THE 'REFUGEE CRISIS' FROM ATHENS TO LESVOS AND BACK: A DIALOGICAL ACCOUNT

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Our grandparents, refugees
Our parents, immigrants
We, racists?[1]
The slogan that prefaces the paper provides the theoretical caveat for the tensions, limitations, and contradictions of academic discourses in conjuring the daily realities of the era of the 'refugee crisis' in Greece. This paper has the form of a dialogue between a sociologist and photographer (Myrto) and a political theorist and activist (Anna) who investigate different forms of the ways the 'refugee crisis' is changing the socio-political landscapes in Greece. The multiple aspects of our identities provide valuable tools with which we unpack the multiple and contradictory narratives of researching, learning, and disseminating in the current milieu. In particular, we are interested in the ways we shape knowledge and the tension between the epistemological and the ontological ways of knowing. In other words, by moving from theory to praxis and back, we are attempting to reconcile the problem of knowing and the problem of being part of a specific crisis milieu. For example, how can we use crisis as a research methodology? What can we learn from the ongoing 'refugee crisis' in relation to issues of citizenship, belonging, and the future of the European project? Furthermore, the paper attempts to transcend discursive borders between social sciences and the humanities by analysing the deeply performative, situated and embodied practices of doing research in moments of crisis. For example, how to navigate multiple, and at times contradictory, aspects of one's identity without returning to outmoded discourses of positivism and objectivity?

Keywords: Greece, Athens, Lesvos, crisis, refugee crisis, hotspots, borders

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1   Slogan written on Greek walls in Lesvos and Athens prior to the years of the declared 'refugee crisis'.

Imagine you are standing on the shore of a sea staring across at a landmass opposite, which forms your horizon. You know, although they are not visible to you, that beneath the surface of this sea are the corpses of thousands of people who tried to cross it in order to arrive where you are now standing. Your horizon, then, is a border. This sea has long been viewed as a threshold, and yours is not the first epoch during which it has been crossed by masses of people in a rising tide of desperation, propelled by unspeakable violence. But crossing it has, in your epoch, become a crime. It is the liquid border between what is called "Greece" and what is called "Turkey"; and the solid ground on which you are standing is the "entrance gate to Europe." That you are standing here at all depends on prior crossings—including those of your grandparents—which, many years later, contributed to this threshold nation the semblance of solidity, even as they kept gazing across to a place they never ceased to remember as "home." Recently, this border has been multiplied; metaphorically and discursively, it travels; it exists in the imagination as far away as that "island nation" eager to "Brexit" from

The shore. Photographer: Anna Carastathis.

the continental project of Europe; it's being walled up and razor-wired shut, patrolled by border hunters chasing equally imaginary refugees. Your horizon has become a wall; a multilateral bargain; an aqueous cemetery. Staring at this horizon, things stop making sense. So you turn away. You stop imagining.

In reflecting on the place of imagination, self-expression and collective cultural creation as an embodied means of engaging with the current milieu of crisis and sudden changes, Arjun Appadurai calls for a view of imagination as a popular, social, and collective fact, with a dual and antithetical character. On the one hand, 'it is in and through the imagination that modern citizens are disciplined and controlled'—by states, markets, and other powerful interests. But it is also the faculty through which 'collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge' (2000: 6). Following Appadurai, if the imagination is the realm that produces and sustains the totalities of the status quo, then it is now more crucial than ever to engage in subversive ways of imagining and redefining our vocabularies through action.

This paper follows the trajectories of the formation of hotspots in the European pe-

riphery, which have become the centre-stage of European migration policy. These political trajectories inscribe and proscribe the journeys of people making "illicit" crossings in an effort to survive wars waged by tanks and by banks, only to find themselves, once more, targets and to become the casualties of an undeclared war on migration. Hotspots are Europe's answer to a "migration management" problem it has itself produced; they are sorting grounds, islands turned into prisons, where "human rights" are meted out like scarce goods to those deemed deserving of them. According to the function of hotspots, the national border is moved inward, separating the islands from the mainland, creating a liminal zone of questionable legal status, but also multiplying the border through so-called "mobile hotspots," which follow people on the move who have circumvented the security regime (Spathopoulou, 2016; Carastathis, Spathopoulou and Tsilimpounidi, forthcoming).

The hotspot approach was presented by the European Commission in May 2015, as part of a larger policy push termed the "European Agenda on Migration" (EC, 2015). Ostensibly to facilitate the emergency relocation of refugees to other EU member states, following the EU Decisions of 14 and 22 September 2015, hotspots were conceived in order to "swiftly" sort those deemed eligible for international protection at the point of arrival on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, in Italy and Greece. Five "registration and identification centres" started operating in Greece, on the islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos. The European Agenda on Migration mandates the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Frontex, and Europol to collaborate "on the ground with frontline Member States to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants" (EC, 2015), dividing those eligible to apply for asylum from those deemed ineligible, who are slated for deportation either to their countries of origin or of exile—or, since the bilateral EU-Turkey agreement went into effect (20 March 2016), for those who passed through that country, back to Turkey. Further, Europol and Eurojust are to assist the "host" Member State in the dismantling of "smuggling and trafficking networks" (EC, 2015). The hotspot approach's main target, then, is managing human mobility across the Mediterranean: what the EU Commission defines as "mixed flows" arriving at the exterior border of the EU.

If the initial pretext for the hotspots, which became sites of indefinite detention and pre-deportation, was the relocation of refugees, it became clear by March 2016, when Balkan countries sealed their borders, closing the humanitarian corridor, that tens of thousands of refugees who had not managed to cross or to be relocated would be "stranded" in Greece. Although EU states promised in 2015 to relocate 66,400 refugees from Greece, a year later, in 2016, less than 6% had been relocated (AI, 2016). Moreover, since June 2016, relocation has only been made available to asylum seekers on the Greek mainland, trapping those who were not given the "right to the ferry" on the hotspot islands (Spathopoulou, 2016). If Lesvos was once imagined as the gateway to Europe, with the implementation of the hotspot approach, it has now become the gateway to a Fortress.

Moreover, this paper engages with the lived realities of a country after eight consecutive years of financial crisis, and after two years of what has been named the "refugee crisis" in/by/of Europe. From this initial one-layered chronological ordering of "the crises", the intersecting realities of the two phenomena become apparent. Thus, even if we primarily focus on the crisis enacted by the wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the concomitant displacement of populations, it becomes inescapable to frame

Sea as Border, author: Efi Xenou. Photographer: Anna Carastathis.

or analyse this within the milieu of precarity and dispossession within the "hosting" country. Therefore, before entering into our dialogical account, we provide the contextual framework of "nesting crises" (Carastathis, 2017); but, most importantly, we underscore how this is altering social realities both for people residing in Greece and incoming refugees. Having said this, we also want to problematise this prevalent dichotomy between the indigenous, hosting communities and the refugees, precisely by engaging in a discussion of the concentric, simultaneous nature of these declared crises.

This paper takes the form of a dialogue between a sociologist and photographer (Myrto) and a political theorist and activist (Anna) who investigate different ways the "refugee crisis" is changing socio-political landscapes in Greece. The multiple aspects of our identities provide valuable tools with which we unpack the multiple and contradictory narratives of researching, learning, and disseminating in the current milieu. In particular, we are interested in the ways we shape knowledge, and in the tension between epistemological and ontological ways of knowing. In other words, by moving from theory to praxis and back, we are attempting to reconcile the problem of knowing with the problem of being part of a specific crisis milieu.

But what do we understand by "crisis"? In Europe post-2008, crisis should be seen as social and political, rather than merely financial, as western countries witness the consequences of consumption, growth, and profit. Post-2015, "crisis" became a reference to the arrival of people fleeing wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, as the European periphery experiences the consequences of decades of western domination, exploitation, colonialism, and wars in the Middle East and central Asia. In this light, social scientists and engaged researchers must develop new approaches to examining rapid shifts in the social landscape, since crisis is not merely reflected in balance

sheets, but is mediated through spectacular imagery of loss, deprivation, and increased vectors of marginalisation. The pervasiveness of crisis has implications for how researchers approach these subjects in order to avoid a discursive crisis, through the imperative to avoid replicating the model of measuring, labelling, and seeking simplistic solutions. Moreover, this paper is consciously avoiding the replication of stereotypical images of fear, survival, and spectacular humanism from the shores of Lesvos. Instead, it provides images that move away from the spectacle, but depict the daily realities of people on the ground.

This paper, then, presents the deeply ambiguous project of engaging with a social reality that is emergent, contested, and that resists singular 'readings'. While people are still trapped in detention centres, and while the implications of ever-increasing policy changes are as yet unknown, analysis can at best seem like conjecture. Academic analysis tends to take a longer view: demanding the perspective of time in order to seem viable or conclusive. We would suggest that we need to question the very notion of viable or conclusive analysis about times of sudden social change and unfolding crises, without entirely abandoning faith in the potential for theories to be productive in a moment in which categories of meaning are revealed to be precarious. At the same time, we resist the tendency/temptation to reduce social phenomena, lived realities, and embodied subjectivities to mere numbers. As demonstrated in the latter chapters of Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou's book *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013), there is an insidious relationship between the ways 'crisis' has been problematised and schematised as 'fiscal' or 'political', and therefore positing its cures or solutions as managerial or technocratic in nature. If, however, 'crisis' erodes the distinctions between 'social' and 'economic' spheres, then the conditions of crisis necessitate new ways of responding with new tools of analysis.

Finally, on a more intimate level, the context we have outlined above leads to a subjective account of the extent to which 'crisis' inflects a personal re-evaluation of identity and (non)belonging. In the emergent moment, there is a difference between embodied experiences of crisis, its fallout and mediated representations thereof. From our position in academia outside of Greece and our marginal position on the inside, we have needed to navigate between making sense of flux whilst working to cultivate a critical distance. Researching 'home' when one is no longer 'at home', and indeed when the very idea and material conditions of home are being eroded in a range of ways, can best be achieved by questioning the borders between positionality and objectivity, home and away, belonging and the project of nation-states.

We engage in a dialogue in order to flesh out the multiple aspects of our identities both as insiders and products of the current crisis in Greece; and, at the same time, as scholars researching, writing, and teaching about "crisis-related" themes in academic institutions. By moving from theory to praxis and back, we attempt to reconcile the problem of knowing (epistemology) with the problem of being part of a specific sociocultural milieu (ontology). Furthermore, we attempt to transcend discursive borders between social sciences and the humanities by analysing the deeply embodied, situated, and sensory experiences of multiple crises.

NESTING CRISES

The hotspots installed on the Aegean islands operate in the context of a crisis regime in Greece. Currently, this crisis regime is represented through the 'crisis within a crisis' discourse—or, what elsewhere we have called the construct of 'nesting crises' (Carastathis, 2017)—according to which 'Greece' is suffering from two, overlapping, but distinct crises: the 'economic/financial/debt crisis' and the 'refugee/migration crisis.' By the end of the summer of 2015, the Greek government was declaring that it was "experiencing a crisis within a crisis" (Christodoupoulou quoted in Greenwood et al., 2015; Prime Minister of Greece, 2015), dually victimised by 'unmanageable' migration 'flows' in a context of an unmanageable debt and austerity measures required by its institutional lenders (the 'Troika' of the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission). The figure of "a crisis within a crisis" functions to delineate the boundaries of national space and time, and to construct the normative victims of what are seen as separate, if spatio-temporally overlapping political phenomena (debt and migration). The global economic crisis had already been made 'Greek' by being constructed as a problem inherent in the national economy: thus, it became a "sovereign debt crisis." Similarly, the global war on migration was reinvented as 'Europe's crisis,' and then 'Greece's crisis.' The nationalisation of 'crisis' then, has three effects: first, to conceal the global, systemic nature of violent processes of late capitalist, neo-colonial dispossession and displacement; second, to authorise the imposition of regimes of management and securitization, for instance, through the hotspot mechanism; third, to reify borders that simultaneously fortify state and supranational sovereignties while containing human beings whose mobility is rendered illicit or illegal by those borders. In other words, the figure of 'nesting crises'—'a crisis within a crisis'—emerges through the territorialisation of crisis: in this way, national sovereignty is reasserted and continental unity is reconstituted (Carastathis, 2017). If the implementation of the hotspot system on the Greek border islands reveals the transformation of EU migration and border management through the perspective of crisis, it is important to understand how our everydayness (Lefebvre, 1974) is being spatially and temporally fragmented and bordered through a proliferation of hotspot logics (Carastathis, Spathopoulou and Tsilimpounidi, forthcoming). Our experience in the nationalised space of Greece has come to be constructed and perceived through the vocabulary of 'crisis.'

One of the main concerns of this paper is to move away from the tendency to reduce social phenomena to mere figures and numbers, which has been a widespread approach in the era of fiscal austerity and mass migration. We can appeal to statistics to provide an immediate 'picture' of the ways crisis has affected people in Greece; but as we enumerate them, we would invite the reader to imagine not only the realities they disclose, but those they obscure. Welcome to Athens: a European metropolis where time is not marked out by changing seasons and falling leaves, but in between new austerity measures, debt relief memoranda, experiments in representative and direct democracy, and the concomitant spiral of unfolding crises. In Greece, after eight years of neoliberal austerity, one in three Greeks lives in poverty. Greece has the highest rate of unemployment and youth unemployment among EU member states (23% and 45.7% respectively) (Eurostat, 2017). However, even these figures could be skewed by the fact that many people who are still considered employed may have not been paid for the last 6 months (Kollewe & Inman, 2012). From 2011-2013, the

Stencil 'IMF', artist: Bleeps. Photographer: M. Tsilimpounidi.

spending capacity of ordinary people was reduced by 40%, leaving one third of the population below the poverty threshold (Traynor, 2013). In the absence of systematic studies, it was estimated in 2011 by NGOs that 20,000 people were rendered homeless in Athens alone, a number that has visibly grown (and includes recently arrived refugees) in the intervening six years (Klimaka, 2011). The health system has been radically defunded, leading to devastating direct and indirect consequences including increases in infant and adult mortality rates, seropositivity rates resulting from new infections, suicides, and malnutrition (Kentikelenis et al., 2014). Just in 2012, we saw a 45% increase in the use of antidepressants; suicide rates doubled in 2011 and tripled in the first months of 2012 (Mason, 2012).[2] The effects of austerity were sharp and immediate: as early as 2011, Doctors of the World declared a state of emergency in the centre of Athens, redeploying its international units to the city centre (Kanakis, 2011).

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has announced that there are now more refugees and internally displaced people worldwide than ever before. The largest group, Syrians fleeing the war that began in 2011, comprises 4.8 million people displaced primarily to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Europe, and overseas (UNHCR, 2016). The Greek islands closest to the Turkish coast have seen 1,030,170 refugees arriving by sea in 2015 and 2016, while an estimated 1240 people drowned in their attempt to reach the "gateway to Europe" (UNHCR, 2017). The Eastern Mediterranean

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2   The most publicised economic suicide was that of pensioner Dimitris Christoulas. He shot himself on 5 April 2012 at Syntagma square, in front of the Greek parliament, as a symbolic (final) act of his refusal to live under these conditions.

became the primary point of irregular entry into Europe after the land border with Turkey was sealed by a ten and a half kilometre fence, constructed by the Greek government in 2012 (Ekathimerini, 2012).

DIALOGUE: CHRONOLOGUE

Waiting for the Barbarians: Generational Crossings (Myrto)

In the opening stanza of his poem '*Waiting for the Barbarians*' (1904/1984), Constantine Cavafy offers some powerful snapshots of a city in 'crisis': a city preparing for the arrival of the Barbarians. As the poem unfolds, we follow the rituals of this preparation in what appears to be a state of emergency since the daily repertoires of the city and its inhabitants have been dramatically altered by these preparations. Cavafy carefully builds up a sense of anticipation while he offers glimpses of these preparatory rituals: for example, the senate stops legislating because the Barbarians will arrive and they will make their own laws; or, the orators will stop making their usual speeches because the Barbarians will arrive and they are bored of rhetoric. And the poem concludes,

> Night is here but the barbarians
> Have not come
> And some people arrived from the borders,
> And said that there are no longer any barbarians
> And now what shall become of us without any barbarians?
> Those people were some kind of solution
> (Cavafy, 1904/1984).

Cavafy's poem provides a frame for some of the concerns running throughout our analysis, following the trajectories of a city in crisis and its constant, desperate search for Barbarians. In Cavafy's poem, crisis is seen as a continuous frame-breaking moment, a fluctuating state of 'waiting for' which dismantles the blueprints that govern everyday practices, imposing new borders between the Self and the Other and anticipating new orders for navigating daily encounters and performances of belonging. This evocation of the new borders of crisis both in Athens and Lesvos through the frame of everyday life brings to mind Michel de Certeau's remark, "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across" (1988: 129). This assertion captures a postcolonial world traversed by diasporic affiliations, the multiple migrations of people, and narratives of unprecedented transnational dependencies. Quite similarly, the slogan that appeared on walls in Athens and Lesvos, "Our grandparents, refugees; Our parents, immigrants; We, racists?" provides the theoretical caveat for the tensions, limitations, and contradictions of academic discourses in conjuring the daily realities of the era of the 'refugee crisis' in Greece.

I remember my grandfather spending hours staring at those same waters between Greece and Turkey, as if he was waiting for a sign that would alter the tranquillity of the view. My grandfather arrived to Greece in a boat, fleeing the Asia Minor catastrophe. He too remembers the journey in an ungoverned boat from the Turkish shores to

Greece. He survived the journey and the stigmatisation of being a refugee and he returned to the same shores with the same wish every time. To be able to make the journey back, to return to what he called his 'home' that was no longer there after the end of the war. So, it became a habit of his during the last years of his life to gaze at the waters from the Greek side for hours, telling me the stories from the other side, or what he remembered from the other side, or perhaps more precisely what he thought he could remember from the other side. I left the village in which I grew up with my grandparents for the big city (Athens), then I left Greece to study abroad, then I left the abroad for another abroad to work. I left from places in which I temporarily lived so many times, yet I always return to this view of the sea from my grandparent's village for a sensation of 'home'. So, here I am standing on the Greek side of the sea, staring, replaying the stories of my grandfather, and feeling like 'home'. And there it is, in the horizon: a boat. Not what I was waiting for.

Hope the voyage is a long one: Generational Crossings (Anna)

Two of my grandparents were born in Alexandria, the cosmopolitan birthplace of the queer poet who taught us that the nostalgic desire to return home is what makes possible the migratory journey:

> Ithaka gave you the marvellous journey.
> Without her you would not have set out.
> She has nothing left to give you now.
>
> And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
> Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
> You will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.
> (Cavafy, 1911/1992)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, my grandparents' ancestors emigrated to Egypt from the island of Kalymnos in the south Aegean, and from a mountain village in the Pilio region of what had then recently become the mainland of the newly independent Greek nation-state. They were what today would be called "economic migrants"—in one case, an "unaccompanied minor"—who left Greece because their survival had become impossible there. My grandparents met each other in Alexandria; during The War, in which my grandfather had been conscripted by the Greek army, they arrived in Axis-occupied Athens, where two of my grandmother's siblings died—along with 300,000 others—in the famine. The War gave way to another war—this one declared a 'civil war' but in reality a proxy war between Cold War hegemons—and then to dictatorship, and then to the restoration of democracy and 'national unity'. My sister and I were born in the first generation to enjoy the fruits of a post-dictatorship time of democratic socialism. When I was eight years old, my father and mother—herself already twice an immigrant, from Ireland to England and from England to Greece—decided to emigrate to Canada. Twenty-five years later, having myself emigrated to the U.S. to work, I decided to return to Greece—a Greece once more 'in crisis'—while most people my age living there were trying to find ways to emigrate in the opposite direction in order to escape mass unemployment brought by austerity. When I arrived to live in Lesvos, in the spring of 2014, the island was at the precipice

of what, a year later, would be declared a 'migration crisis.' But taking the perspective of a family like mine (or Myrto's, or, for that matter, the family of most "Greeks"), whose members for generations have migrated, 'the crisis' was a function of a rapacious, authoritarian global capitalism, insatiable in its deadly desire for profit at the expense of disposable human lives.

The journey along migratory routes searching for, remembering, or inventing roots, is indeed a long one, and perhaps interminable. If Cavafy's use of migration as a metaphor for the journey that constitutes a human life can risk romanticising migratory voyages (particularly forced or coerced ones), his poem, *Ithaka*, also warns us of the opposite risk: that is, of the reification of "original homelands" that hardened nationalisms, militarised borders, and weaponised seas violently produce. Belonging to a family that has always migrated—and one in which I learned to feel, at once, nostalgia and non-belonging—and engaging in my own ongoing migratory journey (from Greece, to Canada, to the U.S., and back to Greece) with a powerful passport, gives me a perspective on the false dichotomy between the "migrant" and the "indigenous" local. At the same time, staring across a sea that became a graveyard precisely to shore up this dichotomy, I reflect on the possibility of return that is foreclosed to those rendered stateless and therefore homeless, who yearn to rest their eyes on the expanse of the horizon of their own Ithaka.

On the map: geography, power, and territories (Myrto)

Greece's geographical position borders the European Union with the Balkans, Asia and Africa with 92 per cent of the borders being coastline, making it extremely difficult to have a secure border control system. Currently, these factors make Greece the ideal 'entrance gate' to Europe. Quite possibly those were the same factors that made part of the geographical entity that we now call "Greece" an ideal meeting point for trade and commerce in the Mediterranean region. In other words, geography is very much responsible for the ancient Greek civilisation, which is in turn responsible for the birth of democracy—as ancient Greece is often described by many commentators: as 'the cradle of democracy and civilisation'. This idealised and mainstream portrayal of Greek history becomes a very difficult and problematic heritage that creates space for deeply nationalistic and ethnocentric reactions. To be more precise, given that almost every form of nation-building and construction of homogenous ethnic identities evokes the sentiments of a glorious past; this is not a uniquely Greek phenomenon. Yet, in the Greek case, this ancient heritage is supported by worldwide admiration and is presented as the foundation of western civilisation. Such an idealised heritage makes forging new alternatives a difficult, almost impossible, task. Especially in the milieu of crisis and rising xenophobia, when the future is precarious and therefore very difficult to imagine; the present is trapped in a 'waiting for'[3] state; and thus, the certainties of the past seem to be the only way forward.

In this dialogical account, we engage with 'crisis' as a progressive and on-going project which questions the mainstream notion of the term, according to which 'crisis' is

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3   For example, waiting for the right Prime Minister who will lead the country away from debt and bankruptcy; and/or waiting for the correct financial recipe that the Troika will implement that would eventually restart the economy; and/or waiting for the return to national sovereignty and the reinstitution of the old currency; the list can go on with the numerous saviours and miracles for which the society is waiting.

Fragments and Ruins of Ancient Heritage.
Photographer: M. Tsilimpounidi.

a temporary state of unrest, a momentary schism in normativity, leading to the light at the end of the tunnel. Yet, when it is clear that the crisis being faced by Greece and Europe is not only economic, nor one with a simple fiscal solution, then the idea that a society can return to normal is both empirically intangible and intellectually fraught (Tsilimpounidi, 2017). It is rather difficult to expand upon the ways 'crisis' has altered the fabric of Greek day-to-day life as the situation unfolds rapidly, rendering any attempt to theorise contingent at best, and at worst, always already out of date. This kind of 'crisis' is more suited to media analysis, with its rapid pace of dissemination. And yet, there are nevertheless some emerging paradigms like Cavafy's evocation of 'Waiting for the Barbarians' which addresses the loss of certainty that remains when 'crisis' exposes the constructs of nation and Others to be slippery. In other words, there will always be lulled citizens waiting for the Barbarians on the other side of the borders. This gains significant connotations in the era of declared 'nesting crises' in which Europe is implementing tighter and more aggressive border control systems, clearly dictating from an institutionalised perspective who can be cast as a citizen, who as a refugee, and who as a Barbarian.

On the map: camps, prisons, ferries, and fences (Anna)

The hotspot serves to geographically isolate people who have defied the geopolitical order of borders, making cynical use of the islands' topography—and where it fails to do that, as a nebulous technology of governance with no clear definition, and ambiguous legal basis, it becomes mobile, following migrants onto the mainland, into city squares and border zones via the ferries which transport those with the right papers from Lesvos to Athens. While the urgency of crisis management is expressed, in official communiqués in the hotspot's directive to "swiftly" divide those deemed deserving (or, as the technocrats shamelessly put it, in "need") of international protection from those who will be deported back over the Aegean, in fact what the Lesvos hotspot has produced is a regime of institutionalised waiting: if disavowing the previous government's policy of indefinite detention, under the current policy, in practice asylum applicants face months if not years of waiting to be granted the right to the ferry, the right to leave the
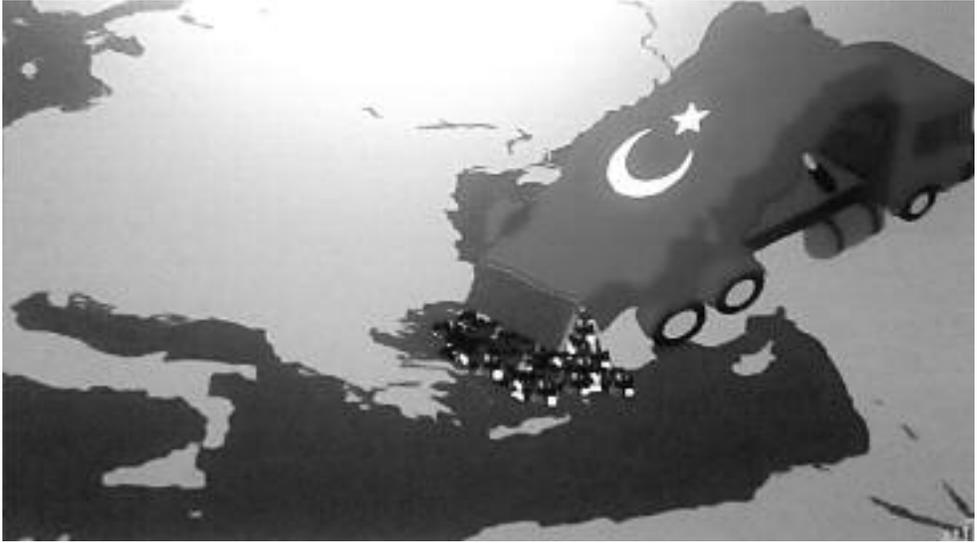
EU-Turkey deal, author: Dimitris Hantzopoulos. Photographer: A. Carastathis.

hotspot island, the right to be relocated to another EU country. On the other hand, reports based on audits of the hotspot procedures reveal that initial sorting procedures occur hastily, and, based on the EASO's "inadmissibility decisions," deportation orders are issued in violation of international asylum law, but in conformity with the EU-Turkey agreement which stipulates the return of all "irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands" as of 20 March 2016 to Turkey, which is defined as a "safe third country" for asylum seekers (ECCHR, 2017). Yet, even before the EU-Turkey deal came into force, eligibility decisions were being made in the Lesvos hotspot of the Moria detention centre on the basis of nationality, with Pakistani migrants (or those perceived by officials to have this nationality), for instance, automatically being handed deportation orders (Carastathis, Spathopoulou & Tsilimpounidi, forthcoming). Thus, the hotspot re-orders not only space but time, accelerating it for some and decelerating it for others, based on "swift" decisions and violated promises.

Not only the promise enshrined in the Geneva Convention, that if you are fleeing war or persecution the signatory states will "protect" you, but the commitments of EU member and accession-aspirant states to "welcome" refugees, were violated as one by one, states' relocation promises evaporated into the thin air of suffocating nationalisms. As we saw the Balkan corridor being razor-wired shut and central European states militarising their borders against human movement, not only the hotspot islands, but the entire country became a site of containment. On 15 September 2015, the European Parliament voted (470) in favour to relocate refugees from Greece and Italy to other European countries (131 were opposed, while 50 Parliamentarians were absent). Although EU states promised to relocate 66,400 refugees from Greece, a year later, in 2016, less than 6% had been relocated (AI, 2016). This reproduces the global standard, according to which, 86% of refugees are hosted by what the UN Refugee Agency refers to as "developing countries," while less than 1% of the world's refugees are ever resettled (UNHCR, 2016). Indeed, at current rates, it will take 18 years for EU states to fulfil their

Refugee crisis management with view of Greek taverna. Photographer: M. Tsilimpounidi.

resettlement promises made in 2015, effectively "trapping" refugees in Greece (AI, 2016). Moreover, repayment of the "Greek" debt is forecast to continue until 2057. In other words, the production of Greece as Europe's hotspot, as its holding container, coincides with the production of Greece as Europe's debt colony, as its economic and symbolic periphery (even as it is posited as the 'cradle' of its civilisational or political values). Transformed, through the supranational management of 'nesting crises', into the "debtor" and the "camp" of Europe, Greece becomes a "waiting room of history" (Chakrabarty, 2000: 7; Tsilimpounidi, 2017: 87-88; Carastathis, 2017).

Journeys: From Athens to Lesvos and back (Myrto & Anna)

On a field visit to Lesvos in December 2016, we drive on the newly paved road from Mytilene to Skala Sykamnias, the point on the island most proximate to the Turkish mainland, where a year ago local and Athens-based solidarity activists and international volunteers had created a makeshift reception operation to bring boats ashore and provide a warm meal, dry clothing, and assistance to people who had made the perilous crossing. As we sit in a taverna, we observe a crowd of Greek and Turkish coastguards, international lifeguards, Arabic-language interpreters, photographers, and a Protestant priest with binoculars gathering at the shore. They have been notified that a boat will shortly be arriving and are casually waiting, occasionally lifting their gaze to the horizon to check the boat's progress. This is a new ritual of waiting, in an atmosphere quite unlike that which marked the frenzied reception of refugees by solidarity activists at the height of the "crisis." By now, hotspots in place, the anxious rhythms of the human crisis have been replaced by the cynical pragmatism of its humanitarian-military management. This, of course, points to an economy that

is thriving in times of crisis, that of reception and management of migrants and refugees now performed by international NGOs and state-run facilities. It is important to note, here, that autonomous solidarity movements and international volunteers were criminalised; squatted buildings and open-air collective kitchens evicted (citing fire safety and environmental protection laws); and the Village of All Together, which since 2012 has operated a shelter on municipal property for refugees has been under constant threat since the "crisis" was declared—even as one of its key organisers, Efi Latsoudi, was honoured by the UNHRC for her activism with a Nansen Award. As the hotspot on Lesvos became operative, in numerous cases 'non-registered'—as they were named—volunteers (and concerned civilians) were arrested and charged with human trafficking. At the same time, the civil society mobilisation in response to the crisis was invoked in leftist state discourses as currency in a moral economy that sought to transform the prevalent perception of Greeks in the EU and beyond—from corrupt and tax-evading freeloaders to paradigms of hospitality and exemplars of "European" values of solidarity.
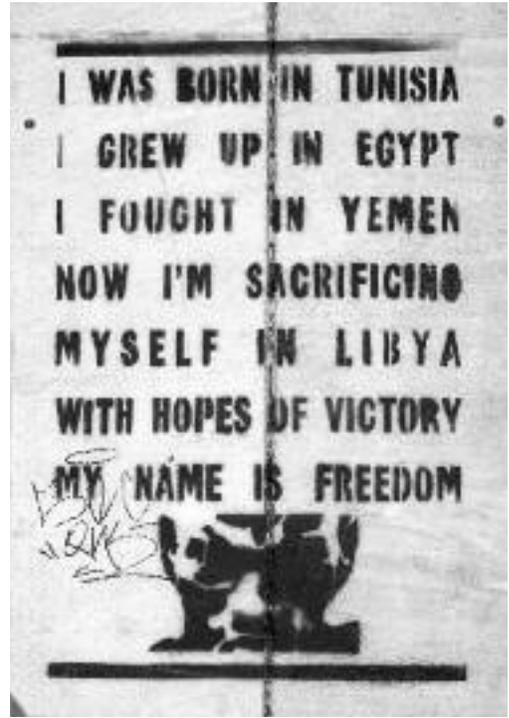
Stencil 'My name is freedom,' author unknown. Photographer: M. Tsilimpounidi.

EPILOGUE: MEETING POINT

The case of Greece has been invoked as a warning for other European societies resisting austerity politics, as financial 'crisis' extends beyond borders, moving from the periphery to the centre of the continent. To argue for a new European vision and to advance politics of hope is not exactly an easy task in the present conjuncture of Greek and European history when far right factions are winning electoral votes and xenophobic policies are implemented creating the bordered reality of 'Fortress Europe'. A new vision of Europe is being implemented by the bureaucrats in Brussels; but it is countered by a growing realisation from the periphery that the Barbarians of our era are to be found in the oppressive structures of capitalist accumulation by dispossession. From the shores of Lesvos it seems like an inescapable fact—despite the rhetoric of "flows," "waves," "influxes," and "avalanches"—that the arrival of millions of refugees is neither a natural, nor a sudden phenomenon. Nor has the crisis subsided, despite the waning of international interest in the spectacle of suffering staged on the shore of this aqueous graveyard. There are no easy solutions or clear pathways to promised lands of economic security and peaceful co-inhabitance; rather, Ithaka can be reached through the every-

day journeys of encounters, solidarities, alternative formations and revisions. In this paper, we deliberately avoided reproducing the spectacular images of people arriving on the Greek shores, as we feel such representations are symptomatic of the wider phenomena of systemic dehumanisation that we are analysing in the text. Human suffering and social solidarity, we feel, is not to be consumed in sensational headlines and exploitative images; rather, they become the driving force that guides our ways of seeing and of ways of knowing as we make our way from Athens to Lesvos and back. The text follows the awkward journeys and uncomfortable trajectories of research produced not only from or for, but within the realities of declared and undeclared intersecting crises. For one last time, we are returning to the shore, searching the horizon for possibilities, but with the knowledge that for too many people, this archipelago is where their last hope of survival expired, as the world went dark.

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