



The Biopolitics of Gender in Greece's Border Regime
January 11, 2019, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences
New Building, 3rd Floor, Room 6

Conveners

Athena Athanasiou | Department of Social Anthropology | Panteion University
Cynthia Malakasis and **Vanessa Grotti** | EU Border Care | Robert Schuman Centre for
Advanced Studies | European University Institute

▪ **Introduction**

This workshop brings together scholars conducting ethnographic research in Greece on the topic of refugee arrivals since 2015 to discuss the gender practices, norms, and hierarchies that manifest, emerge, are (re)produced, or potentially challenged within the interactions of refugees with the agents of the gendered and racialized biopolitical apparatus of migration management (which may include the researcher herself). The workshop will include a particular focus on the experiences and interactions of LGBTQI+ refugees.

The workshop will be the first meeting between these scholars, to discuss early drafts of papers that will later form a special issue. Participants will use their ethnographic material to respond to one or both of the following distinct, yet related theoretical inquiries:

- How are gender norms and relations mediated via national, ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and class hierarchies?
- Within the fields of power shaped by these hierarchies, how is gender mutually constituted with vulnerability, in its discursive and socio-structural dimensions?



▪ Programme

- 10.00 – 11.30** **Session 1 – Chair: Prof. Dimitris Christopoulos | Panteion and FIDH**
Translating Vulnerability into Legal Categories
- Drying experience: the gender-based violence within the refugee population as a matter of reporting**
Elia Charidi | Independent Scholar, NGO Practitioner
- Proving One’s Sexuality: Asylum Claims on the Basis of Persecution Due to Gender and Sexual Orientation**
Athina Simoglou | Lawyer
- Beyond Human Rights and Citizen Status of the Refugee: From the Politics of Law and the Construction of the Biopolitical Subject to the Ethics of an “Unconditional Hospitality”**
Effie Doussi | Lawyer
- 11.30 – 12.00** **Coffee Break**
- 12.30 – 13.30** **Session 2 – Chair: Prof. Elena Tzelepi | University of Thessaly**
Vulnerability and Agency
- From ‘Vulnerable Refugees’ to ‘Voluntary Deportations’:
Performing the Hotspot, Embodying its Violence**
Aila Spathopoulou | King’s College
Myrto Tsilimpounidi | Independent Scholar and Photographer
Anna Carastathis | Panteion
- A Palimpsestous Un-Writing of Vulnerability**
Eirini Avramopoulou | Panteion
- 13.30 – 14.45** **Lunch Break**
- 14.45 – 15.45** **Session 3 – Chair: Athena Athanasiou | Panteion**
Gender and Vulnerability in Medical Settings
- Performing Vulnerability in the Moria Camp: Intersecting Hierarchies of the Gendered and Racialized Suffering Body**
Nefeli Roumelioti | Psychologist, NGO Practitioner
- “Femonationalism” in the Realm of Refugees’ Maternity Care in post-2015 Greece**
Cynthia Malakasis | EUI
- 15. 45 – 16.00** **Coffee Break**
- 16.00 – 17.00** **Roundtable Discussion**
Conducting Research with Refugees in Greece post-2015: Ethics and Politics
Discussants: Athena Athanasiou, Vanessa Grotti, Cynthia Malakasis, Giorgos Tsimouris



A palimpsestous un-writing of vulnerability

Eirini Avramopoulou

The Greek island of Leros has a long history of ambiguous and discontinuous layering processes of violence and trauma -most recently being stigmatised because of the inhumane psychiatric treatment to many of the patients of the Leros Psychiatric Hospital, which admitted more than 4,000 on the island between its opening in 1958 and the psychiatric reformations that started to be implemented in the 1990s. In 2015 the decision to build a refugee "Hotspot" (camp) in the area of Lepida recalled past traumas, as more than 38,000 refugees passed through the island, whose permanent population numbers fewer than 9,000 inhabitants. This paper is based on ethnographic research done in the island of Leros during the last three years, and focuses on the story of Yara, a Syrian woman who arrived in Leros in 2016 and managed to get asylum three years later after struggling to make a case of vulnerability depending on arguments regarding her ethnicity, sexuality and mental health. By addressing the epistemic violence done through naming and 'living on' identities infused by trauma, and by questioning the gendered and racialized biopolitical apparatus of migration management, I argue that an affective and performative reading of history and space, through the employment of palimpsestous writing, help us to relate and understand vulnerability as a reparative strategy of undoing identity and trauma while still depending on them.

Drying experience: the gender-based violence within the refugee population as a matter of reporting

Elia Charidi

This paper is a product of a more than two year work experience (as a social scientist/researcher, field teams coordinator, program manager) in a long standing, local non-governmental organization for the study and support of women's rights (from now on OSWR) and, since 2016, for the protection, help and empowerment of female, but also male and LGBTQI refugee survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). As a small organization funded for the management of the GBV in the so called "refugee crisis" mainly by international NGOs or/and organizations of the humanitarian sector, a series of different ways of reporting, quantifying and making visible GBV issues and experience, as well as their management, gradually embedded OSWR's fund raising and program sustainability procedures. At the same time, in the framework of the actions taken for the daily management of GBV cases through the existing referral pathways, the OSWR's GBV case workers and lawyers have often been required to prove by psychosocial or/and legal reports to other NGOs or/and organizations, as well as public services, that the GBV experience of the refugee they seek to support is a true fact; that the GBV really happened, rendering this way the survivor a vulnerable person, a true victim in need of help.

Taking the above into consideration, the present paper focuses on how GBV experience is constructed as vulnerability within the reporting procedures, such that turns the survivor into an eligible receiver of a series of services; that is, into a beneficiary who does not fake in order to exploit the humanitarian resources for her/his individual interest at the expense of those that "really" need them. At the same time, the paper attempts to explore how the staff working on GBV issues (case managers, lawyers, coordinators, scientific advisors, project managers, administrative officers) risks to be alienated from its primal mandate to offer help and, thus, be cancelled as professionals, if not as persons, due to the fact that they (the writer included) are inevitably caught in and often burned out by the neoliberal



apparatus that saturates, or better, activates the current management of the refugee population.

Beyond human rights and citizen status of the refugee. From the politics of law and the construction of the biopolitical subject to the ethics of an “unconditional hospitality”

Effie Doussi

The refugee, is in effect, another “endeavor of citizen status”, [Rose- Novas, 2011, pp 545] since the status as a potential citizen is dependent upon the methodologies and techniques with which the authorities - both the administrative authorities that undertake the processing of the asylum applications, and other actors involved in humanitarian intervention, such as health practitioners, social workers, members of national and international NGOs– comprehend refugees and influence the overall refugee experience, as it is imprinted on their body, sexuality, health, cultural references, even their language. Additionally, classifications imposed by the authorities, drive humans to formulate a new subjective self-cognition, which is subjugated to management practices, redefining the boundaries of their previous experience in their country of origin in order to adjust, for example, to the regulatory standards of the law, the appropriation of therapy for their traumatic experience as victims of torture and their relevant identification/ certification as such from the relevant authority, within the vulnerability model of western classification that not only aims to provide them with international protection, but also the enjoyment – even temporarily – of the limited available social welfare provisions.

Furthermore, the classification of refugees and the management of the refugee experience from above, both compartmentalises refugees to a network of power structures, and introduces them to the hegemonic morality of the humanitarian intervention, as described by Fassin, which categorises lives between those that are worth saving, the sacred ones, and those that must be sacrificed, as it is impossible for them to be included in the concept of refugees as “victims.”

Through the various processes which will be outlined in the presentation, it becomes clear that the classified reconstruction of the “status of citizenship” onto refugees and the model of the “non-signified, white, middle class, healthy, heterosexual male” becomes reinstated through the symbolic strength of the law, and its implementation.

Therefore, through the derridian concept of hospitality, equal to destabilization, the purpose is to place the role of the host (οικοδεσπότη) or the hosted under question, fragmenting and refocusing the house (οίκο) and the self (δεσπότη) in order to make this possible. The power of hospitality therefore depends on its capacity to shift the borders of power through an act of transiting through and opening up/ (διάνοιξης) of the self towards the other.

“Femonationalism” in the Realm of Refugees’ Maternity Care in post-2015 Greece

Cynthia Malakasis

Drawing on ethnographic research on the maternity care of post-2015 refugees in Athens, this article examines how the gender norms ascribed to pregnant refugees are informed by racist, Orientalist, and, more specifically, anti-Islamic notions. Refugees arriving in Greece since 2015 belong to national, religious, and cultural groups vilified in the Greek and the wider European imagination as backward and “uncivilized.” In certain discourses, their gender norms and relations are portrayed as quintessentially oppressive and savage – perhaps as the central proof of their backwardness. Within the context of maternity care, medical and other personnel explained the behavior and practices of pregnant refugees largely on the basis of culturally mediated gender norms. I classify these discourses under the conceptual banner of “femonationalism” (Farris 2017). The concept denotes discourses



and practices, socially and historically situated in post-2000 Europe, that, in the professed or *bona fide* service of gender equality, reproduce xenophobic and racist, particularly anti-Islamic, politics. I demonstrate the operation of femonationalism within the “crypto-colonial” (Herzfeld 2002) context of Greece at a specific socio-historical conjuncture, characterized by austerity and the country’s role as an EU buffer state (Christopoulos 2017). My specific context of analysis is the narrower yet fertile realm of maternity care, where the relationship between (diverse and contested) idealized notions of womanhood and the realities of socio-historically constituted subjects (Mohanty 1984) acquires more particular dimensions. Caregivers removed from the daily realities and from the structural and intimate histories of pregnant refugees “colonize the [...] heterogeneities of the lives” (Mohanty 1984: 334) of these women by representing them as passive, subdued, or, at best, cunning subjects. “Vulnerability” enters my inquiry as an analytical lens that highlights the ways in which pregnant refugees are constructed as subjects divested of agency. Against these gendered and racialized representations, I demonstrate that vulnerability is a) generated through norms and structures in the context of reception, and b) prompts responses that belie notions of gendered and racialized passivity.

Performing vulnerability in Moria camp: Intersecting hierarchies of the gendered and racialized suffering body

Nefeli Roumelioti

The aim of this presentation is to address how the suffering of refugees who experience displacement and entrapment in Moria camp on the island of Lesbos, is “translated” into psychosocial and medical categories through the biomedical vulnerability assessment procedure, which is an integral and constitutive part of the border and asylum policies. This presentation is based on ethnographic material produced during field research in June 2018 in Moria camp on the island of Lesbos, as part of my MA thesis. Specifically, the research was focused on the intersubjective encounters between refugees and the care personnel of KEELPNO (The Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention) during the process of the vulnerability assessment that was officially performed by the latter. Following the EU-Turkey Statement on the 16th of March 2016 and the imposition of geographical restrictions which resulted in the confinement of thousands of refugees on the Greek islands, it has become highly noticeable how medical humanitarianism becomes institutionalized slipping into the asylum regime. Tightly bound with the asylum processes, the vulnerability assessment procedure becomes the main biopolitical regulator of population’s mobility at the borders. As a technology of governmentality, the mechanism of vulnerability assessment classifies the bodies of refugees into specific biomedical categories. Being identified as vulnerable, refugees gain access to multiple “privileges”, most important of which is the possibility to have the geographical restriction lifted. Hence, vulnerability becomes highly politicized since the acquisition of this status opens up the crucial possibility of escape, although this is not always guaranteed. Through this presentation I would like to raise three main questions: 1) What are the terms and the premises upon which refugees’ subjective physical and psychic trauma is translated into biomedical categories? 2) How does the suffering body emerge as a new marker of hierarchy within border regime and how is it cross-linked with gendered and racialized boundaries that are constitutive of border policies? 3) How do refugees renegotiate notions of vulnerability while performing a vulnerable body during the encounters between them and the medical personnel of KEELPNO?

Proving one’s sexuality: asylum claims on the basis of persecution due to gender and sexual orientation



Athina Simoglou

The examination of asylum claims on the basis of persecution due to gender and sexual orientation sets a number of challenges that crosscut the fields of law and anthropology. During this quasi-judicial procedure, the person seeking asylum is called upon to narrate—in a credible fashion—why and how his/her sexual orientation may become a cause of persecution, serious enough to justify his/her protection by the examining state. By reference to a legally defined and judicially elaborated understanding of sexuality, the case-worker must primarily rule upon the sexuality of the examined person, whose experience may cut through multiple cultural, gender, class and religious categories. At the same time, the examination of asylum claims on the basis of sexual orientation draws upon a number of discourses on sexuality, shaped by legal norms and concomitant discursive formations. More specifically, the content of sexuality is formed, transformed and decided upon through a vast normative and case-law corpus that produces sexuality as the foundational element of the self and at the same time it makes it an object to be proven. In this sense, the examination of asylum claims on the basis of sexual orientation presents a multi-faced interest: on one hand it draws attention to the way the legal normalization of sexuality becomes a “border” separating those who deserve to be protected from those who don’t; on the other hand, it reveals the ways in which sexuality is “frozen” as a unitary and stable identity, conceived as the main marker of the asylum seeker; thirdly, it requires from the asylum seeker not only to disclose his/her sexuality, but also to “confess” the particular ways in which it is performed. This paper aims to bring out some of the contradictions generated during this procedure, as well as the limits set by the normative legal regime that this procedure is founded upon.

From ‘Vulnerable Refugees’ to ‘Voluntary Deportations’: Performing the Hotspot, Embodying its Violence

Aila Spathopoulou, Myrto Tsilimpounidi, Anna Carastathis

In this paper, we intervene in the naturalised distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants,’ which is based on problematic assumptions about agency and choice that underpin the global regime of migration management: namely, that categories of human mobility can be ontologically and juridically distinguished from one another in terms of the degrees or forms of freedom they embody, and that different rights legitimately adhere to each. Focusing on the “hotspots” instituted on 5 islands in the Aegean Sea to manage “mixed migration flows” during the declared “refugee crisis,” we show that the ideological justification for the process of differentiation involves variable attributions of agency, choice, freedom, or their lack thereof, all of which silence the actual subjects transformed into objects of “migration management.” We argue that the figure of the refugee is divested of agency through the ascription of vulnerability, while the migrant is invested with economic rationality. However, the forms of vulnerability that internment within the camp produces are excluded by design from vulnerability assessments. By tracing the various paths out of the hotspot—including the IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme—we show that the hotspot is, in essence, a deportation mechanism. In the final section of the paper, we present an ethnographic encounter which illustrates the psychic and physical violence through which the will is bent and shaped, leading some illegalised subjects to “self-deportation.”



Presenters' Bios

Eirini Avramopoulou is an assistant professor of Social Anthropology at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece. She received a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge (2012). Her research interests include anthropology of human rights, social movements and activism; feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to subjectivity, biopolitics and affect; and more recently she focuses on displacement, memory and trauma in the island of Leros, Greece. She is the author of *Porno-graphics and Porno-tactics: Desire, Affect and Representation in Pornography*, (co-edited with Irene Peano, 2016, Punctum Books), and of the edited volume: *Το Συν-αίσθημα στο Πολιτικό: Υποκειμενικότητες, Εξουσίες και Ανισότητες στο Σύγχρονο Κόσμο* (Affect in the Political: Subjectivities, Power and Inequalities in the Modern World), 2018, Nisos: Athens.

Anna Carastathis is the author of *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016) and co-author of *Reproducing Refugees: Photographia of a Crisis* (under contract, Rowman & Littlefield, with Myrto Tsilimpounidi). Anna is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Department of Social Anthropology at Panteion University of Political and Social Sciences.

Elia Charidi completed her PhD at the department of Social Anthropology of Panteion University in 2016. In her dissertation she researched how blind people in Athens experience and conceptualize their disability in cultural contexts where sight is privileged as the noblest of the senses. For the last two years she works at a non-governmental organization for the support of women's rights and survivors of gender-based violence.

Effie Dousi is a lawyer - member of the Legal Service of the Greek Council for Refugees. Postgraduate Studies in Criminology and Anthropology at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. Working in the field since 2014 offering legal support at every stage of the asylum procedure, consultation and judicial representation to third-countries citizens and to individuals pertaining to non-privileged, fragile and vulnerable social groups, refugees, immigrants, trafficking victims, the mentally ill, addicted users and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Areas of interest: Anthropology of politics, Social/political theory, gender studies, biopolitics, embodiment, memory, nationalism, affect, performativity, subjectivity, ideology, Anthropology of migration, refugee studies, minorities.

Cynthia Malakasis is a cultural anthropologist interested in nationalism, ethnicity, race, post-colonial dynamics with an emphasis on intra-European hierarchies, citizenship rights, medical anthropology and gender, the social media, and Greece. She joined the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies in April 2016 as a post-doctoral research associate at the EU BORDER CARE project, funded by an ERC Starting Grant (2015-2020) and directed by Professor Vanessa Elisa Grotti. She received her Ph.D. in Global and Sociocultural Studies (Anthropology track) at Florida International University. Her doctoral project examined whether and how post-1989, mass immigration to Greece challenged the country's nationalist norms of collective belonging.

Nefeli Roumelioti is a psychologist and has worked during the last five years in a Day Center for homeless people and then in an accommodation facility for "vulnerable" refugees in the center of Athens, operated by an NGO in cooperation with UNHCR. She recently completed her Master's degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology in the Social Anthropology Department at Panteion University.



Athina Simoglou is a lawyer, working in asylum law, in Greece. She has a master's degree in social and cultural anthropology.

Aila Spathopoulou is a Ph.D. candidate at the department of Geography, at King's College University in London. She obtained her MA degree in Cultural Studies at Sabanci University in Istanbul, Turkey and holds an undergraduate degree in Drama Studies from the Department of Fine Arts at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Her research has been published in *Society & Space* (2016), *New Keywords of "Crisis" in and of "Europe"* (2016) and *Refuge* (2018).

Myrto Tsilimpounidi is a social researcher and photographer. Her research focuses on the interface between urbanism, culture, and innovative methodologies. She is the author of *Sociology of Crisis: Visualising Urban Austerity* (Routledge, 2017) and the co-editor of *Remapping Crisis: A Guide to Athens* (Zero Books, 2014) and *Street Art & Graffiti: Reading, Writing & Representing the City* (Routledge, 2017).

