



LEGAL RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Paper No 81/2013

July 2013

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Forthcoming in Maria Joao Guia, Robert Koulis, Valsamis Mitsilegas (Eds),
Immigration Detention, Risk and Human Rights. (Springer 2014)

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Women's Immigration Detention in Greece: Gender, Control, and Capacity¹

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Forthcoming in Maria Joao Guia, Robert Koulis, Valsamis Mitsilegas (Eds.). (2014). *Immigration Detention, Risk and Human Rights*. Springer.

Introduction

As states around the world have sought to reduce rates of irregular migration, many have deployed criminal justice agencies and institutions in the name of border control. Such actions have, somewhat belatedly, garnered the attention of criminologists, leading to the development of a vigorous field of inquiry known as the 'criminology of mobility' (Aas and Bosworth, 2013; see also, inter alia, Guia, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2012; Leerkes and Brodeurs, 2010; Pratt, 2005; Barker, 2013; Weber and Pickering, 2011; Pickering, 2014). As this body of literature has expanded, so too have the sites and methods of analysis in it. While, for the most part, much scholarship has been primarily theoretical or based on secondary and legal analysis (Aas, 2011; Welch and Schuster, 2005; Bosworth and Guild, 2008; Cornelisse, 2011), more recently, a handful of criminologists have begun to publish qualitative accounts of the nature and effect of border control (Bosworth, 2012; Fili, 2013; Kaufman, 2012; 2013; Kaufman and Bosworth, 2013; Gerard and Pickering, 2012).²

¹ The fieldwork for this paper was conducted by Andriani Fili from November 2011 – February 2012, supported by the Oxford University Research Support Fund at the Faculty of Law as well as by Australian Research Council Future Fellowship of Sharon Pickering. Mary Bosworth would also like to acknowledge funding from the European Research Council, Starter Grant, 313362 in writing up the project. Where possible interviews were digitally recorded and then fully transcribed and translated into English by Andriani Fili. Others were recorded in note form and then translated into English. All interviewees have been anonymised. More information about this ongoing research can be found at www.borderobservatory.org and <http://bordercriminologies.law.ox.ac.uk>.

² If we include anthropology, politics and geography, the volume of ethnographic research expands as does the amount of theoretical work on border control (On the former, see, for example, Hall, 2010; 2012; Mountz, 2012; Gill, 2010, on the latter, see Makaremi, 2009; De Genova and Peultz, 2010; Fassin, 2011).

This article contributes to that emerging body of work. Starting with a general overview of the Greek immigration system, it turns to focus more narrowly on life for women migrants and detention centre staff inside Athens' Central Holding centre. Through fieldnotes and testimonies drawn from interviews with nineteen female detainees and ten staff, this article fleshes out our understanding of the relationship between gender and border control. What are women's needs in detention? How do those who work in the detention centre view the women they lock up? What obstacles do detainees face, as women? How do they interpret their experiences?

In asking these kinds of questions, our ambition is two-fold. First we aspire to unveil the human impact of policies being implemented in response to transnational pressures from Brussels and to more local problems. Notwithstanding the legal and geographical significance of Greece to European border security and the international criticism that Greece has received regarding its responses to irregular flows, we know very little about daily life in Greek detention centres other than what we can glean from reports by NGOs and the government. Greek scholarship has mainly focused on the economic, political and socio cultural changes connected to migration processes and the development of migration policy (see, *inter alia*, Triandafyllidou, 2009; Skordas, 2002; Triandafyllidou and Veikou, 2002; Fakiolas, 2003; Vaiou, 2003).

Second, we seek to contribute to a feminist body of literature in criminological accounts of border control regarding the salience of gender (see, also, Bosworth and Kellezi, 2013; Pickering and Cochrane, 2013; Kaufman, forthcoming; Bosworth and Slade, 2014; Bosworth, Pickering and Segrave, 2014). Although traditional accounts of migration paid little attention to gender, more critical scholarship on mobility suggests that women and men's experiences diverge in important ways (see, for example, Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1997). In Greece, when female

migrants have been considered at all, it has primarily been as sex workers or in relation to their male partners (Lazos, 1997; Emke-Poulopoulou, 2001; Lazaridis, 2001). They have rarely been studied in their own right. So far, no academic scholarship exists on their experiences of detention. This article starts to fill that gap.

The research on which this article is based is on going, part of a multi-site, transnational research project (see also, Pickering, Fili and Bosworth, forthcoming). Andriani Fili conducted all of the interviews onsite, while visiting the detention centre, first as a research officer, and then as a member of staff of ‘Medical Intervention’, an NGO offering social and medical support across a number of detention facilities. Though the stories from *Petrou Ralli*, the Central Holding facility for irregular migrants in Athens, belong to those who shared them, they resonate with interviews and observations across similar facilities around the world (Bosworth, 2012; Bosworth and Kellezi, 2013; Grewcock, 2011; Hall, 2012). As states everywhere pursue border control ever more enthusiastically, it becomes increasingly urgent to bear witness to the human costs of immigration detention and related practices.

Immigration Detention and Border Control in Greece

Undocumented migrants can be detained for up to 18 months in Greece in a number of locations, from border guard posts, police stations, at the airport, at the Athens Holding centre, in purpose built detention centres, in ad hoc facilities pressed into service, and, most recently, in new, so-called ‘closed hospitality centres.’³ Some,

³ Any expectations of hospitality disappear upon a visit to one of the new ‘closed hospitality centres’ in Amygdaleza. It is composed of small mobile homes surrounded by high wire and situated in a remote area outside of Athens. The location of the centre makes it particularly difficult for detainees to obtain legal or medical aid; an outcome that appears to have been deliberate, as the young director of the centre revealed: ‘*we want to deport them and we are going to do it, so do not bother informing them*

unlucky, individuals might be detained in all of these places, moved from one to another, whereas others languish for months in the same place. After release, nearly all remain vulnerable to further detention, since barely any are given the legal right to remain⁴.

Most immigration detention centres in Greece were established without uniform standards and terms of operation. They are guarded by the police and funded by the Ministry of Interior through the Prefectures⁵. However, there is no statutorily defined public authority responsible for their management. As Amnesty International has commented the ‘lack of a Ministerial Decision regarding the framework for management and operation of the current centres causes most of the problems that have arisen in them’ (AI, 2010: 35), including the lack of activities, recreation and times outdoors (CPT, 2009).

Each one is overcrowded. They are also dirty. Detainees find it difficult to access decent healthcare or legal advice. Women and men are often mixed, when they should be kept separate, and children are held alongside adults. Detainees frequently describe an alarming picture of mistreatment, overcrowding, and unsanitary conditions. *‘I can’t live in here. This is not a place for humans. This is a place for animals,’* Anwar from Somalia cried out in the Athens airport detention centre. *‘I can’t stay in here anymore. I’m going to hurt myself or someone else. I’m going crazy in here’.* *‘Look at my clothes, look at me, this is not for us’.* *‘I can’t shower here, the toilets are too dirty’.*

about what they need’. (See Johansen, 2013 for an account of a short-lived similarly named set of institutions in Norway and their role in enforcing deportation).

⁴ Greece has now stopped all regularization programmes for economic immigrants and accepted asylum applications, though having risen from 0.1 to 3 per cent recently, are very few compared to the number of requests.

⁵ The new government wants to pass legislation that will shift responsibility for immigration to the Ministry of Public Protection, i.e. the police will be responsible for the arrest, detention and welfare of immigrants and refugees in Greece.

Human rights organisations routinely describe immigration detention in Greece, especially in the border guard stations, as a human rights emergency. Organisations, from Amnesty to the Council for the Prevention of Torture, highlight deficiencies in the infrastructure, insufficient and unprofessional personnel, as well as ineffective and sometimes unlawful practices (CPT 2010; AI 2010; Pro Asyl 2007, p.23; HRW 2008). Such criticisms underpin judgments by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which have found Greece guilty for violating Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (S.D.⁶, A.A.⁷, Tabesh⁸, M.S.S.⁹, Rahimi¹⁰, R.U.¹¹ against Greece) and which have called for an end to transfers of asylum seekers back to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation. Faced with repeated failures on the part of Greek authorities to improve the conditions of immigration detention, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) issued its first public statement in 2011 addressed to an EU member state, condemning detention conditions in Greece,¹² and drawing attention to the failure of this country to ‘improve the situation’ despite recommendations dating back to 2005.

Nonetheless, Greek immigration detention is expanding. Although Greek Law (3386/2005), ‘on the entry, residence and social integration of third-country nationals on Greek territory,’¹³ makes it quite clear that administrative detention shall only be used in cases of danger for the public order and in view to deportation (Article 76),

⁶ S.D. vs. Greece, 11.06.2009, concerning detention in border guard station, Soufli.

⁷ A.A. vs. Greece, 22.07.2010, concerning detention conditions in detention centre on Samos island.

⁸ Tabesh vs. Greece, 26.11.2009

⁹ M.S.S. vs. Belgium and Greece, 21.01.2011, concerning detention conditions at the airport detention facility.

¹⁰ Rahimi vs. Greece, 05.04.2011, concerning detention conditions on Lesbos island.

¹¹ R.U vs. Greece, 07.06.2011, concerning detention conditions in Soufli.

¹² <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/grc/2011-10-inf-eng.pdf>. This is the fifth time the CPT has used this exceptional measure against countries; the first time in Turkey in 1992 and then again in 1996 and in Russia in 2001, 2003, 2005 for the situation in Chechnya.

¹³ For a translation of the law see http://old.certh.gr/libfiles/PDF/MOBIL-65-Nomos3386_en.pdf

Greece, in common with many member states of the EU, has been aggressively enlarging its detention capacity (Cornelisse, 2011). That it has been doing so under conditions of economic collapse, and in the teeth of vigorous international criticism, is worth exploring.

In part, the timing of the expanding detention estate reflects the broader context of migration. Between 1993 and 2008, for instance, the number of irregular immigrants in Greece quadrupled (Chindea et al., 2008). However, whereas previously much of Greek society was either tolerant or indifferent to this population, since the economic crisis of 2008, matters have changed dramatically. More recently, most discussions of mobility have become marked by a toxic combination of securitization and racism. Politicians of all stripes, not just members of far right parties like Golden Dawn¹⁴, blame irregular migrants for rising crime, urban degradation, and widespread economic hardship endured by citizens. In the lead-up to the May and June 2012 national elections, immigration detention and border control more generally, became a lightning rod for public opinion, deployed as a cynical political tool to demonstrate the government's determination to salvage Greek national pride.

In a centralized system like Greece, such politics, perhaps inevitably, has been particularly focused on Athens. Following revelations that around 5,000 migrants were living in an estimated 500 abandoned buildings in the city, and that more than 2,000 other properties occupied by migrants were unfit for human habitation, the

¹⁴ 'Golden Dawn' (Xrisi Avgi), secured 19 seats in the Parliament in the June 2012 national elections, for a first time in its history. Its programmatic statements included virulent posters promising to 'get rid of the dirt off the city streets' and called for 'Greece only for Greeks'. There is also some evidence that suggest that members of the party belong to groups that organize street patrolling and protect citizens by carrying out violent attacks on migrants. It is estimated that 50% of police officers voted for this party.

Cabinet decided to adopt an action plan for the revitalization of the city centre¹⁵.

Warning of a "public health time bomb," officials sought to reduce the concentration of irregular migrants in the city centre through daily patrols and police 'sweep operations'. Foreigners are not hard to find.

All around the city but especially in the centre you can see immigrants pushing trolleys filled with any metal objects they have found in garbage bins. Poverty has visibly increased on the streets of the capital where immigrants can be seen rummaging through garbage cans for food or scraps of metal or glass to sell to garages for some Euros per kilo. The streets there are downhill and due to the weight of the trolleys they sometimes get drifted along on the road risking being run over by cars and buses. Lucky ones have very small cars to transfer everything they find. (Fieldnotes, January, 2012).

Those considered to be irregular are forced to register and may be arrested. Such practices lead directly to the enlargement of the detention population; a connection acknowledged by the government who, in addition to enhanced checks, promised in 2012 to build more detention facilities, manage asylum cases more quickly and expand voluntary return programmes.¹⁶ By 2014, then Minister of Public Protection, Mr Chrisochoidis, announced, the state would build 30 new detention centres in 10 Greek prefectures. Officially named 'closed hospitality centres', the facilities will be based on unused military sites, typically apart from urban centres and concomitant sources of assistance. They are expected to have a capacity for 30,000 people, with upwards of 15,000 places available by June 2013, a total that not only dwarfs previous

¹⁵ <http://government.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/%CE%A3%CF%87%CE%AD%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CE%94%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%83%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%9A%CE%AD%CE%BD%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%91%CE%B8%CE%AE%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%82.pdf>

¹⁶ http://www.minocp.gov.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=&perform=view&id=3790&Itemid=513. For an account of the role of 'voluntary return' programmes elsewhere in Europe, see Johansen, 2013.

numbers in detention but is considerably more than the nation's prison population.¹⁷ In Athens and Korinthos alone, building works are taking place in order to facilitate the detention of 4,000 migrants in each centre.¹⁸

These developments appeared, on the one hand, designed to siphon away voters who were otherwise attracted to the anti-immigrant sentiments of Golden Dawn. Yet they were not implemented solely in response to local ambitions. Partly subsidised by the European Union to the tune of 250 million euros, the origins of the plan appear to have come, as with much Greek border control, from further north.

Even before its current economic problems, Greece was considered a liability for 'fortress Europe'. The country's repeated failure to protect its borders has only heightened political tensions as EU states worried that their own tight job markets cannot handle the tide of irregular migrants pouring into the rest of Europe via Greece. The influx from abroad has not only sustained a backdrop of a wider social unease and anti-immigrant sentiment within Greece but has led to widespread critique of Greece from EU member states. In June 2012, Greece failed its five-yearly Schengen evaluation due to 'serious shortcomings' in its border management, leading to the possibility that member states may reintroduce internal border controls at their own discretion in emergency cases¹⁹. If this happens, Greece could be effectively isolated from the rest of the Schengen zone. Irregular migration, then, has become crucial for developing rhetoric surrounding the need for stricter border controls and tougher policies that would at the same time satisfy Greece's EU partners.

Required on the one hand to secure its border with Turkey on behalf of all of Europe and hence effectively deliver a secure external border, Greece must do so,

¹⁷ Greece's current prison population is estimated at around 12,000 people. The total detention capacity in specialised detention centres at the moment is 2,500.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, (2012) <http://picum.org/it/attualita/bolletino/38052/>

¹⁹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/130761.pdf?

under conditions of financial privation and surging xenophobia. Castigated for contravening the human rights standards expected of EU members it seems unable to do otherwise than fail. Turning now to the micro politics and lived experiences of immigration detention in Greece we explore the lived effect of the rapid expansion of penal inspired responses in light of these competing regional and domestic pressures.

Athens Central Holding Facility

Operating since 2005, *Petrou Ralli* is the Central Holding Facility for Aliens in Athens. As such, it was designed to hold detainees for a short period of time (up to two weeks) prior to their deportation. Whereas some officials, like Panagiotis, emphasised the particular status of the centre, insisting '*this is not a detention centre, it is a special holding facility for migrants (Eidikoi Xwroi Paramonis Metanastwn)*. *That's the official name and that's what we offer here*' (Principal officer), in fact, like the holding cells at Athens airport, another site designed for brief stays, women and men languish here in over-crowded, insanitary conditions, for many months at a time (Fili, 2013).

Entering *Petrou Ralli* it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the noise, the smell, and the dirt. Walls are painted an institutional light green and yellow. The floors are unwashed. In the men's section, the smell of urine is pervasive. Everywhere, the stench of anxiety is palpable. The iron doors slam, officers shout, detainees speak a confusing mix of languages.

People who are detained here are either arrested on the street or at their flats following typical raids by the police. This means that they have only the clothes they are wearing. And if they don't have anyone outside who can bring them the clothes, they end up staying with the same clothes for weeks. The smell sometimes is overbearing. (Fieldnotes, January, 2012)

Detainees are housed in a line of cells along a corridor each of which has five cement beds. Due to serious overcrowding, many detainees end up sleeping on the floor. Entry to these rooms is through a barred, locked iron door, affording the detainees no privacy. Most need to ask for permission to use the bathroom. The guards allow them out of their cells for two hours a day and into the rooftop exercise yard for only one hour a week²⁰.

Detainees spend little time outside their cells and have nothing to do inside them other than to sit or lie on their beds all day. The listlessness is patent: *'We are not doing anything, nothing. We end up sleeping all the time,'* Chiora from Georgia complained. For many it is distressing, *'I fear I'm going to die here,'* June from the Dominican Republic protested. *'The police don't understand my language and I'm afraid. It's difficult'.*

Under these conditions, staff and detainees struggle to understand what is happening. Some staff members are critical. *It's much worse than a prison.* Alex told us. *It's the trap of temporary detention that doesn't allow us to have the privileges of a prison. They are psychologically distressed here, I would go crazy myself.* Others, like Vassilis, a senior police officer, who has served many posts, are more defensive. *'In this current economic situation,'* he claimed, *detention conditions are satisfactory'.* Any inadequacies could not be held to their account since:

Most of the time we don't have enough space for the number of immigrants we arrest... Numbers increase constantly. Today we were sent 50 women from the Evros region. The system crashes due to Africans and Asians because you cannot send them back. When you

²⁰ This has now been reduced to once a month due to overcrowding.

collect from the street, as well as receive women from the border, you end up having a number that you cannot deal with. (Vassilis)

Maria, a young officer, who has spent time at the border, agreed; matters were out of their hands. *We are doing a great job here. But no one was prepared for it. The state didn't expect this. My colleagues, they just follow orders. I imagine that if we knew we would have built something appropriate.*

Some, however, blame the detainees for having brought their lot upon themselves. In such accounts, staff members draw on familiar narratives around the poor rational choices of migrants and the necessary use of detention as the central plank in deterring these choices. *There are too many immigrants in Athens*, Christos a senior member of the medical personnel at *Petrou Ralli* asserted. *They have to go back.*

If women's choices are considered poorly calculated and in need of correction, the detainees themselves are often viewed as morally and intellectually suspect. They stand accused of sexual promiscuity, instrumentality, or naivety; coming to Greece to find a good husband, or working in the sex trade. *They get fooled*, Vassilis asserted. *Before they arrive here they are told that they are going to work in houses and such and they end up on the street. They don't know what they are doing and where they are going. Women don't have an idea.*

Most detainees in *Petrou Ralli*, as elsewhere, are men. Women constitute around ten per cent of the total detained population, a much lower figure than some other European countries (Bosworth and Kellezi, 2013). Within the facility, they are sequestered in a row of cells on the third floor, next to the section for unaccompanied minors. Women are separated from men, who are detained on the second floor, but are kept together with their children, in unsanitary conditions, with few clothes or

provisions. Staff, aware of the deficiencies, attempt to fill the gaps. *‘There are many NGOs that help out and of course colleagues. Colleagues help a lot and they have done many things on their own initiative and they have paid money out of their own pockets’* Maria told us. Where possible, mothers are kept together with their children. Beyond the border guard stations and centres they are, however, separated from their male partners. In *Petrou Ralli* a number are searching for their boyfriends, unclear where they may be held.

For those who are incarcerated, the meaning of the high walls of *Petrou Ralli*, the metal doors on their rooms and their concrete bunks is clear: *‘It’s a prison, you know. Ana said bitterly. We can’t do anything. We can’t move’* (Dominican Republic). Staff members were rather less sure. Many recognised the penal in the administrative environment. Vassilis was blunt,

Look, the official name of this place is ‘special centre for hosting foreigners’. But in essence it is a prison. The difference is that we are dealing with administrative issues. We don’t have any criminals here. But yes we imprison them.

Others, like Xenia, were less sure:

I don’t know whether I should call this a detention centre or a prison. They stay here for a long time. To begin with it was 3 months, now it is 6 months. It’s on the verge of a detention centre and a prison, leaning towards a prison.

Certain staff members were quick to differentiate their job from that of a prison officer. *I don't feel like I work in a prison*, a female detention officer called Anastasia confidently asserted. However, the distinction was of cold comfort, she recognized. Unlike prison, *where you end up in... because you have committed a crime [s]ome people don't understand why they are being detained. They can't understand the process of having legal documents*. Such lack of clarity, she went on,

affects my work and how I deal with these women. Women end up being detained here for months under difficult conditions with nothing to do and no one to talk to. It's extremely complicated. Some women stay in here for quite some time and they go crazy. One Nigerian had been here for 6 months and she went crazy and drank the shampoo we give them in a cup and took some pills. We took her to the hospital. You have to stay calm because there is a very thin line dividing sanity from craziness in here.

As in other countries, the slippage between prisons and detention centres is both a defining characteristic of these places of confinement and a particularly productive part of them, offering a shifting justification of a practice that, in a mobile world, otherwise makes little ethical or practical sense (Bosworth, 2012; 2013; Hall, 2012). Detention centres, particularly in a country like Greece, where the numbers of unauthorized arrivals continues to grow, cannot stem the flow of migration. Instead, their role is largely symbolic, part of a story told by the state about its capacity to govern; an account that, under current circumstances in Greece, must be made ever more urgently even as it rings increasingly hollow.

Detainees

Detainees are key to the narrative of state sovereignty. At the time of the research, the three largest groups of female detainees originated from Georgia, Nigeria and Afghanistan. Staff usually differentiated between the women according to national stereotypes. According to Xenia, for instance:

The Chinese are an extremely disciplined nation. They learn discipline the moment they are born. And these are the women that are the quietest here, you can't hear them, you forget they are here.

She went on:

Georgians, for example, get along with everyone, they have no issues. Albanians the same. Nigerians form a clique, they are very selective because they face racism because of their colour.... Ukrainians and Russians hang around together because they are sly and the others don't follow.

Such accounts were also heavily gendered. As Angel Asale-Ajani (2003) found a decade ago, certain women were considered particularly sexualized. Sometimes the blame lay with them, at other times it was attributed to their national culture. *Women*, Vassilis asserted, *in their countries are like animals*; a view shared by other staff members too. *Women have to be animals*, Xenia opined, they must *'be uneducated, not knowing what's going on around them, have babies all the time'*. Anxious not to sound racist usually the police blame the broader economic and migration context in

which Greece finds itself. *I am not racist, ok?* Alex said defensively. *I am not racist. And I believe that nobody is. It's logical and consequential to have some feelings of racism when Greece is full of immigrants.*

Women are not only condemned by detention staff as individual failed women, but as emblematic of the cultural failings of entire national and/or ethnic groups. *Women were living in another world where they had no rights*, Maria explained, *where they had nothing... It's the quality of life. In their countries they might not have anything to eat, they didn't have anything to survive on... So when they see us it's different. It's like they know, or maybe they have read, that Greece is something different.*

Despite the evident objectification of women by the staff, both female and male, women attempt to assert their own narratives and interpretations of detention. Following the initial shock of being put behind bars, *'I was crying and crying'*, Irema from Georgia angrily highlights the pointlessness and injustice of detention:

'There is no point in keeping us here 3, 4 and 5 months and then give me a paper for one month to ask for political asylum. But even if I get a red card what can I do? If you don't give me a work permit how I work? Always will have problems. And then you, the government, tells me to go and steal, do something bad to survive in Greece. Why do they keep me here then?'

Women migrants describe their aspirations for employment and safety, to support their families back in their countries. The Greek immigration detention system, though ignorant about their immediate needs for some recreational activities *'We don't do anything here'* (Yasmin, Iraq) *'I need books to read'* (Liyana, Dominican Republic) *'We don't go outside, never'* (Amra, Georgia), does not terminate their

dreams. For many, detention is just one step in the journey from their country to a better life in Greece or in Europe. Women rarely sound unprepared for their time post release. They plan to go straight away into the already strained Athenian job market.

Conclusion

In winter 2012, a UN envoy visited eleven of Greece's detention centres. Headed by Francois Crepeau, the UN special rapporteur on migrant human rights, the envoy found shocking conditions across the country:

The Canadian official said he saw infants behind bars at an Athens police station, a group of Afghan children living under an underpass at the port of Patras, and a cramped detention centre near the Greek-Turkish border where newly arrived migrants can be held indefinitely. "Twenty-eight people are held in a small room. The beds are concrete slabs. The toilets are filthy. There is no artificial light. These are shocking places," said Crepeau, who has also visited Tunisia, Turkey and Italy. Most of the Greek detention facilities he visited lacked heating and hot water and the detainees complained about insufficient and poor quality of food, lack of soap and other hygiene products, clothing and blankets (Agence France Press, 2012).

Crepeau has urged for a coherent strategy to improve services for migrants, rather than construct more detention centres. In the current political climate, however, his words are unlikely to have much of an effect.

Earlier that same year, the Greek government, funded by allocations from the European External Border Fund worth approximately ten million euros, began to put

in place its most concerted effort thus far to close tighten border control. Codenamed Xenios Zeus, it seeks not only to seal the Evros border with Turkey but also to remove irregular immigrants from the centre of Athens and the rest of the country. Immigration detention plays an important role in this plan.

Since the beginning of the operation in August 2012, 65,767 foreign nationals have been brought in for questioning, of whom 4,145 have been arrested and detained for not fulfilling the legal residence requirements, and 6,012 foreign nationals have been deported²¹. The procedure, criteria and conditions of this police operation appear to rely on perceived ethnicity as much as robust ‘intelligence’, veering uncomfortably close to discriminatory mass arrests. The outcome for those without papers is poor: administrative detention awaiting deportation, in overcrowded detention facilities either at the Attica Aliens Police Directorate, or other temporary detention facilities in Athens or northern Greece. As the number of arrests has dramatically risen, already deplorable detention conditions reach new low standards. As yet, the capacity of detention centres remains small and there are neither sufficient personnel nor enough funds to pay for more.

Contemporary practices of detention and border control in Greece are justified by concerns about European border security as much as they are facilitated by a rise of intolerance and the far right. The practices, facilitated by racialised tropes about dangerous and undeserving ‘Others’, not only raise questions about the capacity of a democracy for exclusion, but they remind us that border control is related at fundamental levels to beliefs about what it means to be a recognised as a person in a world divided by global inequalities. In the words of Judith Butler (2010: 31), “Part of the very problem of contemporary political life is that not everyone counts as a

²¹

http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=%27..%27&perform=view&id=23632&Itemid=1027&lang=

subject.” Those, whose subjecthood we deny, are precarious, existing outside our usual ethical and normative frames and expectations, as well as sometimes outside the law. They are ‘ungrievable,’ expendable, unrecognizable (Kaufman and Bosworth, 2013).

By segregating foreigners behind bars, detention centres materially, and metaphorically, excise those within them from the wider Greek community, erasing their subjectivity and refusing them the benefits of shared group membership. In so doing, rather than stemming the flow of racist sentiment, they uphold and amplify it. That they do this, within a human rights-based framework, is particularly troubling. When asked about the living conditions of Amygdaleza detention centre, Mr Dendias, the Minister of Public Protection was clear: *‘We make sure we follow European standards. However, conditions are not ideal, this is not a hotel. The logic is that ‘humanely acceptable deficiencies’ will force irregulars out of Greece’*²².

²² Autopsia, 04/10/2012. <http://www.alphatv.gr/Microsites/Autopsia/Shows/04-10-2012.aspx>

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