

Contested Bodies/ Contested Borders. Re-Imagining the Refugee Crisis through Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

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INTRODUCTION

The continuous influx of refugee populations from Syria towards the West has given emergence to a number of socio-political subjects, and particularly to issues of cultural representation of the refugees as the Other; being represented as inherently non-canonical bodies, orientalised, victimised, diseased, and contaminated, the collective body of the refugee populations can be seen as denominator of change in the cultural representation of canonicity and the current socio-spatial regimes of inclusion/exclusion on the borders of South-eastern Europe. The presence of refugees, asylum seekers and dead bodies washed ashore on the threshold of Europe are calling for a reconfiguration of border policies and practices.

Ancient Greek tragedy, being born as a political event itself and expanding beyond the limits of entertainment, can become the privileged site of the representation of the vulnerability and precarity of the human life as well as of the artificiality and discursive construction of geographical demarcations, i.e. borders. Drawing parallels between a literary *topos* (Lemnos) with a real, geographical one (Lesvos), allows us to examine the concept of borders through space and time. Shedding light on a Greek tragedy as a medium of and beyond representation, brings in the foreground its agonistic capacity and the chance to rethink and disturb our pre-conceived notions of our institutions, namely borderlands, and expose the deep tensions within border regimes.

Lemnos and Lesvos are both sites of contestation, where precarious bodies oscillate between spatial binaries, such as proximity/non-proximity, inclusion/exclusion. Both Philoctetes and the Refugee are figures occupying spaces of transition and ambiguity that are either tragic or culpable. In a similar manner that Philoctetes commits a transgression by stepping onto the shrine of the goddess Chryse, the refugee engages in the transgressive act of arrival, which Abdelmalek Sayad calls ‘the original sin of migration’ (Sayad 2004, p. 283) posing a threat to the state’s attempts for order and the artificial ‘stability’ that borders induce. Juxtaposing Sophocles’ text and the ongoing situation on Lesvos, offers the ground for renegotiating the meaning of the island as a categorical yet porous border within the social life of a community, and calls for an alternative ethics that take place outside the realm of sovereign power and secure nation state.

The present article seeks to explore the ways in which ancient Greek tragedy can solicit critical engagement of the reader with the emerging problem of the “intruding” collective body of the refugees seeking asylum in the West. We would like to explore the ways in which the given text can open up new representational potentials of the transgressive bodies of the refugees, while at the same time we are also interested in fathoming the potential of drama to create the presuppositions for an empathetic engagement of the Western reader/viewer with the social, political and cultural aspects of the precarious lives of the refugees. In this framework, our article will take issue with the limits of representation, the politicization of literature, empathy as well as spectatorship and contemporary (melo)dramatic performances and understandings of uprootedness.

LEMNOS/LESVOS AND THE FOUCAULDIAN HETEROTOPIA

What is a heterotopia? Published in 1986, after his death, and based on a lecture given in 1967, Foucault's article under the title "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" has been seminal in the sense that it has informed our current conceptualization of space, while also giving impetus to a burgeoning body of scholarship which engaged with the concept of the heterotopia in various levels, cutting across different disciplines, such as human geography and geopolitics. Drifting away from the fixation of the 19th century with time, Foucault postulates that "the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (p. 1). Foucault's emphasis on and fascination with space signifies a paradigm shift within various disciplines, as space will no longer be seen as a static, essential given; on the contrary, a new era starts, one in which space becomes worthy of philosophical analysis due to its fluidity and dynamism. Common binaries of exclusion/inclusion, local/international/foreigner, legal/illegal, self/other, here/there, underlie the founding principles of constructing modern state borders, suggesting that borders are fixed, given and beyond negotiation, while at the same time excluding emerging heterotopias. Even though modern politics of state and governmentality rely on the idea of borders as clear, demarcating lines which define separate countries and their residents unambiguously, a consideration of migratory movements and contemporary politics of globalisation needs to defy such definitions. Within this framework, Lesvos can be seen as a palimpsest of various heterotopias which co-exist in non-exclusionary terms. The juxtaposition of modern-day Lesvos with literary Lemnos exposes the plasticity of space in terms of representation but also lived experience; the relations of power and its unequal distribution reflect upon individuals, whose vulnerability is systemically produced and sustained. The concept of the island, therefore, becomes a discursive marker which produces various phenomenologies.

Heterotopias are characterized by their heterogeneity and varied typology. In the context of the refugee camps or hot spots, it seems that the fittest type of heterotopia is the crisis one; Foucault defines crisis heterotopias as places "reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment they live, in a state of crisis" (p. 4). The hotspots imposed as a security measure by the EU have been

promoted through a political agenda which supports regulation of the borders in order to minimise the migratory flows from Syria seeking asylum to the West. FRONTEX, which is officially known as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, was founded in 2005 but saw its role becoming even more intensive in the protection of the European Union boarders, particularly after 2015, when its budget increased significantly. The response to the migratory flows, therefore, goes through a technocratic approach to disasters caused by war, which seeks to 'treat' the disruption of normalcy through steps of regulation and militarisation of the borders, being in line with the idea of the clearly demarcated limits of the modern state-nation. Seen through the scope of the Foucauldian heterotopias, the hotspots that were established with the intention of creating a register of the incoming refugee populations and providing safety passages¹ for them, incarnate the par excellence spaces of crisis, where the individuals or group of individuals who deviate from the norm are placed.

The discourse of crisis intersects with the discourse of heterotopias to reveal the many levels of transgressions performed by the figure of the refugee. Naomi Klein's theorisation of disaster capitalism reveals the constructedness of the idea of the crisis and emphasises how the discourse of disaster can be used as the pretext in order to facilitate the application of reform measures by economic technocrats (Klein, 2007, p. 10). The movement of the migratory populations and the so-called European migrant crisis can be seen, therefore, through the prism of globalised capitalism and the unequal distribution of power which produces zones of emergency in the periphery of the West; it is seen as a symptom of the modern state, which has been built on the foundations of civil security and order, policing, discipline and surveillance. Therefore, the response to it seeks to restore order and uses the vocabulary of restoration and recovery, expelling the migratory flows to the realm of a borders' pathology that calls for treatment. Within this framework of highly militarised borders, the hotspots and concentration are in lieu of prisons. Lesvos, thus, acquires the status of a contemporary penal exile on the south-eastern edge of Europe. The heterogeneity of the concept of heterotopias points towards the idea of deviation and how this is treated: The insularity of this prison (which is not named as such in the public rhetoric of the EU policy makers) allows for the corroboration of the binary of us/ them and inclusion/exclusion. Therefore, the problematic shores of Lesvos are used to relieve the unrest caused by the very

prospect of the Other transgressing the clearly defined lines of the centre against the periphery. Nevertheless, the presence of the Other on the threshold of Europe is there to remind the Continent of its imperial past and neo-colonial present, contesting at the same time its rigid, concrete borders both physically and ideologically.

To further extent this crisis approach, crisis heterotopias can be re-signified at the biopolitical level: individuals or groups of individuals who find themselves exiled in heterotopias experience a major ontological shift in terms of vulnerability and precarity of life. The consideration of the border policy of the EU in relation to its Mediterranean neighbourhood is deeply entangled with biopolitics and the distinction between *bios* and *zoe* as well as the state of exception, as they have been theorised by Agamben. The refugee embodies the home sacer par excellence, who may be killed and yet not sacrificed (Agamben, 1998, p. 8). What lies at the heart of the concept of the homo sacer is impunity: homo sacer can be killed but the perpetrator will remain unpunished. In other words, being placed in a heterotopia, equals the loss of one's humanness and visibility. At the same time, the representation of the refugee migratory flows corroborates even further the distinction between grievable and worth-remembering lives. The use of statistics and probability by technocratic policy makers, who rely on the use of certain types of knowledge in order to render disasters predictable and, therefore, easier to tame, deprives individuals of their uniqueness and humanness, paving the way for the distinction between disposable and non-disposable lives. It is not surprising to underscore that the UNHRC Greece provides detailed statistics on the daily arrivals and deaths on the Greek shores, which is indicative of the technocratic approach to the mitigation of the effects of the war. What is more, the use of the term 'vulnerability' in discourse of risk management cannot go unchallenged, as it implies a passivity on the part of the individuals or communities who are affected by a disaster to a lesser or greater extent. Consequently, the Other, as it is reflected on the refugees, figures as a homogenous and recognisable body, which can be deprived of any kind of agency, disenfranchised and marginalised to the status of a disposable life.

Modern Greece, nevertheless, forms a complex migratory landscape which problematizes the currency and the validity of the modern state narrative and the implications of it on agency and citizenship. It serves as an example of a country/space forged by various ongoing crises, that is the fiscal crisis that emerged as a serious national

problem in 2010 as well as the so-called refugee crisis, which culminated in 2015-16². As such, it both attracts certain populations, while it also pushes away others. For the local people, the economic crisis has meant that many individuals have found themselves in the margins of the economy, being forced to work with minimum, if any, work rights and finally being forced to migrate to other countries, and mainly in the European North, in search of better opportunities. At the same time, though, Lesvos, being so close to Turkey and being the last border of the EU and the first host country which can offer shelter to asylum seekers, has attracted people from disadvantaged countries, or countries that have been afflicted by war. Lesvos, being part of Greece, exemplifies the idea of the border as a space of becoming- and not being. Located on the borders between Greece and Turkey, it forms one of the last borders of the EU. An island that has been traditionally attracting tourists from all over the world and for which tourism is the resource that sustain its economy, becomes a zone of emergency with the influx of Syrian refugees, attracting asylum seekers and volunteers at the same time. The island of Lesvos defies monolithic representations and definitions of borderlands, as it has transformed into a malleable space of becoming. The day-to-day lived experience of the island and the interaction between different people in its social space reveals the polysemy of the concept of the border, as it becomes reconfigured through the presence of different occupants.

PHILOCTETES, HOSPITALITY AND HOME

Greek Tragedy offers scope for theorising and rehistoricising dispossession, displacement and seeking refuge. Representations of the migrant are abundant in various plays and have been adapted within different contexts of humanitarian crises. Oedipus, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, asks King Theseus to grant him sanctuary so that he can finally find his last resting place. Similarly, in Aeschylus' *the Suppliants* the daughters of Danaos also seek asylum. Adaptations of *Antigone*, *the Trojan Women*, and *Hecuba* bring to the foreground depictions of vulnerability, the need of belonging and the right to community. These themes resonate powerfully with the current refugee situation, as, according to Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the world is experiencing 'the highest levels of forced displacement in

recorded history'. In this context, tragic characters do not only represent migrants fleeing war and atrocities but can be appropriated to illuminate and call attention to the position of the stateless person and the ethical obligations that arise towards them. In this sense, ancient Greek tragedy, which was born as an act denoting the political involvement of the Athenians in their democracy, can be rehistoricised and reinterpreted in order to provide a more affective understanding of the precarious condition of the refugee, pointing towards an ethics of moral responsibility and inclusivity towards the de-territorialised war people.

A play that has been adapted many times in recent years, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, alludes to themes ranging from illness and pain to war trauma and PTSD, albeit has not been frequently connected to representations of the refugee plight. Taking into consideration Philoctetes' wounded and exiled body, this article considers that the play offers metaphoric equations to current conceptualisations of borders. The *Philoctetes* is a play that ponders on a wound that never heals. The protagonist oscillates between health and disease, liminal spaces and non-linear territoriality/ temporality, navigating the eremia of Lemnos' barren landscape, as contradicting forces attempt to contest control over him. Philoctetes' terrestrial and bodily boundaries are fluid, and the danger of violation is constant and ever present.

Ancient tragedy, like the one being examined here, invites not only critical engagement with issues of vulnerability, dispossession and disenfranchisement, but also provides a study on the importance of empathy and community, the ritual of supplication or *hiketia*, which was actively practiced as a moral agent in ancient Athens. The juxtaposition of Sophocles' tragedy with the events that took place in Lesvos in 2015-16 crosses the boundaries between the ancient and the contemporary and seeks to rehistoricise the ancient Greek tragedy in order to bring on the foreground vital issues of precarity, vulnerability and the ethics of togetherness.

The concept of hospitality, which has been emphasised as a fundamental conceptualisation of ethics by Emanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, is highlighted in the *Philoctetes*, as a political action of providing community and empathy to the suffering protagonist of the play. In her seminal work *Precarious Life, Vulnerability and the Ethics of Cohabitation*, Judith Butler addresses and problematizes the ethical obligations towards people or groups living in precarious states redefining

geographical borders and the implications that arise from forced proximity or lack thereof. She writes: 'Emmanuel Levinas offers a conception of ethics that rest upon an apprehension of the precariousness of life, one that begins with the precariousness of the Other'. (p. 17, 2004) Philoctetes embodies the vulnerable Other, the discarded body at the shore of Lemnos with very little materiality to carry him into the civilised world, trapped within categorical boundaries which he nevertheless threatens with his mere existence.

The borders of both Lemnos and Lesvos render both Philoctetes and the refugee either powerless or culpable, figures to be pitied or held accountable. Seen from this perspective, the Sophoclean tragedy sheds light on the contemporary tragedy of the refugee, as they both oscillate between acceptance and rejection, inclusion and exclusion, between stability and fluidity. As Mark Justin Rainy argues in 'The Tragedy of the Border and the Dialectics of Repair': "At these borders the arriving migrant occupies an ambiguous set of positions that allows the receiving state to cast moral judgments on both groups and individuals and affix a stratified set of legal and social statuses which [...] range from the posthumus citizen to the criminal." Philoctetes occupies the liminal space which strips him of any kind of human rights and the state, personified by Odysseus, who ascribes his authoritarian conditions on Philoctetes' wounded and vulnerable body, at times stripping him off any kind of agency, and at others restoring him to his previous status of Greek warrior when he needs to fulfil his utilitarian purposes. Similarly, the refugee populations occupy various, often contradictory roles, embodying the threat against the idea of a homogenous Europe on the one hand, but, also become the humanitarian *raison d'être* on the other hand, justifying the existence of humanitarian spirit among NGO's, activists, and volunteers. In the latter case, far from incarnating a threat, the refugees become the promise for a Continent that can extend its sympathy to those who have been afflicted by wars and other disasters. In this binary, the role of the refugee is that of the victim, who needs protection and therefore Europe occupies the role of the caring mother who provides for her children.

The action in the play begins when, following his accidental trespassing onto the sacred ground of goddess Chryse, he is bitten on the foot by a poisonous snake and suffers from chronic infection and acute spasms of pain. The horrible stench of his

wound and the constant cries of agony force his cohort to abandon him on Lemnos for 10 whole years, while they continue their journey to fight in the Trojan war. During this time, and with no sign of the war ending, a prophecy reveals that victory would come to the Greeks only with Herakles' bow which was bestowed upon Philoctetes shortly before his death. As the play begins, Odysseus explains to Neoptolemus that they have to deceive Philoctetes with a false story in order to extricate the bow from him and bring it to Troy. Neoptolemus agrees and this is where the action begins.

Lemnos takes centre stage as a *topos* of crisis, thus constituting a heterotopia where the state, in the form of Odysseus, employs utilitarian means in order to disenfranchise and deceive him. The play begins with the word, *akτή*, or shore, as for the first 100 lines of the dialogue the protagonist is in so much pain that he has no words. Philoctetes' precariousness is emphatically intertwined with Lemnos' assertive insularity. Sophocles turns his stage in something akin to a laboratory, where the othered, exiled, precarious body, is gazed upon both by the internal (Odysseus, Neoptolemus and the chorus) and the external audience (the spectators). Philoctetes is encompassed and simultaneously in flux within the boundaries of the island, his pain keeping his materiality on the surface, living in a constant 'in-between'. Lemnos hosts Philoctetes in crisis, as the refugees in Lesvos, in very fixed yet abstract borders.

Butler considers proximate and distant suffering, and the ethical claims that determine the 'here' and the 'elsewhere'. She writes: 'To find that one's life is also the life of others, even as this life is distinct and must be distinct, means that one's boundary is at once a limit and a site of adjacency, a mode of spatial and temporal nearness and even boundedness'. (p. 141) Philoctetes' embodied existence is exposed to both kindness and injury, community and exclusion, containment and contagion. The *Philoctetes* is a study on the illusion of borders, on vulnerability and the wound of displacement. Sophocles creates a deeply political ecosystem, with various contesting forces fighting to keep liminal boundaries while they are challenged both by Philoctetes himself and by the pity and empathy Neoptolemus manifests. His marginal existence demand from the others to position themselves with or against him ethically. By removing any kinship elements, present in various other tragedies, Sophocles sends a very clear message: Philoctetes' precariousness is a distinct political problem, as Odysseus assumes the role of governmentality as theorised by Michel Foucault, as

a mode of ruling based on population knowledge and control (Rozakou, 2015), trying to alienate and quarantine him within his watery and terrestrial borders, while there is an act of resistance happening from within, in the way the relationship between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus grows and alters both characters' emotional states.

The character of Neoptolemus is an addition by Sophocles as he does not appear in previous adaptations by Aeschylus and Euripides. As Marina McCoy argues, "this dramatic innovation allows Sophocles to explore the significance of natural sympathy between human beings as the grounds for a political bond." (2013, p. 73) What these two characters have in common is nothing but their mutual encounter with the pain, but it succeeds to produce a clear decision on the part of Neoptolemus to stand ethically with Philoctetes.

Juxtaposing the two islands, the ancient and the contemporary one, Lemnos and Lesvos, provides the space for critical engagement with the notion of border zones, where both the protagonist's and the refugee's social calibre are contested and re-conceptualised. In this manner, the play can be read or staged by inviting a different definition from the one that Aristotle provides about the purification of the audiences' emotions through the spectacle of violence (*katharsis*), by demanding ethical and political criticism that could lead to the construction of a deeply political community. As Martha Nussbaum argues in 'Invisibility and Recognition: Sophocles' Philoctetes and Ellison's Invisible Man', "...narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral and political interaction. Habits of empathy and conjecture conduce to a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community: one that cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another's needs, and understand the way circumstances shape those needs." (1997, p. 270). (...) Sophocles invites his readers and spectators to question societal representations of the diseased, the marginal, the not fully human. Not all characters in the play receive Philoctetes in the same way. The Chorus, unlike their leader, make an effort to imagine his suffering, loneliness and isolation, alluding to spectators' imaginative engagement with the protagonist's invisibility and forced lack of humanity:

This man Philoctetes,
for all we know, is just a good
as any member of the finest clan.
But here he lies all by himself,

Apart from other human beings,
With shaggy goats and spotted deer,
Suffering from hunger pangs
And from his painful wound.
It's pitiful—he has to bear
An agony that has no cure,
And, as he cries in bitter pain,
The only answer comes from Echo,
A distant, senseless babble. (231-240)

The Chorus serves in a way as a representation of the spectatorship, as through them the audience is invited to acknowledge Philoctetes' plight and evoke feelings of empathy and community. Martha Nussbaum considers this an act of political decision, as "in this way, by showing the public the benefits of the very sort of sympathy it is currently awaking in its spectators, the drama commends its own resources as valuable for the formation of decent citizenship and informed public choice." (p. 275). The process of forming this decent citizenship is underpinned not only by taking a political stance against extreme suffering, but also by engaging critically with the importance of mundane materiality and the ordinary as a way to carry humanity into civilisation, like the need for shelter, comfort and of course food. The fact that Philoctetes lives in a cave in an isolating, inhospitable place, means that his diseased body is not carried into civilisation, his ties with the community are cut off. Everyday objects that carry no complex meaning other than their practical use, become signifiers of malignancy, contaminated by the disease that festers in Philoctetes' foot, and with each close examination by Neoptolemus and Odysseus connotes the dissolution of any certainty or comfort, any projection of the body to the outside world, to the making of a sharable experience and connection. The fact that Philoctetes is absent from the scene further destabilises any suggestion of cure. Elaine Scarry argues that the catalysis of the prisoner's material world contributes to their unmaking of the world:

"There is nothing contradictory about the fact that the shelter is at once so graphic an image of the body and so emphatic an instance of civilisation: only because it is the first can it be the second. It is only when the body is comfortable, when it has ceased to be an obsessive object of perception and concern, that consciousness

develops other objects, that for any individual the external world (in part already existing and in part about to be formed) comes into being and begins to grow.”³

Philoctetes, is reduced to his bodily faculties and his ‘built’ environment becomes a source of sustenance but also proof of his descent to savagery and lack of community. A space with categorical borders (Lemnos, the cave), but with no trace of civilisation or community, creates a constant interplay of dichotomies between containment and expansiveness, health and disease, extreme embodiment and disembodiment, a complex interplay of subtexts, which forces readers and spectators to constantly question its premises, entering the ambivalent space of a person in pain, always occupied by efforts to alleviate, comfort or numb the suffering.

There is a constant battle of perception in the play, and a constant battle for space occupation. The diseased, noxious body of Philoctetes is removed in this first scene, but there is a tangible ecosystem that indicates the material aspect of his experience. Philoctetes has created an ecosystem upon which he relies: A cave which has two openings, shaped in a way that when it’s cool there are two exits facing the sun, and when it’s hot the breezy drafts slip in through the narrow tunnel. To the left below the cave, there is a water spring that satisfy Philoctetes’ basic needs. The attempts of Odysseus to dehumanise Philoctetes and deem him some sort of an animal, whose ‘wild howling rang throughout the camp’, that ‘we could not pray in peace or make libations and burnt sacrifices’ fail, as Philoctetes, although in great pain, chooses the best spot on the island with a very human sensibility in order to make his shelter. When Neoptolemus approaches his cave he finds signs of civilised life, and of a life that is self-preserving and alleviating.

‘A pallet bed, stuffed with leaves, to sleep on, for someone. | A cup, made of single block, a poor | workman’s contrivance. And some kindling, too’ (33-35). Philoctetes endeavours to live in a distinctive human way, marking the space as his own. The cave and the objects he has accumulated serve as a vehicle to drive his pain outward, to the external world. The caves, the creeks and dens become more than just a metaphor. They become the environment that sustains him, and provide him with a ‘referential object’ for his pain:⁴ ‘Caverns and headlands, | dens of wild creatures, | you jutting broken crags, | to you I raise my cry | there is no one else that I can speak to | and you have always been there, have always heard me’ (336-39).

He calls out to the cave that was both his sanctuary, and his encompassing platform of suffering:

Two doors cut in the rock, | to you again, | again I come, enter again, unarmed, | no means to feed myself! Here in this passage | I shall shrivel to death alone. | I shall kill no more, | neither winged bird nor wild things of the hills | with this my bow. (952- 957)

Philoctetes reclaims agency by creating an environment he can depend on, using tangible objects as means of palliation almost, not as an external referent to unload his pain. He keeps referring to his cave and rags as if they possess human qualities like seeing and feeling. This emphasis on sight and perception is also relevant to the discussion surrounding visible and invisible forms of suffering. The extensive focus on materiality and the use of it, and the way the scene addresses the audience highlights the resistance to the dehumanisation of Philoctetes, as Neoptolemus identifies with him and his pain. The play, therefore, gives spectators the incentives to think deeply about the treatment of the diseased, the Other, the marginalised and consider their inclusion and acknowledgment.

Similarly, in order to regain their agency, the refugees are attempting to make the hot spots and detention centres where they are forcefully kept the space of familiarity and solidarity. Again, as it has been aforementioned, the heterotopia of the hot spot cannot be exclusively seen in monolithic terms, as it functions in a palimpsestic fashion. Even though they have initially been designed as penal exiles for the pathologised collective body of the refugee populations, the interaction of the migratory flows with the local community, the volunteers and other individuals who showed solidarity inscribes the place as a zone of contact between contradictory binaries. The locals set up unofficial trade exchanges with the refugees, creating a separate ecosystem around the camp, which evades clear categorical distinctions, oscillating between visibility and invisibility.

CONCLUSION

In the onset of this article, we brought on the foreground the concept of the Foucauldian heterotopia as a seminal methodological tool, which can shed light on the discursive

sive representation as well as the lived experience of the refugee. Our paper attempted to take a transhistoric look at the idea of the refugee within (a) heterotopia, juxtaposing the literary figure of Philoctetes with the present day refugees and asylum seekers who flee war in Syria and transgress the European borders to find themselves, alive or dead, on the shores of Lesvos. The juxtaposition of Philoctetes vis-à-vis the refugees relies on the consideration of the Other as a figure that poses a threat against the perceived homogenous self-image of Europe. At the same time, we also examined the concept of the heterotopia as a palimpsest which is inscribed with meaning at many discursive levels: the crisis heterotopia, far from being monolithic, seems to be fermented with different interpretation potentials as it is constantly reconfigured through the interaction of space with different individuals. Therefore, within the *topos* of the island, both Philoctetes and the refugees, become deprived of their right to a lawful, visible life, embodying the role of the homo sacer, but through the occupation of their penal exile they also reinscribe this very space with their presence, claiming their agency back. In drawing the parallels between the discursive representation of the refugee as the foreigner and the lived experience of the asylum seekers reaching out the Greek shores with the hope of safety and inclusion, we seek to establish a dialogue between the *topos* as text and the *topos* as experience in order to promote a better, more inclusive understanding of togetherness and the ethics of cohabitation.

NOTES

1. Even though the concept of safety might sound clear, unambiguous and intrinsically benevolent, the lived experience of the hotspots in Moria, Lesvos, exposes the contested nature of such spaces of exclusion and imprisonment. In September 2018, the MSF reported an increase in the number of children who had proceeded to acts of self-harming, had made attempts to suicide or had suicidal thoughts. The NGO has repeatedly called for a drastic intervention that will enable the asylum seekers to be set free from the penal exile of the hotspots. For more information, see <https://www.msf.org/child-refugees-lesbos-are-increasingly-self-harming-and-attempting-suicide>.
2. According to the statistics provided by the UNHRC Greece, the number of the asylum seekers reaching out to the Greek coast in 2015 was 856,723, while it significantly declined the next year (173,450 people arrived). It is interesting to notice that even the UNHRC employs a technocratic

parlance of statistics and disaster management measures in order to present its response to the needs of the migratory flows.

3. Scarry, p. 39.
4. Scarry, pp. 38-61.

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