisations like Sea-Watch and Sea-Eye are ardently attempting to fill the void abandoned by official authorities with private maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, I learnt their solitary forces are frowned upon and their life saving actions are hindered to prevent them being witnesses to these crimes against humanity, including cases of European ships ignoring refugee boats in distress, deliberately letting migrants drown and at times, financing brutal kidnappings and threats from militias. From my perspective, this sobering revelation sets forth inhumane injustice that goes beyond law (e.g. Smuggling Protocol) and authority, leading us back to a society of inequality which one's life is worth less than other all due to a difference in ownership of passports.

Figure 25: Image of Captain Pia Klemp from Robin Jenkins'
Lecture on Humanitarianism. Robin Jenkins. 2021.

Figure 26 : Image of Sea Watch Mission from Robin Jenkins'
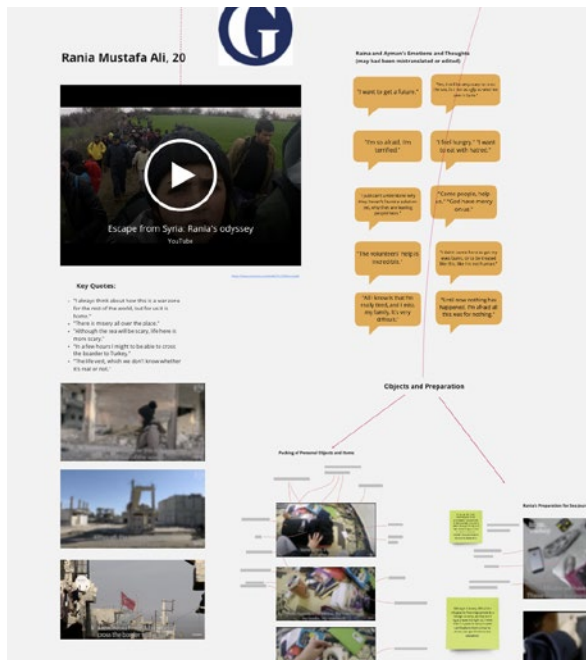Lecture on Humanitarianism. Robin Jenkins. 2021.

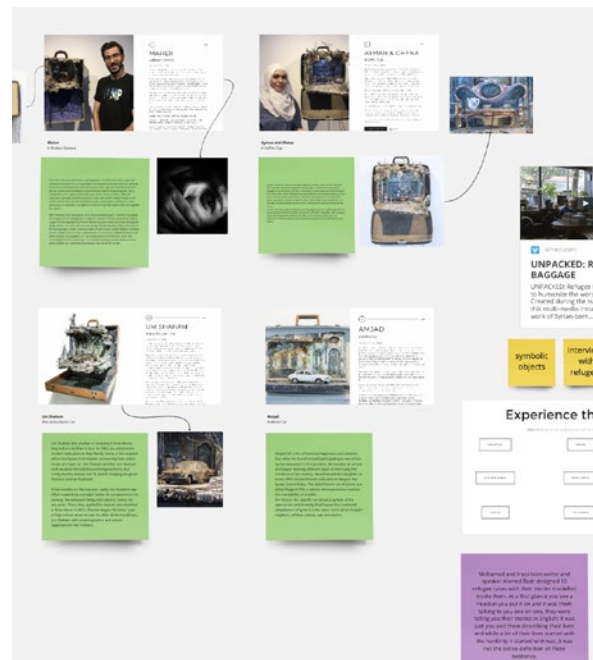Figure 27: Chan, K. Detailed video analysis of Escape from Syria: Raina's Odyssey. 10 March 2021. [Miro]

Figure 28: Chan, K. Analysis of Refugee Stories from Unpacked: Refugee Baggage by Architect Mohamad Hafez. 10 March 2021. [Mro]

Mapping and Exploring Transparency and Ambiguity

Conforming to lecturer Perry Kulper's one of visualisation thoughts, I like to envision "drawing as a ground to open default assumption". When I began the composition process however, I found it difficult to obtain reliable secondary sources online. Enacting the strategy of CRAAP, I realised I had to be mindful of language in the media, and in light of ethical considerations, I settled upon refraining from news channels by employing real-life stories from refugees and humanitarians as the core and protagonist of illustration; in position to narrate stories with and for refugees (Tenore, 2017), whilst resisting against exercising refugees as my "sources" or putting myself in their shoes. In addition, not as a terrorist, nor as a victim, I want these voices of the subaltern to be forefront as "complex subjects who are affected by global processes, and seeking safe passage across borders" (Kapur, 2003). Having extracted individual components from multiple videos and podcasts and more after listening to the humans behind the statistics and the headlines, including "Escape from Syria: Rania's Odyssey", "Fisher of Men (Documentary)" published by Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), Podcast series "What Do We Have Left?" published by Refugee Rescue, this process reminded me of the power of stories, film, and art. In particular, non-fiction documentary like *For Sama, Exodus: Our Journey to Europe* as well as fiction film *Harragas* draw attention to insightful meaning of seeing and listening, enabling us to ethically "see" and "listen" unique refugee stories.

I would say that most significant learning happened through Robin Jenkin's lecture on humanitarianism, provoking a shift of my original objective on securitisation and my interpretation the subjective term "security threat" (Gerard, A. Pickering, S 2013); challenging the role of victim and threat between refugees and coastguards. Applying my understanding of refugee mobility and border control, I placed more consideration into the layering and opacity of textural representations, with the intention to symbolise and reveal ambiguity in the layers of convoluted and superficial information released time after time to the public circling Frontex, or EU Coastguard activities; extending to different governments at the site of an invisible border. Evident in Figure 29, this language encodes and compacts emblematic pieces of ever-growing information layer-by-layer, with the implementation of semiotic abstraction, charts, and statistics. However overall, I believe that it is not just one's right to provide a just and thematic perspective of their personal life and experiences through any form or means necessary. It should be made one's obligation to respect and aid those that have shared or are going through that hardship.
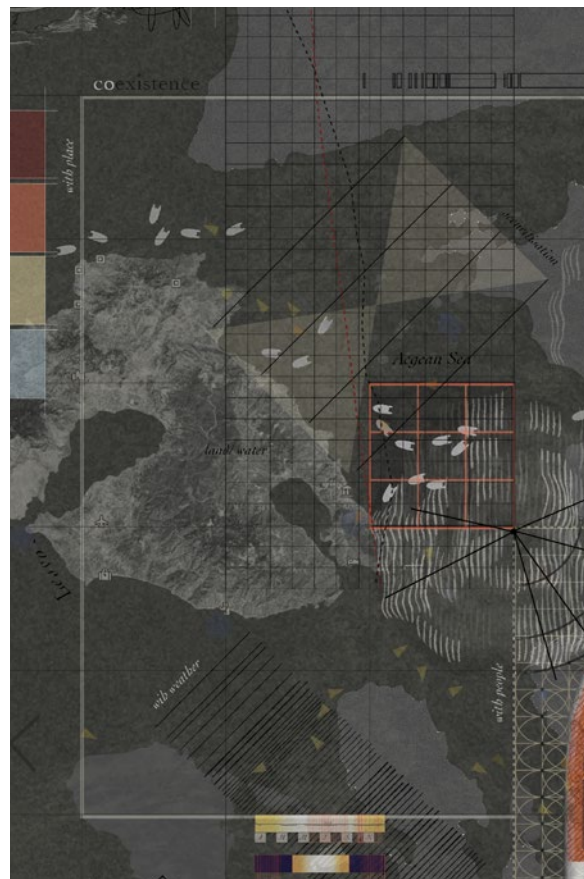

Figure 29: Chan, K. Close up of layers in final compositional illustration. 26 March 2021.

Figure 30: Chan, K. Close up of illustration of different rescue vessel in final compositional illustration. 26 March 2021. [Adobe Illustrator]

Figure 31: Chan, K. Final Outcome for
Composition Illustration. 11 April 2021.

Conclusion and Evaluation

Looking back at the overall journey, this process led me to think more closely to what my role as a designer is and the potential power in my research and illustration can have towards positive social change. I have greatly appreciated this opportunity to be a part of this multi-dimensional contemporary conversation and narrative. I have further gained an ethical approach in my process of research applicable to future projects. Despite the fast-paced development, I believe that I was able to dissociate from my more privileged position, allowing my final compositional illustration to pivot around alternative modes of representation to facilitate humanitarian perspectives that are often overlooked by policy decision, public conversations, and media reports. Together with competing viewpoints , it conceptually addresses and exhibits all complex thematic views on mobility, ambiguity, hierarchy, and identity around coexistence successfully. Moreover, as technology also plays a part in coexistence beside its existing role for EU surveillance, I could have further explored ideas of cybertheory (Miriam, 1999) and intricate dimensions of existence, praxis and living, in connection with the interwoven relationship between trust and technologies of mobile interaction. Rather than viewing digitality as something exogenous, I like to read more about *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City* and further investigate profound effects of migrant digitalities in terms of the social structural transformations, beyond the realm of social struggles and class relations (Trimikliniotis and Parsanoglou, 2014).

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Figures

Figure 20. Patrick Zachmann. Greece. August 2009. Island of Samos. Greek Guards coast patrols on Agean sea where illigal immigrants try to cross the border coming from Kusadasi, on the turkish side. They want to arrive in Europe where they can ask for asylum and make a new life. Most of them come from Afghanistan, Irak, Iran, East Europe, Algeria, Marocco, Palestine. Quite a lot pretend to be Afghanistan or palestinians in order to get a chance to become protected by a refugee or a political statut but are in fact from Pakistan, Algeria or Marocco. They usually pay to the traffickers between 1000 and 2000 dollars, depending if one of htem wiil accompanie the migrants or not. Police arrested the past year in 2008 around 2700 illegal immigrants in Samos and 80000 in whole Greece.   Here, 18 migrants are found at 5:20am. One coast guard is aiming a rifle on them as criminals and shout: "Hands up! Don't touch the boat!" as they often try to cut it in order to oblige the coast guards to save them from sinking and be sure that they won't be sent back to the Turks. They are claiming they are "Afghanis" in order to get the international statut of refugees and protection. One of the guard coast shouted to them as an answer: "If you are afghanis, I am swedish!" They will be arrested by the Police, finger digital printed and sent to the detention center of Samos. Available at: < https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_37860549>

Figure 21. Iva Zimova. (2011). A refugee looks at the Aegean sea shortly after disembarking from a dinghy on a beach on the Greek island of Lesbos, after crossing the Aegean sea from the Turkish coast. Artstor Available at: <https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/AWSS35953_35953_35722127>

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