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Schlepper, Almut

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## Another Drop in the Ocean: Dispatches from the Ground

Working with Lesbos Solidarity in Pikpa Refugee Camp  
Lesbos, Greece in 2017 and 2018

**Almut Schlepper**

City of Sanctuary Dublin

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### Abstract

*In Part One, I give some background of the situation of refugees coming to Europe, especially to Greece. I give a brief outline of the EU policy of Fortress Europe and externalisation of borders. The contribution of Ireland is also discussed. In Part Two, I discuss the challenges and joys of my work in the small refugee camp Pikpa on Lesbos, run by Lesbos Solidarity where I worked for four months in 2017/2018. Other projects, such as the Mosaik Centre are also described. In view of the overall refugee population in the world of 68 million, my contribution seems just a drop in the ocean. The independent camp where I worked has around 120 residents while elsewhere on the island in the notorious “hot spot” camp Moria, 8,000 refugees are confined in a cramped space. Greece has to manage about 60,000 refugees. Still Europe’s numbers of refugees with about 0.5 % of the total population of 508 million taken in are small compared to refugees fleeing to countries neighbouring conflict and war zones.*

### Overall context of European policies and numbers of refugees

#### When did you last hear about refugees landing on Lesbos?

The international media has increasingly been focusing more on refugees crossing the sea from Libya whereas the much less dangerous route from Turkey, only 5 miles to Lesbos, has slipped from public attention.<sup>1</sup> While the numbers of refugees trying to reach Europe are significantly down from the year 2015 there is still a constant trickle trying to reach the Greek islands. The WhatsApp Group ‘Pikpa & South East Coast’ sends regular updates like these every other day:

20 August 2018

*“Two boats just arrived on Lesbos north, 49 people  
First boat landed on Tsipouri beach 22.30 26 people, 14 children, 6 women, 6 men.  
Second boat arrived in Molivos harbour 23.50 23 people, 11 children, 5 women, 7 men.”*

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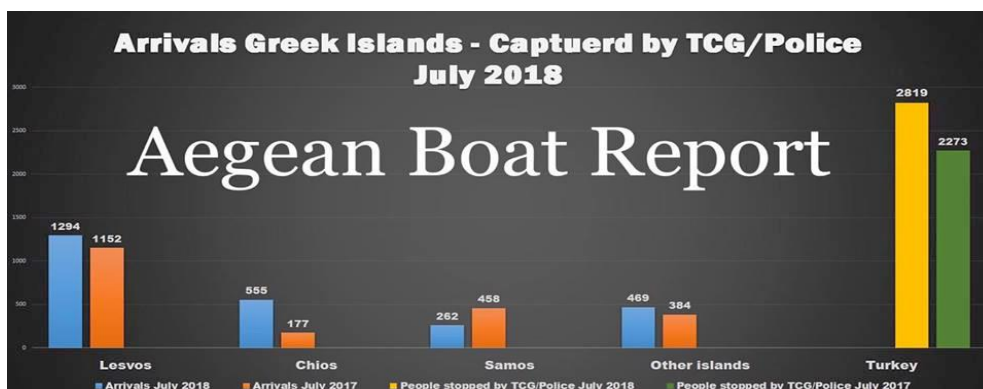
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-the-european-refugee-crisis-is-a-communications-disaster-here-s-why-91215> (accessed 1.9.18)

Lesbos is the largest island in the Northern Aegean but not the only destination, as shown by accounts of how many people landed on the neighbouring islands, Chios and Samos on 16 September 2018:

*Another hectic morning on the Greek Islands. So far 8 boats have arrived with 396 people. Lesbos 6 boats, Samos 1 boat and Chios 1 boat.  
Amongst the 324 people that arrived on Lesbos, there were 148 children!  
First boat was picked up outside the airport, Lesbos south, by British Frontex Valiant, 02.40.  
42 people - 23 children 12 women 7 men  
Second boat also was picked up outside the airport, Lesbos south, by British Frontex Valiant, 03.30. 68 people - 32 children 17 women 19 men*

*Third boat was picked up outside Korakas, Lesbos north, by British Frontex Seeker, 04.30.  
61 people - 33 children 15 women 13 men  
Fourth boat was also picked up outside Korakas, Lesbos north, by British Frontex Seeker, 06.45.  
58 people - 25 children - 10 women - 23 men  
Fifth boat was picked up outside Tarti, Lesbos south, by Frontex, 08.30.  
40 people - 6 children 10 women 24 men  
Sixth boat landed in Gavathas, Lesbos north west, 09.00.  
55 people - 29 children 12 women 14 men  
Seventh boat arrived on Samos at first light.  
42 people 22 children 8 women 12 men  
Eighth boat landed on Vokari beach, Chios south east, around noon.  
30 people - 14 children 7 women 9 men*

The numbers are supplied by Aegean Boat Report<sup>2</sup>. Here are the overall numbers for July 2018 compared with 2017 (TCG = Turkish Coast Guard)



Overall numbers for Lesbos:

September /October 2017 6,200 arrivals on 184 boats

One week in May 2018 936 arrivals

8 June 2018 164 arrivals on 4 boats

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/AegeanBoatReport/>

Overall numbers for the Mediterranean show that there is a trend of lower numbers but more deaths – showing that the routes are becoming more dangerous:

2016 363,504 crossed the sea. Of those 5143 missing or dead.<sup>3</sup>



Altogether 34,361 died en route since 1993 due to Fortress Europe policy.<sup>4</sup>

Forget all the numbers for a moment, just imagine the people on this boat could be your extended family and friends:

men fathers husbands brothers partners grandmother  
 uncles friends lovers women mothers wives sisters aunts  
 sweet hearts children play mates daughters sons cousins

Women in particular are subjected to various dangers, as this short video by the Women’s Refugee Commission shows, illustrating the special dangers that women face: “No safe routes for refugee women“. 26 April 2016 <https://youtu.be/GhIMtEE-q4>



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reached-171635-2017-deaths-reach-3116> (accessed 16/9/2018)

For more figures about overall numbers reaching Europe:

<http://migration.iom.int/europe/> accessed 19/9/2018

<sup>4</sup> [www.unitedagainstreugeedeaths.eu](http://www.unitedagainstreugeedeaths.eu) (accessed 3.6.18)

## Refugee Crisis? – Border Crisis! Fortress Europe and the externalisation of borders

The policies of the EU show no intention of opening safer routes for migrants. It wants to strengthen its borders around Fortress Europe instead of building Bridges to Europe. In EU speak the prevention of refugees reaching European shores comes under the term “solidarity”.

On 12 September 2018, on the occasion of his State of the Union Address, President Jean-Claude Juncker said: "We cannot continue to squabble to find ad-hoc solutions each time a new ship arrives. Temporary solidarity is not good enough. We need lasting solidarity – today and forever more."<sup>5</sup>

While Europe and the EU always saw themselves as representing humanism and human rights it is arming border guards to prevent people exercising their right to apply for asylum. The increase of executive and financial powers given to Frontex is significant, from 1,300 employees in 2018 to 10,000 in 2020 at a cost of 2.2 billion Euros. Frontex will acquire its own equipment, such as vessels, planes and vehicles.<sup>6</sup>

Another aspect of the Fortress Europe policy is the externalization of borders, which has been applied increasingly since 2005. Countries where the migrants come from or which they are passing through are given substantial support if they can stop the refugees reaching the borders to Europe. An obvious example was the EU Turkey deal of March 2016. But now not only bordering countries but also those much further afield where the migrants are coming from are given financial and logistical support to prevent people leaving. It involves agreements on accepting deported persons, improved tracking of people, training of police and border guards, development of extensive biometric systems and donations of equipment including helicopters, patrol ships and vehicles, surveillance and monitoring equipment.<sup>7</sup>

This policy is particularly problematic when the EU supports authoritarian regimes with poor Human Right records such as Chad, Niger, Sudan, Libya and Belarus. It is forcing migration underground and makes displaced people even more vulnerable.

We must also reject the idea that these policies are justifiable because their stated goal is to

reduce the number of deaths at sea, when it is obvious that migrants will continue to take risky journeys and die at sea until safe and legal access channels are guaranteed. Far from being improved, this situation will be actually be made worse by the externalisation approach, which gives a central role to countries like Eritrea and Libya, where prisoners are subject to systematic murder and torture.<sup>8</sup>

The EU has concentrated their efforts on Niger, trying to control its border to the main route through the Sahara to Libya, a route that has been used by migrants for centuries.

<sup>5</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-5712\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-5712_en.htm) accessed 18/9/2018

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-factsheet-coast-guard\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-factsheet-coast-guard_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/expanding-fortress-policies-profiteers-and-people-shaped-eus-border-externalisation> (accessed 16.8.18)

<sup>8</sup> Corallina Lopez Curzi *The externalization of European borders* 1.7.2016 in: <http://openmigration.org/en/analyses/the-externalisation-of-european-borders-steps-and-consequences-of-a-dangerous-process/> (accessed 15.9.18)

*“This relatively unheralded country that connects West and North Africa is now the biggest per capita recipient of E.U. aid in the world. The European Development Fund awarded \$731 million to Niger for the period 2014–20.”*<sup>9</sup>

It must be of concern that 75% of the aid is paid directly to the government rather than NGOs

## **Ireland’s role in the European context**

Lesbos has a population comparable to Westmeath (86,000 and 88,000 respectively). Refugees (about 8,000) make up about 10% of the population although these numbers fluctuate greatly depending how many are sent to mainland Greece when they get their refugee status. There they are stranded in a state of limbo, not knowing whether they will ever be able to move on or be reunited with family in other European countries.

The overall numbers for people seeking asylum in Ireland in 2017 is 0.06 % of the population, less than half of the European average of 0.14%.<sup>10</sup> In August 2015 Ireland pledged to take 4,000 refugees of the 160,000 who were to be distributed according to the Relocation Programme. Minister Charlie Flanagan’s comment was as follows: ‘...The move demonstrates Ireland’s continuing commitment to play a full and active part in the EU’s effort to meet the challenges of the refugee Crisis’.<sup>11</sup>

In reality in March 2018 Ireland had only taken 1022 refugees from the relocation programme. In addition it took 800 on the resettlement programme, from refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan. 50 unaccompanied minors from Calais were also allowed to come to Ireland. 10 times as many refugees (20,430) reached Greece in just 8 months in 2018 from January to September.<sup>12</sup> At the same time Ireland refused entry to almost 4,000 people in 2017.<sup>13</sup> Deportation orders in 2016 were 1196 of which 428 were effected, compared to 2017 when 140 of 932 orders were effected.<sup>14</sup>

In 2017 about 3,000 people applied for asylum in Ireland while about 6,000 were still waiting for a decision.<sup>15</sup>

## **Is Europe flooded with refugees?**

At the height of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven made this point: “Imagine there is a town square with 500 people and one more person enters it.” Here is another image of the reality of 2.72 million refugees and asylums seekers who have come to the EU.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2018/05/22/niger-europes-migration-laboratory> (accessed 19.9.18)

<sup>10</sup> [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asydcfst&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asydcfst&lang=en) (accessed 20.9.18)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2017/0915/905107-refugees-ireland-eu/> (accessed 10.9.18)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reach-73696-deaths-reach-1565> (accessed 10.9.18)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/almost-4-000-denied-entry-to-ireland-in-2017-1.3618042> (accessed 10.9.18)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/june-the-busiest-month-for-deportations-so-far-this-year-1.3617313> (accessed 3.9.18)

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida\\_ie\\_2017update.pdf](https://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_ie_2017update.pdf) accessed 18.9.18)

<sup>16</sup> Postcard from UNHCR Ireland



The problem is the uneven distribution: 77% live in just 5 countries: Sweden, Germany, Austria, France, Italy. Even at that it is still a tiny amount in comparison to the world refugee population. Of those 68 million refugees worldwide, most are displaced within their own country (40 million) and the remaining 25 million flee to neighbouring countries. Only 3.1 million are asylum seekers.

The main hosting countries are:

Pakistan	1.4 million
Turkey	2.9 million
Lebanon	1 million (every fourth person)
Uganda	1 million
Ethiopia	800 000
Bangladesh	1 million Rohingya (UNHCR) <sup>17</sup>

## My work on Lesbos for Lesbos Solidarity in Pikpa refugee camp

When refugees arrive by boat on the island they are first taken to Moria where they can make their application for asylum. Processing these claims takes months, sometimes years. As a result this camp is hopelessly overcrowded (8,000 people in a space conceived for 2000), it is unsafe and the services for the physical and mental wellbeing of its occupants are totally inadequate.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/en-ie/figures-at-a-glance.html> (accessed 20.9.18)

The residents frequently went on protest on Sappho square, in the centre of Mytilini. In bad weather the conditions become worse.

In a [BBC documentary](#) it was described as the “worse refugee camp on Earth”. BBC News 28 Aug 2018. A [video](#) from Médecins sans Frontières “Stuck in Moria Refugee Camp” deemed it worse than what he has seen during the Ebola Crisis in Africa

Women, children and other vulnerable people are exposed to increased danger. People can be transferred from Moria to Pikpa if they are assessed as vulnerable. However, Pikpa can only accommodate between 100 and 140 residents and has a long waiting list.

**Vulnerable people include:**

- refugees with disabilities
- single parents and single females at risk
- elderly refugees at risk
- families with young children
- LGBT persons at risk
- families of shipwreck victims
- refugees needing medical care and families of hospitalised refugees
- refugees on relocation programme

**Lesvos Solidarity – organization and services:**

Lesvos Solidarity is a Greek NGO and depends entirely on donations to provide the following services:

- food boxes three times a week and lunches
- clothing and daily care items, laundry
- housing and shelter, furniture, kitchen utensils
- medical care and psychological social and legal support
- interpretation
- transportation and bus fares
- events and activities (excursions, choir, football)
- language, computer classes and choir in Mosaik
- community work
- up-cycling of life jackets in Safe Passage workshop, employing refugees
- restaurant “Nan” employing refugees

Lesvos Solidarity gives full time employment to Greek staff, administrators, nurses, driver, psychologist, and provides legal support. Residents of Pikpa are involved in the upkeep of the camp. They are involved in the garden and the construction work. There is a cleaning schedule for the public spaces and weekly meetings when everything is translated into Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, and French. Even though they do not know how long they can stay some residents even create their own garden behind the house.

**My own contribution to the work in the camp**



The volunteers come from all over the world and from different backgrounds and age groups. They are assigned work that corresponds with their experience and abilities. As I have been a language teacher all my life the obvious task was to give English classes. In the morning I taught a group of children from 7 to 14 who had not managed to get a place in a Greek school for various reasons. I taught a number of adults, mostly one to one as the levels differ a lot, and also a group of women. An important aspect of the work is not just the teaching of the language but giving people whose lives are so confusing and unpredictable some structure in their day. Having a schedule gives them some feeling of security. This is particularly important for the children whose schooling has been interrupted, often for years.

As always when teaching a language you teach numerous skills, such as intercultural understanding, geography, mathematics, practical information about health, nature and the asylum process. People who have been displaced so many times have to get used to placing themselves in the world, reading the map and finding their own location. Here is one of the worksheets:

*Where do you live?*

*I live in house No.... in Pikpa.*

*Pikpa is a camp in the south of Lesvos, near the airport.*

*Lesvos is an island in the north of Greece, near Turkey.*

*Greece is a country in the south of Europe.*

*Europe is a small continent, north of Africa, west of Asia.*

*The earth has six continents - Europe, America, Africa, Asia, Australia, Antarctica*

*The earth moves around the sun. So we have sunrise in the East and sunset in the West.*

*The moon moves around the Earth. It also rises in the east and sets in the west.*

*The earth is one of 8 planets, we see them as bright stars in the sky.*

*Mercury Venus Earth Mars Jupiter Saturn Uranus Neptune*

## **Challenges and rewards of the work**

The children have not attended school for a number of years. They have to get used to a structure, regular lesson times, looking after their own school materials. They also have to learn social behaviour and try to help and respect each other. Unfortunately, the differences between Arabs and Kurds became an issue even with the children, so they had to learn not to fight. Even within the small group there was a large range of abilities with, some having a learning disability.

The adults also showed a great variety of levels of literacy and educational backgrounds. Some had attended school in their home country for 12 years, some had to learn to shape the letters and phonics. In ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) teaching you cannot just use any English text book. You have to be flexible, creative and sensitive to cultural differences.

Often it is more appropriate to use the experience of the learner as the basis for a text. Here is a work sheet for the time of Ramadan:

*Monday – Tuesday – Wednesday – Thursday – Friday – Saturday - Sunday — weekend*

*What day was it yesterday? Yesterday was Tuesday*

*What day is it today? Today is Wednesday.*

*What date is it today? Today is 16 May 2018 . ( The sixteenth of May twenty eighteen)*

*Tomorrow is 17 May. It is the beginning of Ramadan.*

*On 15 June is the end of Ramadan. Ramadan lasts for 30 days.*

*The time of the start of Ramadan depends on the new moon.*

*In the month of Ramadan many Muslims fast.*

*They do not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset.*

*The sun rises around 4 a.m. in the east*

*The sun sets around 8.30 p.m in the west.*

*In the evening they break the fast and eat dates.*

*Children do not fast. Also old and sick people, pregnant women or women with babies do not have to fast.*

*Some sportsmen, footballers do not have to fast before a big match.*

***Ramadan Mubarak!***

Both children and adults are highly motivated and eager to learn. As most of them are already multilingual they are open to learn another language. Materials are directly useful for their everyday lives, for example finding their way around town, buying food or medicine, cooking, attending a clinic, planting a garden, describing an event in which they have participated. Some could even find work in “Nan Restaurant” run by Lesbos Solidarity when they mastered the kitchen vocabulary. Here is worksheet for the kitchen:

*In the kitchen*

*What do you have?*

*I have.....*

*a fridge, a cooker, an oven,*

*a sauce pan , a frying pan,*

*a wooden spoon a chopping board,*

*plates, cups, mugs*

*Knives, forks, spoons.*

*What did you have at home?*

*At home I had .....*

*What would you like to have ?*

*I would like to have.....*

*a mixer, a grater, a can opener, a baking tray, a sieve, a big knife*

*What do you need?*

*I need an apron not to get dirty.*

*I need an oven glove not to burn myself*

*I need a big saucepan to boil lots of potatoes.*

*I need a sharp knife to cut the meat.*

*I need a mixing bowl to mix flour, eggs, sugar.*

*I need a frying pan to make pancakes.*

*What do you do?*

*I turn the cooker on/ off*

*I boil the water, the potatoes.*

*I cut the vegetables.*

*I slice the cucumber.*

*I grate the cheese.*

*I fry the onions*

*I add water*

*I stir the soup.*

*I mix the flour, water and oil.*

*I roll the dough.*

*I bake the bread*

*How is the food?*

*It is hot —cold*

*spicy— bland*

*salty — sweet*

*dry – liquid*

*It tastes delicious — terrible.*

It is a joy to see what a difference it makes to their confidence and their well being. I think the most important effect you have as a teacher in this context is not just teaching them a bit of vocabulary but showing that you care for them, that you take time and listen to their stories. By showing them respect you give them back some dignity.

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish who is the learner and who is the teacher. You can learn so much about the lives of people before they came to the camp, their skills, courage and incredible resilience. In the art workshop residents also get an opportunity to express their feeling non-verbally as is shown on the painting of the home farm of a Syrian refugee, Jaber, who also worked as an English teacher in other camps on Lesvos.

Jaber's post on FB:

Pikpa is a bright spot in the heart of Lesvos. It is a big nest for all migrating birds and people from everywhere in our universe. I lived there with my family for four months until June. I loved that nice place. I have good memories, smiles mixed with tears. I respect the staff working there and I love them for their generosity, help, cooperation and kindness. I can say

that Pikpa is a nice shelter that takes care of refugees from all nationalities. Pikpa remains a beacon of hope, solidarity and peace.

## Other projects run by Lesvos Solidarity

The town of Mytilini houses the Mosaik Support centre where refugees and locals find a safe and warm space that offers a range of activities like language courses, yoga, workshops in arts and crafts, and lectures. It provides employment for about 20 people, both Greek and refugees, thus strengthening the connection to the community of Lesvos.

In the Safe Passage workshop which employs refugees the discarded lifejackets are up cycled and turned into useful bags.

Another project in the Mosaik Centre is the Intercultural Choir Cantalaloun and the Children's choir Polyphonica where locals meet with refugees. They sing songs in Greek, Arabic, English and Turkish. They performed together with Turkish Musicians the Musical *Mahabharabbit*, a modern version of the story of the flood. Everybody dressed up as a person or a thing they wanted to save from the flood: poets, musicians, storytellers, doctors, plumbers, trees, flowers, birds and water on stage.

To give an overview of a day in the camp, here is one of my group letters.

17 April 2018

Hello Everybody,

Somebody asked me once what a typical day was like, working in a refugee camp. Well, I can only say, there is no such thing, every day is different and unpredictable. So I will just pick one day, Tuesday 17 April.

In the morning I make my Greek coffee, it is a real exercise in patience. The moment you are not watching it boils over. I have my daily fix of newspaper with the Irish Times and check the emails to see how the campaign to keep the Tallaght Intercultural Centre is going and the City of Sanctuary Politics course. So I know what I am missing back home.

I hitch a lift to the camp as the bus is always a bit too late. Greek people are so kind. They often go out of their way to take me right to the doorstep and thank me for volunteering.

The children are late as usual, I have time to clean the table and benches which are covered with dust from the Sahara. The internet is not working so I have to produce the opening song myself. We are doing a boring topic: Days of the week, dates. They all don't know when their birthday is. Teaching children is quite a challenge for me, especially as these range from 7- 12. I have to stop the youngest from crawling over the table and the eldest on from getting bored. Their attention span is about 5 min and they spend most of that time looking for erasers and sharpeners. What worries me most is the fighting going on between the Syrian and the Kurdish children. "Ali Baba" = thief, seems to be the milder swear word. And he wasn't even a thief at all.

I believe children are not naturally racist. They must have picked it up from their parents.

My next student is a young adult from Congo who can speak fluent English but cannot read at all. So I have to go back to teaching basic phonics, rhyme words.

The 14 year old Maryam cannot come because she has to babysit her little brother while the mother is in hospital.

The next student comes without his pregnant wife as she is not feeling well. I suspect she finds it difficult to keep up with her husband. He tells me about his work as a barber in Mytilini and baking the bread for the family. He used to be a mechanic and a tiler. You have to be flexible

as a refugee.

From my table I can watch the construction team building seven new houses. I envy them for their work. It seems to be a lot more clear cut.

After lunch I pick up a new group of five women. The basic questions “are you alone or with your family”, “ How many children do you have” are treacherous as they uncover so much misery, separation and death. It takes them a while to find the place where they come from. The Somali woman is thrilled to find her country on the world map.

After that there is a workshop for volunteers. It is great chance to switch off. I will describe the exercises at the end of this letter.

Going for a swim gives a short reprieve. But then I have to walk into town for a march for the Moria 35 who were arrested last July after a protest turned violent. A lot of the arrested had not been at the protest at all, it seemed the Greeks police mainly picked out African refugees. At the same time the Afghans, women and children are staging a protest on Sappho square against the conditions in Moria. One of them died, presumably because of lack of medical support which indeed is poor as is the legal support, lack of interpreters etc. So while you are trying to manage the work in the camp all these outside influences are going on as well. There is a continuous flow of new refugees (around 1000 in two weeks), desperate conditions in the reception camp Moria, news of boats capsizing, people waiting in vain for help in the water for hours, whole families wiped out.

And then there is the larger picture. Greece changing its asylum regulations, Europe closing its borders, right wing parties winning ground, and the wars fuelled by the European and Russian arms industry with no end in sight.

I should end on a more cheerful note. Today I watched the Arab and Kurdish children playing marbles together. And on Monday 23 April is Earth Day and we will clean up the beach with the children instead of teaching!

Thank you for listening to my story

All the Best

## Homer's Odyssey - parallels and differences

At first sight the parallels to the Odyssey seem obvious. Just like the refugees he comes from Asia Minor, returning from the war in Troy. Odysseus even briefly stopped in Lesbos. He is often shipwrecked and washed ashore with nothing but the clothes on his back. He is caught between the rocks of Scylla and Charibdis, just like the boats crossing from Turkey are caught between Frontex and the Turkish Coast guards. In the episode with the Cyclops he saves his life by claiming “My name is nobody”. Often refugees have to change their identity to get a better chance when claiming asylum. The sailors are seduced by the song of the sirens, just like many refugees are by the prospects of a better life in Europe, only to have to give up all hope when they reach the shore.

The difference is obviously that Odysseus is not fleeing from war but returning home as a victorious participant in the Trojan war. In Greek the word ξένος, ‘xenos’ means both stranger and guest’, so “Xenophilia”, the friendship towards the stranger was imperative. Before Odysseus is even asked his name and origin, he is bathed and massaged with oil, given new clothes and wined and dined. When he leaves his host gives him precious gifts. Sometimes this xenophilia can be overwhelming as in the case of Circe who will not let him go. But in the end Odysseus is returning to his wife and son who have been waiting faithfully for 20 years.

For people who have lost everything, home country, house, job, friends and dignity to be reunited with their family is the most important goal.

To conclude here is the voice of Syrian poet Amir Darwish reflecting on the experiences of refugees in general.

### Where I come from

Where I come from  
From the earth I come  
To the earth I come  
From the heart of Africa  
From the kidneys of Asia  
From India with spices I come  
From a deep Amazonian forest  
From a Tibetan meadow I come  
From an ivory land  
From far  
From everywhere around me  
From where there are trees, mountains, rivers and seas  
From here, there, from everywhere  
From the womb of the Mediterranean I come  
From a mental scar  
From closed borders  
From a camp with a thousand tents  
From shores with Alan the Kurd I come  
From a bullet wound  
From the face of a lone child  
From a single mother's sigh  
From a cut in an inflatable boat about to sink  
From a bottle of water for fifty to share  
From frozen snot in a toddler's nose  
From a tear on a father's cheek  
From a hungry stomach  
From a graffiti that reads, "I was here once"  
From another one a tree says "I love life"  
From a missing limb  
Like a human with everything I come to share the space.<sup>18</sup>

## References

### WEBSITES:

United Nations High Commission for Refugees, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

European Migration Network of the EU Commission, [www.emn.ie](http://www.emn.ie)

EU Commission <https://ec.europa.eu>

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.orient-news.net/en/news\\_show/118333/0/Where-I-come-from-A-poem-on-refugees-by-Syrian-poet-Amir-Darwish](https://www.orient-news.net/en/news_show/118333/0/Where-I-come-from-A-poem-on-refugees-by-Syrian-poet-Amir-Darwish)

International Organisation for Migration, [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

AIDA, [www.asylumineurope.org](http://www.asylumineurope.org)

[www.unitedagainstrefugeedeaths.eu](http://www.unitedagainstrefugeedeaths.eu)

[www.womensrefugeecommission.org](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org)

[www.openmigration.org](http://www.openmigration.org)

<https://reliefweb.int>

[www.newsdeeply.com](http://www.newsdeeply.com)

Human Rights watch, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

NGOs ON LESBOS :

Lesvos Solidarity, [www.lesvossolidarity.org](http://www.lesvossolidarity.org)

Mosaik, [www.lesvosmosaik.org](http://www.lesvosmosaik.org)

One Happy Family Community Centre, <https://ohf-lesvos.org>

Médecins sans Frontières, [www.msf.gr](http://www.msf.gr)

Refugee Boat Foundation, <https://bootvluchteling.nl>

Emergency Response Centre International, <https://ercintl.org>

Lighthouse Relief, [www.lighthouserelief.org](http://www.lighthouserelief.org)