Master's Degree in

International Security Studies-Studi sulla Sicurezza Internazionale

(Laurea Magistrale)

Master Thesis

"THE BORDER WILL MAKE A MAN OUT OF YOU": PERFORMING MILITARIZED MASCULINITIES AT THE EVROS BORDERLAND

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Abstract

The Evros borderland, named after the river that has been used to demarcate the border between Greece and Turkey, appears as a highly militarized and patrolled space, where different actors coexist and contribute to the protection of the border simultaneously. This border zone, which is still closely bound to its military traditions and history, has been increasingly integrated into the European border regime, turning into a theater of increasing violence and abuses against the people on the move.

By adopting a feminist approach to the study of borders, this research aims to unpack how the construction of militarized forms of masculinities informs the violent practices perpetrated on the people on the move at the Evros borderland. While Evros has been a subject of scholarly literature in critical border studies for what concerns pushbacks and detention, little to no attention has been paid to the gender constructions that underpin the militarization of this borderland and the resulting dynamics for the people on the move. This thesis contributes to the current debate by incorporating a feminist approach to the analysis of the border, to see how masculinities are constructed in a heavily militarized area like Evros and how these constructions create consequences on migrant bodies.

Through extensive fieldwork in Thessaloniki, I conducted qualitative research in line with critical and feminist methodologies using a grounded theory approach, enabling an understanding of the border management in Evros as a *collective exercise* in which army officers play an important role as strong and brave "guardians of the Borderland". I argue that the intricate network of actors responsible for border management in Evros tends to interiorize and adapt highly hierarchical and strict standards praised in the army, including the exercise of authority, physical performance, emotional toughness, strict adherence to rules, as well as humiliation and threat through the use of firearms. As a result, people on the move are subjected to violence vis-à-vis the hostility of the Evros borderland, as they are constantly silenced, threatened, and subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

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Acronyms

BVMN: Border Violence Monitoring Network

CBS: Critical Border Studies

CSDP: The Common Security and Defence Policy

ECCHR: European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights

EU: European Union

GCR: Greek Council for Refugees

GDP: Gross domestic product

HRW: Human Rights Watch

MIT: Mobile Info Team

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PRDC: Pre-Removal Detention Center

RIC: Reception and Identification Center

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VIS: Visa Information System

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Introduction

"*There is the stereotype that if you go to the army, then you will go to a brothel and you will have sex with sex workers*", told me Yorgos on a November evening, during the period I spent in Thessaloniki. "*And you will become a man, because the country will make a man out of you"*.

The choice of words of Yorgos is particularly significant. Not only he, as a Greek man who fulfilled his military service almost a decade ago, was trying to describe the army as an institution drenched in gendered stereotypes; but this description is utterly important for the context where he experienced his military duty: the Evros borderland, an area that has been the subject of increasing militarization as a means to securitize and strengthen European borders in the last decades.

The Evros border, named after the river that has been used to demarcate the border between Greece and Turkey, appears as a highly militarized and patrolled space, where different actors coexist and contribute to the protection of the border simultaneously. In this framework, this borderzone, often referred to as one of those European "forgotten sites" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016), is a theater of increasing violence and abuses against the people on the move, who are often reported to be arbitrarily apprehended, detained, and subjected to violence, before being pushed back to Turkey through the Evros River (BVMN, 2022).

By adopting a feminist approach to the study of borders, this research aims to unpack how the construction of militarized forms of masculinities informs the violent practices perpetrated on migrant bodies at the border. Focusing specifically on the case study of the Evros borderland, my research idea resonates with the words used by Yorgos, which did not simply inspire the title of this thesis but also made me wonder: *how can a border make a man out of someone?*

My vivid interest in this topic has in fact been raised in light of the peculiarity of the Evros borderland, a geographical space that is still closely bound to its military traditions and history, despite being increasingly integrated into the European border regime (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022). This area has been the subject of scholarly literature in critical border studies (Angeli et al., 2014; Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019), especially concerning practices of pushback (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; Takou, 2023), detention (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2020; Karamanidou et al., 2021), and the role played by the military, the police, and Frontex (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Pallister- Wilkins, 2016). However, little to no attention has been paid to the gender constructions that underpin the militarization of the Evros borderland, which made me reflect on the necessity of

incorporating a feminist approach to the analysis of the violent practices employed at the border. As a result, I became curious to investigate how masculinities are constructed in a heavily militarized area like Evros, and how these constructions impact the experiences of the people on the move.

To pursue this aim, the following research question is addressed in this study: how are militarized masculinities inscribed in the practices employed at the Evros borderland?

This overarching question entails more specific questions related to the definition of the actors implementing bordering practices, the relationships existing among them, and the effects these practices have on border crossers. Through answering these questions, I aim to understand the dynamics of control at play in the Evros borderland and how these are deeply shaped by militarized masculinities, which is the central focus of Chapter 5. In addition, my goal is also to capture the impacts of militarized masculinities and the resulting control dynamics on migrant bodies, which is the dominant focus in Chapter 6.

The twofold analytical design of my research is particularly useful to unpack the construction of militarized masculinities and the effects they produce on border practices in Evros. All the questions guiding my research are, in fact, intrinsically interrelated.

To be able to answer the research question, a qualitative methodology was adopted, which required the undertaking of fieldwork in the migration and humanitarian context in Greece, where I carried out qualitative research in line with critical and feminist methodologies, using a grounded theory approach that aims to develop new theoretical insights through an iterative process of collecting and analyzing real-world data.

The whole data-collection process took place during 102 days of fieldwork undertaken in Thessaloniki, where I worked as a field reporter for Border Violence Monitoring Network (shortened BVMN), a network of organizations documenting cross-border pushbacks and broader types of violence enacted against people on the move along the Balkan Route. I engaged in a data collection process that combined the methodology provided to me by BVMN with the academic methodology that I employed to pursue my research. This choice has allowed me to adopt a wide range of different methods, such as participant observation, documents and reports analysis, and semi-structured interviews, complemented by relevant material collected during fieldwork, such as photos, videos, notes, and informal conversations that could possibly enrich my understanding of the topic.

To empirically fulfill a gendered analysis of border practices in Evros, I collected ten (10) testimonies of people on the move (comprising both interviews delivered and/or transcribed by me and testimonies that were already present in the BVMN database) and conducted five (5)

semi-structured interviews with Greek men who experienced a period of compulsory military service in Evros. I identified five main themes around which empirical results are presented and which apply to both the militaries and the people on the move: Radicalization and Indoctrination; Hierarchy and Discipline; Humiliation and Hostility; Threat, Aggression, and Fear; The Intersection of Gendered and Racist Violence.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In Chapter 1, I present the current debate on gender, borders, and militarization presented by the major academic contributions on critical border studies, political and feminist geography, and critical military studies. In Chapter 2, I define three core theoretical concepts essential to guide my analysis: border security as a practice, gender performativity, and hegemonic and militarized masculinities. Through an integrated analysis of these three concepts, I argue, it is possible to see how border practices are embedded in gender performativity, as well as hegemonic and militarized masculinities. In Chapter 3, I present my methodological approach and the way I collected and analyzed my data. To do so, I provide a deeper understanding of the data collection process during my fieldwork in Thessaloniki, to show how my work for BVMN has been integrated into my study. I describe the process of collecting testimonies as part of my job as a field reporter, and how this process has been complemented by other interviews and relevant material. Moreover, I clarify my choice to use a grounded theory approach as an iterative form of data collection and analysis, as well as give a deeper insight into the main ethical considerations of my fieldwork experience. Subsequently, I present a proper contextualization of the Evros borderland in Chapter 4, providing an overview of the historical and cultural processes bound to the militarization of the border. I specifically focus on the analysis of the 2020 Evros border spectacle (De Genova, 2013), to show its relevance in the analysis of the interviews.

The last two chapters represent the empirical sections of this work. In Chapter 5, I pursue the analysis of the interviews conducted with Greek men who fulfilled their compulsory military service in Evros, to identify the core themes of militarized masculinities and interpret them through the way they manifest at the border. In Chapter 6, these core themes are employed to dive into the analysis of testimonies of migrants who were subjected to forms of violence at the Evros borderland, and to highlight the effects border practices visibly produce on migrants' bodies. The five core themes of militarized masculinities are identified in the conscripts' words and mirrored in migrants' narratives of border violence through different interpretative categories to highlight the link between the militarized character of the Evros borderland and the violent experiences of people on the move. In the final chapter, I present the results and my

final considerations arising from this analysis, before focusing on the implications for future research and the final conclusions.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Introduction to the Literature

The development of scholarly literature centering on border studies and militarization has been particularly relevant in the last few years, especially during the wave of the so-called European "refugee crisis" (Sachseder et al., 2022). Not only these events have offered many opportunities to analyze the notion of border practices entailing dynamism and complexity, but also to observe how these practices produce effects on the daily experiences of the people on the move(Parker& Vaughan-Williams, 2012).

Indeed, a critical reconceptualization of borders has contributed to broadening the meaning of state sovereignty concerning the protection of nations and the enforcement of security due to the rise of new perceived security threats, such as terrorism and global migration. Borders, which have always been fortified to protect the nation-state from external threats, have now been turned into "sites for militarized security activities" focused on preventing the entry of "illegal" migrants (Jones & Johnson, 2016; p.187).

What is new in this process is therefore a strong connection between the militarization of contemporary borders to the dehumanization of migrant bodies, responsible for creating an unbalanced system of power that disproportionally burdened the people on the move (Jones & Johnson, 2016; Freedman et al., 2023). The transformation of borders into "spatializations of the violence of the state" (Minca & Vaughan-Williams, 2012) is particularly visible when it comes to analyzing the evolution of "militarized borders through the use of military technologies, hardware, and personnel" aiming at preventing migrant mobility (Jones & Johnson 2016, p.187). This process entails a notion of borders that are no longer bound to "fixed territorial lines" (Parker et al. 2009), but rather intangible "technologies for the reproduction of inequality" (Casaglia, 2022; p.185), which manifest through different axes andlayers of people's identities. As bordering practices produce different effects on different people, an intersectional analysis has become central to understanding the overlapping relationsof power through axes of gender and race, which inform the process of creation, preservation, and enforcement of borders through militarized means (Freedman et al., 2023).

By adopting a feminist approach to the study of borders, this research aims to investigate how the militarization of the Evros borderland is the expression of militarized masculinities, which legitimizes the use of violent practices through the duty to "protect" while producing gendered

and racist violence against the people on the move. To situate my research's objectives within the wider scholarly debate I will develop the following section by analyzing the available literature drawing from the scholarship of critical border studies, political and feminist geography, and critical military studies.

1.2. Militarization and Masculinities within the Critical Military Scholarship

To foster a deep understanding of how contemporary borders have encountered a dramatic change in the way they are established, negotiated, and patrolled, it is important to understand what the militarization of borders actually entails. If we look closely at contemporary borders, their increasing militarization, meaning "the processes through which military influence and priorities are extended to civilian life" (Militarization - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics, n.d.), is underpinned by logics of control and deterrence toward migrant groups, whose mobility is restricted by different security actors.

For instance, many scholars have underlined the violent transformation of contemporary borders (Slack et. al, 2016) in light of increasing collaboration between the military force and the police (Silva, 2015). As Jones & Johnson (2016) claim, the militarization of contemporary borders is particularly visible when it comes to noticing how blurred the connotations of "militarizing" and "policing" have become in the USA and the EU. Indeed, despite the police and military being both recognized as apparatus of the sovereign authority of the state, they historically differed in their geographical sites of action, as well as purposes and methods. These distinctions have been fading away in relation to the management of contemporary borders: while the military is becoming more present for matters of internal policing, the police is becoming increasingly 'militarized' in its tactics, technologies, and practice (Jones & Johnson, 2016).

As a result, border militarization, meaning "the pervasive influence of military strategies, culture, technologies, hardware and combat veterans that are now policing the border" (Jones & Johnson, 2016; p.188), is undeniably informed by the role that the military has in transforming social and geographical spaces. Not only this factor is vitally important to understand the way the military is an institution intrinsically bound to the social identities of the people who constitute it, but also to grasp the gender connotation the military itself has historically and culturally assumed. Since the militarization process of borders is bound to the

realms of violence and combat, many scholars have pursued a gendered analysis of military activities by unpacking those gender characteristics of the military that are stereotypically connected to male characteristics.

For instance, in discussing the different declinations of military and militarism's geographies, Woodward (1998) has deeply explored the connection between gender and military activities. Particularly, she observed how masculinities are constructed and reproduced within different spatial organizations, such as the countryside (1998). As she observed, not only is the countryside a location for military activity through which masculinity is effectively constructed, but it also prompts the idea of a man "physically fit, mentally brave, and emotionally hard" (1998, p. 287) related to the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005a).

As a matter of fact, the notion of hegemonic masculinity has been largely used in the literature of critical military studies to understand, analyze, and deconstruct gender norms within different military institutions. For example, Barrett (1996), who explored the construction of hegemonic masculinities within the US Navy, highlighted how soldiers tended to draw their masculine identities upon traits like risk-taking, discipline, rational calculation, and the absenceof emotions. These traits arose in Barrett's research (1996) through "associations of difference"(p. 129) among the organizational positions of the soldiers. This technique was particularly effective in showing how masculinities are not universal or monolithic, but rather a "dynamic pattern of ideologies and practices constructed in interaction" (Barrett 1996, p. 140). This thesiswas also the cornerstone of Hinjiosa's research (2010), which analyzed how pre-active duty service men constructed an identity in line with hegemonic masculinity by situating themselves into hierarchies. By enforcing their dominance over other men and other forms of masculinity,the participants in Hinjiosa's research defined their hegemonically masculine identity through comparison and narration of their military experience (p.181). This technique showed that the symbolic "discursive subordination" (p.192) of other men allowed the participants to symbolically place themselves at the top of the hierarchy. Therefore, these two case studies were effective in showing that there is a strong connection between the military and the construction of hegemonic masculinity, since "the military provides access to resources that allow an individual to fulfill a hegemonically masculine identity" (Reit 2017, p.12).

On the other hand, other scholars explored the construction of military forms of masculinities in contexts that go beyond the military institution, to overcome an idea of military power narrowly linked to the capacity to participate in wars and possess military capability. For

instance, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff (2020) analyzed the European Union as a “military power constituted by multiple masculinities” (p.362). Particularly, they focused on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), highlighting how its discourses and practices foster a legitimization of militarism perpetrated by the EU as a masculine military actor, which inevitably informs also its border policies. Conversely, Tapscott (2020) discussed the relationship between militarized masculinities and the contradictions related to contemporary authoritarian control, by using as examples the the regimes of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and Vladimir Putin in Russia. The author focused on the 'paradox of restraint' to show that militarized masculinities are fungible in sustaining those democratic institutions exercising authoritarian control. In fact, these systems are made possible because they are builton the strong connection between the executive and the military, grounding their power on unaccountable violence and constantly threatening possible state opponents (Tapscott, 2020). These two examples allow us to frame a new discourse on militarized masculinities that is embracing new forms of contemporary militarization that do not belong to the traditional notion of military force.

To further enrich this argument, the proliferation of scholarly literature on the militarization of the police (Marquez, 2021; Ray, 2021; Stavro & Welch, 2023) and border force (Slack et. al, 2016; Jones, 2023) inspired many scholars to integrate a gendered approach of militarized masculinities to these domains. Particularly, Goodmark (2015) unpacked the construction of militarized masculinity among police officers who perpetuate domestic violence against their partners. Drawing on feminist theories, the author underlined how the militarization of the police reinforced the practices of militarized forms of masculinity among the officers, which produced violent effects on their private as well as their professional lives (Goodmark, 2015). This idea was also considered by Silvestri (2017), who pursued a gendered analysis of the police culture, focusing on the “cult of masculinity” and machismo within law enforcement institutions. By analyzing these concepts concerning the leadership style of the police, the author stressed how elements like the “crime fighting” mentality (p.19) enabled the construction of the gendered differences between men and women, defining women as unsuitable for this job. These constructions fostered the idea of the police as a male-dominated and masculine institution, without giving the possibility to question and deconstruct this gendered affirmation.

Although these scholarly contributions have been essential in expanding the idea of militarization and adapting it to different domains and contexts, the intertwining of border practices, militarization, and masculinities remain still unexplored in the evolving European

context. By incorporating a feminist approach to these studies, it would be possible to unravel those gendered constructions underpinning the enforcement of borders in their militarization process. The next section will provide an overview of the existing literature on gender and border security, and what power dynamics are created through the intertwining of these two concepts.

1.3. The Interrelation of Security, Borders, and Gender in Critical Border Studies

When it comes to defining the notions of borders in the European security context, the term "crisis" has become the main label to frame an urgent, extraordinary situation that requires a prompt response by the governments and authorities. As images of millions of refugees reaching Europe were spreading uncontrollably in 2015, the use of the word "crisis" representeda precise strategy, which has gained a political and symbolic meaning in the framework of theEU's border policies.

On this matter, Karamanidou (2022) analyzed the "border spectacle" (De Genova, 2013) that took place in the Evros region in March 2020, which will be extensively analyzed in Chapter 4. As hundreds of people attempted to cross the Greek-Turkish border, the violence used in response by the Greek authorities was portrayed as an exceptional measure vis-à-vis an apparent "invasion" of people threatening the Greek state and Europe as a whole. In her analysis, Karamanidou (2022) argued that the forms of violence perpetrated by the Greek authorities at the border represented a normalized and consolidated practice of border control in the Greek and European context, rather than an exceptional response to a crisis. With the integration of the Evros region within the European border regime (Karamanidou 2022, p.19), this imaginary of an incontrollable invasion of migrants served to strengthen the securitization process of migration, which was intrinsically bound to precise ideologies, values, and norms related to an "idea of Europe" in need for protection. The perspective of a massive influx of migrants served to construct the idea of a threat to the European Union's own ontological existence, highlighting Europe's postcolonial legacies in relation to its struggle for physical and cultural survival (Kinnvall, 2016). As a result, these apparent "exceptional" measures are to be seen as normalized technologies of border control embedded in the "racialized, violent border regimes of liberal states" (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022, p.12).

To comprehend the reproduction of these bordering practices as "particular spatializations of politics" (Basham & Vaughan-Williams, 2012), some scholars have studied the intersection of gender, race, and class (Crenshaw, 1989) to analyze how these practices impact the experiences of the people on the move (Tyszler, 2019a; Freedman, 2018; Holzberg et al., 2021; Sachseder et al., 2022). Particular attention has been given to the construction of femininities and masculinities, and how these socially constructed gendered categories are performed, negotiated, and enforced at the border.

For instance, Freedman (2018) studied the gendered dimension of migration, by focusing on the social and interpersonal dynamics arising within groups of migrants throughout their journey. As she noted, the prominent "crisis" and security discourse was especially effective inobscuring the experiences of migrant women, and "reinforce stereotypical representations of refugee men as a "threat," and refugee women as "vulnerable" (p. 706). Tyszler (2019a, 2019b)re-affirmed this position by drawing on several months of fieldwork at the Morocco-Spanish border, where she carried out extensive ethnographic research. Through her work, she observedhow the EU migration regime tends to emphasize the construction of masculinities and femininities which exacerbate the vulnerabilization of Black migrant women and the virility ofthe Black migrant men. This precise social order was visible in the spatial organization of the migrants' camps, where the power was in the hands of the 'chairmen' detaining sexual controlover migrant women, reinforcing gender-based violence through a pattern of "behaviors perceived as male, such as aggression or violence" (2019b, p.59). These manifestations of virile and violent masculinities could not be sustained outside the context of the camps, as migrant men immediately became subjected to racialization and discrimination: the volatility of the 'masculine power' proved that these categories are not fixed, but constantly changing according to the context they are operating in (2019b).

On the other hand, many political and feminist geographers focused on the role of the body to understand the reproduction of structural inequalities in relation to border practices. Since mobility gains its meaning in a delimited social space and time (Cresswell, 2006), the body became an important analytical tool for understanding how power acts and interacts with space (Mountz, 2017). In this regard, Fluri (2010, 2023) described "the body as an important site of inquiry for understanding security" (p. 282), as the embodiment of security is tangible in relation to conflicts (2010) but also in relation to international migration and mobility (2023).

In particular, Dunn (2009) discussed the importance of a 'politics of the embodiment' that allows the understanding of inequalities concerning access to mobility and space. Indeed, an embodied approach to transnationalism serves as a lens to unpack the power imbalances, as bodies are "simultaneously mobile and emplaced" (p. 5). Starting from these assumptions, Chowdhury (2023) aimed at incorporating a feminist approach to the “embodied political geography” (p. 3) by examining the position of masculinity in the analysis of border guarding practices. To conceptualize “border guarding practices as inextricably linked to body politics” (p. 4), the author successfully disentangled power relations in Bangladesh's Northwestern borderlands - a highly securitized and patrolled area- by focusing on the intersection of gender and class for border-dwelling women. Chowdhury’s intersectional approach, by centering the body as a scale of analysis (2023), showed that the perceived differences of women regarding their economic income and bodily characteristics produced different embodied experiences, as a result of border guards' gendered control over women's mobility. Since the border guarding strategies follow strict criteria related to the concepts of protection and control, they effectively incorporate the control of the "border's inhabitants' spatialities” (p.11).

Staudt (2010) further enriched this perspective by developing a gendered analysis of the US-Mexico Border Patrol. In her research, the construction of masculinities varies not only in terms of time and space but also in relation to political, social, and economic factors. Therefore, the spatiality of the US-Mexican border exacerbated global restructuring processes, bringing both the disintegration and construction of Mexican masculinities vis-à-vis US forms of masculinities. As a result, to ensure protection and control of the border, the author noticed a change from a hegemonic masculine approach to a hyper-masculine approach, related to the need to “inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort traditional masculinity" of many Mexican men (Staudt, 2010; p. 188).

These case studies are effective in proving that when it comes to studying borders as a series of practices (Parker & Vaughan 2012), the protection and control of the borders cannot be separated from the concept of security. Following this idea, Agius & Edenborg (2019) grounded their research on the study of gendered bordering practices concerning Swedish-Russian security relations, by reframing their foreign policies and power dynamics through gender lenses. This gendered bordering discourse is based on a "self-narrative of exceptionalism" (Agius & Edenborg, 2019; p. 58), where Sweden’s exceptionalism lies in its feminist foreign policy, while Russia’s exceptionalism in its masculine and nationalist order drenched in its traditional values. This case study helps us to foster a critical approach to security strategies

that is functional to highlight the prevalence of a prominent gendered discourse that praises stereotypical gender roles.

This perspective can be easily adapted to the context of the European border regime, tracing a clear nexus between borders and security through gender lenses. According to Agius (2021), "self-narratives that underscore the nation rely on gendered binaries such as strong/weak, active/passive, rational/irrational, masculine/feminine. The 'self' that must be secured is construed in gendered terms." (p. 389). Therefore, the core idea of the state as the vulnerable motherland relies on the use of feminine tropes as symbols of nationhood being metaphorically penetrated by an external threat, often portrayed as an aggressive racialized man (Naber, 2008). This image calls into action the need for a strong masculine protector, who can enforce authority and domination at the border with all the necessary means. As a result, the practice of protecting the borders is to be seen as inherently connected to a "masculinist self-narrative of ontological (in)security" (Agius, 2021, p. 387) enforced through militarized means.

In light of these important contributions, a site of inquiry centering on the modalities through which militarized masculinities are constructed and embedded in border practices remains unexplored. This overview of the current scholarly debate therefore suggests the need to incorporate a new perspective to examine how militarized masculine power is inscribed in border practices, in order to understand the impacts this process produces on the experiences of migrants. To investigate how militarized masculinities at the border have a material impact on border practices, a feminist approach to the analysis of the militarization of the border at the edge of Europe is therefore essential. Indeed, the process and practice of militarization, which has been largely recognized in our contemporary societies as entrenched in our normal life and politics, deserves more attention in relation to the construction and enforcement of security at the borders, as it may generate different outcomes for the people crossing them.

As a result, an in-depth case study on the construction of militarized masculinities at the Evros borderland will elucidate how these gendered constructions inform the practices enforced at the expense of migrant bodies. The next section will be devoted to exploring the theoretical concepts to better frame the objectives of the present research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The following section aims to define the concepts that stand at the core of this study. The chapter opens with an analysis of the concept of border practice as a security term, which represents the operational concept allowing me to observe theoretically what happens at the border and which effects are produced. Since border practices are analyzed through feminist lenses, this concept will be embedded with two fundamental theories coming from feminist literature and gender studies: gender performativity, and hegemonic and militarized masculinities.

The second section therefore focuses on how gender is constructed and performed, before moving to the third section providing an overview of the main traits, characteristics, and definitions related to hegemonic and militarized masculinities, which represents the main framework for the analysis of the empirical data of this research.

2.1. Border Security as Practice

The securitization of contemporary borders has drawn increasing attention in the last decades, shedding light on the evolution of the concept of border security and control. The scholarship on Critical Border Studies (CBS) has indeed prompted a redefinition of borders, from static and inflexible lines separating territories to "performances" intrinsically bound to the political and socio-economic meaning of the nation-state (Parker& Vaughan-Williams, 2012). According to many scholars, these new trends concerning the control of contemporary borders show an intrinsic bond between actors enforcing security at the border and the everyday practices involving “professional routines and administrative procedures” (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; p.195). For the purpose of this research, it is necessary to unpack this relationship between security actors and border control by adopting a critical approach of analysis towards the everyday practices of border regimes.

This commitment is essential for multiple reasons. First, by reconceptualizing the border in its fluid and dynamic sense, there is a greater need to focus on the goals and the effects that are enacted through the reproduction of specific practices (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012). Borders, therefore, assume meanings that are far from neutral. By establishing a relationship between the nation-state and the human experience, borders become intrinsically political. In

other words, “Whether we encounter borders as an object of geopolitical strategy, migration management or an everyday practice of differentiating ‘us’ from ‘them’, borders express political agency in deciding life and death questions as well as creating spaces for dialogue and coexistence” (Casaglia, 2020; p.27)

Second, this political role performed through border practices is managed by new actors that are delegated by nation-states to fulfill security mandates and act as security agents; at the same time, traditional actors in charge of the security of the state “behave in new ways with new justifications” (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; p.196). As a result, the mandate of police officers, border guards, soldiers, public security professionals, and immigration bureaucrats overlap and merge with the work of emerging private security actors, technology companies, as well as civilian actors, creating a system in which “each of these actors involved in securing borders evolves in quickly transforming institutional fields distinguished by their own standards, specific regulations, and political stakes” (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; p.196). A deep understanding of this system helps us frame “a more empirical and more interpretive approach to the notion of practice that emphasizes how actors act and how they give meaning to their actions” (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; p.197). This entails a close observation of what happens today at the edge of contemporary borders through the analysis of the practices put in place by different security actors.

An example of such an intricate multi-actor system is the sophistication of technologies and digitalization responsible for border management, which facilitates the establishment of data collection and surveillance on border crossers consequently increasing their traceability and vulnerability. Moreover, the majority of the cutting-edge technologies of surveillance are additional to the already discriminatory Visa Information System (VIS), a biometric database that established a two-tier system between privileged passport holders and the rest of the world. In a European border security framework, this reinforced the right to mobility within the Schengen area for EU passport holders on the one hand, vis-à-vis the brutal control of racialized (in)securitized subjects on the other (Glouftsios & Scheel, 2021).

Given a pattern of brutality as consolidated practices to “reassert control over migrants’ and refugees’ movements in multiple forms” (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2020), increasing attention has been given to the connection between contemporary borders and violence enacted by security actors (Davies et al., 2023; Brambilla & Jones, 2019). This analysis is fundamental to understanding what border practices actually imply, how they entail control over migrants’

bodies, and how they can be sustained and consolidated in light of a respect for human rights standards that is questionable or nonexistent.

Particularly, Davies et al. (2023) have focused on pushbacks as a violent practice employed at the border to "illegally reject unwanted - and racialized - asylum seekers" (p.169). Even though there is no widely accepted definition of pushbacks (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022), they are commonly referred to as "a variety of state measures aimed at forcing refugees and migrants out of their territory while obstructing access to applicable legal and procedural frameworks" (ECCHR, n.d.), connected to the principle of non-refoulment embedded in the 1951 Convention Relatingto the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2023). As explained by Davies et al. in their research on the Croatia-Bosnia border (2023), pushbacks entail the expulsion of individuals without a proper assessment of their asylum claim, which is, among European borders, often a normalizedapplication of border control.

Besides this, the authors have reinforced this argument by remarking that, aside from the illegality of the practice, pushbacks "are often also accompanied by theft, intimidation, and severe police violence" (Davies et al., 2023; p.170). These forms of physical violence burden the experiences of the undocumented people crossing European borders, unfolding a pattern of systemic harm that is as frequent as hidden. As a matter of fact, the concept of "epistemic borderwork" (2013) has been conceived by Davies et al. to describe the practice of testimonial injustice perpetrated by security actors at the European border, who strategically dismiss narratives of pushbacks and violence as non-credible or fake.

It is important to understand that not only the direct narration of people experiencing violence at the border is often marginalized and unvalued (Davies et al., 2023), but the practices of border violence are often pursued without anyone knowing (Topak, 2014). Moreover, this is particularly relevant for our case study on the Evros region, where different forms of border control encompassing pushback, detention, and surveillance mechanisms represent a normalized system of border regimes that is almost impossible to monitor (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022;Topak, 2014; Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). As Topak (2014) has stressed, "These realities demonstrate that the Greece–Turkey borderzones are biopolitical spaces where surveillance intensifies and migrant lives are held hostage." (p.816).

To further reconceptualize different declinations of border practice, De Genova and Tazzioli (2020) used the term "kidnapping" to define "a tactic for governing human mobility" in which all the forms of violent practices employed at the border here analyzed converge together.

According to the authors, “A focus on kidnapping also enables us to politicise the analysis of migration controls and securitarian–humanitarian assemblages by framing these as political technologies aimed at hunting for and chasing unruly mobile subjects” (De Genova and Tazzioli, 2020; p.875). Aside from the use of pushbacks, the authors highlighted how violent forms of border practice can be enforced against migrants even when they manage to cross the borders, as they are often “subjected to enduring conditions of detainability, deportability, and extraordinary forms of exploitation arising from their susceptibility to the recriminations of the law” (De Genova and Tazzioli, 2020; p.871).

Especially detention has been used by European states beyond its legal exception to embody a de facto strategy of governmentality over migrants’ lives (Bigo, 2007). Far from being used as a “last-resort measure” (European Parliament, n.d.), the detention of migrants for foreign nationals on European soil has been used as a violent practice of border enforcement following “a logic of permanent exceptionalism or of derogation by the government of the basic rule of law in the name of emergency” (Bigo, 2007; p.3). The “temporary” detention of migrants, as a strategy of the “dominant politics of mobility” (Brambilla & Jones, 2019) has been gradually detached from its legal meaning, to become a method of bodily control over migrants and racialized individuals, who are de-facto criminalized and incarcerated as “socially dangerous subjects” (De Genova and Tazzioli, 2020; p.880).

From police units and Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) to Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDC), a wide range of different detention spaces have been used to restrict migrants’ freedom of movement, as expressions of “non-punishment punishments” (De Genova and Tazzioli, 2020; p.875), justified as a form of routinely administrative control enacted by security actors.

This is particularly important when it comes to analyzing the border practices at the Evros border. The expansion of such infrastructures has, indeed, contributed to creating a highly hostile and militarized environment (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016) in which the epistemic borderwork of silencing and hiding the violence enforced by security actors is the everyday practice.

To conclude this section, we have seen how the mandate of security actors is inextricably linked to the practices employed at the border. The employment of pushbacks and arbitrary detention are just two examples of the ongoing abuses toward migrants’ mobility.

These border practices are not simply an expression of an extra-legal routine that is performed at the border, especially all over European territories. It is indeed important to understand that the use of physical violence as a consolidated border practice is as serious as forms of psychological and epistemic violence. As a matter of fact, the continuing silencing and dismissal of migrants' experiences at the border allows a further dehumanization of racialized subjects (Davies et al., 2023) and hinders forms of resistance against a radicated system of control and oppression against the people on the move.

For the sake of this analysis, it is important to observe these border practices critically and analyze them through feminist lenses. To do so, in the next two sections, I will explore the two core theoretical concepts that will lead a gendered analysis of this case study: gender performativity, and hegemonic and militarized masculinities.

2.2. Gender Performativity

To fully grasp the meaning of masculinity, including in its hegemonic and militarized acceptions that are most clearly displayed in the Evros borderlands, it is essential to analyze theconcept of gender and gender performativity in feminist literature. As a primary constitutive part, we find the difference between gender and biological sex.

Drawing from Butler's masterpiece Gender Trouble (1990), the author defines the difference between the two terms by stating that, while sex is biologically determined at birth, gender is "culturally constructed" (p.6). According to Butler, this entails that "sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders" (Butler, 1990; p.6). Starting from this premise, masculinity and femininity are not to be seen as "natural", but rather socially constructed gendered identities that are "assigned to the male and female sex respectively" (Nath, 2022; p.45).

This theoretical foundation is extremely important for two reasons. First, it sheds light on the issues of binarism associated with women and men. As Butler (1990) highlights, "Even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two" (p.6). In other words, tracing a relationship between gender and sex creates and reinforces a binary perspective on gender relations which is unnaturally given within society.

Second, connected to this statement, in Performative Acts and Gender Constitution (1988), Butler frames gender as performative, by stating that "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" (p.521). The author moves this argument further by saying that "gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions" (Butler, 1988; p.527). In other words, Butler aims to show that those gender behaviors linked to social categories of femininity and masculinity are not only constructed and assimilated but also performed within society. Therefore, Butler claims that gender is actually performed through acts embedded in "a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes" (Butler, 1988; p.524), which is a constitutive part of the framework that guides a gendered analysis of the dynamics in Evros. This entails that those traits generally linked to the male and female identities are not natural, or determined by individuals themselves, but rather the manifestation of a "system of compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 1988; p.524) that is imposed through a coercive system of "social sanction and taboo" (p.520). Therefore, there are forms of punishment that arise when one's gender is performed wrong, whereas the good performance of gender "provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (Butler, 1988; p.528).

These theoretical underpinnings are fundamental to clarify the purpose of this thesis. Femininity, and especially masculinity, are here examined as socially constructed gendered categories, and not as biologically determined sexes. My argument is therefore built on the examination of traits typically associated with masculinity as a gender identity that is performed and embodied by different actors at the Evros borderland. This clarification will help us uncover those power relations through the paradigm of hegemonic and militarized masculinities.

2.3. Hegemonic And Militarized Masculinities

Gender, as a social construction through which the gender-based identities of masculinity and femininity manifest, is associated with binary traits defining a strict, clear-cut idea of what a woman and a man should be like. According to Nath (2022), since the construction of masculinity and femininity are based on the widely accepted characteristics used to separate between biological male and female sexes, "gender is associated with the characteristics like strength and autonomy to males and the corresponding dependence and vulnerability to the females" (p.45).

Studying the traits and characteristics inherently bound to the construction of masculinities is therefore essential for the clarity of this work. In fact, by exploring the categories through which masculinities manifest according to the scholarly contributions here presented, it will be possible to grasp how masculinities are constructed, negotiated, and performed at the Evros border.

Starting from these premises, it is undeniable that one of the most revolutionary turnovers in feminist literature has been the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity, which laid the foundations of what we define nowadays as 'masculinity studies'. The term "hegemonic masculinity" was coined in R.W. Connell's Masculinities, first published in 1995. Through this work, Connell (2005a) described the construction of masculinities in different settings, since this process "occurs through relationships that are far from monolithic" (p. 147). Since there are different kinds of masculinities, according to the author it is essential to examine the gender relations among men. Hegemonic masculinity is defined "as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005a; p. 77). In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is distinguished from other types of masculinities, which are subordinated ones, as it represents "the currently most honored way of being a man" (Connell, 2005b; p. 832).

This conceptualization is therefore extremely important, as it allows us to trace a connection to the military world that concerns the context of Evros. Through these lenses, it is easy to read, at the top position of this hierarchical scale, the description of a soldier. Indeed, according to Eichler (2014), "the ideal soldier is still defined as masculine, and the warrior remains a key symbol of masculinity" (p. 81). As the military organization is inherently bound to the construction of hegemonic masculinities, the gendered system of power set out by the military practice does not simply position men and women differently, but it also sets a hierarchical scale among men, who embody unequal masculinities.

In order to clearly bridge the connection between masculinities, militaries, and war, Eichler (2014) defines the concept of militarized masculinities as "the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action, and combat in particular" (p.81). According to Woodward (2017), militaries are therefore to be seen as gender institutions, since "in terms of their structures and cultures, historically and into the present, state militaries are gendered male and masculine" (p. 2).

To understand the construction of militarized masculinities in Evros, the role of hierarchy is central when analyzing masculinities in the military context. The focus on the body, especially through strength, muscular development, and physical performance, reflects the idea that men's appearance has to abide by particular standards in order to reach a level of domination over other men. At the same time, these hierarchical scales need to be expanded. In fact, when it comes to unpacking hierarchies in the construction of masculinities and femininities it is important to consider the intersection of race and class as well as gender to avoid "gendered homogenizing tendencies in the work on militarized masculinities" (Henry 2017, p.190).

However, militarism and military masculinities, often related to traits like toughness, violence, aggression, courage, control, and domination (Eichler, 2014), are to be investigated as "a context-specific and dynamic social construct" since they can manifest "within and beyond the military" (p. 82). This means that the analysis of militarized masculinities can be applied to new domains directly or indirectly connected to, and influenced by, the military world. Some of them are, for instance, the use of surveillance technologies, such as drones and thermal cameras,the reinforcement of powers held by the police and the border patrol, as well as the use of military capabilities and tactics outside the military context.

Broadly speaking, military and militarized masculinities became an important definition to unpack unequal gender relations rooted in several societies that host and celebrate the military, consequently normalizing the scope of war. According to Eichler (2014), "When masculinity is successfully militarized - that is when what it means to be a man in a particular time and place becomes closely tied to the military - militarism and masculinism reinforce each other" (p.83). Connected to this statement, by analyzing the militarization of ethnic nationalism, Enloe(2004) noticed that men were often persuaded that the validation of their own manhood depended on their performance as soldiers. In this way, the imagination of the ideal soldier wasbound to manly characteristics that were thought to be "natural", instead of socially constructed.

This "mutually reinforcing dynamic" (Eichler 2014, p.83) is particularly relevant if studied in relation to the establishment of compulsory military service. Analyzing this phenomenon is crucial to understanding the Evros region, a place where many Greek men still serve their compulsory military service. In fact, military service, "considered as a discipline rite de passage that turns boys into men" (Christensen & Kyed, 2022; p.1), is particularly important in this framework not only because it constitutes a central element for men's socialization (Eichler,

2014), but also because it represents a real induction to the realm of violence. As Connell (2005a) stated in her book, “Violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military, and no arena has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in European/American culture” (p. 213).

With military service, men are asked to adapt their being into the shape of exemplary soldiers, fostering an idea of heroism that sees the use of force and combat as legitimate and necessary. By providing young men with the resources and skills needed to resort to violence and war, participation in state militaries becomes a unique experience for young men, which inevitably impacts the dynamics in Evros. Since “the capacity to inflict or threaten with violence, detain, injure, or even kill others is the unique professional skill of a military” (Kronsell 2016, p.6), young soldiers learn that through their achievements in the military, they can reach the best version of their manhood. This tendency goes hand in hand with the devaluation of sensitive and emotional behavior, which is in contrast with the notions of emotional toughness, control, and self-reliance (Nielson, 2020) inherent to the ideal soldier.

Within this framework, military training amplifies an ideal conceptualization of manhood that is bound to the identity of the masculine soldier that is glorified in Western societies. This domination of the Western manly army officer takes form with the subsequent subordination of other subjectivities that are often oppressed and marginalized. Therefore, the glorification ofthe typical masculine characteristics of the Western soldier is connected to the “devaluation of gendered others, as well as those othered by race or sexuality” (Eichler, 2014; p.83). Particularly, Basham, (2018) argued that militarism in liberal democracies is legitimized and sustained through the logic of racism, spreading fear and a sense of insecurity among the population. As a result, this mechanism turns militarism into a greater source of insecurity for racial and gendered others, which is visible also in the violence perpetrated against migrant bodies in Evros.

Moreover, these racialized, classed, and gendered ideas call into action what Kronsell (2016) conceived as the “protector masculinity” trope. The image of the perfect hero, largely fostered also by popular culture and Hollywood movies, shaped the idea of a masculine soldier willing to sacrifice in the name of his land. As a result, “the militarized masculinity of men becomes prominent in conflict and is reinforced by women’s symbolic personification of ‘normal life’ and by women witnessing male bravery” (Nath, 2022). Protector masculinity not only entails sacrifice, as the man is seen as the one who provides security in physical but also economic

terms; but it is also connected to power and control, "as the protected individuals need to recognize and accept the authority of the protector and their own subordination" (Wojnicka, 2021). This authoritarian attitude is closely connected to a nationalistic idea of a common and homogeneous identity that must be protected at all costs (Kronsell, 2016). This protector/protected dichotomy (Kronsell, 2016) reinforces fixed gender relations and highlights the role of the military as a masculine protector of the nation. In this way, it visibly shows that "the military allows to sustain the patriarchal structure by upholding the binaries." (Nath, 2022).

The protector trope is therefore fungible to justify violence, in all the ways it can manifest. The aspiration of being perceived as powerful, in control, and intimidating vis-à-vis an apparent threat is intrinsically bound to the role of arms and armed protection (Warner et al., 2021). The issue of gun ownership is central in the military since, in a hypermasculine context like the army, detaining arms can be perceived as fulfilling, fostering "compensatory masculine displays" (Warner et al., 2021; p.102) in men performing their duty in the military. Within this research, the conceptualization of a protective form of masculinity helps us frame the context of militarized masculinities at the Evros border. In light of the duty to protect the border, practices of violence can be exercised and legitimized through forms of authority and domination that are underpinned by the narrative construction of border crossers as racialized "Others" threatening the vulnerable motherland. This study aims to show that, conversely, militarism and militarized masculinities are believed to be sources of greater insecurity in particularly gendered and racialized ways (Basham, 2018), which are further exacerbated at the border.

Chapter 3: Methodological Research Approach

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

My initial idea for this research was to investigate how the militarization in the Evros region reflects the reassertion of a gendered territorial authority (Casaglia, 2022), involving normalized technologies of violence and abuse (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022) toward people on the move.

Even though the available literature on Evros was quite extensive, I immediately realized that, in order to fulfill the aim of the research and to give justice to the topic, I needed to go to the field and learn as much as possible about it. I contacted various organizations that were known for their work in the context of migration and asylum on mainland Greece and I received a response from Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN, hereafter), a network bringing together several NGOs working to support people on the move and defend their rights along the Balkan Route. Particularly, the work of BVMN focuses on documenting cross-border pushbacks and broader types of violence enacted against people on the move, for instance, arbitrary detention and eviction. To do so, field reporters are in charge of conducting in-depth oral interviews with the people on the move, who are reached through the contribution of partner organizations based in different locations throughout the Balkan route. All the testimonies collected on the field are then combined into a larger open-source database "whichacts as a living archive" (BVMN, 2023c) to record all the instances of border violence specifically for advocacy purposes.[1]

Since their methodology and values were in line with mine, I was really hopeful that a collaboration with BVMN would have been a real game changer for my project. After a few interviews with the organization in the role of assistant, I got the position of field reporter within the team based in Thessaloniki, which comprises two anonymous partner organizations: an organization providing legal support and vital information for asylum seekers (which I will informally call Anochi from now on), and another anonymous partner organization providing basic humanitarian aid to people on the move, as well as undocumented and homeless people in Thessaloniki.

Consequently, I moved to Thessaloniki, where I worked, researched, and lived for 102 days between September and December 2023. Not only this fieldwork experience has provided me

[1] It is possible to read all the testimonies of pushbacks collected by BVMN on their website. https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/.

with precious tools and practical knowledge on the current practices of migration management and asylum in Greece, but it also gave me the opportunity to get to know and be inspired by incredible people, who gave me enough trust and knowledge to pursue this project in the most authentic way possible.

Before moving to Thessaloniki, I decided to address the research objectives by undertaking qualitative research in line with critical and feminist methodologies, using a grounded theory approach.

Grounded theory, as conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967), refers to a qualitative research approach where researchers develop new theories through an iterative process of collecting and analyzing real-world data, as "a form of structured inquiry that is useful for studying questions that themselves have been concealed by dominant discourses, conceptualization, and notions of what questions are important" (Ackerley & True, p.204).

Not only this choice has allowed me to adopt a wide range of different methods, such as participant observation, documents and reports analysis, and semi-structured interviews, but also to combine my academic research on the field with the methods and training provided to me by the organization I was part of as a field reporter.

Particularly, I decided to undertake this methodological choice because, as Ackerley and True defined in their book Doing Feminist Research, "the research's selection of a grounded approach may be guided by certain normative or epistemological commitments, such as understanding people as sources of knowledge not object of study" (p.203). Indeed, this was crucial in my research. In a context where the personal stories of the people on the move are often neglected or distorted to many accounts by mainstream media and politicians, one of my primary commitments was to center their testimonies as an important source of knowledge regarding the border practices employed in the Evros region. I had the immense chance to be faithful to my intentions and put this commitment into practice thanks to my active participation in a grass-root organization that has always been attentive to give visibility to the people on the move while caring for their safety and anonymity. For this reason, the commonality of values and passions I shared with my BVMN team in Thessaloniki enabled our relationship to be fruitful and significant.

Moreover, this approach seemed particularly suitable to answer my research question, as no existing theory could uniquely give me a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon I was seeking to investigate. This was useful especially during my fieldwork, as the whole process of collecting and analyzing data required a "constant reflection, evaluation, and

reconceptualization of (my) research questions and theoretical frameworks to align them with the data (I) have collected and to ensure the research findings are 'grounded' in these data" (Ackerly & True 2020, p.204).

As Charmaz (2006) said, "Grounded theorists start with data. We construct these data through our observations, interactions, and materials that we gather about the topic or setting. We study empirical events and experiences and pursue our hunches and potential analytic ideas about them" (p.3). The data collection was supported by relevant material collected during fieldwork, such as photos, videos, notes, and informal conversations. Moreover, an ethnographic approach to my fieldwork was complementary to this process, since navigating a new professional and social environment undeniably fostered further reflections that enriched my understanding of the topic I was researching.

Using a grounded theory approach means also avoiding developing a meaning of the theoretical concepts a priori, and rather giving "meaning to these concepts through the reflection of the data" (Ackerly & True 2020, p.204). This implies that the researchers should start their project without pre-assumed notions or hypotheses in mind. However, grounded theorists also encourage the use of these guidelines flexibly and creatively, to find the best strategy that can apply to each individual case study (Charmaz, 2006). Both for my work as a field reporter and as a student pursuing field research, I believed that building a satisfactory background of information and theoretical notions was essential to making sure that the interviews and the data-gathering process were coherent and well-structured. The preliminary knowledge I built before starting my data collection provided me with a greater level of theoretical awareness and a deeper knowledge of the context I was operating. This is particularly important if considering that the analysis entailed an intricate relationship between social categories, specific characteristics, and logics that are grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

The entire data collection process was condensed during three months and ten days of fieldwork that I spent in Thessaloniki, the second biggest city in Greece and the largest city closest to the Evros region. Since BVMN's actions are possible through the activities of the partner organizations on the field, namely Anochi and the anonymous organization, I was part of this threefold collaboration, which allowed me to work closely with every single actor involved and provided me with a full perspective of the fieldwork experience.

While Anochi advocates for policy changes in the Greek asylum system and assists their clients through multi-lingual Facebook and WhatsApp hotlines, the anonymous partner's activities concern the daily distribution of hot meals and non-food items,

as well as giving to people the possibility of taking hot showers, doing their laundry and charging their phones. As part of my work for BVMN and my complementary ethnographicapproach for this research, I spend some of my workdays at the Anochi office, where I performeddesk-based research for the BVMN Monthly reports, as well as transcriptions, reports writing, and the collection of testimonies over the phone, while the rest of the time I was based at the anonymous partner organization, where I collected testimonies in person with whoever was available to share their stories. In fact, the majority of the people who frequented the anonymouspartner organization were young men from Morocco, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Pakistan, Algeria, Tunisia, and Iran. Moreover, I volunteered at the anonymous partner whenever possible, by helping with cooking, distributing meals, and cleaning the whole space for the community members.

As previously mentioned, I decided to undertake a data collection process that could combine the methodology provided by BVMN to the field team and the academic methodology that I employed to pursue my research.

BVMN presents a fixed methodology for the whole process of testimony collection, from the delivery of the interview to the report publishing (BVMN, 2023c). The organization presents two different categories of testimonies, which employ two different types of question forms used for the testimony collection, namely pushbacks and internal violence (see respectively Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Every field reporter, before even starting to be operative, is encouraged to get familiar with the methodology through preliminary training, covering "topics of informed consent, the importance of privacy and anonymity, establishing trust and rapport with respondents, avoiding retraumatization, among others" (BVMN, 2023c).

Since the beginning, I decided that my sample would have comprised the interviews I was expected to collect on-site, but also the testimonies that were already collected and published on the BVMN database. Indeed, it was very clear to me that the testimonies collected on-site within three months would not have been enough to give a comprehensive overview of the border practices in Evros over the last few years. It was therefore necessary to use past testimonies as well. In any case, knowing the methodology of the organization was still essential to understanding the narratives, specific language, and structure given to every single report published on the organization's website, including the past ones.

Moreover, being a part of the BVMN field team gave me essential insights into the wider migration context in Greece, which turned out to be incredibly useful for my position as a field

reporter but also as a researcher. For instance, I learned the relevant specificities of the Greek context thanks to a variety of documentation provided by the coordinators, such as interactive maps, a list of nicknames for detention sites, relevant routes, and practices that were mentioned in the past testimonies and I also encountered while leading the testimonies in the first place. In addition, I deepened my knowledge by studying the classifications of detention sites, their management, and practices, as well as the typical pattern for the apprehensions, the uniforms of the officers, and the way they can be usually identified. Lastly, I have been lucky enough to get to know and engage in conversations with people who used to work or live in the Evros region and had an in-depth knowledge of the migration context.
All of this helped me incredibly to understand what border practice actually means, and how I could use this knowledge to pursue a deeper analysis of the data.

The testimony collection process usually started with initial contact with the people giving the testimonies, called "the respondents". This initial contact could be either through the social media of the partner organization Anochi or through the anonymous partner organization.
In the first case, the respondents were reached through the Facebook page of Anochi, which routinely publishes an open call for people who experienced detention in Greece and want to share their experiences for advocacy purposes; in this case, the testimony is usually scheduled over the phone, in the presence of a translator.
In the second case, the respondent was contacted in person through the anonymous partner organization thanks to a translator or other operators; in this case, the testimony was delivered in person with the respondent and the translator. The translators were either specialized in Arabic, Farsi, or Hurdu; in those cases where the respondent could speak fluent English, the translator was not present.
If the testimony took place in presence, it was important to set up a safe space. As part of the preliminary consent statement, the first important step was to explain the entire scope of the interview to the respondent, as well as the work of BVMN in general. It was especially crucial to highlight the fact that all the interviews were anonymized or anonymous, and that every type of sensitive information could be omitted or deleted afterward to protect the respondents' safety (BVMN, 2023c). After that, the respondent was asked verbally for their consent to the recording, and the whole interview usually lasted between 25 minutes and one hour, depending on the details provided and the clarity of their narrative.

The questions asked to the respondent during the interview are a mix of "hard data (timings, dates, locations, officer and vehicle descriptions, photos of injuries, medical reports and other corroborating evidence) with qualitative narrative accounts" of the pushback or abuse experienced (BVMN, 2023c). Moreover, "the data collected is coded by certain characteristics. These include age, nationality, gender, types of violence used, police involved, treatment in detention, and attempted asylum claims among others" (BVMN, 2023c). Field reporters are also encouraged to support the testimony with relevant material to better frame the narrative ofthe respondent, such as maps to identify places of pushback or detention, or photos of uniformsto identify the unit of the officers who committed the violence.

After the testimony collection, one field reporter among the team members was in charge of transcribing the recording and then writing the narrative under a specific report format. After the testimony was successfully transcribed, the recording of the interview needed to be deleted immediately. Particularly, reporters must learn the reports' style of writing, which has certain characteristics to protect not only the respondent's safety but also the organization itself. These characteristics include a specific vocabulary, a tone, and a defined structure to strengthen the narrative for advocacy purposes. For instance, it was preferable to use the term "people on the move" or "transit group", rather than "migrant", as well as the frequent use of "reportedly" or "reported" served to specifically underline that that information embedded in the testimony was not verified, but reported according to the respondent's narrative. This includes also the use of direct quotations and links to past testimonies from the BVMN database, to show that some practices create a consolidated pattern of violence.

For the purposes of my research, I selected ten (10) testimonies that comprise both interviews delivered and/or transcribed by me, and testimonies that were already present in the BVMN database. This selection was carefully delivered to foster a comprehensive overview of the border practice in Evros, including pushbacks, internal violence, detention conditions, as well as verbal and physical abuse. The testimonies selected cover a period between 2020 and 2023, to purposely present an overview of the border practices after the so-called "border spectacle" (De Genova, 2013; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022) occurred in February 2020 (which will be presented in the next chapter). All the "pushback" testimonies were publicly available on their database by the official finalization of this research project. The only reports that were not published were the "internal violence" testimonies of Respondent 3, Respondent 4, and Respondent 5.

In the following table, I summarize the list of testimonies used for my research.

N.	Respondent	Pushback/ Internal Violence	Date of the incident:	Public/Not Public
1	Respondent 1	PB	September 2020	Public
2	Respondent 2	PB	October 2021	Public
3	Respondent 3	IV	July 2022	Not Public
4	Respondent 4	IV	August 2022	Not Public
5	Respondent 5	IV	August 2022	Not Public
6	Respondent 6	PB	September 2022	Public
7	Respondent 7	PB	September 2022	Public
8	Respondent 8	PB	January 2023	Public
9	Respondent 9	PB	April 2023	Public
10	Respondent 10	PB	September 2023	Public

Once I was on the field, I decided to expand the initial interview sample and look for more participants. In fact, I realized there was a necessity to focus on the gender and power dynamics in the context of the militarization of Evros, before actually observing how these constructions are inscribed in the violence perpetrated against the people on the move. To do so, I felt the need to expand the scope of my research and gather different perspectives on the region, to effectively understand its intrinsic dynamics as a highly militarized borderzone.

Since I knew that obtaining an interview with army officers, policemen, or border guards in Evros would have been quite impossible or even dangerous, I decided to look for new participants among Greek men who performed a period of military service in Evros.

This choice turned out to be wise since the people who finally participated in this study were all men between 25-35 years old, employed in a different variety of jobs, who temporarily joined the army against their will. This detail implied that none of them was related to the armyanymore, and all of them had different thoughts and points of view on the army and its role in Evros as "outsiders", which was very insightful for me and expanded my perspective on this topic. Since military service in Greece is compulsory for men older than 18 years old, and Evrosis one of the main sites where conscription is performed, it was not difficult for me to find some

participants in Thessaloniki through my small network of friends and co-workers. Not only is Thessaloniki close to Evros, but it is also a vibrant university city, in which meeting new open-minded people is quite easy.

To articulate this set of semi-structured interviews, I tried to focus on those elements that I needed to investigate to gain a deeper understanding of the border practices within the militarization of the region. Since the region is heavily inaccessible and securitized, I was interested in analyzing the dynamics among different actors and institutions inside the area, to understand how they inform the current border practices. By understanding the division of the tasks and domains among the several actors in Evros, I wanted to unpack the social constructions underpinning the militarism of the region also in relation to its power and gender dynamics, to bridge these factors to the testimonies of the people on the move. As a result, I tried to develop this set of interviews to complement the narratives embedded in the testimonies, as I needed to fully understand how the power relations and specificities of the borderzone before analyzing the impact on the experiences of the people on the move.

For these interviews, I tried to pursue the same structure and epistemological commitment of the testimony collection, to give coherence to the whole empirical section (see Appendix 3). The interviews collected with the former cadets did not simply provide my research with important details about the logics, structure, and organization of the activities, but also with valuable personal impressions and reflections which made the whole interaction more authentic and incredibly precious.

Between November and December 2023, I conducted five interviews with Greek men who served in the army in Evros between 2012 and 2023. All the interviews were delivered in English in person in Thessaloniki or remotely through video call. I initiated the interaction with my participants by sending an email with essential information about my research project, the scope and structure of the interview, and how their narrative would be used in my thesis. I specified that, in case they changed their mind at any time regarding their participation, they were free to retract their consent to the project. I added that they were invited to contact me in case they had the desire to "follow up" on the data analysis process or to review the final draft of the interview.

All the interviews were based on verbal consent. Some of the interviewees agreed on being recorded and then transcribed, while for others I only had the consent to take notes during our conversation. Given the highly sensitive topic, all the names of the interviewees have been anonymized and replaced with made-up ones. In the following table, I summarize the information on the interviews:

N.	Participant (made-up name)	Date of the Interview
1	Yorgos	01 November 2023
2	Spyros	03 November 2023
3	Pavlos	26 November 2023
4	Panagiotis	12 December 2023
5	Vasilis	18 December 2023

3.2 Data Analysis

In order to critically evaluate the data collection, I have used an analytical approach in line with the grounded theory method. In grounded theory, the data collection and data analysis happens iteratively, creating a continuous cycle of collecting and analyzing data.

After the first round of interviews and testimonies, I started to analyze the participants' narratives with an initial coding process by comparing the data to see "what our research participants viewed as problematic and begin to treat it analytically" (Charmaz 2006, p.47). For what concerns the interviews with the people on the move, I decided to analyze their testimonies written under the report format, as they were published on their website. The report format is standardized and also includes direct quotations of the respondents, to strengthen their narrative

and center their stories. Whenever I needed more clarification on their narrative or the specific words used, I came back to the original transcript for additional support.

This initial open coding process draws on a "line-by-line analysis of data to identify phenomenological themes" (Hinjiosa, 2010, p.182). Codes are attached to each theme as a label, to show patterns and trends within the respondents' responses that create categories and sub-categories. Through this method, I was able to identify sub-categories in line with the performance of militarized masculinities at the border, such as violence, dominance, self-discipline, and humiliation.

This coding process is important because it enables the researcher to "distill data, sort them, and give us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data" (Charmaz 2006, p.3). Personally, the use of note-taking during the interviews and memo writing afterward facilitated the analysis immensely, as it allowed me to speed up the process while I was in the field and to keep track of all the themes that arose throughout the interviews.

Once I gathered more data, I compared the new data with the codes. After that, I started connecting the codes together in a process called axial coding, where I grouped the codes together to find the core themes. I continued collecting data until I reached a point of "saturation" (Ackerley & True 2020, p. 207), where they did not bring anything new to the analysis.

Throughout this analytical approach, it has been possible to identify the main themes of militarized masculinities, to then understand how they influence the entire border environment and create violent outcomes for transit groups. As a result, the core themes that are presented specularly in the narratives of the conscripts and the testimonies of migrants are interpreted through complementary categories, highlighting the interdependency of the two parts of this research.

In this process, developing the categories from the coding scheme was extremely helpful, as codes and themes in this process tended to highlight the use of a specific language used by the respondents and enable a comparison (Ackerly and True, 2020). Moreover, this analytical approach was coherently adapted also for a critical analysis of the articles, reports, and documents collected throughout the whole process. This was necessary not only for the sake of a proper contextualization of the topic embedded in Chapter 4 but also as a further reinforcement of the respondents' narratives.

3.3 Challenges, Limitations, and Dilemmas: Ethical Considerations on Fieldwork Experience

Approaching my research question has been challenging on many levels and accounts, especially due to my double role as a researcher and field reporter in Greece.

First of all, working on the topic of migration often makes you realize how fast-changing this context is. I expected to witness things that did not happen, while others occurred and I was not prepared. This is certainly part of the game, and I quickly learned how to be more adaptable and flexible. This fast-changing factor also deeply concerned my research: one clear example of this was the impact of the devastating fires that burned down the forest in the Evros region just a few weeks before I moved to Greece, consequently diminishing the flow of people crossing the Greek-Turkey land border and reaching Thessaloniki.

In addition, another shortcoming regarding the interview sample is the lack of women among the participants. Collecting testimonies of border violence with women is often difficult for many reasons; in fact, the vulnerabilization of women on the move and the power dynamics within family groups in transit make it almost impossible for organizations to reach out to women for an interview.

This applies similarly to what concerns the army in Evros. Since the rules for compulsory military service do not apply to women as they do to men, women can be part of the Greek army only as professional soldiers. This creates obvious obstacles when it comes to understanding their experience in the region and the army. These factors create a disproportionate imbalance of male voices in this project, which I encourage to overcome for future research on militarized masculinities at the border.

Another important factor to consider in my research is my positionality. As a feminist white Western woman performing field research in Greece, I believe my privileged position informed my approach and analysis of the reality I was steeped in. Dealing with migration so closely, but feeling partially detached from it, is to be considered an undeniable privilege that I acknowledged every step of the way. Moreover, working and socializing in an environment where everyone had extensive knowledge of migration practices and had witnessed closely the consequences of a deeply dysfunctional and unfair system of asylum played a huge role in my biased perceptions of my topic of inquiry. The majority of people I had the pleasure of creating bonds with were foreign nationals working in the migration context in Greece for a relatively short period (usually between three months and one year). This inevitably creates a “bubble” effect, where everyone spends their time together and shares the same values, ideas, and

commitments that are hardly ever challenged. Nevertheless, almost none of these people had a migration background or were directly affected by migration policies in the first place. I believe this factor is worth taking into account when it comes to analyzing privileges and ethical challenges in the humanitarian environment, which undoubtedly informed my work for this project.

Lastly, my epistemological commitment to understanding the role of the people on the move as a source of knowledge raised many questions and reflections from my side. Collecting testimonies from people who were facing awfully bureaucratic issues and traumatic personal experiences has always felt like a humbling experience to me. Not only for the tremendous gift that people make in giving some of their time and patience to share their story with you; but also because you have the responsibility of that story. Feeling powerless therefore comes easy once you realize that you are witnessing an enormous amount of pain and injustice, but there is nothing immediate you can do to help.

Most of the time, I felt like people were giving to me more than I was giving to them. I am sure that this awareness will never abandon me from now on.

Chapter 4: Contextualizing the Militarization of the Evros Region

4.1 Background of the Region: A Border History

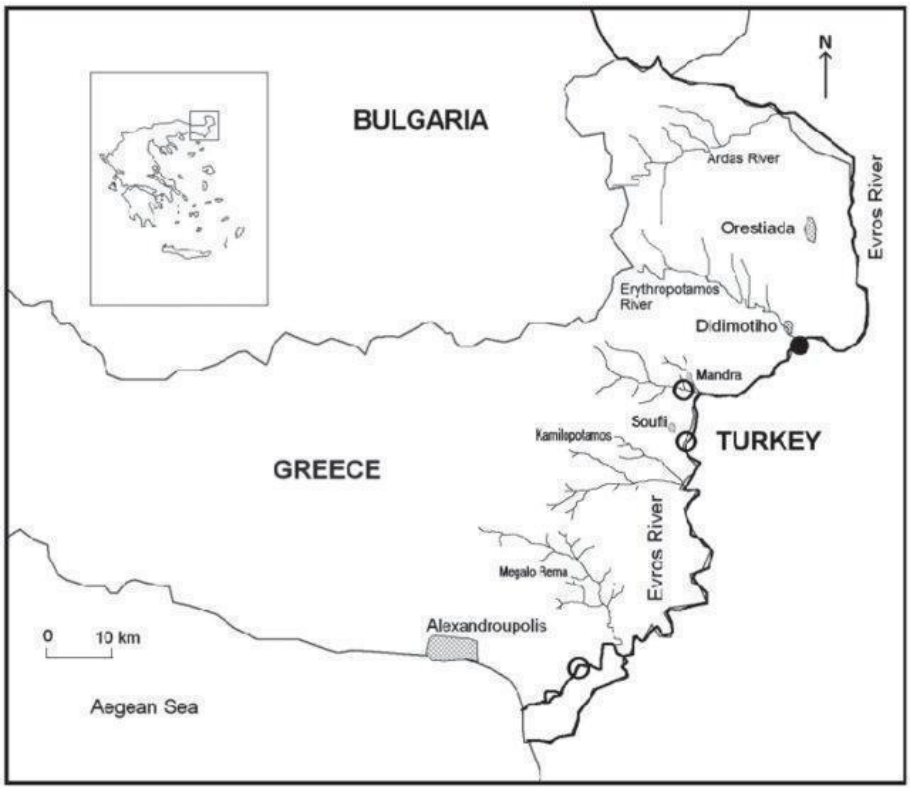

Figure 1: Map of the Evros River Delimitating the Greek-Turkish Land Border. (Perdikaris, 2007; p.47)

Drawn on the occasion of the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 (Kaşlı, 2022), the land border separating Greece and Turkey has been the protagonist of a rich history as a transit area and a meeting point for different cultures and actors, creating a truly unique space.

Because it follows almost entirely the line marked by the Evros River flow, the administrative region and the related border take the same name (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) as a part of Thrace, an area that used to be populated mostly by Turkish/Muslim populations (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022;p.18). From the year of its establishment as a constitutive region of the Greek state, the Evros border has encountered an increasing militarization process (Spentzos, 2014, Kaşlı, 2022) as a

way to protect the area and defend the borderland against the "enemy" state Turkey. Recalling the historical and symbolic heritage of akrites, the guardians of the border during the Byzantine Empire (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; Tagle, 2021), the presence of the army was effectively reinforced through the constitution of the III and IV Army Corps, the latter still considered "the most powerful of the Greek army divisions" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016, p.12).

The past of the Evros borderland is therefore marked by stories of protection, nationalism, and - as a result of political tensions and hate - also forms of violence that are still visible today. However, as many scholars pointed out, the presence of border crossers in Evros is not something new (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; Kaşlı, 2022; Demetriou, 2019). Aside from the "1923 forced exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey" (Demetriou, 2019; p.24), migration started to represent a matter of state security for Greece during the 1990s when several people flew from the Balkans and post-Soviet countries to settle in Greece after the endof the Cold War (Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019).
This wave was later followed by another migration flow of people coming from Middle Eastern and South Asian countries, which intensified in the 2000s (Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019). As a result, a process of securitization of migration started to take place in Greece as a means to deter new arrivals. Particularly, the police and the army began to play a key role in the Greek migration policy (Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019), which will gradually intensify throughout the years.

An effective integration of the Evros borderland into the European border regime began to concretize once Greece became a member of the Schengen area, assuming the role of a transit zone for people aiming to reach Europe's wealthier countries (İşleyen & Karadağ, 2023; Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019). The consequent externalization of migration and border policies was therefore the result of an overlapping system between internal security matters and the EU border regime, which turned Greece into a frontline actor (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019). As migration flows from Middle Eastern and Sub-Saharan countries continued to increase, the border separating Greece and Turkey "assumed a discursive, symbolic and material role in the nation-building process of both countries" (İşleyen & Karadağ, 2023; p.480).
For Greece, this process reached an exasperated point in 2008, when a devastating financial crisis struck the country, giving a new opportunity to the far right to spread anti-immigrant slogans and harsher propagandistic border policies (Demetriou, 2019; Grigoriadis & Dilek,

2019). By portraying migration as a "threat to Hellenic identity and national security" (Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019; p.174), far-right parties such as Golden Dawn raised their consensus dramatically between 2010 and 2015.

These factors are essential to understanding the context of securitization in the Evros region. Not only the role of Golden Dawn in Evros has been prominent in shaping the political sentiment of the region, but it also intersected with the reality lived by the local community itself. In fact, Evros is widely known for being one of the poorest and most underdeveloped regions in Greece, "contributing about 26 percent to the GDP of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and 1 percent to Greece's total GDP" (Tagle, 2021). As such, it relies on a mainly rural community, for which the greatest sources of revenues are still based on the agricultural and the military sectors, since "approximately one in four is employed in the civil service or military." (Tagle, 2021)

In light of these rich elements, it is not hard to conceptualize the Evros region as a fertile ground for anti-immigrant sentiment, which gradually established its roots between 2010 and 2015. In the next section, we will examine how in the past few years an increasing integration of actors, technologies, and practices have been interlaced to create a highly militarized borderzone displacing open hostility to the people on the move.

4.2 The Evolution of Border Militarization in Evros

When it comes to unpacking the technologies of border control in Evros, one of the most remarkable infrastructures is undoubtedly the fence. As approximately 100,000 people crossed the Greek-Turkish borderland between 2010 and 2011 (UNHCR, 2018), in January 2011 the Greek authorities announced the initiative of building a fence on the only strip of land that was not encompassed by the River Evros, representing the only existing "risk-free" access to the Greek side of the border (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; p.57). The idea of building a fence as a copycat of the US-Mexico border was not simply presented as a practical way to deter new arrivals of migrants coming primarily from Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (Dimitriadi, 2023), but also as a symbolic representation of a concrete action of border control undertaken by the Greek state (Angeli et al., 2014).

The Evros fence, constructed between Kastanies and Nea Vyssa, was officially terminated in 2012. It was 10,365 km long, with an average height of 3 meters, and consisted of "two cement

walls with barbed wire in between" (Angeli et al., 2014, pp.27-28). Although it was built on Greek territory, it is considered "to be at its closest only one meter away from the Turkish border" (Angeli et al., 2014, p.28).

What is particularly interesting about the process of building the fence is the lack of support from the European Union. Already in early 2011, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström stated that the costs of the fence could not be included in the funding from the External Border Funds programme since, as the EU explained later in 2012, the project was "pointless" as it did not address the issue of migration in a "structural way" (Angeli et al., 2014; Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019). As a result, the Greek state decided to undertake the project anyway at its own costs, investing 3.3 million dollars in the fence despite the economic crisis they have been facing since 2008 (Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2019; p.175). In spite of the controversies, the Evros border fence is still considered a key component of Greece's border security, as it is currently under expansion. According to local news, between the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, new construction works have been launched to extend the fence from 10,3 km to 35 km in length and sustained by 5-meter-high stakes, which are to be developed between the villages of Psathades Didymoteicho and Kornofolia Soufliou (EVROS NEWS, 2024).

Nevertheless, in the wake of the so-called "2015 migration crisis", the support of EU authorities did not go missing. As thousands of people were crossing the Greek-Turkish border, the EU contributed greatly to implementing a starker securitization and militarization of the Evros border. Instead of investing in physical barriers, the EU authorities relied on "technical equipment" (Angeli et al., 2014, p.27) for surveillance purposes, such as thermal cameras and thermovision vans (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; p.19), as well as a new "control center in Nea Vyssa used as surveillance hub" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016; p.10).

However, the most remarkable contribution of the EU to border management efforts in Evros has been the permanent presence of Frontex since October 2010, "signaling the attempt to deepen the Europeanization of the local border regime" (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; p.20). Frontex, which is the EU agency supporting member states and Schengen-associated countries in guarding the external borders of the EU (Frontex, n.d), was presented as a "facilitator" in Evros by overseeing the "coordination and material support", consequently creating "overlapping and divergent regimes of control and responsibility" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; p.58). As such, it was particularly highlighted how the role of Frontex at the Evros borderhas been upholding an idea of border policing in tension between the responsibility of caring for migrants' protection and the duty to control migrants' mobility (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015;

p.54), further strengthening the

militarization process of the Hellenic police already visible in the two main law-enforcement operations led by the Greek state.

The first one of these operations, Operation Aspida (shield in English), was co-funded by the EU and launched in August 2012 (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). It comprised the deployment of 1,881 new police officers along all 206 km of the Evros riverline, with the purpose of "strengthening the physical presence of patrol officers at the Greek-Turkish land border" (Angeli et al., 2014; p.28).

In the same period, Operation Xenios Zeus was implemented and integrated into the routine police procedures as "a series of regular round-up operations carried out in areas with high concentration of irregular migrants, including street and house searches" (Angeli et al., 2014; p.29). For its "sweeping nature", the activities had dramatic results, as thousands of apprehensions of "migrants" were conducted only in a few months (Angeli et al., 2014; p.29). The Operation, entailing racial profiling and abuse of power, received heavy criticism as it included regular checks and arrests also of regularly documented people and asylum seekers (Angeli et al., 2014; p.29).

The quantitative growth of police officers deployed was therefore accompanied by the reinforcement of the powers of Greek police through new technologies, assistance, and know-how, partially provided by Frontex. What is central in this matter is that, while a progressive militarization of border policing has been registered over the last decade, there has not been a subsequent decrease in traditional military activities (Pallister-Wilkins 2016, p.13).

Considered "the guardian of the Borderland" (Pallister-Wilkins 2016, p.14), the Greek army still retains a central role in Evros. Not only because militarism is at the core of Greece's sense of nationalism, but mostly because the military detains a greater level of respectability and prestige within Greek society, which has been exacerbated in the border region (Pallister-Wilkins 2016).

This is visible in the importance given to compulsory military service for young Greek men, which is performed in Evros and is still considered a duty as well as an honorable way to serve the country. In this framework, the militarization of the law-enforcement did not replace the role that the military traditionally assumed at Greece's borderlands, but rather doubled the technology of border control, creating a "hierarchically cross-hatched space where both law-enforcement function and a military defensive function occur simultaneously in the same space" (Pallister-Wilkins 2016; p.12).

As a result, the protection of the border in Evros creates an overlapping system composed of traditional military capability and new technologies provided by Frontex (Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022), reinforcing an area already dominated by secrecy and inaccessibility. This militarization process, where systemic arrests, arbitrary detention, and forced returns happen daily, brought a consequent decrease in border crossings in Evros until the late 2010s, shifting the focus to Greek islands like Lesvos and Samos (Angeli et al., 2014; Dimitriadi, 2023).

4.3 "*It's a Collective Exercise*": The 2020 "Border Spectacle" and Beyond

The mediatic attention on migration in Evros slowed down the pace for a couple of years, at least until the catastrophic events of February 2020, previously mentioned in Paragraph 3 of Chapter 1.

On the 27th of February 2020, Turkey decided to suspend the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement leading thousands of asylum seekers to move in proximity of the land border with Greece. (Dimitriadi, 2023). The following day, Turkish President Erdogan announced that the Turkish government officially withdrew from stopping refugees from reaching European territories (Takou, 2023). According to several sources, approximately 12,000 to 25,000 peoplemobilized along the Turkish side of the border seeking to cross (Dimitriadi, 2023).

Greece's response could not be harsher. The heavy mobilization of the police force, border guards, and military personnel in the area has been indeed accompanied by the decision to invest in "supply ammunition, M84 stun grenades, grenades of chemicals, grenades (CS830) and armament, amounting to €2,180,520.00." (Takou, 2023; p.168).

The extensive use of tear gas, stun grenades, and rubber bullets (Fielitz, 2020) was legitimized by the urge to fight "an asymmetrical threat against Greece's Eastern borders, which are also European borders." (Statements by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Kastanies, Evros, Following His Visit with the Heads of the EU Institutions at the Greek-Turkish Border | Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, 2020). By serving as a "shield" for the rest of Europe (Rankin, 2020), Greece reacted by immediately suspending the registration procedure to apply for international protection for one month, consequently criminalizing migrants for illegal entry and sentencing them to a maximum of 4 years in prison (Fielitz, 2020).

Not only this event is considered a turning point in defining the border management of Evros in the years following 2020, but it also brought to public attention the involvement of locals, paramilitaries, and armed vigilante groups in "helping" the army and the police in defending the border (Fielitz, 2020; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022).

By recalling the historic role of akrites in Evros, armed vigilante groups supported the operations of the area by patrolling the borderzone and "stopping migrants from crossing" (Fielitz, 2020, Tagle, 2022). Once I tried to gather more information about the involvement of civilians in the protection of the border, I had the immense luck to have a conversation with an expert and former resident of the area. What was particularly interesting to me was that they referred to those actors as "*border hunters*" since, in their opinion, "*they preserve a "very deep ideological commitment to protecting the border and protecting the nation*".[2]

Generally speaking, the "border spectacle" (De Genova, 2013) that took place between February and March 2020 changed the outlook of the Evros border regime dramatically. Although the level of violence concerning frequent arrests, pushbacks, and detention has always been present in the area, after 2020 new disturbing elements enriched the list of violent practices employed at the expense of transit groups.

One of the clearest examples concerns the detention sites in Evros. Already subjected to a significant expansion since the 1990s (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022), detention sites met a significant change through the establishment of cells in border guard stations and police units (such as the Orestiada police station), the creation of Reception and Identification Centres (RIC), and a pre-removal detention center (PRDC) near the village of Fylakio (Karamanidou et al., 2021; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022). However, after 2020, the conditions regarding detention spaces became unbearable and impossible to unsee.

Especially Fylakio, established in 2007 as a detention facility before being transformed into a pre-removal center in 2012 (Karamanidou et al., 2021), has drawn attention in the last years for the evident degrading conditions and the abhorrent treatment toward the detainees (MIT, 2023). Drawing on 11 testimonies of people who have been detained in the Fylakio PRDC at some point since 2020, MIT (2023) recently published a report highlighting unhealthy conditions inside the facility, such as unsanitary and dysfunctional toilets and showers providing almost no hot water during the day, dirty mattress infested by insects, and dramatic low quality of the

[2] Anonymous source in conversation with the author (December 2023).

food that was distributed; at the same time, “general ill-treatment, verbal aggression and racist language towards detainees was experienced” (MIT, 2023; p.29).

Nevertheless, employing detention as an abusive form of control over migrants’ mobility in Evros does not simply encompass “official” facilities, but also hidden detention sites, as shown in the case of Poros (Karamanidou et al., 2021; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2020; Stevis-Gridneff et al., 2020). In fact, in 2020 a team of researchers and journalists uncovered the existence of a secret “quasi-official” (Karamanidou et al., 2021) detention facility in Poros, despite no evidence of its operation found after 2015 (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2020). Although the Greek government stated that the facility was not hidden or secret, there is an evident lack of official documents reporting the use of the facility as a detention site, as well as the conditions of the detainees and the type of funding it received from the police (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2020). As a result, experts suggested that the Poros facility was hidden from public attention and used as a detaining site for migrants before pushing them back to Turkey, as it was located only 2 km far from the border (Forensic Architecture, 2020; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2020).

Connected to this, pushbacks have represented a routine practice in Evros in the last decades (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022). Due to the militarization of this highly restricted area, pushbacks are performed in total secret, without the possibility of documenting them (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; Takou, 2023).

However, after 2020 these practices have been intensified. Several NGOs have reported repeating cases of violent pushbacks through the Evros River, as people were often stuck on small islets inside the river for days or weeks without access to food or water despite several distress calls (Alarm Phone, 2023; BVMN, 2022). Several cases of pushback included the use of physical, verbal, and sexual violence, torture-like practices, and a complete lack of assistance vis-à-vis extreme conditions, including extreme temperatures, injuries, and medical emergencies (GCR, 2023; Alarm Phone, 2023; BVMN, 2022). Moreover, there have been registered increasing forms of abuse during the apprehensions that anticipate pushbacks; these practices included the theft of mobile phones and personal belongings of transit groups, forced undressing, and the use of violent and racist language (BVMN, 2023b).

Although pushbacks are mainly performed by police officers, border guards, and army officers, recent testimonies have proven the involvement of Frontex officers speaking European languages like German (BVMN, 2020; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022; p.24). Similarly, paramilitary and

vigilante groups have been involved in pushbacks and other forms of border violence even after 2020, by working closely with Greek authorities (BVMN, 2023b; Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022).

This was proven during the recent wildfires that sparked in the Evros region in August 2023, considered the most devastating fires registered in Europe in the last 20 years (BVMN, 2023a; BVMN, 2023b). On that occasion, the Greek state ignored the early warnings and the risks connected to potential fires in the area, failing to manage the emergency, and consequently blaming border crossers instead (BVMN, 2023a; BVMN, 2023b). As a result, political leaders and far-right groups took advantage of the situation and mobilized against transit groups, by kidnapping and locking them in trailers (BVMN, 2023a; BVMN, 2023b).

Besides this, the aftermath of the 2020 border spectacle revealed the involvement of new actors in the practice of pushbacks, enlarging an already intricate picture of violence and abuses against the people on the move. Recent investigations uncovered the "enslavement" of asylum seekers, who are coerced into assaulting and robbing transit groups before pushing them back through the Evros River (HRW, 2022; Lighthouse Report, 2022). These groups of people, who refer to themselves as "slaves" (Lighthouse Report, 2022; Fallon, 2022), were reported to cover their faces with balaclavas and speak with Pakistani and Afghani accents, as well as Arabic Syrian dialect (GCR, 2023; p.21). In addition, they reported being forcibly enrolled by police units in exchange for police notes allowing them to remain in Greece for 25 days (Lighthouse Report, 2022; Fallon, 2022), uncovering once again the involvement of Greek authorities in atrocities and violence at the border.

All these elements resonate with the words used by one of the participants in my study:

> *"Protecting the border has become a collective exercise, like a duty, a local duty. […] It is not institutionalized as such, but it weighs itself to local life".*[3]

For the sake of this analysis, it is important to understand the meaning of these practices through the narratives of the people who have known the borderzone in the first place. The next section will be dedicated to the analysis of the interviews I conducted with Greek men who performed their compulsory military service in Evros in the past 12 years, to uncover the construction of militarized masculinities at the border.

[3] Anonymous source in conversation with the author (December 2023).

Chapter 5: *"Where the logic stops, it's where the Army Begins*". The Construction of Militarized Masculinities in Evros

The conscription to compulsory military service still represents a reality for the majority of men in Greece, who are asked to put their lives on hold for 9 to 12 months to serve their country. This section will be devoted to the analysis of interviews I conducted with five (5) Greek men, here presented with the fictional names of Yorgos, Spyros, Pavlos, Panagiotis, and Vasilis. These men came from different parts of Greece and presented different backgrounds for what concerned their education, professional life, and civil status. Moreover, during their conscription, they served the army in different divisions and units in Evros.

The choice of combining the narratives of conscripts in Evros with the lived experiences of border violence of the people on the move is purposely made to highlight how the main features inherent in the construction of militarized masculinities have an impact on border practices in Evros.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, the Evros borderland has encountered increasing militarization in the last few years, as a way to exercise control over migrant bodies. In this militarization process, the role of the military in Evros has not decreased and still appears to be central due to an uncontested sense of nationalism and militarism that is deeply felt by its local citizens, who have proved to be increasingly involved in border practices especially after 2020 (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022).

In this chapter, I aim to trace a clear link between the militarization of the border regime and the values, features, and techniques adopted by the army, considered a respectable and honorable institution representing "the guardian of the Borderland" (Pallister-Wilkins 2016, p.14) in Evros.

As a result, those themes that constitute the construction of militarized masculinities found in the words of the conscripts are here interpreted in relation to their manifestation at the Evros border. These themes will be identified specularly in Chapter 6 and interpreted to highlight the effects that the construction of militarized masculinities produces on migrants' experiences.

Through the analysis of their interviews, five main themes and interpretative categories were found in their narratives: Radicalization and Indoctrination expressed through "a Network of Actors"; Hierarchy and Discipline visible in the "Strict Obedience to the Rules"; Humiliation and Hostility, which is expressed through "Emotional Toughness"; Threat, Aggression, and

Fear, expressed through "The Use of Firearms"; The Intersection of Gendered and Racist Violence expressed through "The Domination of the Masculine Authority". These narratives refer to their experience working inside the army in Evros, as well as their perception of the area and the people they collaborated and worked with. The use of vulgar language or swearwords has been censored, in order to respect the reader's sensitivity without distorting the participants' narratives.

5.1. Radicalization and Indoctrination: A Network of Actors

One of the main elements that emerged from the interviews was the high sense of militarism felt in the Evros region. The level of trust and respect toward army officers is undeniable and intrinsically bound to the history and culture of Evros. The leadership of the military personnel is clear when it comes to comparing the role of the army with the other actors in the region, such as the police and the border guards.

As highlighted by Pallister-Wilkins in Chapter 4, the army is seen as the absolute leader who is asked to protect the border against the "threat" of Turkey. This means that the army is not formally compelled to act on border management against "illegal entries", which is the duty of the police and border police. However, several accounts suggest that a collaboration between the army and the police exists. In fact, while the police and border police act as the "operational" part of this collaboration, the army stands in support as an "authoritative" position. This was clarified by Pavlos, who served in the army in the artillery unit after his university studies.

> *"It is just a small part of the army that just helps the police of the borderland to handle the situation with the immigrants, because the main job of this police division is to check the crossings. No hierarchy and no such thing in the police and the army, they do different jobs. But because they are in the same country, they help each other. It's more similar to having an authority that you can use to stop them". (Pavlos)*

Even though it is difficult to clearly understand if there is a de-facto hierarchy between the tasks and duties of the army and the police, it is undeniable that the respect and recognition between these two actors are felt differently by the local community.

> *"The locals feel that the army is doing a more important job than the police, because, for the military officers, the main thing is to protect the country from the "bad Turks", which is another way they call the "enemy". And I say "the enemy" because there were very few times that we heard the word "Turkey". It was always the enemy.*
> *"If the enemy does that, if the enemy comes…". The enemy, the enemy is always the main thing." (Yorgos)*

This nationalistic duty of protecting the nation against the "*enemy*" is mentioned by many participants, which has been effective in demonstrating that the relevance of the army in the region is still unquestioned.

> *"It's for the security of the borderland and of the country in general. That's why we have compulsory military service. You know, "It's better to be a warrior in a garden rather than to be a gardener in a war" [he laughs].*
> *That's the purpose of the army, to prepare you if something badhappens. And you have to secure your country from an outside threat."(Pavlos)*

Drawing on these words, the construction of a militarized masculine identity for military soldiers is shaped through the duty of protecting and "*securing the country from an outside threat*", recalling the symbolic heritage of *akrites* previously presented. By receiving the recognition as protector of the area and the country, army officers experience an emotional fulfillment attached to a comforting idea that they are serving the country for a bigger purpose. The "protection trope" (Kronsell, 2016) therefore materializes through emotions of pride, courage, and sacrifice. This was exemplified by the words of Vasilis, who said:

> *"The fact that I served in Evros made me feel more proud as I believed that my family and friends were safe because I was on the edge of the country protecting them". (Vasilis)*

As a matter of fact, militarism, connected to values of protection and pride, lies at the heart of Evros' identity. The characteristics typical of ideal soldiers, who provide protection and safety

to the vulnerable country, are praised and taken as role models for other actors, including the local community. This creates a symbolic transfer of the values embodied by the army, which are consequently taken and adopted by the local community, as well as police officers and border guards. The structure, morale, and main features of the *akrites* are therefore seen as the most honorable way to be and act, which extends to every actor who is involved in border protection against the people on the move.

In contrast to this idyllic image of the brave soldier, the perception of the police is disregarded by many.

> *"(The army does) not have the best perception of the police. There were a lot of small arguments, like "Oh, the police again, what do they want?!". Also, the army is more important, but the police show more, they have more effect. But if the army is needed on some occasions, they show up and enforce all the decisions." (Spyros)*

> *"There is a very negative opinion of the police (...)*
> *It was like, "Oh the police are stupid, the police are just interested in smuggling cigarettes and drugs". There was like, you know, this was the main idea that, "Oh, if you are a cop, you're stupid!"." (Yorgos)*

Through this inter-actors comparison, the identity construction in line with militarized masculinities shows a clear hierarchical position between army officers and police officers, where army officers are seen as the strong "protector", while the police officers are the ones perceived as "stupid" and "corrupted" doing the "dirty job".
However, the values represented by army officers are not the only element that makes them so appreciated in Evros. According to Yorgos, there is an economic element we must take into account.

> *"There are many places in Greece. Many of them are in the border areas, like the land border, but it's also the islands of the North Aegean and the South Aegean.*
> *And these places survive because there is an army presence. So, what does that mean? The officers will need to rent a place, which moves the*

local economy. The soldiers will spend money. Like, you know, when you want the gyros, when you want the kebab, when you want to go buy cigarettes, when you will go to the local community. And because you have so much free time in the army, you will start going to gamble. You might go out to drink. You might go out to find sex workers and bars and stuff like that. There is this idea that the soldier is part of the social capital of the local economy. And this is up to the point that at a certain time, when a barracks closes in a specific town, there are demonstrations or stuff against it closing because they know they will lose the local economy." (Yorgos)

Drawing on Yorgos' words, the romantic symbolic meaning of the army officers as "*guardians*" and "*protectors*" is accompanied by a more materialistic value of the army as a "*social capital*", which enables the representation of the military personnel as economic and "fatherly providers" for the border region's development. Seeing the army as a resourceful actor means that its hypermasculine characteristics, contradictions, and controversies are not negotiated or objected, but rather praised.

As a result, the local community members are encouraged to follow the army's lead and participate in border protection as part of their civil duty, which justifies the existence of a radicalized system of different actors that compose the Evros borderland in "deterring" border crossings of people on the move. The idea of a "*collective exercise*" presented in the previous Chapter was indeed confirmed by all the participants, who particularly stressed how the protection of the border against transit groups is a duty that compels every single actor in the region, from the border guards to the civilian "*border hunters*".

Nevertheless, the words of the participants added something extremely insightful to this framework. Through their narratives, they depicted an intertwined network of actors that is "informal" and primarily based on family relations and friendly connections, rather than an institutionalized system of border control.

Panagiotis, who served in the army in Evros from September 2021 to June 2022, explained that the rural community where he was based was particularly welcoming to the conscripts because they had familiarity with the army officers, which enhanced a higher level of trust.

> *"Because everyone knows everyone there. Most people that worked in the army, especially older ones, were from there. So yeah, they had, like, regular interactions. Many of them were related to someone being,like, either the army, the police, or the border police. I think they had agood opinion of the army officers." (Panagiotis)*

This level of trust and affection toward army officials is crucial, especially in the context of migration management. As many participants have stressed, since their "inner circle" is an integral part of the militarization process of the region, the protection of the border against the people on the move has become a natural exercise of community life.

> *"If you live there, there is a good chance you know the local chief of the army and you know the local police chief. And maybe your brotheris in the army, your cousin is in the police, your wife is working in the police office, and your daughter wants to go to the police academy. Like, it's a very security force-driven society.*
> *You don't really have to call the police in official ways. Like, you don't really have to be like, "Oh, I have to file a complaint". You can literally call them and be like, "Hey, George. I just saw 5 refugees or 5 illegal immigrants crossing. Tell the guys", and that's it." (Yorgos)*

Despite the Europeanization process of the external borders in Greece (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022), the Evros region still looks like a "family-run" system of border protection, where the army represents the backbone of its society. By performing the hypermasculine values of protectionand sacrifice embodied by the army (Kronsell, 2016), the local community actively participates in the migration control of the region as a manifestation of their own identity. This comes withan indoctrination for the protection of the border that the children in Evros are raised with.

While I was interviewing Yorgos, we had the chance to talk about those young men who originally came from Evros and were serving the army with him. I asked him if he thought that a soldier from Evros would have acted differently from every other soldier, in case they encountered a person on the move during their guarding shift.

> *"First of all, they would be way more aggressive. And they would*

immediately inform their superiors. They would try to cause trouble to

the people. That doesn't mean that they would shoot at them, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that they will actively try to cause trouble (…).

I would say that there is an indoctrination that happens to all these young boys from a very small age, to protect their country and their border.

And as much as I want to say that this is very toxic and it's sick, and it's like patriarchal, very aggressive, and definitely pedagogically wrong, my criticism is misinformed because I don't know how it feels to grow up in such a place." (Yorgos)

The construction of militarized masculinities, exemplified by the idea of a soldier providing protection and safety, is taken as an example and embodied by different actors in Evros. The sense of militarism and the celebration of militarized forms of masculinities enable a spill-over effect of those values and characteristics inherent in the military institution to the other actors involved in the border environment. Not only radicalized forms of border protection can be perpetrated by many people in Evros, but they can easily translate into "aggression" or physical violence toward people on the move at any time.

5.2. Hierarchy and Discipline: The Strict Obedience to the Rules

Since army officers are symbolically taken as true examples to follow in Evros, the characteristics and values praised inside the army shape the idea of the honorable "protector" that is emulated by all the actors involved in migration management. For this reason, it is important to understand how the perception of uneven masculinities can create hierarchies among actors, which extends to the whole border environment.

For example, something that was clearly highlighted by all the participants was an overly important attention to the body and body ability, functional to prove one's value as a man in the army. To explain this concept, Yorgos mentioned the example of the recruitment for the special forces, which is a very prestigious division of the Greek army.

"The special forces will come and choose people based on body characteristics, like "Can run this at a certain time?" and stuff. It's like

a physical examination as well as a psychological examination. (...) And if you test positive, you can join them, so basically they ask you if you want to.
This is interesting because you can avoid it, so even if you fit the special forces, you can avoid it. But in many situations, it would be considered a gay thing to do. Like, why would you not want to be the best man you can be?" (Yorgos)

These impactful words make us reflect on the specific values that make a man "the best man that he can be" inside the army, as well as in the whole Evros borderzone. The prestige people in Evros tend to admire is directly bound to the external validation of other men, which is attached to their physical appearance and performance. Once these characteristics are recognized and praised, avoiding fulfilling the duty the man is appointed to would be "*a gay thing to do*". This sentence depicts a strict hierarchy also in relation to sexual orientations, connected to Butler's idea of a "system of compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 1988; p.524) that is amplified and exacerbated inside the army in Evros. As a result, to become "*the best man (they) can be*", meaning the exemplary brave soldier in Evros, army officers are asked to ground their value to bodily characteristics and performances that are specifically required inside the military institution, while other skills and talents become rather neglected.
To prove this, there is an old motto in Greece, which gives the title to the present Chapter: "*Where the logic stops, it's where the army begins*". I asked Spyros to explain what it meant, according to him.

"You know, people just want to keep the rules! It is known that when you go to the army, there is no logic." (Spyros)

A similar explanation was given by Vasilis, who stated:

"In the army you are forced to do many things which are, to say the least, ridiculous. As much as a reasonable person is, someone in the army goes crazy from different situations. For example, many times we did some cleaning in such a meticulous way that after a point it didn't make sense, but when you are carrying out orders from your superiors, you can't do anything else. I must not forget to mention that some of the

executives were lazy all day and we were doing the tasks that needed to be done. But the most irritating of all was this nationalist mentality of some, that you see we have an army and no one can beat us. In general, the army has many useless people who offer nothing." (Vasilis)

Drawing on Vasilis' words, it is visible how the strict adherence to the rules is usually combined with a strong nationalistic mentality. These particular characteristics of the army inevitably affect the surrounding environment of the border, where self-discipline and obedience are more valued than critical thinking and emotional intelligence. However, it is worth asking: how can a characteristic typical of the army inform the attitudes and practices embodied also by other actors involved in border management?

To answer this question, it is important to consider the role of compulsory military service "as a discipline rite de passage that turns boys into men" (Christensen & Kyed, 2022; p.1), where conscripts learn how to embody those features, values, and attitudes of an exemplary soldier through which they can reach the best version of their manhood. This is relevant in the analysis of the construction of militarized that informs the whole border regime, since according to Yorgos, several members of the local community in Evros used to serve the army in the same border area.

"It's just interesting to note that the other people that move in the space of the border are farmers, hunters, and fishermen. 99% are men, who have their own modes of masculinity as locals. The interesting thing about the local community, on top of that, is that if you are from a border area, you will usually serve in the army in the border area where you are from." (Yorgos)

From these words, it is easier to understand how the logics of the army are integrated into the network of actors in Evros. Linked to the previous paragraph, we can deduce that the military service therefore serves as an incumbent for the "*indoctrination*" that people in Evros are subjected to. Since many locals used to serve in the army in Evros, and the military officers play an important role in the community, values related to discipline, strict adherence to rules, and nationalism circulate among different people in Evros. As a result, some locals learn insidethe army how to defend their border and their land, to then adapt those values to their everyday activities, including their collective exercise of border control. This produces the effect of

transforming the borderzone into an increasingly hostile place for people on the move, as was highlighted by Panagiotis:

> *"Most people there were not xenophobic. But for them, it was a reality that people coming are illegal and it's bad to have them here. They don't really know why, but it's bad for them. We, people from the cities, we didn't really know this kind of people existed, actually.*
> *I think left and right is something that there is different from here. There, a very left, you know, someone with the left-wing ideals. If you ask them their opinion on, like, immigrants, they will not answer the same way as the leftists here. They would say something like "poor people", but, you know, "we would have to help them, but what's happening is not good". Like, they're not really critical of the way that people are treated. You know, they are sad, but they're not really critical. It's like a different dimension of politics." (Panagiotis)*

Panagiotis' affirmation enables a deep understanding of the system of border protection in Evros. Connected to what Basham (2018) stated, militarism in liberal democracies is legitimized and sustained through the logic of racism, spreading fear and a sense of insecurity among the population and resulting in a greater source of insecurity for racialized and gendered others. In the case of the Evros borderland, we can see how the hostility toward the people on the move at the Evros borderland is not motivated or explained, but rather assumes the semblances of a mere nationalistic mentality, connected to those values upheld inside the army described by Vasilis. In this way, some members of the local community in Evros seem to believe that migrants are "*bad*" simply because they adhere to what they were told, consequently failing to empathize or question the reality of the migration context they are livingin.

To sum up, the highly hierarchical and strict standards praised in the army prevent people from critically reflecting on their actions, which are justified through authoritarian power, discipline, and a sense of nationalism. In this way, these standards are assimilated by different actors in Evros, who become indoctrinated and invited to emulate those practices in border protection as

a way to filter mobility, without critically questioning those practices or empathizing with the conditions of the people on the move.

5.3. Humiliation and Hostility: The Expression of Emotional Toughness

Directly connected to the skills and practices taught and assimilated inside the army, and how these are visible in the whole border area, the use of humiliation as a form of control and discipline was covered by many participants during the interviews. As much as physical characteristics determine the hierarchical position of men, humiliation is taught as a way to subjugate those men who do not present a dominant type of masculinity, according to the standards established by the military institution. Yorgos explained this phenomenon by describing the physical tests men are asked to do before enrolling in the army.

> *"In male culture, (…) there are certain assumptions made, and there are certain like shaming, and I will speak about it openly. I hope you don't mind. Like on the size of someone's breasts, how f***able he is, or how f***-able he is.*
> *It's interesting that one of the main examinations they give you when you go to the army, when they first give you a medical exam of sorts and before you do some vaccines, is also a very weird examination. They make you stand naked and put your hands like this on your balls so you can prove that you have two of them instead of one, because it's a medical condition apparently that some people have only one ball. (…). And I was like, okay, so if someone has one ball, does that make them less of a man?" (Yorgos)*

There are therefore certain bodily characteristics that are considered to be essential, which are intrinsically linked to one's perceived manhood as, in this case, his male member. This proves that being a "real man" is considered fundamental to the point that its manifestation transcends even those intimate spheres of the human being. In other words, people who serve in the military in Evros are constantly exposed to humiliating forms of violence, which is something extremely visible also in relation to the treatment of the people on the move.

By assimilating these concepts during their military service, people in Evros learn the idea that physical attributes linked to masculinity are not simply set out as a definitive standard, but they also serve to shame whoever does not comply with these standards, who can be harshly humiliated. Humiliation is, therefore, an expression of the masculine hierarchical authority represented by the military institution, which is emulated by all the actors who are committed to the protection of the border.

The use of humiliation, strict adherence to discipline, and blind nationalism is thoroughly taught to the people in Evros, who perceive the region as a bad place for them to stay.

> *"There is a psychological test every month because the situation inside is not the best. In fact, the school inside the army teaches you how to be an a**hole. So, after that, you can level up. You have to be always strict, without feelings and it is very heavy. It's very difficult. People get bad influence in there.*
> *For me, it was fine to stay just 9 months, but if you stay longer, it's hard. The first thing that I said in the first two weeks was: "Even if I get a good salary, I would never do this job". (...) One of my friends asked to leave because he couldn't stay there, so he asked to be moved because the place was really bad for him." (Spyros)*

Spyros' words describing the necessity to be "*strict and without feelings*" echo many forms of border violence against migrant bodies, linked to the lack of critical thinking and empathy toward the people on the move that was presented in the previous paragraph.

In the context of the Evros borderland, these masculine military values create an overlapping system of humiliation used as a form of "emotional toughness, control, and self-reliance" (Nielson, 2020) that governs the whole border regime. As a result, the experience of the participants of this study, who were not born and raised in Evros, was based on a perception of the borderzone as a highly "hostile" place.

> *"They really don't want you to commit suicide, and Greece has a problem with suicides in the army. And Evros in particular, because Evros is a very hostile space. Like, as an environment. Imagine if you lived your life in a city and suddenly (you were in) an aggressive space like the army, right?*

Many people break. Their psyche, their psychological status breaks. So there are people that have committed suicides, multiple people throughout the years, officers included, but there is also a big chunk where people died out of accidents because they were tired, or they received bad instructions. They call these "work-related accidents", as you are perceived as a soldier for those months. And they really want to avoid that." (Yorgos)

The conscripts in Evros are therefore portrayed as victims of a double oppression, represented by the army as an "*aggressive*" institution and Evros as a "*hostile*" place. As a result, people who are forced to stay in Evros have two options: they can either escape such a "hostile" place or adapt to those rules in every aspect of their lives, including in the management of the border.

"There are also people that, you know, use it as an opportunity to be hateful towards immigrants. I have heard that a lot of bad things happen at the hands of the border police.
Like, they steal stuff and immigrants, they kick them, a lot of stuff.
Some people really like it, but I don't think there's someone that will tell you that to your face. But from locals, I heard it. Like, someone said, "I have a cousin that, really enjoys it"." (Panagiotis)

Through these lenses, it is possible to deeply understand how the intricate network of actors responsible for border management tends to interiorize and adapt those forms of humiliation and hostility connected to being "*strict and without feelings*". As a result, these tactics are reproduced against transit groups, who are constantly subjected to forms of abuse and violence in a deeply humiliating way.

5.4. Threat, Aggression and Fear: The Use of Firearms

The hostility of the Evros borderland, as well as the linked relevance of humiliation and emotional toughness employed by actors to protect the border, becomes incredibly important in relation to the spheres of threat, aggression, and fear. The recurrence of violence as a way to

prove one's masculinity is a prerogative of the army, since, as previously highlighted, "violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military" (Connell, 2005a; p.213).
What is important to consider in this framework is that the construction of militarized masculinities at the Evros borderland is deeply connected to a heavy militarization of the area, which is visible also in terms of material capabilities. As a consequence, the presence of firearms makes everyone in Evros a potential threat or victim, adding a new element to an already utterly hostile environment. To clarify this passage, Yorgos told me an anecdote he experienced during a guarding shift at the border, largely related to the prevalent far-right sentiment of the Evros area.

> *"In my unit, there was a very publicly visibly outspoken supporter of Golden Dawn, the Nazi party. I was the anarchist, and he was the far right (...). He was physically very, very well built and I am not.*
> *And the first night we were to do guard duty together, he asked me to put our guns on the side and that we stay at some distance because he was afraid.*
> *He had full-body superiority over me. Like, if there was a chance that we entered an altercation, he could kill me with one hand. There's no debate. But there was this space that even he understood, that was "we are here, and the danger overall, and the situation is problematic enough, that we might as well just take the bullets out of our guns." (Yorgos)*

Interestingly, this event narrated by Yorgos depicts the construction of militarized masculinities in Evros under multiple facades: the duty to protect, an aggressive political sentiment, the opportunity to kill the opponent, and the struggle of fighting for your own life. The deterrence between two armed men who can potentially harm each other clarifies the masculine image of a soldier embodying the protector of the border in Evros, who must be prepared to face the threat at any moment. As a result, his aggressiveness represents a way to overcome fear and prove his value and preparation as a hypermasculine soldier.
Since the presence of weapons is extended and perceived as threatening, it is proved to be employed also to exert control and authority over transit groups. This concept, already explained by Pavlos at the beginning of the first paragraph, was confirmed by Spyros, who stated:

"The army has to secure the border but they don't care about migrants. Some old army officers might do something to them, but not everyone. When they see migrants they just point guns and stop them to wait for the police.
Some police officers are more aggressive and beat them, others just arrest them." (Spyros)

Due to the "informal" collaboration between the army and the police, this use of threat and fear through firearms is used by army officers to establish their role as authority and "guardians of the border" also against the people on the move. The use of firearms as a "compensatory masculine display" (Warner et al., 2021; p.102) can result in a de-facto involvement of army officers in border violence.

"Your main duty (as a soldier) is to make sure that there is no enemy army or enemy agents that try to kill you, or kill your fellow soldiers, you know. It's a very blurry situation though. (…)
And exactly because it's very blurry, we see all these things happening right now, right? We also see soldiers getting involved in pushbacks. We see soldiers getting orders to do pushbacks. We see soldiers having to aim at people, force people to sit down, and apprehend refugees. So soldiers, even conscripts, become part of the border management system." (Yorgos)

Soldiers involved in the control of the border against migrants' mobility use their weapons, tactics, and capabilities to support civilians, border guards, and police officers. For this reason, the militarization of the border at the expense of transit groups is drenched in violence and threat. This constitutes a continuous threat for the people on the move, who are exposed to fear and aggression vis-à-vis the fatality of the weapons.

5.5. The Intersection of Gendered and Racist Violence: The Domination of the Masculine Authority

Different forms of violence, humiliation, and aggression are inherently part of the performance of militarized masculinities in Evros. As was widely highlighted in this Chapter, the intricate network of actors involved in the protection of the border against migrants' mobility tends to emulate those characteristics embodied by the ideal soldier in Evros, creating a militarized system of hostility.

At this point, it is worth noticing how the practices, tactics, and narratives employed inside the army are informed by gendered and racist logics, which inevitably impact the system of border protection at the expense of the people on the move. In fact, by reinforcing their masculine authority as protectors of the border, army officers present a clear construction of their identity based on the subordination of every other subjectivity, that are in turn oppressed and marginalized. Not only the celebration of the typical Western masculine soldier is visible in Evros, but it also resonates with a "devaluation of gendered others, as well as those othered by race or sexuality" (Eichler, 2014; p.83) previously analyzed.

For instance, this is clear if analyzed in relationship with the gendered hierarchical domination that is upheld inside the army. When I asked Panagiotis how women in the army were perceived by male army officers, he replied:

> *"That's really hard to answer because I think that the first thing that they do is to see them as inferior. They never really disrespect them, but you can see that a woman needs to set her boundaries more times than a man in the army. It's mainly like this." (Panagiotis)*

This was also confirmed by Yorgos, who stated:

> *The way that soldiers talk about women is abhorrent. (…) I was impressed, by how the female body is diminished into literally meat, it is shocking. (Yorgos)*

This widely spread misogyny that characterizes the army inevitably informs the practices perpetrated by all the actors involved in the control of the border. In fact, not only the majority of those actively involved in the border practices are men, but also the majority of the tasks and duties valued as important are bound to a stereotypical idea of manhood, while traits stereotypically associated with femininity are dismissed.

As the gendered logics of the army come with the subordination of women and femininity, the marginalization of women in Evros is perceived in different aspects of their daily lives. This was affirmed by Yorgos, who told me:

> *"In most of these towns, when we as soldiers go out to drink, you will see that most women between the ages of like 10 And 60 just disappear. I cannot even explain how this happens. It's like, they know that we are coming and they just disappear. And this is because they cannot stand them for a good reason, obviously, right? Like they don't want to be part of this. Like, soldiers getting drunk and calling their names." (Yorgos)*

When it comes to unpacking the gendered mentality of the ideal man in Evros, the symbolic construction of the hypermasculine soldier fluctuates in his representation. In fact, the masculine protector, who provides safety and care to the vulnerable country, becomes a sexual predator threatening the local women, as well as female army officers.

As a result, the marginalization and humiliation of femininity, in contrast to the embodiment of masculine forms of pride and courage, elucidates the dynamics in Evros, where the Western ideal soldier stands in absolute dominant power above every other subject.

Moreover, these categories are widely present in the extensive use of humiliation as a way to establish a masculine hierarchical authority that is inherent in the army. The use of physical and verbal violence is not only glorified by the army but also employed as a manifestation of the "protector masculinity" trope. As a result, the nationalistic values of protecting the border and the nation are seen to be upheld by racism and sexual violence against racialized Others, including the "*enemy*".

> *"There was a motto that we were forced to sing in one of our training days. I will share it with you just to see the level of indoctrination that they had when it came to Turkey.*
> *We were like 30 people shaking it out loud while walking, like while doing jogging in the morning, like at 7 am. And we were shouting this song, that was going like this. "I see my knife, and my knife is blooded. On the edge of my knife, I see the filthy Turk, and I stopped him. I never believed that this moment would come.*

And now that this moment has come, I feel a hard on and I wanted to come again." And it is illegal to say that. It's illegal by quite many laws and actually we managed to get the officer in trouble for ordering us to do that.
But the fact that he felt okay to ask us to sing this song at 7 AM as a thing of, like, morale-boosting? So this is how this works.
The way that they were referring to Turkey it's a paradox. On the one hand, they have to say that Turkish people are ugly, stupid, scum of the earth, filthy Muslims, enemies, rapists, etcetera, But at the same time, they're very dangerous.
So it's like degrading them as humans, but you have to boost their military worthiness and value because otherwise there is no point for you to be there." (Yorgos)

The use of sexist and racist language to degrade the opponent enables the symbolic construction of the masculine Western man who dominates the "enemy", who is verbally abused and humiliated. Within the nationalistic context of Evros, this tactic is used to give a purpose to the protection of the border and reinforce the absolute domination of the masculine authority, which equally informs the violence perpetrated against the people on the move. In fact, according to Panagiotis, these gendered and racist categories inform the mentality of all the actors in Evros, who are described as "*conservative*" and "*close-minded*".

"I think (they use) the same discourse of the far-right. You know, making fun of minorities in that way. They say, like, "Equality is already there. Why did you bring this?". Also (they do) not like the factthat people come to Greece for a better future or because of war.
I think a lot of people who go to the army and go to the police are like this. But I think I heard it mostly from locals, these kinds of things." (Panagiotis)

Through these words, the hostility that characterizes the Evros region crystallizes into the reproduction of those gendered and racialized logics that are fostered by the army and spread to the entire border environment. By "making fun of minorities", it is possible to read the same use of dehumanization functional to subjugate the enemy and establish a masculine form of

domination and authority. This mentality is also drenched in hostility toward migrants which intersects with the rejection of equality, showing how the domination of masculinities in Evros comes with the subordination of gendered and racialized individuals, who are oppressed and marginalized. As a result, this inevitably impacts the people on the move, who encounter hostility, violence, and aggression as everyday practices of border control.

Chapter 6. *"If you don't behave correctly, they are going to beat you even harder"*: Violent Practices of Militarized Masculinities at the Evros Borderland

This last analytical Chapter aims to unpack how the constructions of militarized masculinities presented in Chapter 5 are inscribed in the narratives of violence experienced by the people on the move at the Evros border. To highlight how the increasing militarization of border practices in the aftermath of February 2020 is connected to the construction of militarized masculinities, I analyze ten (10) testimonies of people who experienced border violence in Evros in a period of time between September 2020 and September 2023.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the testimonies here analyzed include those collected on-site, as part of my work as a BVMN Field Reporter, and those that were already published on the BVMN database,[4] to give a comprehensive overview of the practices employed after 2020.

The participants in this study, called "respondents", are numbered from 1 to 10 according to the correspondent testimonies. By the time this research was written, the only testimonies that were not publicly available were those categorized as "internal violence" testimonies, namely the testimony of Respondent 3, Respondent 4, and Respondent 5. Conversely, all the other testimonies refer to narratives of pushbacks and were already publicly available on the BVMN database.

The testimonies are written in a report format that is standardized by the BVMN methodology. However, whenever possible BVMN Reporters tend to include direct quotations of the respondents. The direct quotations are presented in this Chapter highlighted in bold, in order to strengthen their narrative and highlight the respondents' use of words.

To show how militarized masculinities are inscribed in border practices in Evros, the identification of core themes of militarized masculinities within the testimonies mirrors the same structure and thematic framework of the interviews with the conscripts. Here, the same core themes are functional to analyze the narratives of the people on the move and, therefore, correspond to new interpretative categories in order to highlight the effects these themes visibly produce on migrant bodies. The themes are therefore: Radicalization and Indoctrination, expressed in Chapter 5 through "A Network of Actors", corresponds here to "Migrants as Silenced Bodies"; Hierarchy and Discipline, expressed in Chapter 5 through the "Strict

[4] It is possible to read all the testimonies of pushbacks collected by BVMN on their website. https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/.

Obedience to the Rules", corresponds to "Migrants a Subjugated Bodies" in this Chapter; Humiliation and Hostility, expressed through "Emotional Toughness" in Chapter 5, here is equal to "Migrant Bodies as Deprived of their Dignity"; Threat, Aggression, and Fear, analyzed through the "Use of Firearms" in Chapter 5, corresponds to the representation of "Migrant Bodies as Targets"; The Intersection of Gendered and Racist Violence, which is visible in "The Domination of the Masculine Authority" in Chapter 5, here materializes in the analysis of "Migrants as Abused Bodies".

Through these five dominant themes and their interpretative categories, it is possible to grasp how the construction of militarized masculinities inherent in the army is assimilated and reproduced by different actors in Evros as part of their collective exercise, which produces violent outcomes over migrants' mobility. In fact, the intricate network of actors governing the border regime in Evros adopts the same values upheld by military soldiers, such as the enforcement of authoritative power, intimidation, and discipline. This results in violence perpetrated by multiple actors on transit groups, who are often subjected to different declinations of physical, verbal, and psychological forms of abuse. For the sake of this analysis, I am to center the voices of the respondents to give a comprehensive analysis of their perceptions and lived experiences in Evros.

6.1. Radicalization and Indoctrination: Migrants as Silenced Bodies

In line with what arose from the interviews with the conscripts, in the testimonies of the people on the move it is easy to recognize the existence of a radicalized network of different actors who collaborate in the apprehension, detention, and pushback of transit groups. The simultaneous presence of different actors enforcing the border, namely army officers, the police, the border police, and civilian vigilante groups, has a multiplicative effect on the violence and control exercised on migrant bodies. Not only the structure, tactics, and authorityof the army are highlighted by the respondents' narratives, but also the collaboration of the army and the police is indeed widely cited, showing how the indoctrination of different actors and their relationship produces effects on the violence suffered by transit groups.

> *"Approximately eight officers reportedly approached the two men from behind and told them to stop walking, look at the ground, and get on their knees. The respondent could not confirm the exact number,*

> *because the officers reportedly told him to look at the floor, so he was not able to count them properly. The respondent reported that some of the officers were wearing green camouflage uniforms and some were wearing blue uniforms; he believed the former to be army officers and the latter police." (Respondent 4)*

In line with the militarized construction of masculinity shown in Chapter 5, the order to *"stop walking, look at the ground, and get on their knees"* shows us how the "authoritative" position of the army officers in collaboration with police officers is used to apprehend the transit group. Using the words of Pavlos in the previous Chapter, army officers actively collaborate with police officers in the control of migrants' mobility because they have "*an authority that (they) can use to stop them*". The practice of stopping migrants and forcing them to avoid eye contact and kneel is extremely common at the Evros borderland, strengthening a logic of masculine enforcement of authority and fear against transit groups. People on the move are consequently scared by different perpetrators and deprived of their agency, as they are unable to react to the orders they are imposed.

At the same time, the presence of other actors in the respondents' narratives suggests an even wider network of border protection, which includes the active involvement of Greek civilian border hunters and foreign nationals. Respondent 2, who was reportedly apprehended and transferred to an anonymous "big building" next to the Evros border, described a multitude of different actors at the detention site.

> *"There were reportedly around ten persons wearing what was described as an army/camouflage uniform. Some of them were wearing balaclavas, others were wearing regular face masks. Some of them were speaking in Greek, and others in English.*
> *The respondent reported there to also be around six other persons present. He did not know if they were Greek police officers but reported them to be wearing "really weird uniforms": balaclavas, black jackets, jeans, and boots." (Respondent 2)*[5]

[5] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"I have never experienced that violence in my whole life. I never expected that I would be in that situation*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/october-21-2021-0000-kavala-greece-evros-meric-river/.

This description suggests the presence of Greek and foreign border hunters who, independently from their official jobs, were hiding their identity and arbitrarily detaining transit groups. The use of arbitrary detention as a practice of "dominant politics of mobility" (Brambilla & Jones, 2019) has been widely documented by BVMN, which often manifests in combination with a "lack of information provided by the authorities regarding the reason for their arrest or the length of their detention within the facilities" (BVMN, 2023b; p.10). This constitutes an erosion of the rights of transit groups, who are often silenced and denied the possibility to challenge these forms of restriction of their mobility. This collective exercise of control over migrants' mobility here takes form and is exemplified in the use of repeated violence reported by the same respondent.

> *"When the respondent arrived at the building, he explained that he was searched and that they took 170 Euros and his phone from him. He tried to explain to the officers that he had asylum in Greece, he tried communicating in English and German, but the officers did not respond and reportedly beat him.*
> ***"I was trying to speak to them in English, German, they didn't respond. They just beat me."*** *" (Respondent 2)*[6]

The construction of radicalized forms of militarized masculinities is here shown through the use of violence and aggression, as was previously highlighted also in Chapter 5. Although the respondent tried to explain that he could legally stay in Greece thanks to a successful asylum procedure, the men who detained him repeatedly ignored him and showed no mercy in return. The unwillingness to listen to the respondents' rights is here directly linked to a lack of empathy and a missing "*logic*" that characterizes the army, as previously explained by Spyros. Moreover, in line with a recent BVMN Monthly Report (2023b), the use of violence is here accompanied by the theft of personal belongings of transit groups, which represents another manifestation of authority and abuse. As a result, in front of a person attempting to explain his rights, the perpetrators react aggressively, by stealing his belongings and beating him violently. The enforcement of masculine authority results in this case in the silencing of the respondent's voice and the deprivation of his agency through violence.

[6] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"I have never experienced that violence in my whole life. I never expected that I would be in that situation*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/october-21-2021-0000-kavala-greece-evros-meric-river/.

In addition to what was narrated by the conscripts, the description of foreign nationals suggests the co-presence of "slaves" pursuing border violence, which was widely documented in several BVMN testimonies. As mentioned in Chapter 4, these actors, who are asylum seekers from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Arabic-speaking countries, are forcibly recruited by the Greek authorities to commit pushbacks against transit groups (HRW, 2022; Lighthouse Report, 2022; Fallon, 2022). Drawing on the narrative of Respondent 9, not only do these actors work closely with the authorities to commit violence at the border, but they also need to comply with specific bodily characteristics, which is something that echoes the description of the "ideal" soldier.

> *"According to the respondent, they drove for approximately 22 minutes to reach the (Evros) river (...). Near the river, the transit group was brought to a group of six Pakistani nationals, who pushed them back to Turkey.*
> ***"We were transferred to the river. And near the river, we met people who were actually Pakistanis, but we believed that they worked with the Greek authorities.***
> ***They are kind of professional. I think their selection happens by seeing if they are strong physically and can do this job.***
> ***They get offered this job, and they get something back at the end of these 3 months approximately."***
> *The transit group was subsequently transferred on a dinghy on the Evros River. Out of the group of six Pakistani nationals, two of them pushed the dinghy into the water, while the other four boarded the dinghy to lead the transit group across the river." (Respondent 9)*[7]

This narrative perfectly shows how the hypermasculine focus on the body and body ability fostered by the army is symbolically transferred and applied in the violence perpetrated in the practice of pushback. Pushbacks, performed with the aim to " reject unwanted - and racialized - asylum seekers" (Davies et al., 2023; p.169), require compliance with the bodily standards established in the army, in this case being "strong physically". This recalls what Yorgos

[7] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"One of the women army officers was laughing while we were taking our clothes off. She was laughing at us and saying, "Arab!". By that time, we were half-naked.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-2-2023-evros-river/.

previously described as "*the best man that (one) can be*", related to the recruitment in the special forces of the army. In this case, it is visible how the "*indoctrination*" takes form through the border practice of pushback, which is linked to physical force and authority fostered inside the army. The features highlighted in the perpetrators hinder the possibility of reacting to such practice, as the transit group is immediately pushed back across the river.

6.2. Hierarchy and Discipline: Migrants a Subjugated Bodies

Connected to the focus on the body and body ability identified in the construction of militarized masculinities in Evros, many testimonies highlighted how physical performance is intertwined with hierarchy in the enforcement of violence against transit groups. This was the case of the testimony of Respondent 5 who, while traveling in a car alongside other members of a transit group, was reportedly apprehended by three men in civil clothing.

> *"Without saying anything, the three men opened the doors of the car of the transit group and reportedly started beating them (...). The respondent was reportedly beaten multiple times on his leg with a wooden stick.*
> ***"The one who seemed their leader was a guy who had long hair. He had ginger hair and glasses on. He was physically big, and strong. He was the guy who initiated the beatings."***
> *The members of the transit group were reportedly beaten on their bodies for what felt like between 5 and 10 minutes." (Respondent 5)*

Here, the violence perpetrated on the respondent is embodied by "*the leader*" of a supposed group of "*border hunters*", who starts beating the transit group with a wooden baton immediately, as soon as he opens the door of their car. The use of physical violence as a form of "excessive and disproportionate force" has been extensively documented by BVMN reporters, who noted that in 2020 only "almost 90% of all Greek pushback testimonies contained one or more types of torture or ill-treatment" (BVMN, 2021; p.26).

Here, it is visible that the description of the leader is connected to three main features of militarized masculinities: being physically big, strong, and violent. In other words, the respondent describes the physical violence suffered as connected with the militarized masculine

identity of the big, strong, and violent leader, who manifests his hierarchical position by physically subjugating the transit group.

This description was confirmed by the testimony of Respondent 9. After he crossed the Evros River on a dinghy to reach the Greek side, the respondent saw nine army officers guarding the area surrounding the border.

> *"The respondent recounted that to avoid being seen by these nine men, he and three other people who shared the same dinghy with him managed to hide in what he described as a ditch located between the Evros River and the army patrol area.*
> *From there, they could see that, among the nine men believed to be army officers, there was* ***"the boss, probably the big guy there, who had a baton".*** *According to the respondent, this man described as 'theboss' repeatedly beat the remaining eight people who crossed the riverin the same dinghy as the respondent because they were unable to finda hiding place. The respondent described the baton used by "****the boss****" as* ***"wooden, tree wooden. It was around 2 meters and a half; it was really big".*** *He further stated that the beatings lasted approximately one minute." (Respondent 9)*[8]

The description of Respondent 9 confirms the representation of "the boss" as a "big" violent man. The use of "excessive and disproportionate force" toward the transit group is embodied by the army officers through their bodily performance, authority, and aggressiveness, subjugating the transit group and exposing them to brutal violence using a wooden baton.
These practices also include a lack of logic and extremely strict discipline, which can result in the arbitrary criminalization of migrants at any point. This was the experience of Respondent 3, who following the apprehension was accused of smuggling by two police officers.

> *"The two police officers reportedly accused the respondent of being the driver because he was sitting in the front seat of the car. He was*

[8] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"One of the women army officers was laughing while we were taking our clothes off. She was laughing at us and saying, "Arab!". By that time, we were half-naked.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-2-2023-evros-river/.

> *subsequently handcuffed and reportedly **"put down on the ground"**, while the two police officers were shouting in English: **"You are the driver, you have to admit that you are the driver"**.*
> *The respondent was reportedly beaten and kicked because he refused to confess that he was the driver. He reportedly told the police officersthat he had several injuries sustained in Syria and asked them to stop beating him. The officers reportedly stopped the beatings after a few minutes." (Respondent 3)*

The arbitrary criminalization of migrants, "coerced into admitting to being the driver of a vehicle, thereby implicating them as smugglers" (BVMN, 2023d; p.16), constitute a common trend of abuse at the Evros borderland, which is here exemplified in this testimony. Not only the violence perpetrated by the police officers is here directly connected to a clear abuse of power, but it also aims at extorting a confession from the respondent, who is completely subjugated in front of this abhorrent level of aggression. Here, the use of authority, dominance, and aggression elucidates a construction of violent hypermasculine power aiming at dominating the person on the move, who is coerced into confessing a crime he did not commit. This is linked to what Spyros described as the necessity to be "strict and without feelings" inside the army, a trait that is emulated by different actors on the borderzone to commit border violence against transit groups.
The same discipline is also adopted by the forcibly recruited "slaves", who assist the competent authorities in pursuing pushbacks. This was stated by Respondent 10, who was pushed back to Turkey through the Evros River alongside another man from Algeria.

> *"Subsequently, the respondent and his Algerian counterpart were brought to a group of six men described as dressed in plain clothes and their faces covered by balaclavas. The respondent said they were foreign nationals who spoke English. According to the respondent, this group consisted of civilians hired by Greek authorities to push transit groups back to Turkey, a practice that was extensively reported also in previous BVMN testimonies. Reportedly, the respondent and the other Algerian national were instructed to look down and to avoid eye contact with the men wearing balaclavas.*

> ***"During the check-in, if you look at them, they can beat you and it can be even worse. No one can go there, look at them or look around, all the things like that. If you don't behave correctly, they are going to beat you even harder".*** *(Respondent 10)*[9]

The direct quotation embedded in this testimony, which gives the title to the present Chapter, is extremely representative of the enforcement of militarized masculinities perpetrated by different actors against transit groups. Migrants, who are violently pushed back through the Evros River, are coerced into "*behaving correctly*" by avoiding eye contact with the perpetrators and not resisting the violence they are exposed to. These forms of domination and abhorrent physical violence directly impact transit groups, who are often exposed to the use of threat and aggression embodied by the authority of the perpetrators.

6.3. Humiliation and Hostility: Migrant Bodies as Deprived of their Dignity

By analyzing the testimonies of the respondents, the frequent use of humiliation as a form of control and discipline was clearly highlighted. These forms of abuse, addressed in a recent BVMN report on violence within state borders in Greece (BVMN, 2024), allow us to draw again a bridge between the practices employed inside the army and the violence enforced on migrant bodies. Particularly, the narrative of Respondent 1 shows a clear use of humiliation through physical exposure after being transferred to a military camp in Evros.

> *"As the respondent reported, this army camp is located near Feres. The respondent's group was brought inside the camp into a big room, where they found 20-30 other people, including a Somalian family and other women with their children. They were guarded by "huge" men wearing green army uniforms, balaclavas, and bulletproof vests. These military personnel told them to strip completely naked and afterward beat them with batons. The respondent stated:*

[9] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"As soon as I turned to jump, one [of the men wearing a balaclava] slapped me on the ear. Still now, I cannot hear 40% or more*.", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/september-17-2023-at-the-land-border-between-greece-and-turkey-near-the-fence/.

> ***"He doesn't care if he hits you in your head or in your face, they are using metal sticks, big metal sticks, […] my body was blue from this beating".*** *(Respondent 1)*[10]

This testimony is fundamental to frame multiple traits of militarized masculinities that are employed against migrant bodies. Firstly, the respondent described the presence of "huge men wearing green army uniforms", stressing once again that being "*big*" and "*strong physically*" is central to the performance of masculinity for army officers. Secondly, the order to "*strip completely naked*" is a clear form of humiliation to exert control over migrants' bodies. This practice is proven to be really common: according to a BVMN report (2024), "25% of respondents across Greece reported first-hand experiences of being strip-searched in detention facilities or witnessing such incidents" (p.13). Through the use of humiliation as a form of control, transit groups are deprived of their dignity and dehumanized, highlighting how the physical violence at the border intersects with other forms of mental and emotional violence.
This violent practice echoes Yorgos' narrative on the physical examination that men are asked to do before enrolling in the army: this suggests that humiliating practices and abuses are reproduced in a chain that follows presumed hierarchies, where dominant manifestations of masculinity enforce their position by physically degrading other subjectivities.
In addition to this, other degrading forms of physical and mental violence were reported to be inflicted by army officers toward the people on the move at the Evros borderland. This was relevant in the testimony of Respondent 8, who was shot in the leg by two men wearing army uniforms.

> *"Reportedly, one of the men in uniforms took a photo on their personal device of the respondent on the ground with his hands handcuffed behind his back after he had been shot." (Respondent 8)*[11]

The practice of taking a picture of the respondent harmed and handcuffed on the ground without his consent is a clear form of humiliation, purposely aimed at causing physical and mental

[10] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"You are Muslim […] and we are Christian, so why are you coming to our country, we don't need you here because you are Muslim*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/september-10-2020-1030-feres-greece/.
[11] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"I heard two shots. The first one didn't touch anybody, the second one was in my leg.*.", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/january-18-2023-near-evros/.

suffering (BVMN, 2021; p.10). The humiliation inflicted upon the respondent recalls the same expression of control, self-discipline, and emotional toughness of army officers previously analyzed. However, in this scenario, we see the escalation into a torture-like practice. The respondent, who is described as physically harmed and handcuffed, is exposed to an unspeakable form of degradation of his condition vis-à-vis the brutality of the two men, who show no mercy for the violence they inflicted. This instance suggests that humiliation as a violent practice of militarized masculinities assumes an even more radical and disturbing meaning in Evros when it comes to the treatment of people on the move, who are tortured, dehumanized, and deprived of their dignity.

Moreover, the use of humiliation in combination with repeated violence and aggression is used by many actors at the border to establish an authoritative power over migrant bodies. This was also outlined by Respondent 6, who was body-searched and beaten by the two men who were identified as the border police officers.

> *"Two men came to conduct a search of the respondent and his friend.* ***"If we don't understand what they are saying, they immediately slapped us"*** *explained the respondent.*
> *This took place in the yard by the building. They were forced to undress here – trousers, shirts and jackets were removed. They were frisked and body-searched for about 10 minutes, recalled the respondent. The men returned these items of clothing, but their backpacks and shoes were taken from them and not returned." (Respondent 6)*[12]

The respondent, who is beaten because he cannot speak the language of the perpetrators, is forced to undress and consequently body-searched and robbed by the perpetrators. The deprivation of the dignity of the respondent is clarified through the overlapping of different forms of humiliation, exposing him to a condition of extreme vulnerability and fear.
Not only do these forms of humiliation of migrant bodies encompass both physical and verbal violence, but they also overlap with other forms of abuse that can amount to increasing mental

[12] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"Many they kept kicking them and beating them just for no reason to scare us and some they undressed them totally.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-6-2022-2200-nea-vyssa/.

suffering for migrants. This is connected to the narrative of Respondent 7, who was apprehended by a group of men wearing unidentified uniforms and carrying weapons.

> *"When the group in transit was surrounded by the 5 uniformed men, the respondent described how one of the uniformed men talked in English to his friend. This uniformed man asked where they were from and took pictures of them with a mobile phone. Then, the respondent stated that the man in the black uniform instructed the transit group tostand up. The respondent was asked multiple times if they were aware of other groups of people on the move.*
> *The respondent stated that then the group's phones were taken, and they were beaten a few times with plastic batons.*
> ***"They asked 'You want to go to Europe?' and he laughed and I [said] 'yes'. My English wasn't good enough to explain to him all, so I told him [that] I want to go to the camp. He kept laughing and suddenly he hit me with the baton on my back"**. (Respondent 7)*[13]

In this testimony, it is visible how violent border practices have cumulative effects on migrant bodies. In fact, the physical violence enacted against the transit group here intersects with other degrading forms of abuse, such as being robbed, ridiculed, and photographed without consent in a condition of vulnerability.

The manifestation of humiliation is therefore strongly connected to the words of the conscripts on their experience in Evros. As forms of humiliation are conceived as legitimate manifestations of domination and authority, people in Evros "*use it as an opportunity to be hateful towards immigrants*", as previously stated by Panagiotis. As a result, they manifest through an even more sinister "enjoyment of procuring harm" to transit groups, who are exposed to continuous dehumanization expressed through physical, verbal, and psychological abuse.

6.4. Threat, Aggression, and Fear: Migrant Bodies as "Targets"

[13] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"Violent pushback of 100 people, including women and minors: "One of the blows struck my head so hard that I lost contact with the world for a moment and thought i'm going to die. [The officers] know the war in Libya, but they don't care and never care. And their way of searching women - it was nasty. And they were crying. And we were completely naked the whole time.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/may-17-2022-1800-rigio-greece-to-saclimusellim-turkey/.

The enforcement of fear through threat and aggression is a constitutive part of a "protector masculinity" trope (Kronsell, 2016) embodied by army officers, who are symbolically represented as exemplary "guardians of the border". However, the establishment of fear particularly targets people on the move, as is exemplified by a direct quotation reported in the testimony of Respondent 9:

> ***"We were scared, and we didn't want to be assaulted by the brutality of the army officers."*** *(Respondent 9)*[14]

The enforcement of fear is a prerogative of the military officers, whose masculine identity is here linked to the connotation of "*brutality*". Militarized masculinities therefore inform border practices through an extensive use of aggressiveness and intimidation, producing a constant state of fear for transit groups.

Connected to this, the use of firearms and weapons is to be seen as a manifestation of the authoritative power of the army officers, which results in a tangible threat to migrants.

The experience of Respondent 8, who was shot by two men in army uniform, clarifies the everyday danger migrants are exposed to, due to the militarization of the Evros borderland.

> *"Approximately six hours after crossing the border, between 10 and 11 o'clock at night, the transit group was reportedly approached by a white Nissan Qashqai with a blue stripe on it driven by two men in green camouflage army uniforms.*
> *They were not wearing face coverings, recalled the respondent. He then described howthe group had been walking on the side of National Road 53 when they noticed the vehicle approaching, and when they looked in its direction two shots were reportedly immediately fired at the group. The respondent was reportedly shot in his right leg by one of two bullets fired from a pistol owned by one of the two uniformed men.*
> ***"I heard two shots. The first one didn't touch anybody, the second one was in my leg."*** *According to the respondent, once the incident*

[14] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"One of the women army officers was laughing while we were taking our clothes off. She was laughing at us and saying, "Arab!". By that time, we were half-naked.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-2-2023-evros-river/.

> *occurred, the rest of the group ran away and he collapsed onto the ground screaming." (Report 8)*[15]

The transformation of the borderzone into a battlefield is here clearly presented: the establishment of authoritative power through the use of firearms concurs with the creation of the highly militarized and hostile environment in Evros, where the different actors involved in the enforcement of border control extensively use weapons to threaten and harm transit groups. In this case, the use of weapons did not simply threaten the respondent, but it actively physically harmed him. As a result, it is visible how migrant bodies are dehumanized by the brutality of the perpetrators, who in this case reduced the agency of the respondent into a simple "target" for their "hunting".

Nevertheless, not only is the use of weapons an inherent part of the military institution, but it also extends to the whole area as part of the increasing militarization of the Evros borderland. By emulating the tactics and capabilities of the army, the whole network of actors in Evros participates in the "hunting" of border crossers, who are constantly exposed to the dangerous hostility of the borderzone exemplified by the use of firearms.

> *"The respondent reported being arrested in a transit group with eight other people, among whom there was a 13-year-old minor. The transit group reportedly crossed the border from Turkey to Greece in a car. Once they got closer to the Alexandroupoli area, they started being chased by an unmarked white vehicle. The respondent reported that the white car was driven by three men wearing civil clothing, who repeatedly hit and destroyed parts of the car of the transit group. Additionally, the respondent stated that the three men chasing their car were carrying firearms and shot four to five gunshots in the air to threaten the transit group." (Respondent 5)*

Similarly to the previous testimony, the establishment of masculine power is exemplified through the use of firearms to "threaten the transit group". In this case, it is visible how the

[15] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"I heard two shots. The first one didn't touch anybody, the second one was in my leg.*.", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/january-18-2023-near-evros/.

transit group is transformed into the "target" for a group of supposed border hunters, who expose their masculine authority and domination through gunshots to produce fear. Not only the transit group is terrified and completely vulnerable vis-à-vis the aggressive threat posed bythe border hunters, but their condition is reduced to a fight for their survival as they are turnedinto "preys" of this "hunting".

6.5. The Intersection of Gendered and Racist Violence: Migrants as Abused Bodies

In the previous Chapter, it was shown how the rooted use of violent language glorifying sexual violence and racism enables the symbolic construction of the masculine Western soldier who dominates the Other, being in that case the enemy. The gendered and racist logics underpinning the construction of militarized masculinities has been proven to be largely extended in Evros, which inevitably impacts the experiences of the people on the move.

In fact, transit groups are often exposed to the intersection of racist and gendered forms of violence at the hands of different actors involved in the collective exercise of border violence. This is often connected to forms of humiliation and hostility, which echoes the same modalities presented in the previous Chapter.

To unpack the gendered and racist constructions underpinning the border practices, a story told by Respondent 7 will be here presented. This happened when the respondent, after being summarily arrested, was brought to an unidentified detention site near the Evros border.

> *"The respondent recalled that 15 uniformed men were present at the detention site. The respondent described that 8 of them wore camouflage green uniforms with the Greek flag stitched to their arm sleeves; 4 of them wore marine blue uniforms with "Police" written on it and the Greek flag on the left arm sleeve; 2 or 3 men wore uniforms consisting of sage green shirts and pants. The respondent stated that all the men were armed and carried firearms in their holsters. The respondent stated that the men in black uniforms who arrived with them were holding metal batons. The uniformed men asked the group to get totally undressed.*
>
> ***"We tried to hide our sensitive parts because the women were with us in the same room, [but] they let us [stay] naked and searched the***

> ***women. And their way of searching women – it was nasty. [The uniformed man] kept moving his hands all over her sensitive places, and when she pushed his hand, he would push her hand away and act like he was searching. [The woman] was crying, he screamed at her, took her jacket and while she was leaving he called her back and asked her to take off the shoes. Then he took them to the cell. And wewere completely naked the whole time".*** *(Respondent 7)*[16]

This long description enables an in-depth analysis of the reproduction of racialized and gendered violence against migrant bodies. The group of perpetrators, allegedly composed of military soldiers and police officers, forced the transit group to undress completely. Men and women in the transit group tried to "*hide (their) sensitive parts*", as they were brutally subjected to physical and psychological forms of humiliation. This humiliation "doubled" in the case of women, who were searched in a "*nasty*" way: they tried to resist the violence, but the uniformed man continued acting "*like he was searching*".

Here, the expression of the sexual violence inflicted on migrant women and men overlaps with the racist violence transit groups already face every day in Evros. Sexual and racist violence therefore intersect through the enforcement of a militarized masculine authority that is embodied by the perpetrators, resulting in physical humiliation and abuse of migrant bodies.

A similar experience happened to Respondent 10. Before being pushed back, Respondent 10 told BVMN that he was apprehended by six men with their faces covered with balaclavas alongside another person on the move.

> *After being beaten and robbed of their belongings and clothes, the respondent and the other man were reportedly forced to wear women's clothes without being told why. (Respondent 10)*[17]

[16] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"Violent pushback of 100 people, including women and minors: "One of the blows struck my head so hard that I lost contact with the world for a moment and thought i'm going to die. [The officers] know the war in Libya, but they don't care and never care. And their way of searching women - it was nasty. And they were crying. And we were completely naked the whole time.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/may-17-2022-1800-rigio-greece-to-saclimusellim-turkey/.

[17] Excerpt of the BVMN testimony titled *"As soon as I turned to jump, one [of the men wearing a balaclava] slapped me on the ear. Still now, I cannot hear 40% or more.*", available at the following link: https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/september-17-2023-at-the-land-border-between-greece-and-turkey-near-the-fence/.

Although it is impossible to know the clear intent behind this practice, the humiliation inflicted on the respondent and his counterpart resonates with the same marginalization and humiliation of femininity that was highlighted in relation to the army. By forcing two migrant men to wear women's clothes, the perpetrators exercise masculine forms of authority and domination against the respondent, who is humiliated through the embodiment of femininity. Following the logic of militarized masculinities, this humiliation of the Other is here dictated by gendered and racialized logics that see migrant bodies, as well as the stereotypical feminine identity, as inferior vis-à-vis the dominant Western man. This shows that the repeated denigration of migrant bodies and the further dehumanization of their condition reinforces the symbolical construction of the masculine protector of the border, at the expense of every other subjectivity.

Conclusions

With this work, I have sought to shed light on how militarized forms of masculinities are constructed and performed in Evros, and how this informs the border practices enacted at the expense of the people on the move. By incorporating a feminist approach to the study of borders, I have highlighted how gender constructions are relevant to understanding the peculiarities of the Evros borderland as a "hierarchically cross-hatched space where both law- enforcement function and a military defensive function occur simultaneously in the same space" (Pallister-Wilkins 2016; p.12). In fact, the analysis presented through the course of thisstudy reveals dominant features of militarized masculinities that are intrinsically connected to the specificities of the Evros borderland.

The words of the conscripts analyzed in Chapter 5 enabled a deeper understanding of the collective exercise of the border regime presented in Chapter 4. Indeed, the rooted collaboration between the army, the police, the border police, and the local community has the power to shape the practices at the Evros borderland, which are informed by a great sense of nationalism and militarism. Although the geographical space of the Evros borderland has been progressively integrated into the European border regime (Karamanidou & Kasparek, 2022) along with the permanent presence of Frontex as a "facilitator" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; p.58), these characteristics do not stand out in this analysis. In fact, the Evros borderland still looks like a "family-run" systemof border control. This creates a collective commitment to protecting the border, in which armyofficers play an important role as strong and brave "guardians of the Borderland" (Pallister- Wilkins 2016, p.14) vis-à-vis the enemy Turkey.

The army, by embodying characteristics inherent to the protector masculinity trope (Kronsell, 2016), represents a role model to follow by other actors in the region, who in turn emulate its inherent characteristics, values, structures, and practices in their daily collective exercise of border protection against migrants.

This emulation brings a twofold effect. First, we see a progressive integration of the role of the army in border practices against transit groups, such as their involvement in apprehensions, arbitrary detention, and broader forms of physical violence. This happens because army officers participate in the collective exercise of the Evros community, which implies their involvement in border practices despite this not being their official mandate. Second, we observe a spill-over effect of characteristics, values, and practices typically bound to the military identity being adopted by all the actors enforcing violence against the people on the move.

Through the correspondence of different interpretative categories, I have mirrored the core themes of militarized masculinities to analyze the effects they produce on migrant bodies in Evros. Consequently, it was possible to identify four core modalities through which the construction of militarized forms of masculinities are inscribed in border practices at the Evros borderland.

The first one is discipline, which is expressed through bodily performance and the enforcement of violent manifestations of authority. An attentive analysis of the testimonies has indeed proven that the violence perpetrated on the people on the move is justified through the authoritative dominance of the perpetrators, who adopt the same emotional toughness and "blind obedience" that hinders the use of logic inside the army to dominate migrant bodies. This results in the systemic silencing of migrants' voices and their physical subjugation, as transit groups are proven to be unable to speak for themselves or to react to the violence they are inflicted.

The second modality is humiliation. In fact, the use of humiliation as a form to exert control inside the army institution is emulated by different actors committing violence against migrant bodies, who are often deprived of their dignity and subjected to torture-like practices. As a result, it is possible to see through these practices an "enjoyment of procuring harm", which exposes transit groups to abhorrent forms of physical, verbal, and psychological abuse.

The third one is represented by threat and aggression, established through the use of firearms and weapons. It was indeed proven that firearms are an integral part of the hostility and militarization that characterizes the Evros region, exemplified by the use of weapons that army officers make to establish control and authority. The use of weapons contributes to the transformation of the Evros borderland into "a battlefield", as people on the move are seen as "the targets" perpetually threatened or harmed in the "huntings" enacted by the actors in the region.

The last modality is represented by intersecting forms of gendered and racist violence enacted against transit groups. In fact, it has been possible to see how the mentality of the army enables a construction of militarized masculinity that symbolically and physically dominates feminine and racialized subjects. As a result, the intersection of gendered and racist logics informs the humiliation and abuse inflicted on migrant bodies at the Evros borderland.

The protector masculinity trope conceived by Kronsell (2016) has been predominant in the construction of militarized masculinities at the border, since the embodiment of the exemplary soldier who sacrifices for his land is largely admired and supported by the whole surrounding community. However, my theoretical and empirical analysis have shed light also on the

manifestation of different forms of "aggressor masculinity", which is fostered by the collective emulation of those traits inherent in the military institution. I, therefore, suggest that the construction of "aggressor masculinity" is also relevant in the Evros region, since it is visible in the glorification of army officers as role models and is manifested through physical violence, humiliation, and a blind discipline that hinders the use of logic and critical thinking. As a result, people on the move are subjected to violence vis-à-vis the hostility of the Evros borderland, perceived as a "battlefield" through which the manifestation of the "aggressor masculinity" takes form.

Throughout this study, I have tried to fulfill my epistemological commitment to centering the voices of my protagonists and, particularly, understanding the role of the people on the move as a source of knowledge. Thanks to the time I spent in Thessaloniki and my work inside BVMN, I have learned the power of listening, documenting, and advocating for those stories that deserve the attention of the world. However, I am aware that this case study is based only on a limited number of voices. In terms of implications for future research, I believe that incorporating more stories and accounts on border practices would be beneficial to have a wider understanding of the reality of border violence.

This research comprises primarily the experiences of people who have stayed in Evros for a short period of time and, by trying to mirror different accounts and experiences, it seeks to highlight common traits and dominant themes. However, it would be beneficial to expand the sample of participants for future research, to combine the words of different actors and see how they mutually intersect, overlap, contradict, and reinforce.

Moreover, expanding new notions and aspects of the construction of masculinities would be extremely helpful in adopting gender lenses to new domains and contexts. This case study focuses specifically on the Evros borderland, but there are many other borders and hostile geographical spaces in Europe and beyond. Analyzing other militarized borders through the adoption of gender lenses would be extremely beneficial to enrich this field of academic literature, enabling the comparison of different case studies on such topics.

I would like to conclude this thesis by reflecting in terms of new possibilities, imaginaries, and trajectories for the Evros borderland. In this research, I have focused primarily on the Evros borderland as a highly militarized and "hostile" place, where militarism and nationalism are perceived as integral parts of the cultural identity of the area, mutually reinforcing the rooting of patriarchal and hypermasculine values among the population. But what if an alternative to this picture could be fostered?

While I was working for BVMN, I found myself wondering so many times about the potential that intersecting forms of resistance can have in establishing a counter-narrative to the mainstream ideas of what migration is, how borders are made, and what they stand for. The work of civil society actors in Greece, like the ones I had the opportunity to work with and learn from, is an essential reminder for us to continue focusing on the stories of the people and try to ground our actions from there.

In an area like Evros, where militarization persists in the daily lives of all residents, trying to put the stories of people who cross borders at the center feels like the hardest challenge. It is indeed difficult to tell a story when there are no patient ears available to listen. However, the actions of informal groups, including activists, transfeminist and queer movements, as well as diaspora associations, could represent the real turning point to promote a bottom-up approach, where the development of the Evros region is intertwined with the well-being of border crossers. A collective struggle is therefore needed to break this vicious cycle of desolation, resentment, scapegoating, and violence and to offer new opportunities for those "forgotten" border areas. Thanks to the inspiring actions of many informal groups I met in Greece, I came to believe even more strongly that only through the power of solidarity and resistance lasting development can be achieved.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview template – Questions on pushbacks

Introduction: Consent and Confidentiality Statement

We are from the Border Violence Monitoring Network - an independent organisation that looks at police violence and pushbacks in Europe. The report will not help your individual case but it can help to put pressure on the Greek government and the European Union. The interviews are made into reports and are then published on our website: borderviolence.eu

The report will be anonymous. We are not going to make use of your name, face or anything you can be identified with.

We are trying to recreate your pushback experience in as much detail as possible. The more details the stronger and more helpful the report. If you allow us, we would also take photos of your injuries/include medical reports which can provide additional evidence (only if in person).

If you don't want to answer a question or in case you feel uncomfortable during the interview, let us know. We can move to the next question, take a break or stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any further questions about our work?

If you give your consent, this interview will be recorded, so we can write the transcript for the report.

START RECORDING

Today is the (date) and the interview is taken by (interviewers and translator) in Thessaloniki. Can I just confirm the respondent is ok to be recorded?

General questions on the pushback

- Age and nationality - if the person doesn't want to tell, put down 'anon'
- When did the pushback happen (date & time)?
- What country were you pushed back from?
- What country were you pushed back to?
- How many times have you been pushed back?
- Where did the pushback take place? (location pin if they remember)
- Where did you cross the border? (location pin if they remember)
- What happened when you arrived?
- What time did you arrive? Day or night?

- Did you notice any towers, cameras, antennas, or other surveillance equipment? Any lights, sounds, anything out of the usual prior to or during the apprehension?

If the person was intercepted by (Greek) police

- What time did the police intercept you? Why did they arrest you?
- What clothes were the police wearing (uniforms, balaclavas, masks)?
- Did the police have a flag/insignia on their uniforms?
- How many police were there?
- How did the police treat you?
- What did the vehicles look like? (colour / any writings on it)
- Who was driving the vehicle?
- How many police officers were in the vehicle?

Police station/detention facility

- Were you taken to a police station/detention centre?
- Describe the police station/detention centre (was it an "official" police station/detention centre?)
- What were the conditions there?
- Did you have access to food, water and the toilet?
- How long were you there?

Treatment at police station/detention facility

- Were you body searched?
- Were personal belongings (phones, money, bags,…) taken?
- Was your phone taken from you, even just for a brief amount of time?
    - Did you have to unlock your phone and hand it over?
    - Was your phone damaged or broken?
    - Was it returned? How long before it was returned?
- Were your documents checked?
- Was a translator present?
- Someone from UNHCR in a detention centre/police station?
- Did the authorities ask for your personal information?
    - Were your fingerprints taken?
        - Did they explain why your fingerprints /personal information were taken?
    - Did they take photos?
        - Did officers take photos or videos with their personal phones?
    - Did they input this information into the computer/database?
        - Could you describe what the device(s) looked like?
- Did the authorities ask you to read/sign anything?
    - Was communication in a language that you can understand?
    - Was the respondent given a copy of the signed papers?
    - Did you have to sign anything concerning storing your data / personal data?

Access to asylum

- Did you express that you wanted to claim asylum?

Violence at police station/detention facility

- Did you experience violence/i nsults/racism/threats at the police station? Did other people in custody?
- Did the police use their hands, feet, batons?
- How long for? How many?
- What position were you in? (sitting, lying on the floor)
- Where on the body were you beaten?

Other people-on-the-move at police station/detention facility

- How many people were held in custody at the police station?
- Where were the people from?
- What ages were the people?
- Men, women, minors, babies?

Transport after police station/detention facility

- What happened after the police station/detention centre?
- What vehicle were you put in?
- Did you see the number plates?
- What did the vehicle look like? Did it have any specific characteristics?
- How long was the drive?
- Who was driving the vehicle?
- Where did the vehicle stop? (surroundings, ask for a link)

Pushback site

- Where were you pushed back?
- What did the people who pushed you back look like? How many? What clothes were they wearing? Where were they from? What languages did they speak?
- How were you pushed back? (what method was used for pushback - boat, car)
- How long were you in the border area for? How long did you have to wait?
- How many people were pushed back? Which nationalities? Men, women, minors, children?

Violence experienced during pushback

- Did you experience any violence/threats/insults/racism during the pushback?
- If yes, can you describe the person who hurt, threatened or insulted you?

After the pushback

- What happened after you were pushed back?

END OF TESTIMONY QUESTION

Appendix 2: Interview template – Questions on internal violence

Introduction: Consent and Confidentiality Statement

We are from the border violence monitoring network – an independent organisation that is researching detention in Greece. We are looking into access to asylum in detention, detention conditions and violence in detention. The report will not help your individual case but it can help to put pressure on the Greek government and the European Union. The interviews will be published anonymously on our website: borderviolence.eu

The report will be anonymous. We are not going to make use of your name, face or anything you can be identified with.

We are trying to understand your experience in as much detail as possible. The more details the stronger and helpful the report. If you want, you can also send us photos of yours or other documents which can provide additional evidence.

In case you feel uncomfortable during the interview, let us know. We can take a break or stop the interview at any time. You can also interrupt or ask for clarification at any moment.

Do you have any further questions about our work?

If you give your consent, this interview will be recorded, so we can write the transcript for the report.

START RECORDING

Just to confirm you are happy to be recorded?

Today is the (date) and the interview is taken by (interviewers and translator) in Thessaloniki.

Interview Questions

Demographics/Basic Information:

- Age and nationality - if they don't want to tell, put down 'anon'
- When was the respondent arrested?
- Where was the respondent arrested?
- Were they told why they were being detained (written in a language that they understood) and how long for?
- When was the respondent detained?
- Where is the respondent detained?
- What happened upon arrival?

- Did the respondent have to sign anything? If yes, did the respondent understand the document, and which language was it written in? Were they forced to sign?
- Was the respondent previously detained? If so, in which places and for how long?*

* Would also be important to map how detainees are transferred, assuming that in many cases people might go between places upon their arrest/apprehension, i.e a person arrested in Athens might go from Local police station -> Petrou Ralli -> Amygdaleza -> Korinthos or elsewhere in another PROKEKA.

Access to asylum in detention:

- [RIC questions]
    - Prior to being detained had you tried to apply for asylum?
        - If yes, did you have any support to do this? Friends, NGOs?
        - If not, why?
    - Did you book an appointment to register at Malakasa or Diavata?
        - If yes, did your appointment get cancelled or rescheduled? Do you know why? Did you show the appointment receipt to the police/authorities?
        - If not, why? Did you have issues with the online platform?
- Whilst in detention were you told about the asylum procedure?
- Did you ask for asylum whilst in detention
    - If not, why?
    - If yes, who did you ask, and what happened?
- Who did you ask for asylum?
- Were you provided with an interpreter? If yes, was it the detention centre or the asylum service that provided it?
- Did you understand what was happening?
- What is the status of the respondent's asylum case? (1st, 2nd interview, appeal?)

Access to Legal Counsel:

- Was the respondent informed about the length of detention?
- Was a translator present in all official interactions with the authorities AND/OR asylum service?
- Did the respondent have access to legal counsel to challenge their detention decision? If yes, was it free (from an NGO or the state) or private?
- Is the respondent in contact with a lawyer? Did the respondent have the opportunity to meet a lawyer in person? Privacy provided? Or online?
- Did the respondent have access to a lawyer at any time?
- If the respondent has access to a lawyer, where did it come from? How did they come into contact?
- Was information given to the respondent about the right to seek asylum or the possibility of free legal counsel?
- Does the respondent have access to a system for making complaints (regarding treatment or detention conditions)?

Conditions in Detention:

- Describe the detention centre
    - Is the respondent detained in a container (isobox/mobile unit) or a building?
    - Would the respondent be able to provide a rough size of their room?
    - How many people does the respondent share a room with?
    - Does the respondent have access to heating/air conditioning?
    - Does the respondent have a proper mattress/bed frame? If yes, is a mattress provided to all fellow inmates?
    - Does the respondent have access to electricity (plugs in the wall)?
- How many people are in the detention centre? Is it overcrowded?
    - Where are they from?
    - Men, women?
    - Minors?

Hygiene

- Is it clean? Who cleans the space? Are detainees provided with cleaning items?
- Are there enough toilets & showers? Do they work? Is the water hot or cold? Are they cleaned regularly? Is shampoo and soap available?
- Are toilet articles (toilet paper, soap) provided? If sold, are they sold to adequate prices?
- Are laundry services or facilities provided? How are clothes, sheets washed?
- Are the cells infested with rodents or insects?

Meals

- Are those incarcerated provided with adequate amounts of food?
- How many times a day do they receive food?
- Is food nutritious? Fresh food? Does the food provided change regularly?
- Is drinking water available at all times? If yes, do they drink tap water or is it supplied in bottles?

Health and Welfare

- Is the respondent allowed to go outside to get fresh air/exercise? If yes, from when until when? What space do they have?
- Is there access to medical and psychiatric care?
- Are psychological support services available?
- How long does the respondent have to wait for a doctor's appointment?
- How many doctors/nurses work in the facility?
- Can medical staff provide sufficient care?
- Do they have access to translator or are able to communicate well with the medical staff?
- Does the respondent have the possibility to go to a hospital? If yes, what is the procedure like there?
- Did the respondent experience any violence/threats/insults/racism from the medical staff?

Provision of Other Services

- Is there a library?
- Are educational programs accessible?
- Is there a place of worship?
- What does “the market” sell? Who runs the “market”?
    - When is it open?
    - Are goods sold at adequate prices?
- Do nongovernmental organisations have access to the detention facility? And if so:
    - What types of intervention are there? Do they provide legal advice or for material needs?
    - Was the respondent or others detained allowed to interact with them in a private space?

Communication:

- Are telephones available? If yes, with or without cameras? Do they have some use restrictions?
- Is wifi available?
- Is communication (both written and oral) with detainees in a language that they can understand?

Surveillance & technology:

- Did you have your personal details taken? Were your fingerprints taken?
- Were photos taken of you?
- Did officers take photos of you on their personal devices at any point?
- Are there CCTV cameras in detention centres? Do you remember what they looked like? What colour? Do you think that they functioned? Why do you think that they wereused?
- Did your mobile phone get taken from you at any point? Did you have to unlock your phone for officers to be granted access?

(Police) Abuse

- What officers did the respondent encounter while detained?
    - Greek Police Officers in uniform? In civilian clothes?
    - Frontex Officers?
    - Foreign agents?
    - Other specific units?
    - Does police enter from outside (riot police - M.A.T.)?
    - What were the police wearing (shields, batons, tasers, helmets)?
- Are the police violent?
- Did the respondent experience any violence/threats/insults/racism?
    - If yes, who hurt, threatened or insulted the respondent?
    - Does the respondent feel scared of the police/authorities?
    - Age?
    - Male, female?

- Did the police use their hands/feet/brass knuckles, batons?
- Where on the body was the respondent beaten?
- How long for?
- How many police officers were involved?
- What position was the respondent in (on the floor)?
- Did the respondent see other detainees being beaten, insulted, threatened?
- Injuries (light, severe)?
  - Where (extremities, torso, head)?
  - Was there a potential risk of death?

Potential for Hate Crime

- When insulted/threatened/attacked, was a reference made to the respondent's race/ethnicity/country of origin?
- When insulted/threatened/attacked, was a reference made to the respondent's gender?
- When insulted/threatened/attacked, was a reference made to the respondent's religion?
- When insulted/threatened/attacked, was a reference made to the respondent's sexual orientation?
- Other? (anything else that could result in this being classified as a hate crime)

Hunger Strike/Protest

- Did the respondent participate in a hunger strike/protest?
  - If yes, what is/was the respondent's motivation?
  - How was the hunger strike/protest organised?
  - When did the respondent start?
  - How long?
- If not, did the respondent witness any hunger strike/protest?
- What was the reaction of the police?
  - Did the police try to divide/weaken groups that protest/strike together?
  - Did the police make promises?
  - Did the police keep these promises?
  - Did it bring change?

Pushbacks

- Does the respondent know of any pushbacks directly from the detention centre?

Internal Conflicts/Dynamics

- Do conflicts occur between different people detained?
  - If yes, why?
- Does the police intervene?
  - If yes, how?
- Was the respondent kept in a separate facility, away from convicted criminals? Or in the same space?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions on Military Service in Evros

General questions about organization/activities:

1. How did you receive the call?
1. What was the age range of the cadets?
2. How long did you stay? When?
3. Background of the other cadets? What did they do, where were they from?
1. Were there also women among the cadets? Or women in the military in general?

What were your tasks in Evros? Daily activities? Was your role clear to you?
Was the hierarchy clear? The division of the tasks, the organization of the operations?
What are the main activities of the military in Evros?
Consider what you saw/witnessed, do you think the military in the region collaborates or work alongside the police or other local actors?

a. Did they collaborate with the border police?
b. How was your interaction with local people?

Do you know someone who lives in the area and used to serve in the army?

a. Were they interacting a lot with the army or the police? In which way?
b. Were there police officers who used to serve in the army?

Do you know about any interaction with people crossing the border there? Did you experience it personally?

a. What is the general perception of people crossing the border?

Logics/mentality and attitudes:

1. How would you define the attitudes of the people you worked with? How were your superiors/bosses? How was the attitude of the other cadets?
    a. How did they speak to you?
    b. What was their attitude towards the other actors in the region? Such as:
        i. Police
        ii. Locals?
        iii. Frontex?
2. What was their attitude, and language used, towards the people who crossed the border? Did they use any specific language to describe them?
    a. Was there ever any use of violence?
3. Did you witness any form of physical violence?
4. Did you ever perceive the presence of a violent language? Insults, slurs? Nicknames?
5. Any racist comment towards the people crossing the border? Any instance of violence towards them?
6. Did you ever notice any form of discrimination?
7. How did they refer to women during your period there? Are there particular characteristics/features/adjectives used to describe women within and outside the military environment?

8. Did they ever ask you or comment about your sexual orientation? (Same for the other soldiers)
9. Could you benefit from psychological support, while there? Do you know anyone who asked, or benefitted, from this service?