

MODULE 4. DETENTION CENTRES

Capsule 1. A history of a cap: from Moria to the new multipurpose reception and identification center (MPRIC).

Socio-spatial segregation and ghettoization of refugees. The fatal triangle of urban precariousness¹

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Mytilene has a past of socio-spatial differentiation, which has been transformed in socio-spatial segregation in the middle of the Asia Minor refugee-crisis, between 1920 and 1930 (Artemi & Petropoulou 2015). The Northern part of the city, the Synoikismos neighbourhood near the ancient old port (Anagnostopoulou 2006; Anagnostou, 2011), was the more industrial and polluted part of the city (electricity centre and other industries, near the sea). It is where refugees from Asia Minor concentrated in the years 1920-1950. The Southern part of the city (Akleidiou, Sourada) was a middle - upper class quarter,

¹ Based in the text: Petropoulou C., 2021. Local Economies and Socio-spatial Segregations in the Aegean Islands: Touristic Development Versus Refugee Arrivals and Ghettoization? The Case of Lesbos Island. In: Dominguez-Mujica J., McGarrigle J., Parreño-Castellano J.M. (eds) International Residential Mobilities. Geographies of Tourism and Global Change. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77466-0_16

built of luxury homes near by clean and beautiful beaches. The installation of the Airport and the University in this South area changed the land use and the social profile (big traditional luxury houses divided in rooms for students) without completely changing its landscape image. In the second half of 20th century, the new modern centre-city and many new neighbourhoods (like Chrysomalousa, Kalithea etc.) are developed in an area between the old historical centre and the residential luxury south of the city (Artemi, Petropoulou, 2015).

On the other hand, in Lesvos, immigrants' detention centres have been in use since 2001. In 2003, **the detention centre of Pagani** opened. It is a time when official nationalist discourse rendered immigrants and refugees a menace (Petrakou et al. 2015; Troubeta 2015). The distribution of racist information against refugees by mass media and the creation of politics of discrimination –stigmatization– criminalization with the parallel abandonment of social politics became a critical factor of legalizing an anti-migrant perception and opinion of some locals. In this process, the “fatal triangle of urban precariousness” (Loïc Wacquant, 2014): “class fragmentation, ethnic division, and state-crafting”, is obvious.

As of 2015, the installation of refugee camps to the North of the city follows the previous pattern of socio-spatial segregation. The closest to the city, that of **Kara Tepes** (built by the Municipality, as an exemplary refugee reception camp), is erected in an area destined for the recycling of waste. The banner “recycling space” still exists, as an allegory to the human theories (Bauman 2000; Bauman and Donskis cited by Urteaga 2015). In 2016, Kara Tepes becomes a controlled but open centre under the supervision of UNHCR and the Municipality, and offers a supportable condition of living.

Further, three kilometers from the city, the **Hot Spot of Moria**, a reception - detention camp, was built near Moria community, in an old

army camp for 2200 people. Currently, inside and around this camp of Moria, more than 20,000 people live, trapped by the EU-Turkey Statement 3/2016 that orders the State of Greece to register and handle the asylum applications by the Migration offices in this place and either accept the application or proceed to immediate deportation of the refugees back to Turkey.

The Moria camp brings together refugees from several countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Congo, Eritrea and other countries of Africa and Middle East. Seventeen thousand refugees are installed in the exterior of the main camp under tents in a territory of olive groves five times bigger than the official Hot Spot area, in inhuman conditions (without water, electricity, drainage, waste system and without any planning for infrastructure works, medical centres, schools and other public services). This situation has caused many social, environmental and public health problems not only for the refugees, but also for the inhabitants of the community of Moria.

The limited space, poor housing conditions, scarce food and the discrimination policies relative to ethnicity cause great conflicts between different ethnicities. Because of despair, alcoholism and drug addiction are increasing. Within the camp, there are jail buildings for new refugees and those who will be deported, and buildings for minors. The tents are organized per ethnic group. In the exterior of the Hot Spot, an informal city has organized itself as an emergency (groceries for cigarettes, phone cards and water, complementary meals, barber and hairdressers' shops etc.)

As has been the case with earlier mass movements of refugees in Greece (1922-1930) or other countries, as NGO Antigoni had foreseen on the basis of its international experience, "the lack of host infrastructure can cause discontent to the inhabitants of the areas where immigrants and refugees arrive, especially in cases of mass arrivals. Discontent can become racist and instead of being pressured

into the policies pursued by the authorities, it may turn against the migrants, blaming the victims themselves for these policies" (Antigoni 2012).

This policy of current abandonment and ghettoization of the peri-urban Northeast part of the city of Mytilene, in contradiction to the development policy of new luxury homes south of the city and to the gentrification process of the city centre, causes social and very conflicting policies.

After 2016, the new arriving refugees (if not deported) had to wait up to 2 years on the Island to be allowed to continue their journey to Athens, if not to Northern Europe, with the latter destination becoming an unrealized dream. Because of this situation, many refugee revolts happened, hunger strikes began (that had few positive results and only for just the strikers), fires, suicide attempts and several deaths. General insecurity exists all over Camp Moria: lack of hygiene, sexual abuse, drug trafficking, etc. (Figure 13). At the same time, the Karatepes camp and the Moria Hot Spot opened many job opportunities in NGOs.

Between 2016 and 2020 there had been many refugee manifestations demanding free movement to Athens and other European countries, and the need for measures in the Moria Hot Spot that would improve living conditions and a faster asylum decision process. Since July 2019, with the government of the right party New Democracy, the State of Greece is currently operating in a permanent "state of emergency" and a situation of regularization of the management of "outcasts of society" (Agamben 2005; Sparke 2006, Tsianos and Kuster 2016; Agier, 2012) who live in a situation of extreme poverty and neglect².

² See: Image of Moria Hot Spot 2020 in :Source:<https://ffm-online.org/refugee-incarceration-on-kos-island/>

Refugees can no longer share the public spaces of the city with the inhabitants because they are persecuted by the repetitive controls of the police (which force them to return to the Hot Spot camp). As the police multiply in the city, the city simultaneously loses its functions of care and solidarity. Within this situation the opinion of the inhabitants (that are also deeply affected by the international and national socio-economic and political crisis) changes. The fear and easy blame against the victims of the wars coming to Lesbos is a daily story. The news follows a policy of "silence" and "selective information" coming from above, that offers support for the planned construction of a new detention and concentration closed camp. New refugees cannot apply for asylum and are transported to exile sites in northern Greece (March 2020).

During 25-27th of February 2020, the inhabitants of the island, independently of their political, ethnic or religious preferences, fought against the installation of a second detention camp. They faced the police forces coming from Athens to Karava-Kavakli near Madamado (a small town with a long history of anti-fascist struggles) and Diavolorema, in the middle of the Mytilini-Kaloni road, where populations from other parts of the island gathered. After this battle, several groups of paramilitaries - fascists began beating people related to the solidarity of the refugees. At the same time, other solidarity manifestations in favour of the refugees started taking place. At the moment of finishing this text and in the time of COVID-19 "corona-virus", the security policies are related to just the local people, and the Moria Hot Spot population in reality is abandoned and restricted in this terrible place. By such a policy of ghettoization, the urban socio-spatial segregation has become extreme.

In 2020 the Moria Hot Spot was completely destroyed by a great fire (the causes remain conflicting and are attributed to refugee groups, other political interests or a combination of the above). The fire started after an attempt to build a wall that would isolate the entire

camp from the surrounding areas and mainly from access to the city and the sea. A new camp near of the KaraTepe camp its open in a very inhuman place. At the same time, the only place of reception and solidarity for refugees that existed in the PIKPA – Lesvos Solidarity area (on the other side of the city - mainly middle class) was stigmatized as an illegal occupation (despite its concession by the Municipality the 2012) and then forcibly evicted by police forces. Thus, the socio-spatial divisions were further established.

Currently, pressure from the Greek government has resumed to locate a big, closed camp (of at least 5000+ hab.)³ away from residential areas, right next to the central Sanitary Waste Landfill (XYTA). The justification for this location comes as the culmination of a series of discrimination and communication practices (fake news) against the refugees, thus confirming the proposes of Wacquant's theory (2014) of "fatal triangle of urban precariousness" (State with workfare and prisonfare).

Reflections

This research shows that the city of Mytilene lives in a situation of change from a city of thresholds (Stavrides 2010) to a city of pockets. This process has been intensified by the creation of the Moria Hot-Spot and the Karatepe camp and by the creation of luxury houses in the other part of the city.

These refugee ghetto policies went to extremes during the pandemic period through forced confinement into incompatible spaces, thus reaffirming Loïc Wacquant's (2009, 2014) approaches to the fatal triangle of urban precarity that links: class fragmentation, ethnic

³ The new Multi Purpose Reception and Identification Center (MPRIC).

division and government practices - state-crafting (state with workfare and prisonfare).

Lesvos, as a peripheral island frequently abandoned by public policies, lives at the same time the impacts of an uneven development policy within the country and Europe. In comparison with other Greek islands, it does not have a great tradition of tourism development, on the contrary, has an important agricultural production. During 2019-2020, the decisions at the European and national level of lowering the prices of milk and olive oil production together with the impacts of the concentration of public institutions in the city of Mytilene (since 2010), have emphasized the already existing territorial inequality in the interior of the island.

Since 2015, the so-called “refugee crisis” aggravated the socio-spatial segregation. In this context, Mytilene, capital city of Lesvos, transformed into a glocal centre of international, national and local conflicts related to the refugee crisis. At the same time, the geometry of power of these conflicts superpose on the structural socio-spatial changes of the city. As Nikos Xipolitas (2019) showed in his book, the situation of abandoned refugees in reception centres is not a lack of public policies, but an entry deterrence policy. From this policy, not only refugees, but also residents of nearby communities were affected (Antiracist Observatory of University of the Aegean, 2020).

Actually, the new Multi Purpose Reception and Identification Center (MPRIC) that is set to be constructed in Lesvos in 2022 in a remote and forest fire danger zone of the island. Mitchell and Sparke (2018: 1) say: “Hotspots have made migrants unsafe, even as they have been simultaneously justified in humanitarian terms as making both Europe and refugees safer”. In so doing, it is shown that in the management of the migratory body, bio and geopolitical governance technologies inescapably overlap. “The migratory body is used as a technology of

governance in a broader EU biogeopolitical game” (Mitchell and Kallio 2017: 4).

The migrant is not, however, merely a passive object of governance processes, but also an active subject (Michel and Spark 2018, Alexiou et al. 2016; Tsavdaroglou et al. 2019). Based on Massey (2005) and Anzaldúa (1987) and understanding borderlands as a space of enunciations, possibilities and multiple identities, we can say that Lesvos is a borderland space that lives under glocal embodied geopolitics. One of the effects of these policies is the rapid “gentrification of Mytilene historical city”, the “exclusion-ghettoization of newcomer-refugees” and finally “socio-spatial segregation”. In a period of crisis, the old socio-spatial segregations, gentrification, exclusion and discrimination are very important processes in the creation of a new urban configuration and structural re-organization of space.

See:

- <https://aoratespoleis.wordpress.com/2020/07/22/walking-together-collection-of-stories-on-the-refugees-right-to-the-city/>
- <https://aoratespoleis.wordpress.com/2019/05/08/contested-borderscapes-transnational-geographies-vis-a-vis-fortress-europe/>

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