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"The Balkan Route of the refugees: A case study about the concept of movement and temporary settlement in the Balkan Route"

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Contents

Introduction

This paper deals with the 2015 European refugee crisis, also known as the Syrian refugee crisis. In literature, it is described as a period (Ayoub, M. A. 2019, Almustafa, 2021) of significantly increased movement of refugees and migrants[1] into Europe in 2015, when 1.3 million people came to the continent to request asylum (Barlai et al., 2017), the highest number in a single year since World War II. The majority of those requesting asylum in Europe in 2015 were mostly, according to the sources, Syrians (Dumont et al., 2015), but also included significant numbers of Afghans, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Iraqis and Eritreans (Ayaz et al., 2020), as well as economic migrants from the Balkans (Batha, 2016). My research will mainly cover the topics concerning concepts like "refugees", "Balkan Route" and "makeshift camps" and also, how the concept of space is perceived by the people there. I will be closely examining the path that the refugees of the 2015 crisis followed by focusing in detail on the path that they took in the Balkans, the conditions they had to live in, as well as

Research Methods

In my research I will make use of secondary sources which refer to another person's empirical findings, and the method of semi-constructed interview because it can provide the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, while having the advantage of the use of an interview guide. In that way when one is being interviewed, they are fully aware about the context of the interview but at the same time, both the interviewer and the respondent can have a productive conversation without the restriction solid, strict guidelines (Bernard, 2005).The interview data is included in the appendix.

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[1] There is a technical difference between the terms "refugees" and "migrants" due to the urgent movement of the first category which if often debated. That is why the term forced migration is currently used.

Part 1: Theoretical Approach

Defining Refugees

There have been many attempts to define people who have forcibly fled their countries due to fact that their lives were in danger in their home countries, such as "refugees", "asylum seekers" or "forcibly displaced people". Soon after the Second World War, as the refugee problem had not been solved resulting in the need for a new international instrument to define the legal status of refugees.

According to the UNHCR handbook a refugee is defined as "every person who, due to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality" (UNCHR, 2019).

In my research, I will be using the term "refugees" as it was defined by Barbara Harrell-Bond and Eftihia Voutira in "Anthropology and the Study of Refugees" (Harrell-Bond et al., 1992). Specifically, in their work refugees are described as people who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation and unless or until they are 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin), they find themselves in 'transition', or in a state of 'liminality'. This 'betwixt and between' status may not only be legal and psychological, but social and economic as well (Turner, 1969). Liminal comes from the Latin word 'limen', which means threshold. A liminal space is the time between 'what was' and 'what will' in someone's life. It is a place of transition, a time of waiting and not knowing the future. Turner developed this idea of liminality from observing rituals and rites of passage of the Ndembu tribe of central Africa. In our case though liminality refers to the fluid, transitional state refugees are in while on the move. They are (forcibly) fleeing their countries, abandoning everything known to them and travel under compromising conditions in search of a better life. Until they are granted asylum and relocated, they remain in a liminal state, but a also in a liminal space in our case, one of uncertainty and transition, in which the safety and integrity of their lives are constantly questioned.

Moreover, through research we can also detect that encoded in the label 'refugee' are the images of dependency, helplessness and misery. According to Lillich (1984) the presence of migration groups that are in a state of transition presents the international community today with one of its greatest challenges. As Zia Rizvi noted, 'once an individual, a human being becomes a refugee, it is as though he has become a member of another race, some subhuman group', thus, a problem for others (Dunbar-Ortiz et al., 1987).

In order to understand in depth how the Route shifted during the refugee crisis and the importance of refugee camps, we need to further analyze and consider the struggles of refugees but also, the fact that the treatment that is based or influenced by stereotypical views such as those mentioned before can only cause more problems and suffering. As many studies have shown refugees can increase productivity, bring novel skill sets and knowledge, enrich culture, stimulate the economy and complement the job market. So, instead of driving them away and treating them as sub-humans, we could treat them in a more humane matter, finding a mutually beneficial solution for their re-location and integration into our society by providing the required means and motives.

Stereotypes, though, in our case, work both ways, according to my data, refugees do not consider Greece as part of the European Union but as part of the Balkans. This perception essentially translates and adheres to the existing colonial legacies and the division between the "cultured", "civilized" Northern-Western Europe and the developing, "uncultured" Southeastern part of it. The north/west of Europe is perceived as the flourishing, financial core while the Southeast, as its dependable periphery enhancing the power asymmetries and polarization among them.

For those reasons, the following research will be dedicated in deconstructing these preexisting notions that hinder efforts that are opting to cease the lacking treatment and beliefs regarding refugees and also aims in the deconstruction of the history, notions and function concerning the Balkan Route.

The Balkan Route

How did it become a transit space

Mobility due to forced migration in the Balkans does not signify only a crossing of a geographical and political space of different landscapes and borders, but also a crossing in histories framed by different patterns of migration, which essentially influencing how states and their diverse citizens approach people on the move (Tosic, 2017).

The enormous complexity of (forced) migratory legacies in the Balkans has led many scientists to choose precisely migration as the main lens through which to explore the history of this part of Europe. According to Todorova (Todorova, 2009, Tosic, 2017) the Balkans are more adequately understood as "semi-colonial" since "they are part of Europe" (technically they belong in its periphery/province), and the "sensibility of victimization is much less acute" related to an ever given "consciousness of a certain degree of autonomy" (Todorova, 2009) of refugees. What actually led us towards that understanding of the Balkans is its rich migratory past.

From a historic point of view, between 1990 and 1995 and later in 1999, due to violent conflicts in former Yugoslavia, hundreds of thousands of people had to flee to the neighbouring countries. Very often those people were indeed encountered with scepticism, reservation and often even with animosity (Tosic, 2017). In Serbia, for example – just as in August 1995 when around 220,000 members of the Serbian minority were brutally expelled by the Croatian army and came to Serbia, they were not welcome (Tosic, 2017). Those without relatives to help them received little assistance from the state were often othered as "Croats" due to their dialect, exploited on the labour market and strategically resettled. Similar behavior can be found in other parts of the former Yugoslavia during that tensed period. That kind of treatment was still present during the summer of 2015 since refugees that had no acquaintances or relatives to help them, faced an even more difficult time in their new environment (Tosic, 2017).

An other aspect of migratory history in the area of interest is actually the absence of a "legacy", namely the lack of a functioning asylum system. Due to the economic downturn and violent conflicts in the Balkans after the collapse of socialism, this part of Europe became primarily a space of emigration (Tosic, 2017). The hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo to Serbia, Croatia and Albania by large were considered to be Internally Displaced People, flooding unprepared countries with complete absence of means to handle properly the huge migration flows (IDPs). Phenomenon that caused extreme damage to an already flawed system. As a result, the proper mechanisms for refugee reception were never properly established. In their place, half-measures and temporal solutions were found, creating a fragile, lacking hosting system (Tosic, 2017).

Furthermore, the Balkans are metaphorically well-known of being the "powder keg" of Europe because they represent a region inhabited by people entangled in "ancient hatreds" (Tosic, 2017). Notions that suggest that the Balkans are a place that could "explode" any time circulated since the 1990s. This stereotype has pervaded political and media representations throughout the refugee crisis. That stereotype though is not only planted in the mind of the E.U. but the refugees as well, restricting the role of the Balkans to that of a transit one, not one suitable for a permanent stay.

European Border Regime

It is widely believed that the world has become borderless and de-territorialized, and that the significance of geopolitical borders has changed as a result of globalization, the formation of supranational organizations, regional integration, and the power of cyberspace. Additionally, it is thought that borders have become more permeable due to the constant movement of people, capital, goods, and information (Manos, 2016). The sub-national, national and international levels have all resulted in the opening up of borders, the relaxation of state controls and the increase of communication and socio-economic changes. There are various ways of conceptualizing the relationship between different views or perspectives, one of which is to use metaphors such as a membrane or a bridge (Manos, 2016). The current tensions and conflicts in the Middle East and northern African countries as well as the vast waves of refugees and illegal migrants are perceived as compromising stability in the region and EU security. The resurgence of old national/nationalist projects, as well as the creation of some

new ones, have resulted in an increasing number of intense disputes over border issues between neighboring states. Some of these disputes are new, while others are old and unresolved. The reemergence of extreme right-wing parties and movements suggests that the idea of open borders is not well received by everyone. This vision of the world has been shaped by a capitalist, neo-liberal perspective that sees the permeability of borders as a current project that is desired and actively promoted. New ways of classifying and ordering people, places, and things emerge from the operation of new border regimes, where borders act as tools for categorization (Manos, 2016). There has also been an investment of money and other resources in trans-border cooperation. The importance of understanding how shifting border policies contribute to cross-border relations and transnational cooperation lies in the fact that these play a role in articulating relationships between identity, territory, and sovereignty (Manos, 2016).

In our case we are interested in the time when Greece, in 2012, erected a barbed wire along its border with Turkey, which migrants often used as a passage. A few years later, in October 2015, Hungary closed its border with Croatia hindering their efforts of crossing the country towards Western Europe. In the new postcolonial world order, border control is not only made more rigid by various technologies, but also becomes a central issue in the discourse of European and national identity, often linked to the (un)sustainability and holistic nature of the welfare state and economy (Tosic, 2017). The political landscape in Europe has shifted greatly these last years, phenomena such as backlash against xenophobia and the rise of far-right political movements, as well as cross-border activism, humanitarian volunteerism, and political solidarity were heightened (Tosic, 2017). The refugee crisis not only contributed to an increase in the number of people trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean, causing a domestic and international response to its struggles, but it also created a significant agent for concern in every part of the political spectrum, each focusing in different aspects ("we are being overloaded" versus "we are losing our humanity") (Tosic, 2017).

Experiencing that tumultuous time, the E. U. was faced with a dilemma. From one point of view, the freedom of movement was protected by the Schengen agreement but, on the other hand, the countries wished the closure of their borders in order to ensure the "protection" of their countries from foreign elements. A posteriori we

know that eventually they followed the second plan of action by refusing passage to refugees into Europe. That is a distinctive example of how the European borders shift and turn porous, calling into question the status quo of the region's security. One of the rights that the E. U. promises is that of the freedom of movement. Refugees, though, cannot enjoy it when they are denied entrance in the E.U. It's coverage is nulled as long as that it is reserved and offered to other people that meet certain criteria (status, wealth, more preferable country of origin) and those who do not meet these conditions are left to tend for themselves. Moreover, in view of the fact that they have not been given the opportunity of being 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state, or returned to their state of origin, (Harrell-Bond et al., 1992) they find themselves stuck in a perpetual state of transition and uncertainty. They are, thus, led into trespassing and other illegal behaviors in order to ensure their survival.

The closing of the borders gradually turned the E.U. into a fortress, compromising their integrity and pushing the people seeking shelter there to find solutions usually through illegal means, in order to achieve their goals "invisibly", without detection.

Refugee Crisis

Going back, during the wars in Syria and Iraq, refugees traveled through the Balkan Route to seek shelter. The path that they usually followed started in Turkey and then crossed through either Bulgaria or Greece. The migrants continued then further north, eventually reaching Slovenia or Hungary on the path towards countries like Germany (Kralj et al., 2019). The Route though was used as a way for migrants to move around Europe to seek asylum long before the outbreak of the refugee crisis, in 2012, when the EU eased its visa restrictions on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Dockery, 2017).

Often, migrants needed to pay considerable sums of money to human smugglers to cross the ocean on the initial part of the route from Turkey to Greece, leading to disastrous results (Dockery, 2017). A characteristic example out of many is the case of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy, whose family had tried to leave Turkey to Greece by boat. That case made the headlines worldwide when a Turkish journalist took a picture of the lifeless body of the young boy, washed up on a Turkish beach (Dockery, 2017). Asides from that, according to the report of the Refugee Rights

Report, the borders usually are characterized by their length and the fact that they are often located in forests, fields and mountainous areas. Both traits that make guarding and irregularly crossing them, challenging (Ahmetašević, 2020). In the 1990s, several wars were fought in the region, and land mines from that period still pose a serious threat for people moving in this territory. (Ahmetašević, 2020). Once the migrants get to Greece, they remain for a transit period and then they continue towards Northern Europe. Typically, migrants tried to move from countries that had more antagonistic refugee policies to more friendly ones.

Specifically, in 2015, when the humanitarian corridor was active, transportation was allowed by buses and trains from North Macedonia towards Croatia, and further on, resulting in around 1.5 million people crossing the Balkans this way (Ahmetašević, 2020). The closure of the borders started at the beginning of 2016 with the fence erected in Hungary and later on Slovenia, and Austria – sending a strong message that no more people could be allowed to enter. People, though, continued traveling using more dangerous roads, mostly through Serbia towards Croatia. At the end of 2017, movements through the Balkans started taking place across the region (Ahmetašević, 2020). Though, due to the character of the Route refugees did not follow one path but several, crossing different countries each time to temporarily locate themselves. The most frequented main streams of the Route were, one leading from Greece over North Macedonia to Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH), while the other one going through Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and further on to BiH (Ahmetašević, 2020). There may be talk of the "Route" in singular but, in reality, it is not limited in only one, specific path, but several, differentiated. On the other hand, we are talking about paths or stops because there are in abundance throughout the area.

Greece as a transit-country
Greece was not a stranger to large migration flows. However, until the 1990s, Greece had essentially no immigration policy. The Greek state was built on the logic of racial homogeneity, it did not trust or encourage foreigners to settle in the country, thus, very few foreigners settled permanently in the country (Papageorgiou, 2013). The main reason for the almost complete absence of immigration until the 1990s was the poor economy. Greece could barely sustain its citizens, let alone attract immigrants, in fact, up until the 1970s, Greece was one of main providers of immigrants that either

sought a better life abroad or migrated for a few years to gather money. Therefore, no corresponding policy or legislation is required (Papageorgiou, 2013).

Workers from Poland and Yugoslavia also arrived in the early 1980s, but by 1990 immigrants constituted only a small fraction of the population. According to Papageorgiou's research before 1988, it was estimated that there were only about 40,000 legal immigrants and about 15,000 illegal immigrants out of a total population of 10 million (Mousourou, 1999, Papageorgiou, 2013). In the beginning of the 90's the situation changed radically. The fall of communist regimes, especially in Albania, led to large numbers of Eastern Europeans massively entering Greece illegally. Albanians were in the majority from the start (unofficial figures for 1991 already give the number of 150,000 Albanians in that year alone) (Petriniotou, 1993, Papageorgiou, 2013). Citizens of other neighbouring Balkan countries also entered the country, although in smaller numbers, always illegally. This unexpected change in such a massive, swift, and unorganized way found the state and the society totally unprepared. Gradually, though, due to necessity Greece expanded its laws on migration even though many alterations were needed (Papageorgiou, 2013). We should also not forget that due to the financial crisis in 2008 Greece became a place that exported many economic migrants. Greek residents migrated due to the poor economy and the instability it caused.

Concerning the refugee wave to Europe in 2015, as it was mentioned before, it came via the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece once again played a key-role in the passage the refugees used. Once they arrived there, they used a land route to get to Germany and other western European countries as we can see bellow in the maps (Sabic, 2017). From Greece, the refugees made their way to North Macedonia, on foot and sometimes by bicycle to Serbia, from where again mostly on foot, they would cross to Hungary, where it would be relatively easy to reach Austria and Germany, since Hungary is located in the Schengen area (Sabic, 2017). Looking more closely into the path that the refugees followed, we can see that it was full of tribulations. During the spring of 2015, Hungary started to complain about a larger number of refugees arriving daily at its borders from Serbia. The border between Serbia and Croatia was closed in September 2015 after it threatened to erect a barbed-wire fence. This caused a re-route for travelers by crossing into Croatia instead, in an attempt to enter

Hungary. In response, Hungary started erecting a barbed-wire fence along the border with Croatia. A month later, the border was closed due to a security issue (Sabic, 2017), resulting yet in another reroute, in the middle of October 2015, refugees started crossing Slovenia via Croatia to reach Western Europe.

One would expect that refugees from Turkey would find it easier to get to western Europe via Bulgaria and avoid the dangerous journey in small boats to Greece. Though, due to the fact that in 2014, Bulgaria built a fence along the land border with Turkey and used violence to repel refugees, it became much more difficult for them to cross over that way (Sabic, 2017), making Greece the main entry point to the Balkans through Idomeni.

The name of the tiny hamlet of Idomeni became synonymous with the largest refugee camp in Greece. Idomeni was a sprawling camp within 500 meters of the Macedonian border. The camp was open as a stop for refugees who were able to cross into North Macedonia and go into Europe (Wright, 2016). Due to the constant changes and sudden decision of the country to close its borders refugees were forced to stay there until they were allowed to pass in to their next destination (Wright, 2016). It was required of them to remain in the camp until a decision was made on their individual cases. Some, even, had to stay in the camp for 9 weeks or months when the borders closed.

As the international community debated how to handle the millions of refugees fleeing chaos in their home countries, Greece and other countries were quickly being overwhelmed with people anxiously awaiting to reach Central Europe (Wright, 2016). Even after their decision to close off the borders, many people hoped that their arrival in Europe would be possible, providing them an opportunity at a life relived of conflict, until they could return home or relocate somewhere peaceful, essentially, putting an end in their liminal state .

Following the Balkan Route

Map of the Balkan Route

(In)visibility

The timeline of the Balkan Route as Nora Hill[2] mentioned in her work "can be roughly divided into four phases, clandestine, open, formalized, and closed" (El-Shaarawi et al., n.d.). That practically means that the migration flows existed and traversed there long before the refugee crisis but in smaller, more controlled groups that were practically invisible. And as Beznec in his work mentions, what becomes known as "the Balkan Route has actually a long history, marked by successive transformations in scope and visibility" (Beznec et al, 2016). In the summer of 2015, due to the fact that migration through the Balkans reached unprecedented levels, the Route suddenly became more visible, something of an open secret. Informal campsites sprung up along the borders where people were prevented from crossing resulting in landscapes and towns being transformed by the volume of people crossing through.

Asides from the historic aspect of the Route, there is another way to examine the phases it went through, one that helps us understand its complex and shifting politics, visibility. Before the summer of migration (Kasparek et al., 2021) in 2015, the Balkan Route was largely "invisible". Even though it was a functioning, established path towards the western European countries due to the notions surrounding refugees and the fact that they were on the move and in a transitory state (Harrell-Bond et al., 1992), granted the Route a special feature, it was visible in terms of materiality, there were established paths, infrastructure and passages but people were not paying attention to it, granting those seeking passage there a necessary form of invisibility.

Those traveling on the Route did so in secret, doing their best to remain undetected by the state. During that time, invisibility was a powerful tool. By staying invisible, if they had the ability to remain undetected, they claimed freedom of movement for themselves. But when the numbers of people on the Route rose in 2015, staying invisible posed a far greater challenge (Kasparek et al., 2021).

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[2] Nora Hill is a researcher that conducted a honored thesis which explores issues of (in)visibility and representation of migrants travelling along the Balkan Route to Western Europe from 2015-2018 through visual analysis of the images of migrants and borders. Her research is extremely helpful in order to better comprehend the Route and its several aspects and allows us to discover a different point of view on the subject.

It is precisely through the daily struggles of invisibility (travelling mostly on nighttime, minimal access to drinkable water, food and healthcare and proper shelter) that the status quo of the freedom of movement is called into question. As the refugee crisis made abundantly clear, people simply enacted their rights to escape and to free movement. In the absence of legal pathways, they found irregular ways to cross the European border and, having entered the Schengen Area, they circumvented the Dublin Regulation in order to arrive at a desired place that allowed them to live, and not merely to survive (Ataç et al., 2015).

Makeshift Camps

Part of the (in)visibility aspect is the establishment of makeshift, temporal places, officially called "informal transit camps". The care for the most urgent needs of the refugees being their primary goal, they are a byproduct of contemporary irregular migration and enhanced bordering practices, and indicate the response of states, migrants, and humanitarian aid networks to blocked routes and interrupted journeys. (Martin, 2015, Minca, 2021). As mentioned before, refugees are constantly on the move for extended periods of time, in a state of liminality (Harrell-Bond et al., 1992), consequently, they are not in search of permanence while in the Route, but of temporal dwellings that can offer them protection, a "rest-stop" until they can resume their journey.

Accordingly, in his description, Martin et al. (2020), (Minca, 2021), define makeshift camps as "temporary and ephemeral dwellings created by people "on the move" that reflect the precarious character of their condition together with their need for shelter. These camps are usually made of basic tents and flimsy shelters built out of simple materials available onsite such as cardboard sheets, blankets, and sleeping bags, and/or nylon and tarpaulin sheets stretched over a frame made of timber studs or branches collected locally" (Martin et al., 2020, Minca, 2021). The expansion of those camps often comes with the aid of local charities and international humanitarian agencies in sustaining and equipping them with basic utilities such as water tanks and portable toilets, although the creation and operation of minor and more isolated camps is often dependent on smugglers (2020, p. 745), (Minca, C. 2021).

While state camps usually last for long periods of time, the improvised camps often exist only for short periods. The creation of these built spaces seems to be completely arbitrary as they are formed in unexpected times and places in relation to various social, economic and political conditions (Katz, 2016). But where there is a forced restriction of movement, camps will be formed. These camps, where people wait in anticipation of their departure for their next destination, often grow rapidly, making them visible when a bottleneck is formed due to border policies that temporarily or permanently block certain migration routes. Violent displaced people are often socially, culturally and linguistically isolated in these camps. They themselves ask not to be detained in such camps, gesture that reflects the personal and political demand of refugees not to stop and be suspended under terrible conditions for unknown periods of time in places they did not want to come (Katz, 2016).

Closed European refugee camps and detention centers have seen increasing usage rates in the last decade for the accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers[3]. Transit countries outside Europe have also set up "processing centers" for displaced people (Katz, 2016), which however have been proven to be deficient and detrimental to the physical and mental health of prisoners. Due to the operation of an abundance of concentration camps by private companies, they are mostly kept outside of the public eye and, therefore, away from political scrutiny. Much like refugee camps in home regions, European internment camps are located away from other built-up areas and urban centers, which serves to keep people "invisible" , and separated from the rest of the population (Katz, 2016).

The refugees' demands for free movement to their preferred destination and refusal to stay in camps opened by the authorities doesn't subtract from the fact that the makeshift camps in question are an important part in their journey to Europe. These

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[3] According to Angeliki Dimitriadis's work (Dimitriadi et al., 2019) people who are forced to leave their homes due to conflict or disaster are often referred to as migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. The term refugee is often used in a non-legal sense to denote someone who is forced to leave their country or region of origin. "Trafficked", "smuggled", "irregular", and "illegal" are all terms used to describe the movement of people across national borders without proper documentation or authorization. This is in part a result of UNHCR's discourse, which was reinforced heavily in 2015 with its use of the terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' when discussing migratory flows. This is also due to the politics of humanitarianism, which dictates that an individual must be vulnerable and suffering in order to need protection. The term 'refugee' is often used to denote someone who has been forced to leave their country or region of origin as a result of persecution, human rights abuse, environmental disaster or civil war.

temporary spaces have been, for the last decade, common in European cities such as Berlin, Paris, Calais and Patras, and portray, in a way, the displacement of communities that are residents as well as builders. The evacuation and demolition of these camps after short time spans is a common occurrence, sometimes preceding their reconstruction in a different form or place (Katz, 2016). For instance, a makeshift camp was set up in the heart of Budapest at Keleti Railway Station following the increased flow of refugees through the nation. The location of the camp was of great significance, as more than 2,000 migrants wished to travel by train to the Austrian border. Another example is the improvised camps that got erected on the Greek island of Lesvos, where thousands of refugees were waiting for the required documents to continue their transport. The aforementioned represent only a small sample of such cases, since as of the past decade a plethora of similar camps has been built and demolished in European territory (Katz, 2016). The camp in the Greek port of Patras accommodated more than 1,000 refugees from Afghanistan and existed for several years before its demolition in July 2009. The most well-known example of a makeshift camp in Europe nowadays is the camp in the French port of Calais, also known as the "new jungle", where more than 5,000 Immigrants from Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are anticipating their documents or an opportunity to traverse the border and enter the United Kingdom (Katz, 2016).

People in these camps are often supported by NGO activists and volunteers from neighboring communities, citizens who help refugees through various acts of solidarity and support. Instead of hiding from the general public, makeshift camps are often set up not far away or in existing built-up environments, nestled in urban centers or on the outskirts of cities (Katz, 2016). These camps have been characterized by most as places of inadequate care and questionable sanitary conditions, which form lacking shelters for people who are in great need of them. However, unlike closed state "detention" or "reception" facilities that impose isolation on detainees while depriving them of their liberty, these makeshift camps are built by their own residents with ingenious survival acts and sometimes become locations where the displaced regain power through the production of their own countries (Katz, 2016). These camps also become part of urban environments where meetings with the local population take place.

Without them all these refugee waves would have nowhere to rest in their challenging journey or places to seek necessary help. Since, there are in a state of transition and liminality they lack the protection and security that being a citizen of a state offers (hence the term statelessness) leaving them vulnerable (Harrell-Bond et al., 1992). For that reason, asides from their lacking and insufficient character, their presence is crucial and it would prove to be much more efficient and helpful if they were properly established and funded, not as last-minute, temporary solution to an extremely complex and demanding situation. Their poor treatment stems from the belief that the refugees are, as was mentioned before, "a member of another race, some subhuman group", rendering them unworthy of proper aid (Dunbar-Ortiz et al., 1987).

Although makeshift camps may be a symptom of these people's ingenuity, they are still insufficient places for people to live. Since camps are needed for the temporary accommodation of migrants, they should not be located in remote places but part of the political environment. Most importantly, these vulnerable people must be able to move forward instead of being confined to temporary places of coercion within Europe, suspended on its doorstep (Katz, 2016).

Part 2: Main Part- Case Studies

Political scene in the Balkans

The refugee crisis has generated two different types of fear in the Balkans. One potential fear is that the refugee crisis could lead to new conflicts among neighbors who have not yet fully reconciled after the violent break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The refugee crisis could lead to conflicts in the Balkan countries because of the many unresolved issues from the past, as well as the countries' lack of trust, grievances, and contested borders. There are a plenty of states that are not particularly friendly to immigrants (De Borja Lasheras, 2016, Wunsch et al., 2016).

From within the region, it appeared that the refugee crisis may contributed to the enhancement of preexisting feelings of insecurity in Europe. Images of people in need of protection were juxtaposed with images of undocumented, unregistered young males which, in the minds of people, were a threat. From the Paris attacks in

November 2015 and the Cologne 2016 New Year incidents to the Brussels airport attack in April 2016, the July 2016 attack in Nice and the Manchester attack in May 2017, every next terrorist attack generated more fear of uncontrolled immigration (Wunsch et al., 2016).

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The refugee crisis put great pressure on the governments in the region, and demanded further assistance from the European Union than anticipated. The countries were concerned about the influx of refugees, they feared that once Austria, Germany, and other countries closed their borders, refugees would be stranded in their territories (Wunsch et al., 2016). The four countries' official statements concerning the status of the borders were similar – the government held responsibility and would not accept any kind of assistance that was disproportionately given to one country over the others. The status of being an EU Member State or not had no significant impact on each country's response.

Furthermore, there were a number of reasons why North Macedonia and Slovenia, both candidate countries for membership in the European Union, had different concerns about how to handle the refugee crisis, while Serbia and Croatia, both EU members, took different approaches. While both Serbia and Croatia had some disagreements over how to handle the refugees, they embraced a more humanitarian approach than North Macedonia and Slovenia (Wunsch et al., 2016). Therefore, EU membership was not a decisive factor in the manner that the countries handled the crisis. In light of the lack of a European-wide solution, countries felt the pressure to develop their own solutions, which tended to protect their national interests. However, that was an almost impossible task, as the nature of the refugee crisis meant that no single country could solve it on its own (Wunsch et al., 2016). Cooperation was the key to finding a solution. The refugee crisis in the Balkans showed us and highlighted the need for substantial cooperation in the area which still is sorely lacking among it.

Experiences from the transit camps

In an effort to better comprehend and understand how the refugee crisis evolved in Greece and in the rest countries of the Route I tried to depict the way transit camps

were structured and the conditions under which refugees had to live during that period, by taking an interview and analyzing existing ethnographic documentation on the topic.

I met my interviewee, Black, randomly through a common friend of ours that brought us into contact. My research topic came up and we realized she could help me by agreeing to an interview. As a result, after a few phone calls that opted to getting to known each other and breaching the subject of the interview we arranged an electronic one through a Zoom video call since nor I, nor she, could transfer where each one of us currently resides. Black is a volunteer for the humanitarian organization "METAdrasi" in Greece, she is currently hosting 13 unaccompanied, underage children in Samos until they can either be relocated or integrated to society with the help of state programs. She lived for many years in Axioupoli, a village near Idomeni and thus, close to the borders with North Macedonia. During the time of the refugee crisis she was officially acting as a deputy mayor, but due to the circumstances and the complexity of local politics she chose to take some distance from her political role and started to help the humanitarian organizations and volunteers that aided the refugees.

I chose to conduct a semi-constructed interview with an assortment of questions that provided to my interviewee some guidelines but also freedom to elaborate on topics she thought were also of importance, a chance to share her experience in a more open, unrestricted manner. The questions that were asked aimed at providing some information about her life, how she came to provide aid professionally to refugees and her role at Idomeni, details in her experience about the campsite that was created, the refugees that arrived, key-factors whose help is still detrimental at similar situations and information about the Route.

In the beginning, as my interviewee stated, Idomeni was a vast field used for agriculture, there was not any plan for it to became a "makeshift" camp for refugees. Especially, since, before the outbreak of the crisis, any incoming refugees went to a nearby village and from there they moved to their destination with the help from the locals. Around the beginning of the summer of 2015, though, refugees started to gather at a bigger rate than the established system could handle. As a result, people

started camping and establishing temporary places to stay while waiting to cross over in North Macedonia.

Taking a closer look at the given material the first thought that could came on someone's mind is that it simply shows us different kinds of tents, spread out randomly in a field. Its importance, though, is much bigger. That picture depicts the image of Idomeni after it took the shape and form of a transit camp. It took several months for that to happen since, in the beginning, Idomeni only hosted refugees for a short while so there was no need for an organized, properly equipped shelter. For that reason, it is extremely important to consider that Idomeni had to evolve and cope with the change in demands. That effort had to be supported by many volunteers, humanitarian organizations as well as UNHDR which aided and contributed in the transformation of the field in to a transit camp as it is shown bellow.

Idomeni from above (UNHCR archive)

Many years after the dissolution of Idomeni we can safely say that the state was not in the slightest prepared for the huge incoming influx of refugees. As Black mentioned in her interview, in the beginning, people randomly inhabited any empty and available space because their stay was a short one. As the time passed more people occupied the field of Idomeni. For that reason, humanitarian organizations started to offer aid in

any form they could, by giving food, medical help or clothes. Black stressed that in May 2015, there were no indicators of the upcoming refugee crisis. They never anticipated that in the span of a few weeks it would be required of them to host and take care more than a thousand refugees per day.

When the crisis finally reached its peak, they realized that the information they received was extremely lacking and the experience in handling a similar situation was extremely limited, even on a European level. Slowly, as the time passed UNHCR provided tents and some humanitarian aid, but it was insufficient to cover even the most basic needs of thousands of people who crossed the sea and reached Greece with the hope of crossing the Balkans and reaching central or northern Europe.

Even through those hardships during the time the borders were open their stay in Idomeni was not long, it spanned between hours and days so it was easier to provide the necessary aid. From the moment they closed the borders though, the situation changed drastically. The refugees that were stuck in Greece had to be taken care of for an unknown period of time and the volunteers had to explain to the people that they could not continue their journey. As we can notice on the photo bellow there many efforts from the refugees in order to mobilize the global community to take action. At that time, in Black's words, misinformation was a common occurrence since the situation was unpredictable and shifted extremely quick. Some refugees that held an open line of communication with people over the borders were informed that North Macedonia would open its borders while that could not be further from the truth, causing as a result, more tension and disappointment, feelings that took the form of political protest. For that reason, a usual occurrence in Idomeni was the presence of the Greek police in order to monitor the area between the campsite and the border.

As Opp (2009) aptly points out, political protest typically occurs during periods of conflict, and is defined as the collective action of individuals aimed at achieving their goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target. The goal of political protest is to influence the decisions of those in power (Opp, 2009, Mokre, 2018). Thus, the goals of political protest range from raising awareness of the conflict in question, to inciting public debate and controversy, to providing the general public with information, and mobilizing people to participate and join a protest group (Kriesi, 2011). The primary

targets or opponents of asylum, deportation, and border management protests are nation-states, their institutions and political processes, and the authorities responsible for policy adoption and policy implementation. The nation-state is still legally allowed to regulate and implement border procedures and decide on reception, accommodation, and deportation (Mokre, 2018). Taking that into consideration, we need to understand that refugees, as people in a transitional and vulnerable state, had no other means at their disposal that could be used to protest the closing of the borders and even more so to claim their right of free movement which should be protected and guaranteed within the Schengen area. Being confined, refugees in Idomeni utilized their tents, attempting to spread their message as effectively as possible to the public and, therefore, the international community. In the picture bellow we can see a distinctive example of how tents became a conduit of protest.

Outcry of the refugees, asking the opening of the borders

Those who rose up to the challenges of those tumultuous times were the volunteers and humanitarian organizations which provided humanitarian aid. My interviewee was among those people. She explained to me that they tried to help by coordinating food shipment schedules, allot food supplies, garments and blankets and medical aid when possible. The tents provided were not enough so people stayed in the mud-covered ground or in any dry surface they could find, using their clothes as a

makeshift tent so that had a form of protection from the weather and since Idomeni is a field there was difficult access to water. In the picture provided by Black we can see a family struggling to set their small tent in the railroad since the camp does not have more free space, under heavy rain. Similarly, due to the lack of space, many refugees ended up placing their tents on the railway line. Others, even, had their tents in the fields which became mud pits under the harsh weather conditions (Wright, 2016). Parents usually lived in the mud, hanging up clothes, blankets, and sleeping bags on the fences along the railroad track. Not everyone though slept in small tents. There were also two large UNHCR temporary tent buildings which provided approximately 100 bunks, arranged much like the overcrowded prisons in the U.S. Most of the refugees seeking shelter in Idomeni had to endure those conditions for months after the borders closed.

Refugees attempting to set their camps in Idomeni (provided by interviewee)

The given material provides us with a small sample of the challenges and hostile conditions countless refugees had to endure. Being in a foreign country and in a state of transition (Harrell-Bond et al., 1992) they had to adapt and survive under those challenging and troubling circumstances (harsh weather, lack of shelter and protection). The camp in Idomeni was shut down by the state around March of 2016

transferring those staying there to other locations, other establishments that were created or even empty storage spaces.

During the open phase of the Route, following Idomeni the path that the refugees traversed was towards the transit camps in Gevgelija, North Macedonia, Central Railway Station in Belgrade (Northern Serbia), Kanjiža close to the Serbian-Hungarian border and Keleti Station in Budapest (Hungary).

One of the most crowded transit places in Europe was the small town of Gevgelija. Gevgelija was in a strategic position for refugees crossing the Greek border and then moving through Serbia (or, less commonly, Bulgaria and Romania) towards Szeged and Budapest (Hungary), and then towards Northern Europe (Forino, 2016). The Gevgelija camp was located, similarly to Idomeni, in the countryside, with just a few surrounding houses, and about three kilometers from the town's train station (Forino, 2015). People usually arrived on foot from a similar camp in Greece and where met with the double lanes of barbed wire. Protests by the desperate crowds were a frequent phenomenon especially leading up to when North Macedonia closed off its borders resulting in mounting crowds, pushing to enter North Macedonian territory (Forino, 2016).

Once past the border, refugees had to walk along an unpaved way usually carrying their belonging. Following the example of other makeshift camps, refugees when they first arrived there were registered by the authorities, and were provided with some food, water, and clothes by national and international volunteers (Forino, 2016). Due to the weather conditions, plastic shelters and gazebos exposed to the sun were placed randomly, in any available spot. Their stay at Gevgelija camp was mainly short, after few hours, most of the people left on buses towards Serbia.

After Gevgelija, Belgrade was the fundamental travel point for refugees moving toward the Hungarian line. Usually, they were packed in one side of the Central Railway Station, with the belief that transports would be enough for them to cross the Serbian-Hungarian border (Forino, 2016). It was a small, exceptionally packed area, with people of all ages but mainly youth showering in the fountain, and people sleeping in igloo tents, recovering on the floor, or drying garments close to the

garbage. According to Forino (2015) during his research despite the fact that the railway station was the fundamental station in Belgrade, the general climate that prevailed was chaotic (Forino, 2015). In his descriptions locals merchants with packs and bags were passing all through the refugees' region or getting to the shops and bars outside the station (Forino, 2015).

Further along the Route, in Kanjiža, the transit camp was situated in a country region three kilometers from the town and near a rail line track. The outside of the camp and the surrounding streets were full of displaced refugees wandering, looking for food, or trying to gather all the family's members with no provided assistance. In Forino's description (2015) the conditions there seemed relatively better and more organized than in Gevgelija and Belgrade. The camp was managed and monitored by volunteers who benefited from Russian aid providing shelter, tents, fountains, toilets, and food (RT, 2015).

One of the final transit spaces is the area in front of the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest, where refugees gathered waiting to take trains to Germany and Austria (Forino, 2015). That makeshift camp had several differences from the campsite in Idomeni but its usage remained the same. In contrast, with the rural environment in Greece, in our case, we can see in the picture that it was set in a railway station in the city centre. As a result, the distribution of the people and infrastructure is different. There are no tents, instead the refugees sleep on the ground or on fabrics and clothes while they wait take the train on to their next destination. Due to the proximity of the camp's location with their final destination we can assume that informal establishment has also an ephemeral character, its features resemble more that of a rest-stop than a permanent stay location.

Refugees waiting in Keleti station (Giuseppe Forino)

Refugees that arrived there were in majority extremely worn-out from the long journey, in dreadful conditions and were welcomed with lacking and unsanitary conditions that barely covered their essential needs. The camp was equipped with just a small and insufficient water pump and a few toilets, as well as minimal food and no safe areas for sleeping (Forino, 2015). Refugees were left waiting for days in front of the station, sleeping on the ground, some even protested with a sit-in and exposed protest signs in front of the station's stairs, claiming their right to travel. (Forino, 2015).

These transit spaces are the embodiment of liminality. Their makeshift and ephemeral character materializes "life on the move". Similarly with the Balkan Route these are existing placements yet they are unwanted and usually their existence has a short duration. Refugee camps are intended to embody temporary architecture. They are usually made up of tents and shelters, designed to be assembled quickly and easily in response to emergencies (Petti, 2013). Temporary structures or buildings are not designed to be long-lasting. The establishment of refugee camps is justified by humanitarian intent and technocratic design discourse, but they remain an essentially political issue. The humanitarian bodies tasked with managing and controlling them

do not ultimately decide whether they serve temporarily or become more permanent, but rather political conflicts do. The prolonged exceptional temporariness of the refugee camps could paradoxically create the conditions for its transformation into an active political space that embodies and expresses the right of return (Petti, 2013).

Conclusion

The refugee emergency was an extremely challenging encounter for Europe and the previously mentioned nations in the Balkans. It seems that the refugee crisis brought to the surface and heightened problems and weaknesses within the region that still need have not been addressed.

What we can understand from this research is that the Balkans are imagined in a specific way. The Balkans are not seen as the "complete Other" of Europe, but rather as its "incomplete self". Their space is, in a temporal ideological sense, a space framed from the perspective of an eternal "generation" of modernization, development and Europeanization. They appear to always be in a liminal state of being and becoming something more.

During the "refugee crisis", the Balkans indeed appeared not only as an eternal transit zone, where the only permanence seemed to be the element of movement itself, but additionally, confirmed with their actions that they are absorbed in a continuous and ambiguous transition to Europe. While some countries in the Balkans that are already EU member states exhibited a "less European" manner of behaviour due to (violent) border closures to refugees, some EU candidates emerged and positioned themselves as "true" representatives of Europe (Tosic, 2017).

The Balkans have been imprinted to our consciousness as, both the "backyard of Europe" and an eternal "transit zone" because of the inconsistent EU migration policies related to the migration crisis and the continuing effort of many to claim a better life in Europe. Since the "European solution" still is not constituted from solidarity and fair distribution of tasks within the EU, but rather border closures and selective refugee exchanges, the south-eastern part of Europe will most likely

continue to reproduce equally unstable migration border (im-)mobility patterns of being stranded and settling temporarily (Tosic, 2017).

Being in a state of liminality refugees are called to face numerous challenges both physical and mental, starting from the uncertainty that comes when a person flees their country until they achieve their goals. It can be safely assumed that, in order to support these people, there is an imperative need for a well-organized, effective system of all sorts of humanitarian aid and proper establishment of transit camps. Whether they are camps that precede or follow wars, encampments set up after natural catastrophes, or refugee camps, they often become places where people are born and die waiting to be resettled. The camp condition has opened up a new horizon of political and social configurations, as well as new ways of understanding the relation of the population to space and territory (Petti, 2013).

By improving the transit campsite system both the countries and refugees will be greatly benefited. Makeshift establishments should not have a punitive character, unsanitary conditions and punish people for being refugees. On the contrary, they should have a more humane character that embraces people in need and can offer them support as quickly and effectively as possible. In Turner's work (1969) liminality is a necessary part of the process of coming of age and entering society, in our case though that state has a different dimension, its full of uncertainty, dangerous challenges and has no specific duration. Only a few refugees will manage to be granted asylum and get relocated while others might lose their lives.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1.Can you tell me how you came into contact with refugee issues? Are you still active today?

2. When did you start dealing with refugee issues? What got you into it?

3. What was your role in the case of Idomeni?

4. Do we know from the media that the number of refugees was huge? This is true;

5. What was the capacity of Idomeni and finally how many people was it called to host?

6. Can you give an estimate of the number of people who passed through during the crisis?

7. Do you know which countries they come from? How did they get to Greece?

8. Which age and social groups prevailed? Men, women or children?

9. How is an unaccompanied child treated as a refugee? What are the possible endings/outcomes?

10. What was the initial care provided to the arriving refugees?

11. What was/is the general treatment of refugees?

12. Can you describe the conditions in the structure? What problems did you and the refugees face?

13. Could the structure meet the needs of the refugees? How did you deal with the growing needs? Was there support from the state? If so, was it enough?

14. Can you describe a typical day in Idomeni? How was their daily life shaped?

15. What was the average length of stay of the refugees? Where did they want to settle later?

16. Finally, do you know if they were able to be re-promoted or absorbed/received asylum?

17. Were there any who were forced to leave the country?

18. Do you know how easy it was to get refugee/asylum seeker status?

19. From which countries has there been greater absorption? Which ones had the highest acceptance rate?

20. Do you know the route they took to reach their destination?

Has anyone decided to settle in Greece?

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