



"Our house" commoning practices in Omonia square

**Renewal plan vs. the
homeless refugees'
right to the central
square of Athens**

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Omonia Square 1932



Omonia Square 1937



Omonia Square 1965



Omonia Square 1966



Omonia Square 2004



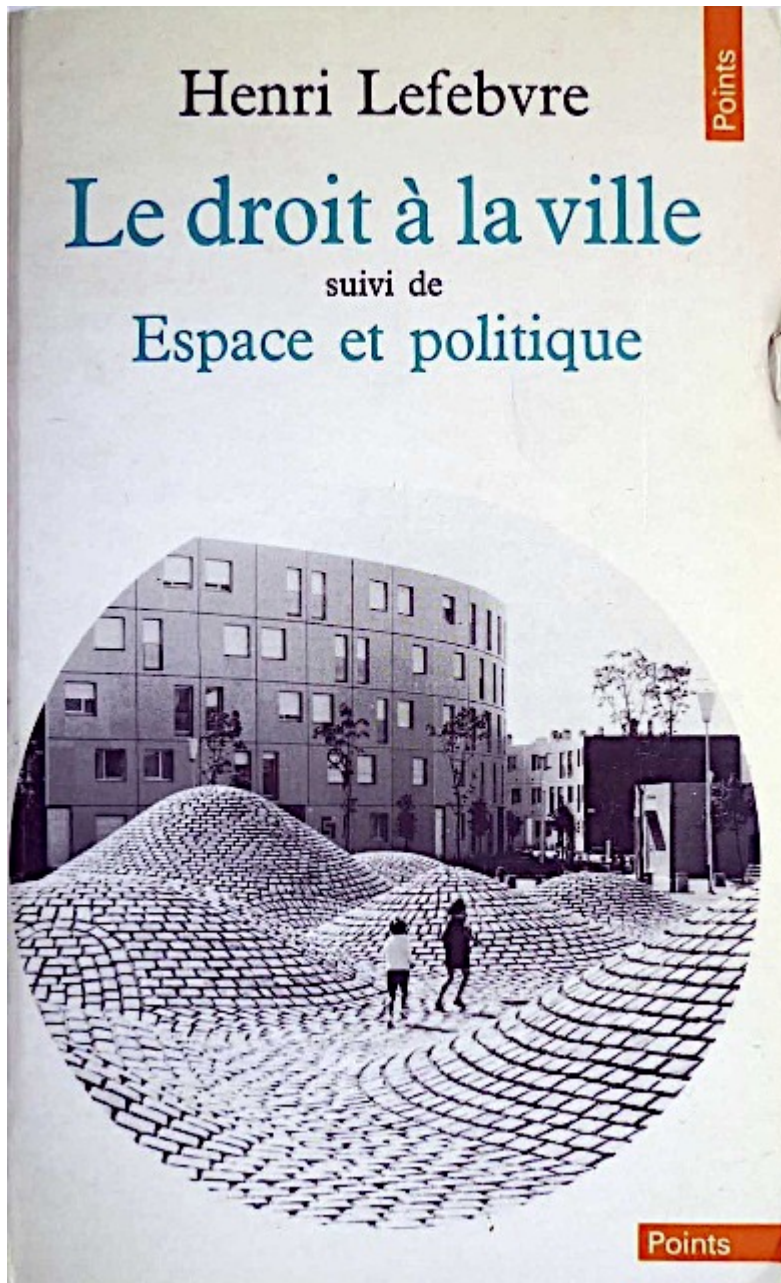
Omonia Square 2020



Omonia Square 2020



Omonia Square 2020



The Right to the City

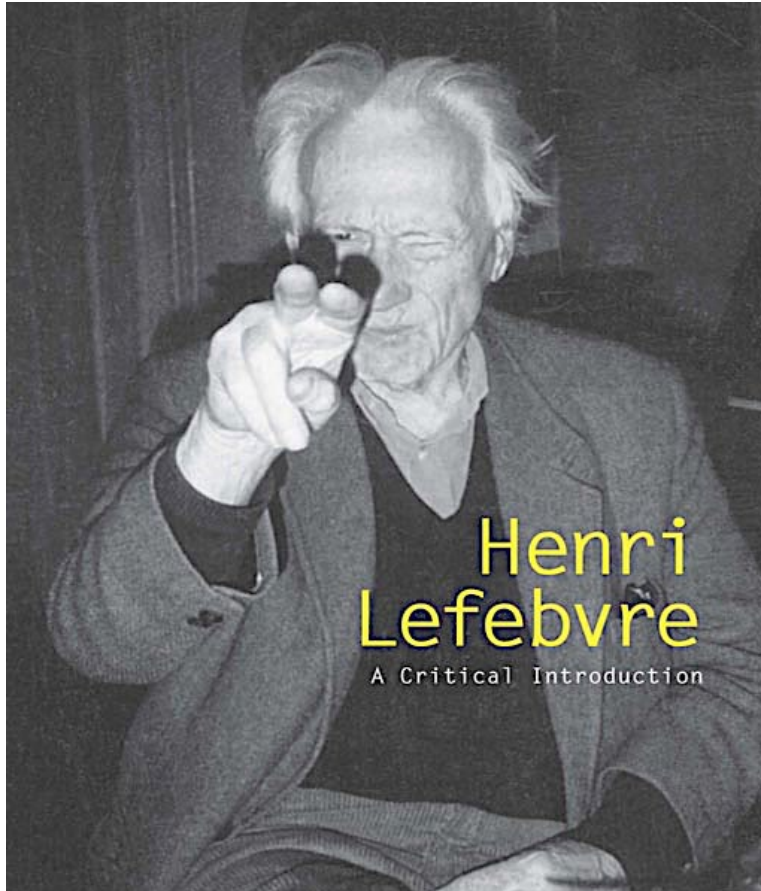
Henri Lefebvre 1968

“we have here...projected separately on the ground, groups, ethnic groups, ages and sexes, activities, tasks and functions, knowledge. Here is all that is necessary to create a world, an urban society”

(Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 143)

The Right to the City

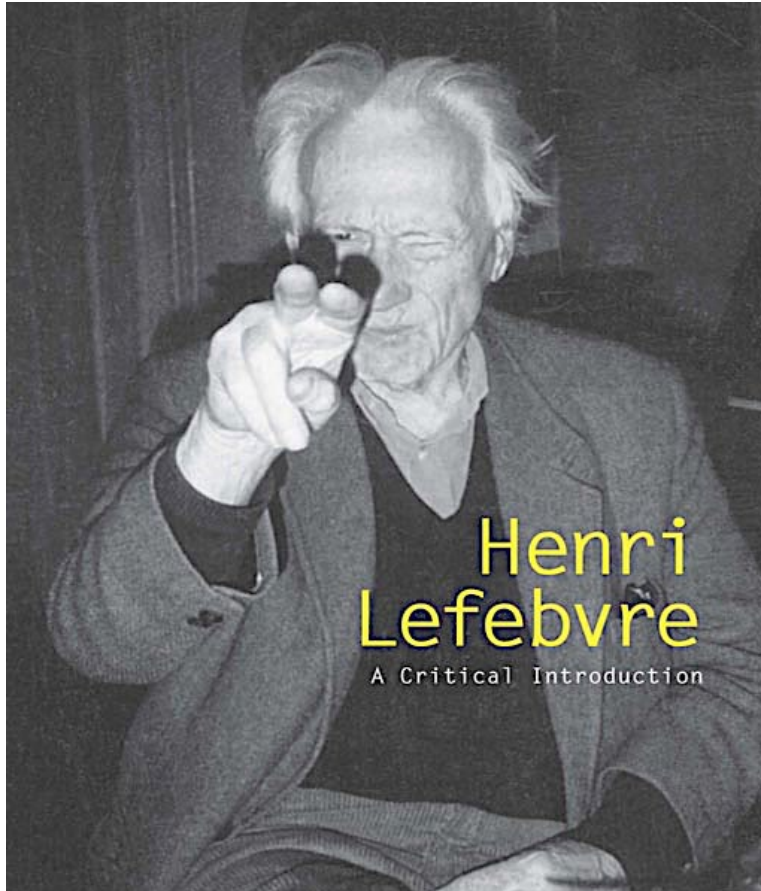
Henri Lefebvre 1968



He acknowledges that most of these groups are **'the non-participants, the non-integrated...who survive among the fragments of a possible society...excluded from the city'** (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 144). Thus, for Lefebvre, the right to the city includes, combines and transcends 'the rights of ages and sexes (the woman, the child and the elderly), the rights of conditions (the proletarian, the peasant), the rights to training and education, to work, to culture, to rest, to health, to housing' (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 157).

The Right to the City

Henri Lefebvre 1968



the right to the city is the right to the 'urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places.' (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 157).

the right to the city 'would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the "marginal")' (Lefebvre, 1996/1968: 34).

Commoning practices



Usually, the discussion on commons refers to the so-called “tragedy of commons” (Hardin, 1968) and the state (Ehrenfeld, 1972; Ophuls, 1973) or private (Smith, 1981; Welch, 1983) management of common-pool resources. Ostrom (1990) examined the possibility of sharing a common-pool resource and the self-managed practices of the producers-commoners. Beyond the economic debate of private or state management, a new generation of autonomous Marxists scholars emphasised the verbal form of commons, the so-called commoning.

Commoning practices



De Angelis (2010, p. 955) comments that ‘there are no commons without incessant activities of commoning,’ it is across the social relations of (re)production in common that ‘communities...decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things.’

Linebaugh (2008, p. 45) clarifies and claims that commoning is ‘independent of the state, is independent also of the temporality of the law and state.’

‘Borders have changed place’ as they are not only ‘at the edge of territory’ but they ‘have been transported into the middle of political space’ Balibar (2004: 109).



Critical urban homeless literature (Lees, 1998; Rowe and Wolch, 1990; Ruddick, 1990; 1996) emphasizes “the strategies by which spaces of homelessness are disciplined and contained, and the tactics deployed by homeless people to negotiate this containment.” (Cloke et al. 2008, 241) as well as the possibilities homeless people to exercise autonomy within the wider constraints of social and cultural regulation.

**Our house
in Omonia square**





Arrivals

41.038 in 2014

856.723 in 2015

173.450 in 2016

29.718 in 2017

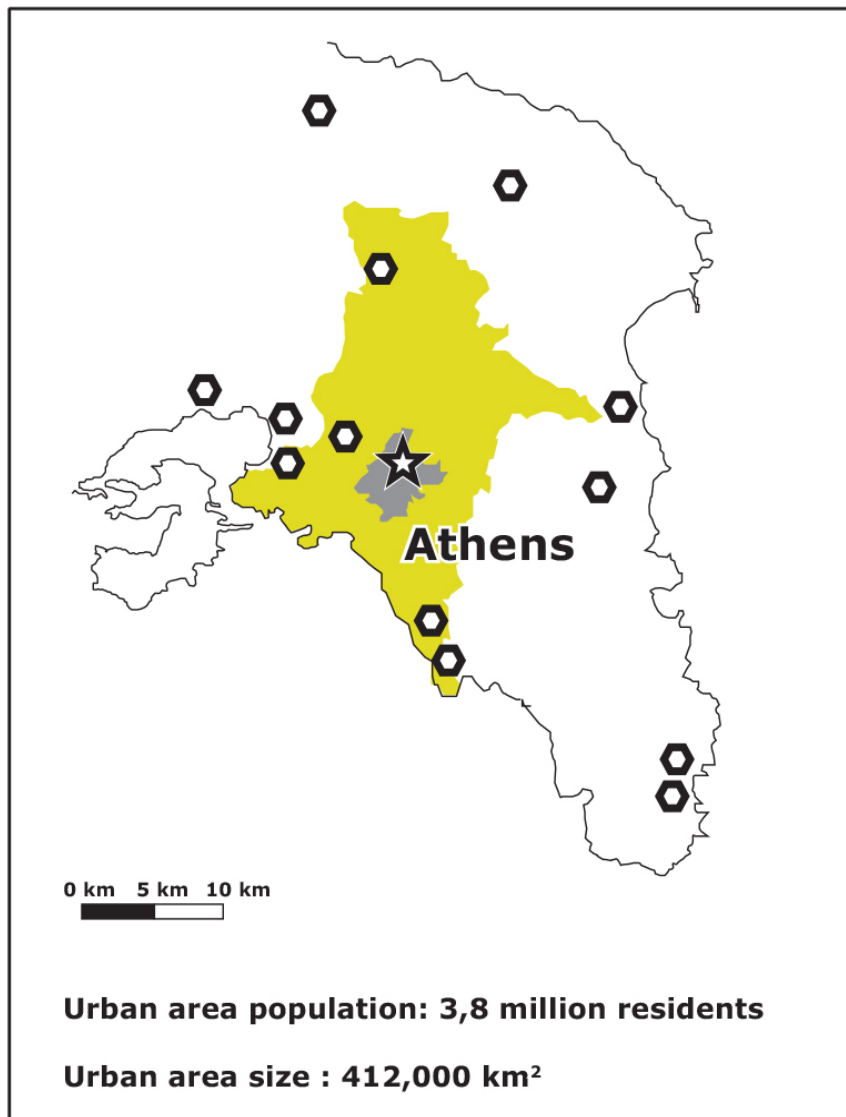
32.494 in 2018

59.726 in 2019

15.696 in 2020

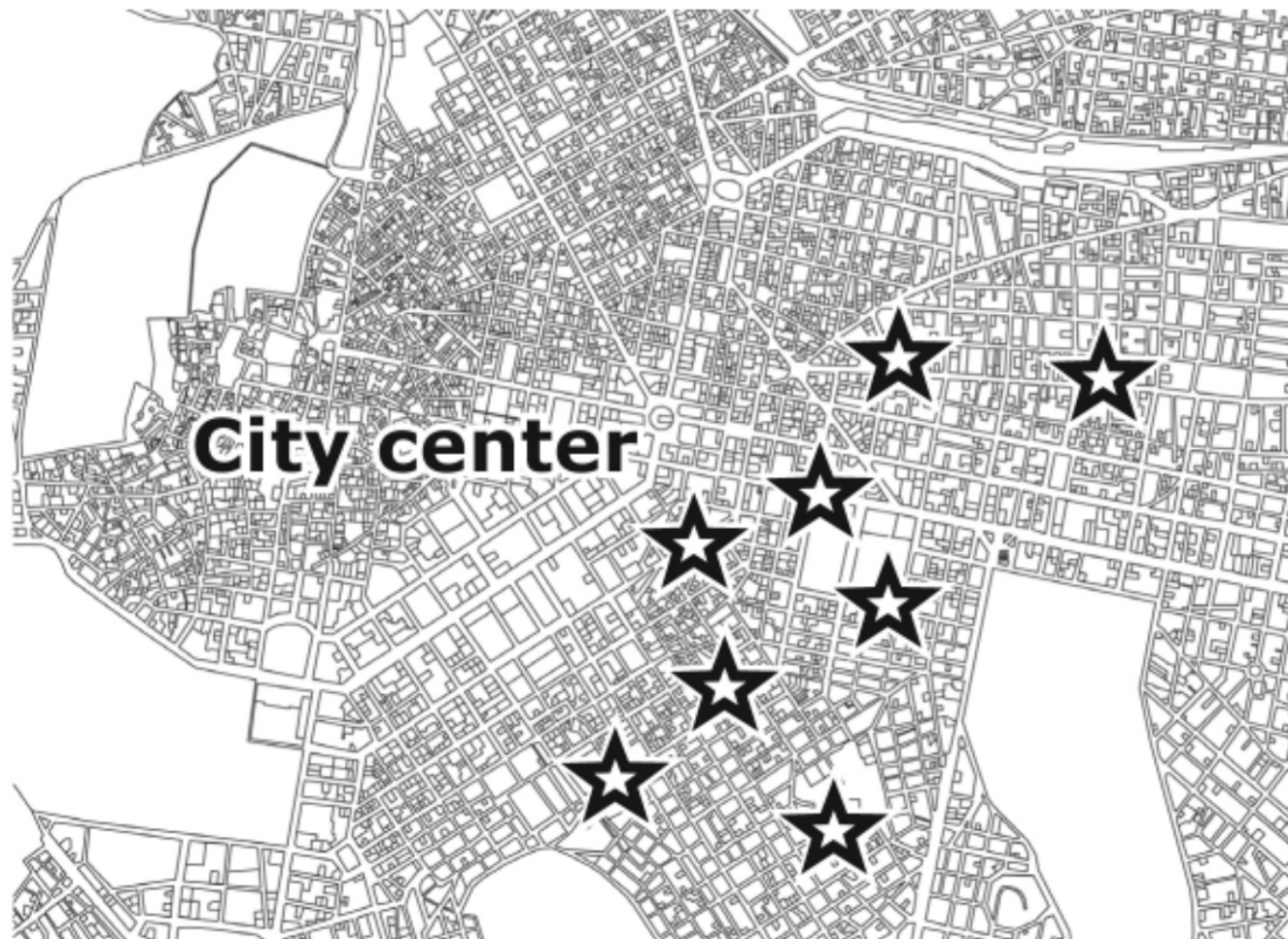
5.309 in 2021

**In total:
1.214.154**



Refugees are accommodated in 13 state-run refugee camps in the outskirts of Athens. The state-run camps do not meet international standards for refugees' accommodation. According to several reports the camps are overcrowded old factories and abandoned military bases, located at a significant distance from the city center and in non-residential and hazardous industrial areas.





Athens

0 km 0,5 km 1,00 km



Refugee housing squats and common spaces

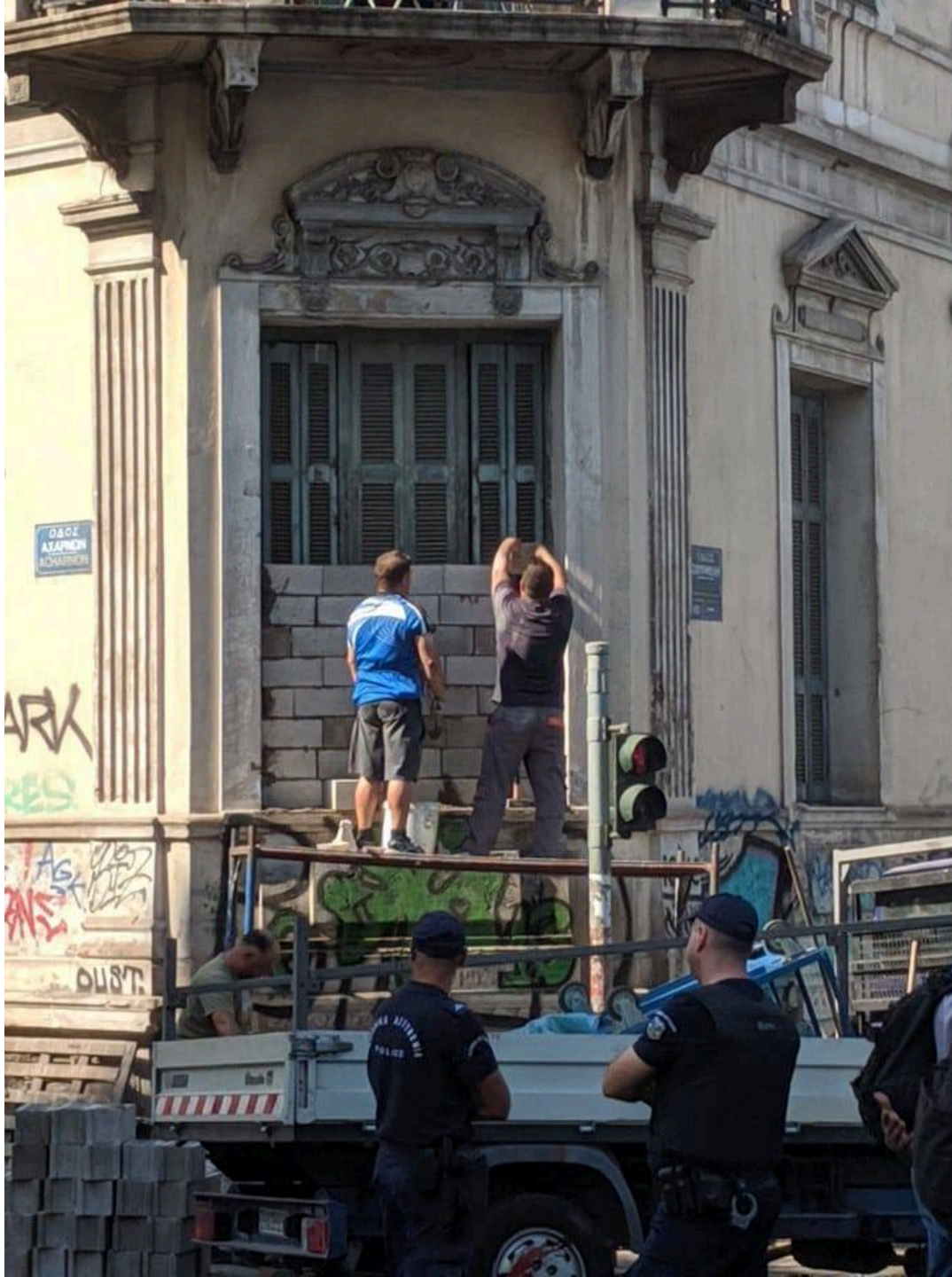


REFUGEES
WELCOME

HOME



**Refugee Squats
in Athens**



Athens, September 2019

Pogrom against Refugee Squats



Here there are no NGOs. We rely on free consciousness and we support each other.

(Personal interview, April 17, 2019).

“A reference point was set up for both volunteers and activists who want to help the homeless and the homeless themselves in the city center. Most importantly, relationships of mutual help between the homeless began to be created. In other words, our house became a meeting point, a point of solidarity and mutual aid. The distribution of food was just the occasion for the homeless people to create relations of solidarity.”

(Personal interview, April 17, 2019).



“Gradually we started to bring clothes, sleeping bags, shoes, etc. Most importantly, the homeless themselves started sharing their own things, for example someone maybe has two sleeping bags and bring one to give to someone else who needs it. Also, with the contacts we have in migrants squats we have found shelter in some migrant families that met in Omonia. Here I would like to emphasize that most of the homeless are migrants from the Middle East or Africa, but in our house there is no discrimination, everyone is welcome.”

(Personal interview, September 10, 2019).



“So now we have food, clothes and sleeping bags. Then we thought why not have a barber, the homeless are in great need of barbers. So we asked the homeless migrants if anyone knows how to get a haircut and a homeless from Iran was prepared to get a haircut every afternoon for a couple of hours. Then we thought of having some music. We asked the homeless people again if they knew how to play any musical instruments and we brought some guitars”

(Personal interview, October 29, 2019)





“while in Athens there are so many NGOs for migrants that provide food on their sites, until now there was no structure to provide food to the homeless in open spaces. Homeless migrants do not have mobile phones and internet access to look at the map and look to find the NGO buildings. The homeless may know some abandoned buildings and central squares. To be precise, their house is the square. This is how the name our house was born. Omonia is obviously not a normal house, but at the same time it is the home of so many homeless people.”

(Personal interview, November 20, 2019).









Conclusions





Restriction, exclusion and marginalization of refugees are constitutional components of the Greek State policies. However, against the isolation and enclosure of refugees in state-run camps, welcomed practices between solidarity groups and refugees gave birth to the refugees right to the center of Athens.

- commoning practices among homeless refugees in Omonia square not only contest victimization, criminalization and marginalization of State migration policies but homeless people are also experimented with forms of horizontality, mutual help and solidarity, highlighting a collective agency.
- Our house project cutting across ethnicity, religion, languages and other identities inventing innovative mechanisms of co-existence and togetherness.
- Our house project re-signified and transformed the Omonia square from a place of anonymity to a place of care, to place of community that territorialize new transnational common spaces for the most vulnerable people highlighting that the homeless migrants lives matters.



OUR HOUSE