

Occasional Paper 8

Notes From The Border: Refugee Lives and Necropolitics In The Aegean, August-November 2015

Katerina Stefatos, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Chloe Howe Haralambous

In August 2015 Katerina Stefatos and Dimitris Papadopoulos spent a few weeks (August 4-20) on the Greek island of Lesbos in what was initially planned as a trip to visit family and friends. Their trip quickly morphed into an impromptu ethnographic fieldwork at the three main refugee camps in Mytilini, the island's major town. This paper is based on some first ethnographic notes from the field drawing on interviews and discussions with refugees, locals, and volunteers at these camps in an attempt to unfold the refugees' tumultuous and often deadly journey to an imagined Europe but also to explore the political tensions and contestations within the local community against the background of a parallel Greek financial and socio-political crisis. Chloe Howe Haralambous spent her summer (June to August) on Lesbos, primarily in the north-east part of the island (at Kleió, Tsónia, Sykaminiá, Mólivos), working closely with refugees, volunteers, NGOs, and helping organizing makeshift dwellings for the refugees or coordinating their transfer to medical centers and to the port of Mytilini. The text has been updated based on recent developments on the island and our ongoing personal communication with some of the refugees, volunteers and locals.



Katerina Stefatos is Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Women's Studies Program at Lehman College (CUNY) and the Hellenic Studies Program Coordinator at Columbia University. She has published papers in international journals, and has contributed book chapters for edited volumes by Palgrave-Macmillan, Payot, Ashgate, and University of Pennsylvania Press. She is the co-editor (with Victoria Sanford and Cecilia Salvi) of *Gender Violence in Peace & War: States of Complicity* (Rutgers University Press, in press).



Dimitris C. Papadopoulos is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Lehman College (CUNY) and a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life at Columbia University. His research centers on the question of socio-cultural space. Using perspectives from the anthropology of place and landscape, material culture, architectural history and digital humanities he works on borders and transnational space, sacred, historic and post-conflict sites, museums, archives and memory institutions with a regional focus on Greece and the Balkans. His work has appeared in various journals and as book chapters in collected volumes.



Chloe Howe Haralambous holds a BA in Comparative Literature and Society from Columbia University and a MSt. in Modern Greek Studies from the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on biopolitics, performativity, and narratives of the state in crisis Greece and Italy. She currently works with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation on coverage of the Golden Dawn trial and as an editor for the comment and analysis website Analyze Greece. She has also spent time on Lesbos handling the reception of refugees at the island's entry points with the NGO Borderline Europe.

The politics of visibility. An introduction

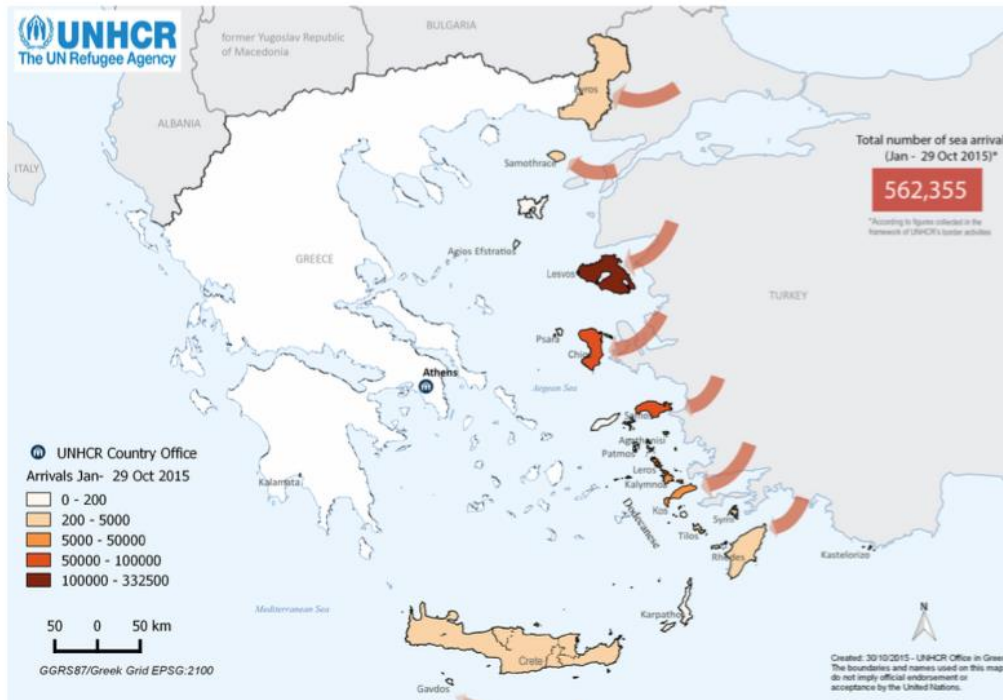
Last August we flew to Lesvos, an Aegean island close to the Turkish border. Envisioned as a homecoming, our trip quickly morphed into an impromptu ethnographic fieldwork. Having spoken with family and friends on the island, we knew that Lesvos was one of the refugees' main entry points to Europe. We were not, however, aware of the scale and intensity of the refugee crisis at the local level. The thousands of refugees daily propelled onto the island's shores, flocking to the town port and strewn on the roadside and in the public squares of remote villages had transformed the island's landscape and re-positioned it in the ideational topography of Europe: once a speck on the European periphery, the little island had come to the foreground of discussions of the refugee crisis, a testament to a global shift of scale and proportions, a reorientation of urgencies, priorities, and political agendas.



Mória camp

All photographs taken by Dimitris Papadopoulos except where stated otherwise

In the weeks immediately following our visit, Lesvos attracted global media attention as a “hotspot,” a term adopted and imposed by European bureaucracy to denote cardinal entry points for migrants, and a FRONTEX (the European Union border management force trusted with the deflection of migrants from the European coast) initiative to install new registration centers geared towards sorting refugees from migrants (and thus from prospective deportees) on the border region. Global media outlets from CNN to the *New York Times* reported daily from the island. The visibility of the lives and deaths of refugees, together with their value and significance, is currently debated, negotiated or challenged through quotidian images of drowned children, the celebration of discreet heroes such as fishermen running to the rescue of drowning refugees, through agonizing concerns for weather conditions and traces of the alteration to the micro-topography of the island as it adjusts to the constant influx. The visibility of the island in the media cartographies of the refugee crisis is linked to its emergence as a European frontline testing-ground. However, Lesvos's placement as a proxy for managing, negotiating, and accounting for lives and deaths is not a strategic concern alone. Rather, it speaks to a European-wide fetishization of the border region. It provides comfort to anxieties deeply entrenched in the ideologies of modern Europe that have come under strain in recent months. In that sense, the refugee crisis came at a time that was ripe to expose these ideological and political inadequacies.



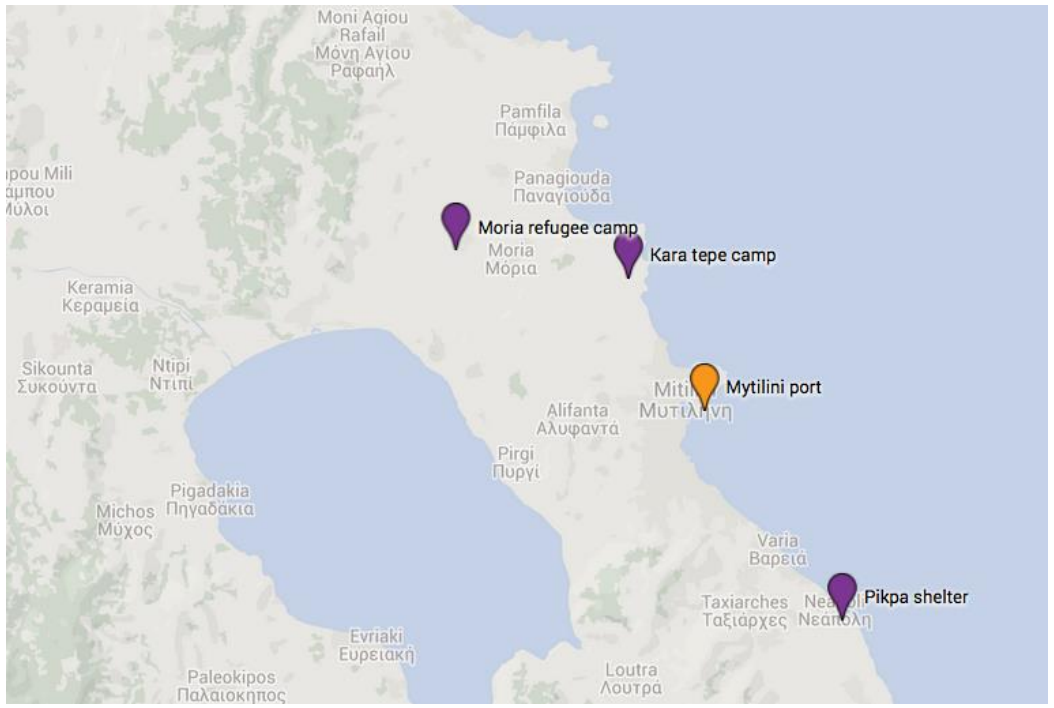
Number of arrivals to Greek islands as of 29 October 2015, UNHCR
<http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

In the summer of 2015, debates specific to the Greek crisis swelled into broader misgivings. The continuing suffering of the Greek population under austerity brought many to question the validity of the European liberal democratic project and the feasibility of a singular European identity. Over the same period, what once had been a steady trickle of refugees and migrants exploded, inaugurating a new crisis. Political discourse shifted away from the European social and political decay to the influx of refugees. The ideological integrity of the European project on the verge of collapse and the sudden onslaught of the foreign Other at its borders proffered the opportunity to bolster the idea of Europe by recourse to alterity and to its crudest rudiment: territory. Sympathy for the “refugee” produced and projected an eidolon of liberalism and civilized compassion; disdain for the “migrant”¹ opened up affective mechanisms of hatred of the Other to bolster the integrity of the proverbial European Self. But the imagery of “invasion,” “occupation,” and “siege,” all of them terms freely deployed in commentaries and analyses in the public sphere, which were once the privy of xenophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant discourse, at the present moment finds its way into mainstream media and news reports as the SYRIZA government comes under fire for its weakness or unwillingness to protect Greece’s—and, by extension, Europe’s—borders. The border region acquires a status of sanctity in the European imaginary as firm vigilance of the periphery and the reaffirmation of the right to exclusion marks Europe’s last claim to unity.

This has contradictory implications for the people of Lesbos, whose own territory and lives form the backdrop of the drama. While struggling to survive economic and political dispossession by a cruel Europe and a floundering state, they find themselves at the foreground of Europe’s attention, inhabiting the mythical point of contact between Europe’s (imagined) invaders and its (equally imagined) safe keepers. An underlying question persists, then: “Are we within the

border, or without?” Observing a group of young refugees washing their clothes in the sea, an elderly Greek couple deliberated, wondering where these people came from and why they had come to Greece. The husband remarked with confidence: “what do you expect? They come here because Greece is an open house (ξέφραγο αμπέλι).”

The cohabitation of locals and refugees has reshaped the island’s social and economic milieu. Refugees form the focal point of discussion in local shops, at the beach, at the *kafeneion*, and the point of inspiration of improvised micro-economies flourishing wherever the state has lacked the funds or the infrastructure to make provisions (food, water, transportation). The constant influx of refugees and their (often) quick transfer to Athens allows little time for them to acquire singularity or to establish relationships with locals; they are anonymous, but everywhere visible, and everywhere close by. Their constant presence across the island, on the road from the landing point to the city, in the port and the town center, is the articulation of a claim to a space of survival, and a foregrounding of a politics of visibility: a negotiation of what it is to be seen or not seen, and of what, if seen, is unacceptable.



Refugee camps in Lesvos.

“What is this place?”—The Mória camp

Once migrants have made the arduous journey from the entry point to the island’s capital, Lesvos, the authorities sort the herd: Syrians are directed to Kará Tepé (“the Black Hill,” having retained its Turkish meaning); various “others” to Mória. Purportedly the result of tensions between Syrian refugees and other nationalities, the partitioning of the migrant group mirrors the taxonomies established by the EU as ordering principles of the crisis, the most notable of which is the distinction between “the refugee” and the “economic migrant,” delineating thus the suffering war-torn pride of European humanitarianism and the notorious immigrant hammering at Europe’s door for a share of its bounty. Even amid the chaos of the overrun island,

hierarchies are quick to gain sway. These, too, are articulated and performed through strict economies of space and visibility.

Both Kará Tepé and Mória are set up as “camps” (στρατόπεδα, the official term used both by the EU and the Greek state) that defy all the expectations of structure and (even the minimal) services that the term implies, but the registration process is expedited at Kará Tepé, whose exclusively Syrian population is ensured refugee status. Kará Tepé is closer to the city and to shops; it is within view of the road. Its placement ensures its visibility; what is more, it ensures the modicum of *contact* through which the migrant is humanized. Mória, however, home of the “others,” of Europe’s undesirables, is hidden: a former military base cached in an olive grove. A wire-fence surrounds a unit/center for documentation, partitioning the site between the registered and unregistered, colloquially, “Mória In” and “Mória Out.” When the registration process stalls, people in Mória Out are left languishing indefinitely, until conditions deteriorate to such a degree that they try to scale the fence in frustration.



Refugee tents by the Mória camp’s main (outer) gate



*Mória camp.
Families in tents, trying to stay away from the sun*



At the time of our visit (August 18), there were about 600 people in the internal unit. On the periphery of the camp (Mória Out), 2,000 people sat waiting to be called in and documented. Many lived in tents in groups of five or six, most of them families with young children or young couples. Food and water were scarce. A (privately operated) food truck in the camp—one of the many local enterprises that have sprung up to cater to migrants for above-market prices—charged for food and water, but most refugees were either not able to afford it or were trying to save money for the ferry ticket. The heat in the camp was sweltering, as the area lies exposed to the sun for most of the day, exacerbating the results of poor hygiene conditions (restroom facilities were shared and self-maintained).



Mória camp



Mória camp

The officer in charge of the camp told us there were 2,200 people (mostly from Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Nigeria) in the camp and that the camp was clearly understaffed, trusting in the capabilities of four to five local police officers aided by doctors from *Medicins du Monde* for medical examinations, interpreters from the International Migration Organization, and UNHCR staff. The process also includes biometrics and a nationality screening with the help of interpreters from FRONTEX.



Mória camp

As we entered the camp and on our way to reach the main, internal unit, we passed dozens of tents erected next to the wired fence, surrounded by families and children sleeping, waiting, or preparing food. A group of maybe five Afghans sat next to a tent. One of them was making scrambled eggs on a pan to share with his friends and he invited us to join. He looked at our

camera and told us he was a photographer in Afghanistan but that he had fled the Taliban. He insisted on offering some eggs on a piece of bread.



Mória camp. A group of Afghans preparing their meal

As we were preparing to leave the camp, exhausted and almost dehydrated ourselves after spending only a few hours at the site, a young Somali who had thus far been preoccupied with making his phone work, turned to us and asked, in broken English, “What place is this?” We said, “This is Mória.” He looked at us, disoriented, and thanked us. A few seconds later, he asked again. “What place is this? Is this island?” “This is Lesbos,” we answered, realizing that he did not know which part of Greece or Europe he had landed in. The question, “what place is this,” has stayed with us ever since.

‘This is heaven’: the summer camp shelter

In the past “PIKPA” (Πατριωτικό Ίδρυμα Κοινωνικής Πρόνοιας και Αντιλήψεως, Patriotic Institution of Social Welfare and Thought—here “PIKPA” refers primarily to the physical space, not just the Institution) was a children’s summer camp. Since the summer of 2015, however, it serves as a refugee shelter, self-managed and run by the local volunteer initiative “*The village of All Together*” (“Το χωριό του Όλοι Μαζί”) which is supported by both local and foreign volunteers. The camp site was allocated free of charge by the City Council following the initiative’s repeated requests. Refugees are housed in small wooden cabins in a shaded area and priority is given to pregnant women, the disabled, or the infirm. Food and hygiene essentials are, for the most part, provided by volunteers and activist groups.

When we arrived at PIKPA, we parked in front of a building that appeared to be a makeshift kitchen. The smell of cooking (garlic, cardamom, cinnamon) wafted through the yard. A young Greek woman spoke animatedly on the phone about a toddler with a heart condition who had just been released from the hospital, and about an eight-month pregnant woman with complications who had to be hospitalized. We approached her and introduced ourselves. She was Efi Latsoudi, the lead coordinator of *The Village of All Together* that has set up and runs the refugee shelter. Efi gave us a brief overview of the project while her phone rang assiduously off the hook. As we spoke Mohammedin, one of the volunteers serving as an interpreter, entered the shelter. Refugees surrounded him and, after greeting him with mirth, bombarded him with questions and requests: asylum status and paperwork, daily essentials, hospital updates, medicine.

Efi briefed Mohammedin on the new cases that required immediate attention, including a young cancer patient who lives in the camp with her husband, and their children, a new-born and a toddler.

Despite the bustle, the camp almost looked and felt serene in the August afternoon sun; the wooden cabins of the former children's camp surrounded by pine trees and decorated with multi-colored rags, the summer sound of the cicadas, refugees gathered in the middle of the camp, children playing, were scenes set in surreal contrast to the hundreds of refugees we had just seen walking for hours under the brutal August sun, hungry and dehydrated, carrying their belongings in plastic bags, many carrying their infants in their arms.

While Efi and Mohammedin were busy micromanaging, we visited the makeshift kitchen. A tall young man (Afghani, as it turned out) in a white shirt and khakis was preparing a meal. The door was missing and an old bench had been placed in the middle of the room. The stove had only one functioning burner, but the young Afghani seemed dedicated to his cooking. Another young, relentlessly smiling man from Pakistan, Hassan, pottered around in shorts, a sleeveless shirt, and glasses. He was preoccupied with the repair of the moldy, deteriorating wall. Hassan had lived in Athens for a couple of years but could not find a job, so he decided to come to Mytilini and help the refugees. He seemed to lack the basics for the imagined renovation, so we promised to return a few hours later with some sand, cement, and lime.

Our eyes fell on a young Afghani girl entering the room. She had light brown hair and big eyes overshadowed by bangs; she wore a purple shirt with a glittery big heart stamped on it. She was too shy to introduce herself, but the cook, who turned out to be her dad, told us that her name is Setayes. Setayes would not smile. She was silent but curious about our presence there. We asked if we could take a picture of her; she nodded and her dad smiled and gave us his permission. We asked her if she likes it there, if she likes Greece, the nice weather, the beach which is close by. She said *ὄχι*, "no" in Greek. "I want to go to Allemagnia, Germany, Yermania." She had been in the camp with her parents and siblings for eight months.



Setayes at the PIKPA shelter

Efi told us that food would be distributed to the refugees around 6 pm, so we promised Hassan to be back by then with the building materials. At the local hardware store, we met two of Katerina's old acquaintances from her village. They greeted us warmly and asked about our life in New York. We talked briefly about the on-going Greek financial crisis and how it was

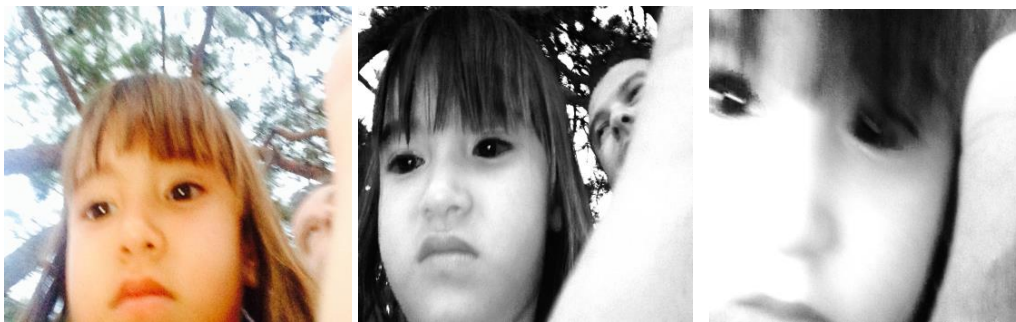
affecting small local businesses and the construction industry. They also seemed eager to talk about the “illegal immigrants” (λαθρομετανάστες) that have overrun the nearby villages. Once we mentioned that we needed the supplies for the refugee shelter, they insisted that we should not pay given it was for the “illegal immigrants,” a poignant gesture of empathy expressed through a term (“illegal immigrants”) widely used in Greece with negative anti-immigrant connotations.



Refugees (mostly mothers) getting supplies distributed by volunteers at the PIKPA shelter

By 6 pm, we were back at the shelter, after a quick stop for supplies at a local supermarket: rice and lentils, juices and cookies for the children, sugar, jams, rusks, formula for the newborns, soap, and diapers. It was a busy evening at the shelter. We brought the food to the storage room where local volunteers were distributing food and basic daily supplies in cartons, one per family. Each family was responsible for its own cooking. Clean towels and sheets for the babies were given to mothers; with the help of the interpreter, a local volunteer was trying to give instructions to a mother who had just given birth on how to use chamomile to sooth her baby’s eyes.

While we were talking to the volunteers, Setayes ran into Katerina’s arms. She was indifferent to the toys and balls that were handed out earlier to the children by a European Christian Volunteer group, but was far more interested in Katerina’s phone. She took a few selfies, randomly black and white. She still would not smile. On our way out of the distribution room we noticed that right behind the refugee shelter and next to the local airport there was a tennis court, part of a sport facilities complex. The tennis players looked totally oblivious to the refugee camp flanking them.



Setayes’s selfies: PIKPA shelter

Later in the evening, one of the volunteers introduced us to Samer, a 22 year-old accountant from Damascus. Samer lives at the PIKPA shelter and helps with daily tasks and occasional translations, being one of the few English-speaking refugees there. Prior to PIKPA he had been to Mória and Kará Tepé. We asked him about these sites.

They are miserable, he said. If you compare this camp to Mória, or Kará Tepé, here is heaven. This is heaven... if you want to describe it... this is heaven... Kará Tepé, they used to have all the garbage there [he is referring to the wastewater management facility that is located there], all the people sleep in the tents, if there are no tents they sleep on the asphalt.

Samer had travelled on his own, crossing from Turkey in July but was reluctant to continue the journey to northern Europe being aware of the risks and hardships. How did he travel to Greece, we asked him.

There were 45 of us including families, he said, all from Syria, 45 people on a single boat (dinghy). The trip was bad in every way. Everything was set against us. Everything. The sea, the wind, the conditions, everything. . . . It took us ten hours from Izmir. It should take two hours, no more than two hours, but it took us ten. It was partly the stupidity of the person driving the boat. . . . Then it was the wind, the waves, we almost drowned a couple of times. We were lucky to survive. We ended up on the other side of the island. I don't know the place. We called the Coast Guard to say that we are stuck in the sea. And also the fishermen in the sea tried to help us. . . . After two to three hours they took us to the port. We saw that there were volunteers there, there were officials there. They saw the condition of the families, of the handicapped people so they decided to bring us here [to the refugee shelter].

When we asked him why he decided not to continue his trip to Northern Europe, he said:

Look, this place is for families that apply for asylum. Ok? All the families here are applying for asylum. They are waiting for IDs and their refugee passports. Once they get their IDs and their refugee passports they can leave. The only two countries that can accept them are Germany and Sweden. So they can apply for a new one (asylum) there. So if you want to compare taking the illegal trip, the dangerous trip, or staying here for like one month, two months, maybe if you have bad luck three months, it's better to stay here than the illegal way. Look, a lot of people get killed (on the way), a lot of people are missing, a lot of people got mugged by thieves, there are a lot of stories.

While Samer was talking to us, a middle-aged man joined in. We asked his name and Samer began to translate for us.

His name is Mohammed. He's from Gaza, Palestine. . . . He's on his own. His wife is back in Turkey. She stayed there. She was afraid to come here by boat. Mohammed came here on the boat. This is the only way, if you want to come here, you come on a boat. He paid 800 euros.

We asked Samer how he travelled to Turkey and on to Greece.

Look, he said, it's dangerous [in Syria], maybe you are going to end up dead; if you are not going to get killed, you are going to kill people. And when you stop killing people, you are going to get addicted to blood; you are going to end up with no feelings just like a killing machine. . . . There is two ways to go to Turkey. You can use the legal way and the illegal way. The illegal way you are going to go through Aleppo through the borders and then to Turkey or you can go by plane. I went to Turkey by plane. I went to Lebanon first and then from Lebanon I took the plane to Turkey, to Adana, and then Izmir. Then we came by boat.

“Did the smugglers in Turkey find you,” we asked, “or did you find them?”

Ok. Now it's a trade. If you go to Turkey and you ask any Syrian if they have any number, they are going to give you ten. So all you have to do is collect the numbers, start dialing and choose the best offer you can get. And of course in the end you are going to get screwed because in the end all of them are going to lie to you. You agree with him on something and you get there to the port and it's different. . . . Look, now. . . . The way they are smuggling people is the second business now after drugs anyone who can work there works there. There's a lot of money for them. Look, if you put 50 people on the boat there is 50,000 dollars. He is going to buy the boat for two to three so basically his net profit is let's say, 45,000.

“Are the smugglers on the boat themselves?” we asked.

No, no one, he's not stupid to be on the boat. Basically, they are going to tell you. If you drive the boat, it's going to be free for you. We are not going to charge you. They teach you like for half an hour like how to steer the boat.

We asked if refugees are aware of the danger.

Yes, of course they know, he said. No one can describe it. No one can say how they felt on the boat. . . . Look, maybe you are going to end up drowned in the sea. . . . They put you in a small van, stuck all the people in a small van like cattle, and they drop us after an hour or so and they are going to put us on the boat and they are going to say, follow this light, or follow the GPS, so they know yes, that this town is Mytilini, or this is Lesbos. . . . Maybe you will arrive there, maybe not, based on your luck. A lot of people drown. But we've been the luckiest ones.

On death and necropolitics

The impression of hope and solidarity afforded by the summer camp shelter (PIKPA) lost its sheen upon our visits to the other camps—Mória in particular. It was further diminished two months after our return from Greece as the dead bodies of children, young women, and men washed up on the shores of Lesbos. On October 28, a shipwreck on the northern shore of Lesbos stunned the island. Two hundred forty two refugees were rescued, eight people drowned (including four children), 15 children were sent to the hospital, 32 people went missing.

The Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, addressed the Greek parliament on October 30 and criticized European leaders, emphatically stating that “the waves of the Aegean are not just washing up dead refugees, dead children,” but also “the very civilization of Europe” (Bilefski 2015). In reality, the “very civilization of Europe” had looked poised to crumble long before the refugee crisis gained leverage in mainstream media. The political and economic crisis had already revealed something rotting in the core of Europe. Grappling for means to fortify a collapsing project, European leaders found an Other and proffered a new idea of Europe, one defined by recourse to its borders under the name of “Fortress Europe.” The civilization of Europe might be the cost European leaders are willing to pay for what counts as Europe.

The bodies suspended in the waters of the Aegean were never intended as the beneficiaries of European civilization, which has little interest in making them live. Its power and sway now express themselves in their crudest form: in the right to exclude, in Foucault's terms, in the power to let die (Foucault 2003). The silent, yet visually powerful violence of the border crossing is “a violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death” (Butler 2006: 36). In wielding this violence and in negotiating the politics

of death at its door, “Fortress Europe” functions as a rudimentary proxy of Europe defined through territory, and through exclusion of and violence against the Other. Greece—country and people held in suspension under the threat of socio-economic collapse under an EU-imposed ghost of financial default—is tasked with the upkeep of the border in the service of the ideality of a Europe by which it has already been dispossessed. Lesbos, the border, the region, is not only assigned the management of a refugee crisis, but also the management of death, a death that is constantly being normalized as we write and as you read this.

Seventy-six children drowned in the Aegean Sea between 2 September, when Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old boy from Kobane, his older brother Galip, and their mother Rihan, were found washed up in the shore of Bodrum in Turkey, and the recent shipwreck of 28 October, when 300-350 refugees were piled onto an old wooden boat (*Angi* 2015; *TVXS* 2015). Aylan’s death and his heavily mediatized motionless body in a red shirt and blue shorts, a symbol of the unfolding refugee tragedy that caused international outcry, now seems representative of the norm.

The island’s morgue runs on extremely limited resources and personnel: a coroner, a young man from Preveza for the whole prefecture (the islands of Lesbos, Lemnos, and Ai Stratis) and two local forensic assistants have been on call twenty-four hours a day since the early summer. Seventy corpses (among them 45-50 children, infants, and toddlers) have passed through the morgue refrigerator since 14 October. Since 31 October, a second external container/refrigerator has operated next to the morgue, in the hopes of decongesting the overwhelmingly occupied area. On an average day, the coroner and his assistants conduct five to six autopsies. They often need to stop the autopsies as the coastguard, NGOs, local authorities and, most importantly, the relatives who need to identify the bodies of their loved ones make the process unbearable. The area is reminiscent of a war zone, not the hospital and morgue of an Aegean island. These three men saw their emotional capacities tested after the deadly shipwreck of 28 October, when they had to conduct an autopsy on a nine-month pregnant woman carrying a 2,5kg baby boy. On 31 October, a father was called to identify his daughter’s corpse. He asked one of the forensic assistants to give him his daughter’s earrings. As the assistant carefully removed them from the girl’s ears he broke down and fell into the father’s arms. Similarly, a few weeks prior to that, a mother had to identify the bodies of her three children.

In these instances the banality of death is challenged; the routine of death that governs these men’s professionalism (their ability to retain a position outside of the bodies that they are treating) is challenged and corrupted by the inflicted violence. While emphasizing his ignorance about the politics of migration, one of the forensic assistants stressed the need to open the borders, if only for the winter months, so that people would stop drowning in the Aegean. He said, “If we can do nothing to stop the Turkish smugglers who are terrorizing, blackmailing, and murdering the refugees, we should at least open the borders.” “This is a crime” he continued, “our sea washes up bodies of children who drowned more than 4 months ago. Just yesterday the coastguard brought a young boy in advanced sepsis to the morgue in a plastic bag. This will not stop; the sea will keep washing the deteriorating corpses of children throughout the winter” (phone interview given to Katerina Stefatos, 1 November, 2015).

Families, relatives, and friends gather outside the morgue, devastated by the sight of the frequently unrecognizable corpses of their dead. Then, the difficult decision of burial emerges. There are three options: they can either return to their countries in order to bury their relatives, send them to Europe if they have relatives or friends in a European country, or bury them on



Aghios Panteleimon cemetery. Photo credit: Jodi Hilton

Lesvos. The last is the most practical and pragmatic solution. However, the cemetery of Aghios Panteleimon, the final destination of the poor, subaltern, invisible inhabitants of Lesvos, of Jehovah's witnesses, Muslims and, lately, of refugees buried at the end of the cemetery is filled to capacity (Balaskas, 2015; Aggelakos, 2015). According to local authorities and the morgue personnel, there are currently only seven places left. The postmortem precarization is evident.

The burial sites for refugees resemble mass graves. In Aghios Panteleimon the deceased refugees, both Muslims and Christians, are often buried without a coffin, in a sheet (according to Islamic doctrine, the deceased is buried without a casket, wrapped in a white cloth and exhuming or relocating the body is prohibited in principle). Misspelled makeshift burial signs made out of a piece of wood or marble with only the first name scribbled in Greek or Arabic or just the date of death have become the signage of such deaths (Balaskas, 2015; Aggelakos, 2015)—just some scribbles replacing a name, an imaginary name, a fictitious ethnic or national marker, a small attempt at visibility and identity. As Judith Butler aptly reminds us “if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life...it does not qualify as a life. . . . It is already the unburied, if not the unburi-able” (2006: 14).

Do those bodies count as human? Do their lives count as lives? Are their lives grievable?

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AND OXFORD UNIVERSITY

NOTES

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank Neni Panourgía, for the invitation and her insightful comments. We would also like to thank Victoria Sanford at Lehman College (CUNY) for her

interest in our work. Electra Simou helped us get in touch with the personnel at the Lesbos Police Headquarters, especially Mr. Antonellos and Mr. Papazoglou, the police lieutenant at the Mória camp. Mary Stéfátou provided valuable information, help, and support. We are grateful to the refugees who shared their stories, fears, and hopes with us especially Samer and the volunteers and coordinators at PIKPA, in particular Efi Latsoudi, Theofilos, and Simos. Their kindness, solidarity, and resilience were a source of inspiration for us.

¹ We are not referring here to the legal dimension of these terms as defined by the UNHCR but highlighting instead the arbitrariness and instrumentalization of such categories to taxonomically support and preemptively enforce policies of exclusion and deportation.

REFERENCES CITED

- Aggelakos, Christos, 2015. «Μέρες Σεπτεμβρίου: Ημερολόγιο Μυτιλήνης,» *Lifo*, (October 1) <http://www.lifo.gr/team/gnomes/60746> Accessed: 31 October 2015.
- Avgi*, 2015. «Πάνω από 70 νεκρά παιδιά στο Αιγαίο τους τελευταίους δύο μήνες» (October 30) <http://www.avgi.gr/article/5983048/pano-apo-70-nekra-paidia-sto-aigaio-tous-teleutaiou- duo-mines> Accessed 31 October 2015.
- Balaskas, Stratis. 2015. «Γέμισε το νεκροταφείο στη Μυτιλήνη. . . . 10 σοροί προσφύγων σε αναμονή για την ταφή» *Lesvos News*, Athens News Agency/Macedonian Press Agency, (October 30). <http://www.lesvosnews.net/articles/news-categories/koinonia/gemise-nekrotafeio-sti-mytilini-10-soroi-prosfygon-anamoni-gia> Accessed 31 October 2015.
- Bilefski, Dan. 2015. “Greek Premier Condemns Europe’s Response to Migrant Crisis,” *New York Times* (October 30). <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/31/world/europe/tsipras-migrants-aegean-eu.html> Accessed 31 October 2015.
- Butler, Judith. 2006. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and Brooklyn: Verso.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. “*Society Must Be Defended:*” *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, edited by Bertani, Mauro and Fontana, Alessandro. New York: Picador.
- Jodi Hilton. 2015 <http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-11-03/cemeteries-lesbos-are-full-refugee-families-still-need-bury-their-dead>.
- TVXS, 2015. «Δύο Μήνες...76 Αϊλάν. Ταξίδια Θανάτου» (October 30) <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/dyo-mines%E2%80%A6-ebdominta-eksi-ailan> Accessed 31 October 2015.

REFUGEE VOLUNTEER GROUPS IN LESVOS

<http://lesvosvolunteers.com/>

<http://lesvos.w2eu.net/tag/village-all-together/>

http://xorioloimazi.blogspot.gr/p/blog-page_14.html?view=magazine

<https://www.facebook.com/%CE%9C%CE%9A%CE%9F-%CE%91%CE%B3%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%AC-1175287122497713/timeline/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Helping-refuges-Lesvos-island-Skala-Sykamineas--581610095340512/timeline/>

<https://www.facebook.com/HelpForRefugeesInMolyvos/>

<https://www.facebook.com/thekempsons?fref=ts>

<http://www.protistassi.com/de/ueber-protistassi/>

<http://oallosanthropos.blogspot.gr/p/social-kitchen-other-human.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/514654685298655/>