

MODULE 5. INDUSTRY: IRREGULARITY PROVIDES CHEAP LABOUR

Capsule 1. Local economies in Lesvos & migration

A little of history: Mytilene, a traditional passage of migrations with impacts in contested habitus¹.

Lesvos constitutes a traditional passage of migrants moving from Asia to Europe. After the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), many refugees passed from the island (more than 100,000 refugees). Most of them moved to other parts of Greece and some of them settled in the peri-urban areas of the city of Mytilene. The delimitation of peri-urban spaces for newcomers –refugees– and the following discrimination of these populations has a long history in Mytilene, which left its traces on the urban landscape. During the period that this discrimination was under construction, the centre of this city was becoming an

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 Lesvos 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

important quarter of a medium-sized city with new public and private buildings and with some villas (epavlis) in the southern part.

The centre of the city changed because of the presence of the University of the Aegean after the 1990s and at the same time, the periphery was marginalized because of the construction of a centre for refugees in Pagani (2000-2001) and of the persecution and discrimination against local Roma populations who moved to the periphery of the city. This new segregation because of the establishment of a closed refugee camp like that in Pagani had a deep influence in the social construction of the local people's opinion.

However, at this period the anti-fascist movement is important with an influence in anti-racist comportment. "The condition of racism is changeable. Thus, a scientific and theoretical argument justifies the movement's action" (Pistikos 2012: 8), and the habitus is changeable (Wacquant 2016; Petropoulou 2018; Petropoulou 2019).

The social construction of opinion is a very important process with a big impact in the long social construction of habitus (Bourdieu 1979). The No Border festival in Lesvos in 2009 changed the discourse with another based on solidarity. After a few months, the Pagani camp closed and the deportation of refugees stopped (Troubeta 2015; Petracou et al. 2015). Between 2010 and 2015, flows from Lesvos to Athens remained open and the opinion of locals became friendly, with some exceptions related with the economic exploitation of refugees. At the same time, the socio-spatial configuration of the city (Papachristou et al. 2019) and the condition of politicoeconomically crisis (Petropoulou, 2015) played an important role in the social construction of the judgement about refugees.

Between April 2015 and March 2016, more than one million people arrived in Greece (550,000 passed through Lesvos) from several countries as refugees (UNHCR 2019). The entry into the country coincided with the government of a SYRIZA-ANEL coalition. During

such a big displacement of migrants, the inhabitants of the border islands at the beginning, and later on other solidarity volunteers and NGOs workers, who arrived quickly in Lesbos, formed a large solidarity movement. The same wave of solidarity was also spread to Athens, Salonica, Idomeni and then to many other cities in Europe (Tsavdaroglou et al. 2019).

Autonomous structures related to the first reception and assistance of the newcomers in the northern part of the island (Platanos in Skala Sykamias, etc), and open structures near the city of Mytilene (Figure 2), such as Lesbos Solidarity-PIKPA, "Better Days for Moria", "No Border Kitchen of Lesbos", created a no-formal network of solidarity (Alexiou et al. 2016). Since 2015, the Municipality of Lesbos proposed the City of Mytilene for European Capital of Culture 2021, with the slogan Mytilene Capital of Solidarity.

After the EU-Turkey Common Statement of March 20, 2016, migration policy differentiated refugees from migrants in a completely ethnic way. Spontaneous solidarity and self-management were criminalized (Petropoulou 2017). Many NGOs abandoned the city of Mytilene. At the same time, a large part of the new refugees/migrants were limited in the Aegean Islands with a ban on moving to large cities. In addition, 60,000 refugees in Greece (5,000-6,000 in Lesbos) were transferred to camps in very poor conditions and outside the cities, mostly near army camps and abandoned industries and some of them in prisons within Hot Spot fields (Tsavdaroglou et al. 2019). In 2014 the number of arrivals in Greece by sea was estimated at 41.000 persons, in 2015 the number climbed to more than 856,000 (UNHCR 2015). From 1 January to 15 October 2019, some 48,507 refugees and migrants have arrived in Greece by land and sea (European Commission 2019). The condition of control with a model of panopticon is in examination (Tsianos, V., & Kuster, B., 2016; Sparke, M. 2006). Hotspot geopolitics versus geosocial

solidarity (Mitchell, K., & Sparke, M., 2018) produce "contested habitus" (Petropoulou, 2019).

Between 2017 and 2019, many NGOs came back to the island. In parallel, new friendly spaces for refugees opened, like "Mosaik" in the centre of Mytilene and "One happy family" near the camp of Moria and Karatepe and other self-organized autonomous places of refugees in the interior or near the camp of Moria (autonomous schools created from refugees of Afghanistan – Syria – Congo and others, like Wave of Hope. In March 2020, the situation is extremely difficult because of the abandonment of a population of 17,000 refugees in precarious conditions outside the Hot Spot of Moria, among olive groves.

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 highly controlled precarious camp it's open and the normalization of discrimination with policies of pushbacks (Xipolitas, 2019; Mezzadra, S., 2016) continues with real pushbacks in interior of the sea.

On the 1st of March 2022, seven bodies of women and men from sub-Saharan Africa washed up on a beach of the city. Only a small group of supportive people organized for his farewell. The city is used to ignoring these situations. The refugee cemetery is hidden. During the war between US-Russia in Ukraine on 12 April 2022 a big anti-war manifestation of many artists took place in Sappho's Square. Contested habitus 'disturbed the waters'.

See:

- <https://lesvosatlas.net>

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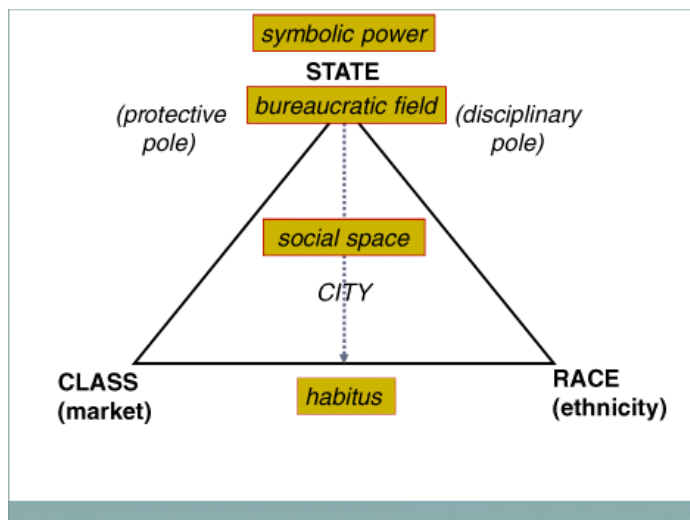
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See also : The underlying theoretical architecture



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