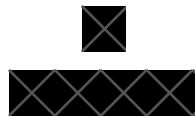


A space of exception? A visual analysis of refugee geographies in the Mória Camp in Lesvos, Greece.



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Abstract

Scope & central aim: Greece became a gateway and entry point to Europe during the refugee crisis and the Aegean islands quickly became characterised by overcrowded, inhumane and violent hotspots. By far the most notorious was Mória camp on Lesbos. This study aims to determine whether Mória resembled a space of exception, in which individuals were stripped of their rights and humanity.

Method: A desk-based, visual analysis of refugee geographies in Mória was conducted using videos, documentary footage, images and photography. Data from video and images were deconstructed and decoded to gain an insight into exceptionality and evidence of agency in Mória.

Results: Mória became a space in which human rights, European ideals and state protection dissolved. Data provided indications of human rights abuses, considerable insecurity and suffering, judicial suspension and the exertion of agency through protests and other transnational methods.

Conclusion: Features and aspects of refugee geographies in Mória resembled theoretical articulations of exceptional spaces. However, the body of refugees were not resigned to complete disempowerment and suppression, as Agamben suggests they are.

Introduction

From late-2014, wars, violence, civil unrest and mass persecution in the Middle East and Africa caused the largest population movements since World War II (Gunst et al., 2019). The sheer number of displaced people led to an unparalleled influx of refugees into Europe and the beginning of the refugee crisis. In 2015 alone, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported that over 1 million people arrived in Europe by maritime routes. In the same year, 3771 people were found dead or missing at sea. Entry point countries on the southern external border received a disproportionate number of refugees than countries further inland, with 153,800 refugees arriving in Italy and 850,000 crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece (UNHCR, 2015).

This journey across the Mediterranean is among the most perilous and life-threatening border crossings a refugee can embark upon (Park, 2015). However, awaiting a refugee on land is perhaps a more merciless and unforgiving experience. People who have been forced from their countries, homes and livelihoods are confined to refugee camps, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, detention centres, transit camps and deportation camps (Turner, 2015). These camps aim to provide temporary hospitality and are intended to be spaces of security and sanctuary for the most vulnerable individuals and communities (Bulley, 2014). Despite positive intentions, refugee camps have become characterised by inhumane conditions, typified by gut-wrenching hopelessness and theorised as spaces of exception where life is barely preserved (Lenette, 2019).

In response to the unfolding crisis, and the seemingly endless arrival of refugees on the shores, two refugee camps were erected on the Greek island of Lesbos, in Kara Tepe and Mória. The latter was initially designed for 1,200 asylum-seekers but it contained over 20,000 at its peak and 17,000 in 2019, which made it the largest in Europe. Mória was considered a symbolic representation of the EU's failed migration policy. It was dubbed the 'worst refugee camp on earth' (Nye, 2018) and labelled as a 'hell on earth' (Grant, 2020), which spoke of life for the refugee within its barbed wire boundaries.

The overarching aim of this research is to determine whether Mória refugee camp, and the experiences and plight of refugees, bear comparison to academic theories on spaces of exception. This research aim will be met through obtaining a number of objectives, which are as follows:

1. To define and conceptualise the space of exception using literature,

2. To outline the evolution of the Mória camp, as documented through newspaper articles and UN statistics,
3. To examine, through a visual analysis, the experiences of refugees and humanitarian organisations that navigated the camp (as represented through documentaries and videos and images and photography),
4. To highlight evidence of positivity, community and agency within in camp,
5. To ascertain whether Mória, and similar refugee camps, can transcend the notion of exception.

Contemporary context

Coupled with pre-existing economic turmoil, the refugee crisis brought immense difficulties to both mainland Greece and the Aegean islands. At the end of 2019, the country accommodated over 186,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, including over 5000 unaccompanied children (UNHCR, 2020). Reception centres on the islands of Chios, Kos, Leros, Samos and Lesbos had an intended capacity of 5,400 people yet housed 36,000 in 2020 (UNHCR, 2020). The capital of Lesbos, Mytilene, was a focal point in the crisis. Mória camp was located in the north-west of the town.

Mória was built in 2013, on land previously used as a military camp. It was one of the most population-dense refugee camps in the world (Panayotatos, 2020) until September 2020, when it was destroyed by a series of fires, rumoured to have been started by refugees protesting living conditions. The blaze left 12,000 refugees (and 4,000 children) homeless (UNHCR, 2020) but Mória should never have been designated as a 'home' for any of the people that dwelt there. It had become an unruly mass of humanity (Donadio, 2019) and a space unsuitable for human habitation, with numerous humanitarian violations occurring on a regular basis. Mória is pixelated on the Google Maps satellite view which deeply symbolises the lack of identity, value and care that a refugee entering Moria was assigned.

Local, and international newspapers alike, have documented Mória's spiralling growth from an initial processing point and reception centre to a sprawling settlement and detention facility. Kathimerini (meaning 'daily'), one of the largest Greek newspapers in circulation, reported the population of the camp at 6,000 in 2017, then over 18,000 in 2020 (Kathimerini, 2017; Kathimerini 2020). The olive groves surrounding Mória became scattered with makeshift tents and shelters as a result of new arrivals and the increasingly opaque asylum process. It had become a bottleneck and a long-term migrant camp as oppose to a transit centre (Larsen & Gordon, 2020). Mória's multi-ethnic fabric, and severe overcrowding,

increased tensions which often resulted in violent conflict in the camp. An article from *To Vima* describes a case in December 2017 when 15 were injured and two stabbed, during a clash between refugees of Afghan, Iraqi, and Arab descent (ToBHMA, 2017). Another Greek newspaper *Naftemporiki* (2020) then stated that 5 asylum seekers were stabbed to death, with another 10 injured in hospital during the first 5 months of 2020. A special observer report from the Guardian provides further insight into the conditions and dangers in Mória. A doctor working for the Boat Refugee Foundation (BRF) stated that the daily threat of violence and sexual violence was so high that women and minors wore nappies to avoid having to leave the tents at night (Chapman, 2020). Refugees lived in severely unsanitary conditions and lacked access to adequate medical care. Many suffered from deteriorating mental health with the BBC reporting that children as young as 10 attempted suicide in the camp (Nye, 2018). After a visit to Mória, Pope Francis stated that 'international accords were more important than human rights' (BBC, 2017) and in November 2017, the mayor of Lesbos likened Mória to a concentration camp where all human dignity was denied (McElvaney, 2018).

Theoretical context

The writings of Italian philosopher, and radical political theorist, Giorgio Agamben were profoundly influenced by World War 2 concentration camps, such as Auschwitz. He investigated the ideas of exception, bare life and sovereign power in camps and they form the theoretical pillars that underpin this research. His work has sculpted the views and understandings of a host of more contemporary scholars who address these concepts, many of which have theorised the refugee camp as a space of exception (Bulley, 2014).

Agamben maintained that a space of exception is produced through state declaration of an emergency (Gregory, 2006) and 'refugee situations are coined in the language of emergencies', according to Turner (2015, p. 140). An exceptional space is founded in conditions of extreme displacement. Its purpose is to preserve and relieve, but never provide complete care for, a population of people (Redfield, 2005). Agamben claims that refugees in camps are stripped of all rights, other than the right to life, and 'excluded from the fullness of the judicial system' (Papastergiadis, 2006, p. 436). In a space of exception, a refugee is reduced to raw biological existence, possesses no identity or value and is managed by a sovereign power who has the ability to suspend law. Ramadan (2013) elaborates, writing that concentration and refugee camps exist on the same continuum, and refugees represent bare natural life as oppose to recognised citizens in the eyes of the state. He also writes that refugees are solely included in the political order through their exclusion. Refugee camps

are often found on the borders of physical state territories, at the interstices of the places of arrival and departure (Papastergiadis, 2006). In the same sense, refugees in camps are liminal figures that are outside the protection of the law. They are excluded from the security of the state, marginalised as the 'other' and rendered invisible in camps (Turner, 2015). In Agamben's state of exception, national security is given priority over moral obligation to the other (Papastergiadis, 2006).

Agamben's writings are complex, weighty and do not exist without critique. Ek (2006) alludes to a degree of pessimism and dystopia in his work which Ramadan (2013, p. 68) explains, 'Studies of real-world refugee camps cannot be reduced to a formulaic reading of spaces of exception filled with silenced and disempowered *homines sacri*'. Community, agency, positivity and resistance within the refugee camp should not be entirely ruled out. Agamben's work dismisses these, to an extent. However, refugees living in dire conditions will undoubtedly relate to the concept of a space exception where they have no hope, no rights and no protection.

Literature review

Several attempts have been made in literature to spatialise and politicise the refugee camp, but there has been no specific attempt to draw parallels from Mória to a space of exception as defined by Agamben.

Research by Ramadan and Fregonese (2017) draws on Agamben's conceptualisation of spaces of exception in a discussion of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Palestinian refugees have resided in several camps in Lebanon since the establishment of Israel as a state in 1948. The UNHCR (2020) reported over 200,000 in the country in January 2020. Ramadan and Fregonese address the contested nature of sovereign power in the Palestinian case. The camps have been ruled by 'hybrid arrangements of sovereignty' (p. 960), between the Lebanese state itself, Palestinian political groups, militias and international humanitarian organisations. However, they ultimately reject the designation of refugee camps as spaces that are 'outside of politics' (p. 961). Between the crevices of the combinations of sovereign agents, political agency and autonomy has been allowed to sprout. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Cairo Accords, led to a change in conditions for Palestinian refugees, as well as an uprising against the Lebanese in the Palestinian resistance movement of 1969 (Amiri, 2016). Ramadan and Fregonese write that Palestinian political agency, that initially arose from armed struggle, has continued to be fostered through everyday acts that reproduced a Palestinian people and nationhood.

Palestinian autonomy has been retained, but the refugees are marginalised, impoverished and lack the security of a status and a home. Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon seem to transcend spaces of exception but remain environments of immense suffering and repression.

Research by Gregory (2006) considers American prison camp, Guantánamo Bay, as a space of exception. An exceptional space forms from the declaration of an emergency by the state. For Guantánamo, this emergency was declared by US President, George Bush, following the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Octagon. Gregory continues to write that Bush produced a situation in which the emergency became the rule or norm, and a technique of government, by declaring numerous national emergencies. The very bodies of prisoners in Guantánamo, were used by the Bush administration as 'legal objects' (p. 413) to wage the war on terror. Guantánamo Bay is a space of lawlessness where prisoners have been detained, often illegally or unlawfully, and law has been suspended. Amnesty International (2020) describe Guantánamo as a 'symbol of torture' which was established to quash terrorism at the expense of human rights.

This research will build on existing literature and Gregory's by posing the questions; which rights were considered expendable in Mória? And how was law suspended in the space? And in the same vein as Ramadan and Fregonese (2017), this research will seek to determine whether the refugee body in Mória ever possessed or exerted political agency. And was it suppressed by a sovereign power? It will aim to analyse the refugee experience in Mória through theoretical and Agambenian lenses, but also from a humanitarian perspective. Crucially, this research is not a review or critique of Agamben, but a study of refugee geographies of Mória.

Methodology and research design

In the midst of the refugee crisis, an infamous image emerged of a lifeless 3-year-old boy washed up on a beach in Turkey, after a fatal attempt to cross the Mediterranean to the Greek island of Kos. This deeply troubling photograph powerfully provoked global concern and stirred emotion as it rapidly circulated. It also led to a plethora of research into the field of visual imagery and its emotional impact.



Figure 1: A Turkish police officer carries the dead body of Aylan Kurdi on a beach near the resort town of Bodrum. Aylan had a had a 5-year-old brother who suffered the same fate (Demir, 2015).

The image was attached with a harrowing narrative, reflected in the associated hashtag, '#KiyiyaVuranInsanlik' or '#HumanityWashedAshore'. Refugees and asylum seekers are vulnerable and exposed to danger beyond compare. They are fleeing from wars and conflict but are dying trying. And they are at the complete mercy of state powers and governments. Lenette (2019) comments on the visibility of the refugee crisis, stating that images are fundamental in shaping and influencing the world's understanding of crisis situations and changing them. The representation of refugees in images and Western media has been discussed throughout literature (see Etem, 2020; Calderón et al., 2019; Dempsey & McDowell, 2019; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016). However, the

depiction and portrayal of refugee camps, and life within them, has been scarcely addressed. When presented, imagery of camps does not speak of the vulnerability of refugees but instead, fuels the assumption of refugees as unlawful and socioeconomically challenged (Lenette, 2019).

This research involved a visual analysis of documentaries, videos, images and photography, of which refugee geographies in Mória were the focus. Visual methodologies, and indeed the use of photography and video as research tools, have become hugely popular in the social sciences over the last half-century (Knoblauch et al., 2008). According to Grady (2008), the social sciences use three types of visual imagery as materials in inquiry: photographs, videos and charts/maps. Photography is a 'visual system of representation' that depicts the visual characteristics of objects (Christmann, 2008, p. 2) and film and video allow events to be preserved and observed (Jewitt, 2012). Both are meaningful in research as they project meaning, communicate evidence of experiences and provide an insight into a subject or phenomena when decoded and deconstructed by the researcher.

Videos were assembled from a range of reputable sources including the UNHCR, major news outlets (local and international) and humanitarian organisations navigating Mória. This ensured a broad number of perspectives, viewpoints and angles were included in the analysis. The videos directly communicated content through speech and their subject matter but were also embedded with further connotations and symbolic features that required interpretation. Background activities and interactions, surrounding environments and settings and sentiment and emotions were all of importance when analysing videos from the camp. Collating images proved more problematic as journalists and photographers had to be given special access inside the Mória camp, but photos from the UN and other official photographers were analysed and used in the research.

Photography was examined for emphasised features, foreground and background figures, surroundings and atmospheres, composition, visual semiotics, symbols, narratives, emotions and impact. Images carry two levels of meaning articulated through denotation: the literal or immediate meaning, and connotation: the symbolic or ideological meaning (Aiello, 2020). Christmann (2008, p. 3) writes that photographs 'offer multi-layered meanings' that are observed and understood in different ways. It is important to note that the interpretation of data from video and photo is subjective and personal, given that both are polysemic. In other words, what one researcher infers from an image may be of stark contrast to another researcher. A consideration of the motivations, as well as the contexts of video producers and photographers was also important during research.

Photography and video evidence presented testimonies of *real* people and communicated *real* experiences of the camp. Images and video stills used depict poverty, frustration and suffering on an appalling scale. And so, it is important to acknowledge ethical and moral concerns when using material concerning vulnerable and displaced individuals in research. Analysis was conducted with an upmost respect for the dignity of individuals concerned.

A number of key themes, relating to the theoretical articulations of the state of exception, were isolated from the data and they form the basis of the combined results and discussion section that follows.

Thematic discussion of results

A space of human rights violations and 'bare life'?

Within a space of exception, refugees are not recognised as citizens by the state. Instead, they are often perceived as security threats that must be restricted by repressive geographies (Ramadan, 2013). Agamben argued that being human, as implied by the tradition of human rights, is not enough to confirm protection in a state of exception (Lechte & Newman, 2011). Ramadan (2013, p. 68) elaborates on this stating:

‘the supposedly ‘sacred and inalienable’ rights of man prove in fact to be ‘attributable to man only in the degree to which he is the *citizen*’.

The international non-governmental organisation (NGO), Human Rights Watch (HRW) had a presence in the Mória camp and had been constantly documenting the situation among refugees. A video and coexisting report, produced by HRW in 2019, outlines significant violations of the rights of women and girls. Interviews, conducted with 32 women and 7 girls in the camp, revealed life to be inhumane, unsanitary and dangerously unsafe. For women and girls, life in Mória was defined by dread and typified by threats of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Mória was an environment where women’s rights, privacy and space were not protected or respected.

The video shares the testimonies of several young women and girls who voice their experiences of Mória. Shayla, a 21-year-old from Afghanistan, stated that simply walking alone in Mória was enough for onlooking men to assume that she was a prostitute offering her body for work. Her distresses were then dismissed by the police as they mocked and laughed at her. Objectification of women was commonplace in Mória, and feelings of insecurity extended to the camp tents and shelters. Greek rules on reception sites insisted that women travelling alone had to be housed in detached, fenced-off sections of the camp. Overcrowding led to single women, who arrived to Mória unaccompanied, being placed in accommodation with unrelated male strangers. Aziza, a 17-year-old girl from Somalia, slept outside on the streets as she feared for her life and could not defend herself. HRW reported that the Greek government had not identified or protected the rights of women and girls in other vulnerable categories, such as pregnant women, women with disabilities and survivors of gender-based violence.



Figure 2: A young girl walking alone on a path in Mória, carrying a unicorn toy (*Women at Risk: Moria Refugee Camp*, 2019).

Figure 2 is a still taken from of the HRW video, 'Women at Risk: Moria Refugee Camp'. A young girl walks alone holding a unicorn toy, in front of a painted desert scene. The girl's story is unknown, but the scene is undeniably a symbolic depiction of the loneliness and isolation women and girls had been subjected to in Mória. The human rights of vulnerable women and girls were near discarded. Many felt physically distant from their homes but felt even more distant from the protection of the Greek state. As stateless people in camps, refugees are ultimately forced to rely on 'bare life' as a basis for the recognition of their rights and this affirms their vulnerability and helplessness (Lechte & Newman, 2011).

For Agamben, 'bare life' was what remained after refugees are stripped of their rights. The concept of bare life stems from Agamben's analogy of the refugee as the '*homo sacer*'. The *homo sacer* was a criminal in ancient Rome considered outside the rule of law, reduced to mere biological existence and deemed unworthy of sacrifice (Papastergiadis, 2006). Any refugee camp should foster the possibility of mass survival (Redfield, 2005) however refugees in Mória were condemned to a struggle for existence and a life of suffering. A non-profit organisation named Legal Centre Lesbos (LCL) reported that conditions in Mória were not just a direct violation of basic human rights, but also the official EU Reception Conditions Directive. LCL (2018) produced a report stating that the standards in Mória were insufficient in ensuring refugees a dignified standard of living, which Recital 11 of the Conditions Directive demands. This is reinforced throughout an analysis of footage and imagery of the camp. Evidence of cruel, appalling and inadequate conditions was immensely prominent. The luxurious beaches and tropical Mediterranean waters of Lesbos island, that tourists enjoy, are of a complete juxtaposition to life within the fences of Mória.

A video produced by the UNHCR in 2020 (*Refugees speak of dreadful reality inside Lesbos' Moria camp*, 2020) focuses on a 41-year-old former Afghan doctor called Sardar, who summaries the conditions in Mória. The provision and supply of food was severely stretched with refugees often having to wait an entire day in food lines, which Sardar explains. The

water supply, designed for a camp of 3,000 people, was also inconsistent and unreliable at best. Over 300 refugees were expected to share every one tap (Oxfam, 2020). The video shows a number of children hoping to fill plastic bottles at a water supply. A boy turns the handle; no water comes out. He prods on the top; nothing. Just hopelessness. Oxfam (2020) also estimated that there were 160 people per single toilet and over 500 for every shower.

The video brings to light the concern amongst refugees, and NGOs alike, that healthcare was insufficient. Sardar speaks of a man with cancer whose condition could not be helped or even eased. Mental health issues and psychological problems were alarmingly common in Mória, even among the youngest children. According to a mental health activity manager at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), children often stopped playing and communicating, turning to cutting themselves and self-harming (Donadio, 2019). Insecurity, being 'in limbo' and the undignified conditions all contributed to deteriorating mental health in Mória (MSF, 2018). Refugees displaced from war-torn and blood-soaked regions were being subjected to equally traumatic and violent lives in Mória. They were locked in a vicious cycle of hopelessness where control over their own lives had been taken from them.

Several images highlighted severely unsanitary and unhygienic living conditions for the refugees. Uncontrollable amounts of waste, broken sewage pipes and overflowing rubbish bins meant that Mória was labelled a danger to public health and the environment by local inspectors, and almost forced to close (Stubbley, 2018).



Figure 3: A young boy walks across a debris-filled creek in Mória (Messinis, 2019).

Figure 3 has connotations of extreme misery and creates an imaginative geography of a bleak and desperate space. The boy's eyes are dejectedly fixed on the ground, assumingly wondering when he'll eat next. He is crossing a bridge over an array of waste and rubbish indicating that the mountains of undisposed litter and refuse were simply normal components of life in the camp. Accommodation was well below humanitarian standards and not suitable for refuge. Tents and poorly constructed shelters that sloped into the mud-covered floors (figure 4) reflect the sub-par existence that refugees had been forced into. Some structures were built on wooden pallets to prevent sinking (figure 5), but the majority do not appear fit to house anyone, let alone full families. How can a space designed to preserve and support vulnerable life be so active in challenging its existence?



Figure 4: A girl walking through a muddy area of refugee 'homes' in Mória (Messinis, 2019).



Figure 5: A woman and young child stand outside a tent constructed on wooden pallets (Welters, 2019)

A space of sovereign power and judicial suspension?

For Agamben, a sovereign power declared a state of exception and was responsible for suspending law. The refugee camp can be perceived as an attempt by the state to exercise power over bare life (Pozzato, 2019) and it is argued that refugee camps are spaces that contain the 'stateless', the impurities and the undesirables (Turner, 2015). Owens (2009, p. 567) refers to refugees as 'biopolitical subjects' whose lives are managed, and whose existence is regulated. Lives of refugees locked in a cycle of suffering in Mória were considered expendable by the EU, and by its policy of deterrence. The EU and Greece failed to establish humane and coherent refugee policies, in turn, plunging the lives of thousands of the most helpless into anguish in Mória and other 'hotspots' in Greece (Panayotatos, 2020). As refugees in Mória once protected themselves from sub-zero winter temperatures by lighting their own fires (figure 6) and burning cardboard, European values, solidarity and democracy were reduced to embers.



Figure 6: Refugees commune around a shared fire between tents (McElvaney, 2018).

Conditions in Mória and the crisis on Lesbos were largely a result of decisions, a series of actions and inactions and political stalemate in the ivory towers in the European political front. The EU-Turkey Deal in March 2016, that aimed to control irregular refugee crossings from Turkey, was at odds to norms of refugee protection and violated international law (Long, 2018). The deal led to expulsion and refolement, tightened European borders and the portrayal of refugees as hostile figures. It also led to the transformation of camps on the

Greek islands into overcrowded detention centres, as oppose to reception facilities, that could not ensure adequate asylum procedures for refugees (Amnesty International, 2017). Mória was a space in which European 'ideals' were sacrificed in a humanitarian and moral failure (Donadio, 2019).



Figure 7: Mória street art in Portugal, created after the EU-Turkey agreement (Bastardo, 2018).



Figure 8: Mória refugee camp from above (Welters, 2019)

Mória bears an uncanny and very deliberate resemblance to a prison, which was obvious in an analysis of photography of the camp landscape (figure 8). Spotlights, concrete surfaces, metal fences, bars and barbed wire were all recurring in images and are compatible with Agamben's conceptualisation of an exceptional space. Refugees in Mória were detained in a zone that was neither within nor outside the state, and not inside nor outside the law. Detention in camps places refugees in the state of suspension but displaces them from the reach of the law (Papastergiadis, 2006).

The International Protection Act (IPA) entered into force on Jan 1st 2020, destabilising the asylum process further whilst diminishing safeguards in the system (Oxfam International, 2020). Greece completely suspended the asylum procedure in March 2020 and forcibly prevented refugees trying to enter from Turkey through the mobilisation of police, army, special forces and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) (Naoum, 2020). In Mória, refugees' freedom of movement to mainland Greece and further into Europe was denied, along with their right to seek asylum. This was despite the presence of NGOs providing legal aid in the camp.

Following the fires in September 2020 that burned Mória down, a new camp was established which has been unofficially christened 'Mória 2.0'. Residents say the conditions are worse than the original camp with inadequate facilities and protection concerns for women and children, elderly people, the disabled and those with medical conditions (FENIX, 2020). This testifies to Agamben's visionary portrayal of a state of exception as the rule, norm and a practice in contemporary politics (Damai, 2005) and the refugee camp as a mechanism to contain the 'matter out of place' (Turner, 2015).

A space of positivity, community and agency?

Agambenian exceptionalism has been disputed for not considering refugee subjectivity and not acknowledging agency, resistance or community (Bulley, 2014). Ramadan (2013) suggests that camps have the possibility of being spaces of struggle and agency, as oppose to complete disempowerment and bare life. Photography and videos were punctuated with cases of political activism, moments of community and glimpses of positivity. Positivity and community were seen in everyday, grassroots activities. Photography by Messinis (2019) shows children playing football and other games, men providing haircuts for one another and a woman giving an English lesson to other refugees in a tent with no electricity. Figure 9 reflects the enduring resilience of the refugees, amid inconceivable suffering in Mória.



Figure 9: A refugee delivers an English language lesson for other refugees (Messinis, 2019).

Representation of protests and activism in Mória has the potential to villainise refugees and depict them as vandals when, in fact, it is the sovereign that should be scrutinised. Refugees protesting living conditions and detention in Mória were inhibited and intimidated by state riot police on numerous occasions. Police used tear gas, flash grenades and excessive force, even when women, children and babies were in present in demonstrations. Al Jazeera reported that some 2,000 refugees rallied in February 2020, with some reaching Mytilene to protest (Fallon, 2020). Reuters (2019) share the details of another case in September 2019 when several hundred gathered near the camp but were prevented from advancing by police.



Figure 10: Seated protesters during a demonstration against living conditions in Mória (Amadei, 2020).

Figure 10 shows a group of refugees during a non-violent demonstration and in the background is a banner that reads, 'EUROPEAN UNION UNITED NATIONS our children are still alive'. The refugees are making the implication that the EU and the UN are at fault for the situation in Mória and for creating the environment. Coverage of the protests allocated a global stage on which refugees could project their message. The demonstrations had an impact that resonated across Europe. In September 2020, 13,000 chairs were arranged outside the German parliament buildings, in solidarity with the inhabitants of Mória (DW, 2020). Thousands of people in 27 European cities called for a paradigm shift in migration policy, demonstrating under the banners 'We have space' and 'No more Moria!' (Europe Must Act, 2020). 'Now You See Me Moria' is another method that created a visibility and awareness of inhumanity in the camp. A number of refugees partnered with a photo editor from the Netherlands to create posters based on pictures taken in the camp. The polemic posters have been downloaded and displayed in cities over Europe and further afield.

The fire, that resulted in Mória burning down in September 2020, was a symbolic and sacrificial act of defiance. It was a culmination of tensions and frustrations and an outcry against the conditions and suffering that the refugees endured. The blaze was an uprising against the sovereign and a metaphorical beacon, that the refugees hoped would alert, inform and spark real and meaningful change.

Conclusion

Mória was a problem that demanded a solution, and a situation that required correction. At the expense of the thousands of refugees that were displaced, the September 2020 fire erased a monstrosity and created a 'clean slate'. It provided an opportunity for Europe to re-evaluate pertinent policies, rethink its stance on incoming refugees and reconsider the inhumane use of camps for detainment and deterrence. Instead of a compassionate and sustainable response, 'Mória 2.0' was established, and the majority of refugees were hurled back into a space where humiliating conditions challenged their very existence.

Visual data from images and videos were immensely valuable in research and provided evidence of a degree of exceptionality in Mória. However, arguments about refugee camps as spaces of exception must occur from first-hand engagement and grounded experience of the spaces (Ramadan, 2013). As the original camp no longer exists due to the fire (and pandemic-related travel restrictions), this was not possible. Ideally, ethnographic research would have been conducted among refugees residing in the original camp. Interviews and/or focus groups would have constituted a more holistic research approach and would have provided personal accounts of suffering, inhumanity and agency in Mória.

More extensive research would need to be completed to conclusively determine whether Mória was as a space of exception, though it did bear a number of significant similarities to some conceptualisations. Human rights were violated on near daily basis resulting in women and girls being mistreated and other vulnerable categories being neglected. The supply of water, provision of food, showers and toilet facilities, healthcare and accommodation in Mória were considerably below UN and humanitarian standards. The already-traumatised refugee population coupled with the under-resourced, overcrowded camp was a formula for a mental health crisis where PTSD, depression and anxiety tore through the camp. Empirical research by Bjertrup et al. (2018) unanimously supports the claim that refugees experience psychosocial distress and feelings of meaningless and powerlessness which stemmed from lack of control over their own lives and the ambiguity of their futures. State police and security forces appeared scarce and did not fulfil their mandates of protection, instead attempting to silence the 'voice' of refugees. Political powers in Greek office and in the EU attempted to manage, direct and expend the lives of refugees in Mória and the other hotspots on Lesbos. Despite the efforts of Greek police, agency was not entirely suppressed as protests prompted concern and opposition against Mória and the other hotspots.

To finish, the definition of 'refuge' as a state of safety and shelter from danger, is incompatible with the definition of exception in Agamben's terms. His work should be read with hesitation and a deep appreciation that camps are complex and contested spaces. Refugee camps are 'grey' areas and refugees residing in camps are forced to live in a state of constant limbo. Mória exemplified a space that was established to preserve and protect European order and citizenry, instead of the fragile lives seeking refuge and fleeing from war. Mória's demise emphasises a growing necessity for empathy in migration politics and legislation, as well as hospitality and a mindset of accommodation on a local level. Human lives are in the balance and, as Ramadan (2013) writes, the structure of modern sovereignty means we *all* have the potential to be *homines sacri* in the eyes of the state.

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