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Foreign People's Greece: Literary, Geographic and Cultural Paths in Contemporary Greece

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Carrefours: Migrants' Support Volunteer Tourism in Lesvos

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ABSTRACT

Lesvos (Greece) has become over the last few years the emblem of human migration to Europe. As a consequence of the so-called "migration crisis" in 2015, people from all over the world who, first in a self-organized way and then structuring themselves into associations and organizations, wanted to bring support to migrants in transit or blocked on the island arrived developing what I define migrants' support volunteer tourism. After defining the historical and contemporary context, I define the tourist framework and in particular this (relatively) new form of volunteer tourism. Keeping in mind that tourism – often described as a panacea for the Mediterranean islands – does not necessarily mean encounter with the other, I try to analyse voluntary tourism from the point of view of the possible relationships that are created thanks to the intersection of two forms of contemporary mobility: tourism and migration.

Keywords: encounter; islands; Lesvos; migration; volunteer tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islands are both historically and contemporarily spaces of "mobility, encounter, displacement, and contradiction" (Mountz 2015, 642). It is exactly as a space immersed in the logic of globalization and of human mobilities (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll 2014) that the island of Lesvos shows its contemporary significance, disavowing the stereotypical characterisation of islands as isolated, remote and immobile. On this island, the constrained arrival and obstructed mobility of migrants, represented

by the so called "refugee crisis" of 2015, attracted and activated other forms of mobilities, namely of volunteer tourists.

Tourism has been described for long as a *panacea* for islands in terms of economic income, but also connections and relations; however, it has been also demonstrated that tourism *tout court* does not always mean encounter, relation and comprehension of the places visited. It is in this perspective that I look to the practices of volunteer tourists on Lesvos. Is it just the space where people transit? Or are people traversing this *carrefour* of trans-Mediterranean mobility able to establish different types of gazes and relations?

This article is based on the research work I carried out on the island of Lesvos; the data have been collected during different fieldworks for a total of 13 weeks between 2018 and 2019. In order to carry out my research, I adopted three main methods: explorative and participant observation; online survey (73 in total) and semi structured interviews (41 in total). This work will draw on these differently collected data which I elaborated for my Ph.D. thesis.

2. A brief overlook on Lesvos island: from the antiquity to today

Lesvos is a Greek island located in the north-eastern Aegean Sea. It is part of the North Aegean region (*Vóreio Aigaío*). With an area of 1,633 km², it is the third largest Greek island in size and the fifth most populated with a total population of 86,436 inhabitants (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2011). The island is located a few kilometres from Turkey, separated only by the Mytilene Strait, which is about 10 km wide. The capital, Mytilene, has a population of 37,890 (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2011) and is located on the southern part of the eastern coast of the island.

Renown for the poetess Sappho (610-570 BCE), the history of Lesvos is long and rich. A number of populations alternated on the island, such as the Mycenaean, the Aeolians, and the Achaeans. Later on, the island was under the control of the Persians until 479 BCE. The Persian domination was followed by the Hellenistic period (concluded with the death of Alexander the great in 323 BCE) and then by the Roman one (Mason 2000; Astyrakakis, Axiotis, and Axiotis 2014).

During the following centuries Lesvos was tight to the history of the Byzantine Empire, when the army sent by Pope Innocent III

defeated Constantinople in 1204, Lesvos felt under the control of the emperor Baldwin, but soon in 1229 it was taken by the empire of Nicaea (Mason 2000). The byzantine period was over in 1355 when the island went under the control of a family from Genoa, the Gattilusi. The commerce flourished under their domination and the Gattilusi were the first to introduce significant extensions of olive and vine groves for trading purposes (Kizos and Koulouri 2005). In 1462 the Ottoman Empire conquered Lesvos; nonetheless, different religions coexisted on the island. At the end of the 15th century there was also a Jewish community and some of the nobles of the island were Jews, such as Alvaro Mandes, Duke of Mytilene (Karkazis 2016).

Lesvos was, as these brief hints to its history has partly shown, always connected with other centres in the Mediterranean, for economic but also political and strategical reasons. In the first half of the 18th century Lesvos exported large quantities of olive oil to Marseille for soap production; afterwards, exports decreased and were directed mostly to Istanbul; this was due most of all to the increase of the capitals' provisioning needs. Due to its geographical position, Lesvos was supplying Istanbul and its environs (Sifneos 2004). In 1774 the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca had as a consequence the religious stipulation that conferred to Russia the representation, within the Ottoman Empire, of the Greek Orthodox Christians in Moldavia and Walachia and on the Aegean Islands. One century later, the Gülhane Decree of 1839 gave start to the Tanzimat reform era. The main element of interest for this work is the fact that this reform aimed to emancipate the non-Muslim population and to integrate non-Turks into Ottoman society. In Lesvos, this led to a general enrichment and strengthening of the Christian bourgeoisie (Astyrakakis, Axiotis, and Axiotis 2014).

The 20th century opened with the umpteenth change of the island's control: in 1912 Lesvos was annexed to Greece because of the first Balkan War (1912-1913). As a first consequence a border was created, and Lesvos lost the tight relationships that over the centuries were built with Asia Minor (Glenti 2019). This was also the time, in contemporary age, when Lesvos became a place of arrivals of refugees. Because of the tensions between Greece and Turkey, between 1912 and 1913, 100,000 Christians living in Asia Minor sought refuge in Greece. In 1919, most of the refugees returned to Asia Minor as a consequence of the smoothing of the Greco-Turkish relations (Glenti 2019). Just three years later, a new wave of refugees arrived in Greece and in Lesvos, following the military "catastrophe" in Anatolia in 1922. Indeed in 1919 a new war

began between Greece and Turkey, which ended with the defeat of the Greek army in 1922 and the treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Salvanou 2017). With the final victory of the Ottoman Empire (soon Republic of Turkey) the Christians living in Turkey had to flee from the country. About one million refugees arrived in Greece in 1922 and 300,000 of them passed through Lesvos, partly settling there, partly moving on towards the mainland.

During World War II Lesvos was occupied by Germany (after 1943 the whole country was under the control of Germany). In Lesvos, as in the rest of the country, the resistance movement EAM-ELAS[1] was operating and Germans were expelled from the island in September 1944, one month before they left Greece. The left and in particular the Communist party was strong, thus during the Civil war the internal conflict appeared to be less drastic than in other areas and the local support helped the guerrillas who fled to the mountain (Stefatos and Kovras 2015). However, Lesvos from the beginning of the 20th century, as a consequence of these long processes, turned from being an active commercial centre immersed in international and national network (within the Ottoman Empire) to be a peripheral region of Greece. A number of political and economic changes brought the North Aegean Region to be at the end of the '90s one of the poorest areas of the European Union. Lesvos' GDP was about 30% lower than the national average (Sourbès 1998) and it raised to almost reach the country average only in the 2000s (Kizos and Iosifides 2007).

Next to the main economic activity (production of olive oil and breeding), as many other Mediterranean islands, Lesvos began developing tourism during the '60s (Apostupulos and Sonmez 2001). The first organised form of tourism had as a main destination the town of Molyvos, which had been declared a protected heritage site in 1965. Tours were organised by a wealthy man from Mytilini, who started bringing over people to visit the town and stay overnight. The first hotel was opened in 1961; moreover, people would be accommodated at local's houses[2]. This sector began visibly growing during the '80s, mostly due to the first arrivals of charter flights pushed by the financial concessions

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[1] EAM-ELAS, abbreviation of Ethnikón Apeleftherotikón Métopon – Ethnikós Laïkós Apeleftherotikós Strátos (National Liberation Front – National Popular Liberation Army).

[2] Interview with Michalis Konstantellis, representative of the Tourism Association of Molyvos.

established by the law 1262/1982 on industrial and touristic investments (Sourbès 1998). This is also when the first paved road was created to connect Mytilene to Molyvos. Indeed, ferries and flights would land in the capital and during those years Molyvos became a renowned site which attracted tourists. Terkenli (2015) reports a ten-times increase of arrivals with charter flights between 1983 and 1989 (from about 5,000 to more than 50,000). Later on, from the middle of the '90s the arrivals through charters stabilised at about 70,000/80,000 arrivals per year. Today, based on the arrivals by flight, tourists' arrivals kept growing (with the exception of 2016 when a sudden drop was registered in particular of international arrivals as a consequence of the "refugee crisis") and the average domestic and international arrivals are between 140,000 and 200,000 for the former and between 43,000 and 82,000 for the latter[3]. These numbers, even though approximate, give us the measure of the phenomenon. It would not be correct to speak of over-tourism in Lesvos, nonetheless it is a primary activity. Tourism in Lesvos is based mainly on the so-called 3Ss (sun, sea, sand), but the island was able to diversify its offer and soon developed also religious tourism, agritourism, (Kizos and Iosifides 2007), ecotourism and cultural tourism (Papanis and Kitrinou 2011).

However, over the last few years, Lesvos has become renown worldwide because of another form of human mobility that involves the island. Since the beginning of the 21st century, and in particular over the last decade on the southern and eastern borders of Europe, islands have become emblematic places of the dynamics of migration. In particular, Lesvos has become a symbol of the "migrant crises"; partly, but not only, for its geographical position. Not only Lesvos is a place of arrival of migrants. Indeed, the island's economy is largely based on tourism, as is the case for many European islands. In particular, after a brief period of decline of the arrival of tourists due to the "refugee crisis", the number of people going to visit Lesvos raised again. Among the visitors, alongside the "conventional tourists" a new form of tourists began arriving: volunteer tourists.

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[3] It must be kept in mind, though, that flights involve the arrivals of people who are also locals, not necessarily tourists.

3. The "refugee crisis" as the basis for volunteer tourism

In order to understand the above-mentioned passage, the so-called "refugee crisis" must be explored more in depth. Over the last two decades, an increasing number of people have arrived in Europe via Turkey. During this "crisis", which reached its peak in 2015, the number of people rose sharply. According to UNHCR (2015), 500,018 people arrived on Lesvos in 2015, accounting for the 59% of the total arrivals in Greece and almost half of the total arrivals in the entire Mediterranean area (1,015,078) for that year (UNHCR 2016). Because of a slow, not organic and inefficient national and supranational response, several volunteers and grassroot organisations arrived in Lesvos to support migrants landing at the shores of the island, most of them from Northern European countries such as the Netherlands, UK, Norway, but also from the USA and Australia (Skleparis and Armakolas 2016; Tsilimpounidi and Carastathis 2017).

Until October 2020, there were three main reception centres in Lesvos: Moria camp, which was the EU Hotspot; Kara Tepe, managed by Lesvos' municipality; and Pikpa, a camp managed by the organisation Lesvos Solidarity opened by local activists. However, in September 2020 the camp by Moria village was completely destroyed by an arson, and at the end of October 2021 Pikpa camp was evicted by the police, because of the new (right wing) lead in the local administration and the national government. People who would stay at Moria camp have been moved to a temporary camp next to Kara Tepe, but their conditions are – if possible – worse than before.

Despite the numerous arrivals and the difficult situation, at the beginning (until the first months of 2016) the flow of people was relatively smooth as they only transited through Lesvos to move to the mainland. Later on, things changed to the point that in various moments the number of people stuck on the island was more than five times the planned capacity. For example, in February 2020 there were 21,737 people on the island (N.C.C.B.C.I.A., February 6, 2020). At the beginning of January 2021, as a consequence of the increased transfers to the mainland there were 9,189 people (N.C.C.B.C.I.A., January 1, 2021); which is, however, definitely over the reception capacity of the available facilities [4].

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[4] To be precise, from October 1st the reception capacity was raised from about 2,800 people to 10,000 because of the new camp (N.C.C.B.C.I.A., October 1, 2020).

The main passages that made possible the crisis at first and then the current situation in Lesvos were, first of all, the escalation of the conflict in Syria, which increased enormously the number of people who fled towards Lebanon and Europe (next to the many other reasons that push people to migrate from other areas); secondly, the establishment of the Hotspot approach [5] by the European Union (applied first in Italy and then in Greece). Finally, the EU built the basis for working in partnership with third countries to block migration upstream and thus pushed for agreements with third countries to stop flows (externalisation of the frontiers), as with the EU-Turkey agreement. This agreement was accompanied in the Greek legislation by the decision n. 4375 of May 31, 2016 of the Asylum Service that imposed the so-called geographical restriction, which established that people cannot leave the Aegean islands until they have a response on their protection request.

In practice this means that until the beginning of 2016, most people arriving would not apply for the asylum procedure but aimed to get a temporary permission: de jure an administrative deportation order that ordered the expulsion of the refugees from Greek territory, but that would de facto give migrants one month, or six in case of Syrians, to stay legally in Greece before leaving the country (Lauth Bacas 2010). What happened after the EU-Turkey agreement, is that the Aegean islands became, consequently to the geographical restriction, spaces of detention.

This is a quick overlook on the situation that brought many to spend time in Lesvos as volunteer tourists. It must be noted that not only the context attracted this new type of tourism on the island, but also the narratives around it. Indeed, Lesvos became – as it happened to Lampedusa a few years before – the island of humanitarian disaster, but also the welcoming island by definition. These narrations were widespread on media and social media which are instruments playing an important role also in the construction of tourists' gazes (Urry 1990; Selwyn 1996).

Records of the volunteers and organisations that passed through Lesvos from 2015 onwards are almost non-existent or very uncertain.

Nonetheless, the condition people are held in that place make it unliveable, thus I refuse to state that the space available is enough for the people held in Lesvos.

[5] "The Hotspot is an area in which the host EU Member State, the European Commission, relevant EU agencies and participating EU Member States cooperate, with the aim of managing an existing or potential disproportionate migratory challenge characterised by a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving at the external EU border": Art. 2(10) of Regulation 2016/1624, European Border and Coast Guard Regulation.

Many groups, in particular at the beginning, were created informally and never register with local authorities. Kitching *et al.* (2017) evaluated that between 2,060 and 4,240 volunteers worked on Lesvos from November 2014 to February 2016. Moreover, in May 2018, the Coordination Committee for the Registration, Coordination and Evaluation of NGOs of the Secretariat General for the Aegean and Island Policy declared that there had been 114 NGOs operating out of Reception and Identification Centres and 7,356 volunteers working on Lesvos from 2016 onwards. However, it is important to note, they also stated that these figures have not been verified (Refugee Observatory 2018).

4. Defining migrant support volunteer tourism

Given the framework described so far, I will now focus on the specificity of volunteer tourism and I will trace the various relations this type of tourism lead to develop on the island. First of all, the most widely recognized and widespread definition of volunteer tourism was given by Wearing (2001) and states that

> the generic term "volunteer tourism" applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or the environment.

One of the main characteristics of volunteer tourism is that regards the local community or the local environment which would be beneficiaries of the volunteering work, but at the same time, it concerns another group of people, which are the volunteers. In this sense every project or programme includes a certain degree of involvement with the local population. Participants are "seeking a tourist experience that is mutually beneficial, that contributes not only to their personal development but also positively and directly to the social, natural and/or economic environments in which they participate" (Wearing 2001, 1). This means that volunteering abroad can lead to self-development and gives the opportunity to people "to engage in an altruistic attempt to explore 'self'" (Wearing 2001, 3; see also Stebbins 1992; McIntosh and Zahra 2007) as well as creating intercultural understanding and mutuality (Wearing, Young, and Everingham 2017, 518).

Nonetheless, volunteer tourism has been also harshly criticised. Some moved critics on the practical level, underlining the possible negative effects of volunteer tourism on the local community or environment. Among others Guttentag (2009) emphasized the danger of reproducing dependency and "otherness", as well as volunteers' widespread unprofessionalism (Guribye and Stalsberg Mydland 2018). Moreover, considering volunteering with migrants in transit in a critical area such as Lesvos raises certain specific problems, such as the inadequacy of (or complete lack of) cooperation with local stakeholders and attention to locals' needs and the negligible awareness of other initiatives taking place in the same region (Guribye and Stalsberg Mydland 2018; Cavallo and Di Matteo 2020). Furthermore, criticisms are moved on another level which considers the commodification of the "humanitarian industry", the individualisation of the response (Butcher 2011) and the "privatization" and the "NGOization" of development and welfare (Sin, Oakes, and Mostafanezhad 2015).

Moving closer to the core of this work, an aspect that has been underexplored until the last few years regards the volunteers who offer their work at European border spaces (Rozakou 2012; Skleparis and Armakolas 2016; Chtouris and Miller 2017; Kitching *et al.* 2017; Guribye and Stalsberg Mydland 2018; Sandri 2018; Haaland and Wallevik 2019). In general, there is a lack of attention paid to this phenomenon from the perspective of volunteer tourism (Knott 2018; Trihas and Tsilimpokos 2018; Tsartas *et al.* 2020), as the existing literature focuses mostly on the topics of the response to the crisis, solidarity, humanitarianism, on the forms of cooperation and self-organization of volunteers, the role of grassroots organisations and NGOs.

I argue that the widely recognised presence of volunteers arriving from different parts of the world to bring their support during the so-called "refugee crisis", can be considered a form of volunteer tourism and the use of this frame can be useful to further understand the intersections of these human mobilities and the relations in which people engage once on the island. As noted by Knott (2018), the phenomenon of migration is a new "attraction" that pushed a number of people to arrive in these places: not only volunteers, but also journalists, scholars, students, and in a much smaller number, conventional tourists led by the curiosity for what is happening.

Theoretically, framing this phenomenon as tourism is possible as it falls within the definition of "tourist", the most common used one is that by the UNWTO (2008) which highlights two sociological compo-

nents of the traveller's role. On one hand, the aspect of movement: the traveller component. On the other, the aspect of sojourn out of one's own place of residence: the visitor component. Another aspect to take into account is the economic one. The tourist is a person absent from home for a relatively short time, whose money spent during this absence is not earned in the places visited.

In view of these definition of tourists, I consider volunteers working to assist migrants from two perspectives. A first, more practical one, includes all of those characteristics such as the fact that volunteers take a trip voluntarily from different countries of the world (mainly northern Europe and North America) or different areas of Greece to go volunteering for a relatively short period. They are consumers; thus they need an accommodation, they have expenditures on meals, shops and so on; for most of them volunteering is not a recurrent trip (not to the point of losing the touristic component of the trip); finally, their main goal is that of assisting migrants through volunteer work, but they also spend part of their time undertaking various leisure activities and sightseeing.

These two apparently clashing sides of the volunteer tourist experience can be considered an expression of Cohen's (1974) idea of overlapping partial roles; indeed, there is a clear overlap between the role of those travellers who are "fully-fledged" volunteers but have a (more or less partial) role of tourists. The various people I met during my work fall into these two categories on different points of a spectrum that go from the "more tourist" subject to the "more volunteer" one. Similarly, Daldeniz and Hampton (2011) distinguish between 'VOLUNtourists' and 'volunTOURISTS'. I suggest that the emphasis on the VOLUNtourist nature of the participants to my research does not blur their "tourist identity" but renegotiates it. This type of framing is the evidence of the challenges to the dichotomies rooted in traditional tourism studies such as work/leisure, host/guest, outsider/insider, and so on (Cavallo and Di Matteo 2020).

Moreover, volunteers' motivations for choosing Lesvos among many different possibilities of migrant support volunteer tourism clearly show the compresence of these two aspects: as the first most common one was that they wanted to get at the core of the "refugee crisis". As Ana[6] said: "I chose Lesvos because I wanted to go to the epicentre of the migration crisis, even knowing that the help I was going to offer I could offer it anywhere else". The second most common answer was related

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[6] Volunteer for "Drop in the Ocean", interviewed on 25/06/2019.

to Lesvos as an attractive Mediterranean destination. As for Harriet[7] who stated: "I came to help, I get 6 weeks off on holiday, I wanted to do something meaningful, but I wanted to go somewhere hot, by the sea. So, this fits perfectly for my need as I'm coming on holiday".

A second peculiar characteristics of volunteer tourism aimed at assisting migrants is that there are at least three groups of people which are involved: volunteers, locals and migrants. If on one hand there are many elements in common with the conventional volunteer tourism, this one is not aimed at the local population or environment, and it does not impact them directly as meant by Wearing. It rather has indirect effects, for example, it impacts the local community economically since volunteers will have expenditures for their accommodation, meals, transportation, entertainment and so on. It may even have negative consequences on the island from the point of view of the increasing pressure of tourism on environmental and social balances.

The same argument is valid when considering the idea of a mutually beneficial intercultural interaction, since volunteers will not spend much time with locals (*Fig. 1*), but rather with migrants who come from many different countries and backgrounds.
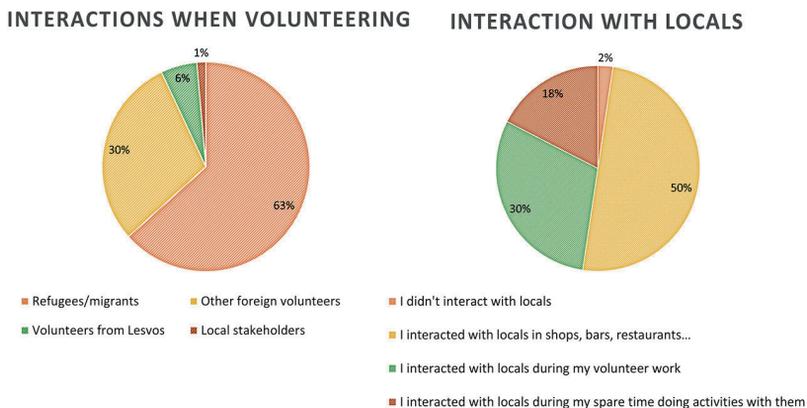
INTERACTIONS WHEN VOLUNTEERING

INTERACTION WITH LOCALS

- ■ Refugees/migrants
- ■ Other foreign volunteers
- ■ Volunteers from Lesvos
- ■ Local stakeholders

- ■ I didn't interact with locals
- ■ I interacted with locals in shops, bars, restaurants…
- ■ I interacted with locals during my volunteer work
- ■ I interacted with locals during my spare time doing activities with them

Figure 1. – Volunteers' answer on the type of interaction during their time on Lesvos.
Source: survey data collected in January 2018.

Therefore, the mutual intercultural exchange in this case would be valid for volunteers and migrants rather than for the local population,

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[7] Volunteer for "Drop in the Ocean", interviewed on 06/08/2019.

or it would involve the three groups of people in different ways (when it would actually happen). Looking at the survey's data, volunteers in Lesvos confirm this idea as only a minority had some relations with locals outside the working spaces, while most of them would spend much more time with migrants or other international volunteers.

Human relationships and encounters (Bruner 2005; Simoni 2014) are (or should be) central to every touristic experience, and as Wearing (2001) remarks, these interactions are also a fundamental part of the volunteer tourism experience. However, it is central to consider what types of relations can be established. Power balance between the groups I am considering is fundamental. It can be deemed even between volunteers, and relatively even when considering the relation between volunteers and locals; for example, volunteers may have an economic advantage on locals, who depend on tourism. The relationship is much more unbalanced when considering migrants. The uneven condition can become extreme in some cases, such as in Lesvos during the lockdown for the pandemic outbreak.

This peculiar aspect of volunteer tourism aimed at migrants' support can lead to specific problematics such as clashes with the local population, which will not necessarily accept the presence of volunteers. In Lesvos over the years there have been various – also violent – demonstrations against the presence of migrants and volunteers. If many were organised by far-right members such as fascists of the Golden Dawn, also part of the population had negative reactions. Clashes, however, may be addressed only to volunteers, considered as the unrequested saviours from part of the local population. As mentioned by two volunteers "[…] we were to all of these meetings with the locals and they graffitied the wall saying 'fuck NGOs' and they would send us threatening messages […]" [8] (*Fig. 2*). Moreover, the rupture between the locals' spaces and volunteers and migrants' one is highlighted by the creation of enclave spaces, such as reception centres or spaces opened by NGOs, where there is almost no contact with the "normal" (Foucault 1986) space of the island. These enclave spaces are not new in other forms of tourism (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002), but in this case are exacerbated.

Relations with migrants are also complex and may lead to negative outcomes; nonetheless, they are at the core of volunteers' experience, to the point that volunteers referred to "human relationship" as one of the main representations they attribute to their experience on Lesvos.

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[8] Sara, independent volunteer interviewed on 22/05/2018.

On one hand, the relations with migrants are determined by a different positionality which makes it impossible not to consider the privilege of the volunteers over the people on the move. On the other hand, during my research I noticed how, particular spaces in Lesvos enable encounters between volunteers, migrants and locals in a context of normality and sharing. This does not cancel the strong power unbalances in play; however, opens to the possibility of encounters. These are spaces such as the restaurant Nan, Mosaik House or bars such as Bobiras or Kafe P. They are either purposely meant for this encounter or even just establishments which are perceived as safe and allied (Cavallo and Di Matteo 2020).

Figure 2. – The graffiti on a wall in Panagiouda expressing the resentment against NGOs and volunteers (May 2018).

Finally, the last type of relations established is that with other volunteers. As argued by MacCannell (1992, 4), the "true heroes" of tourism are people who know "their future will be made of dialogue with their fellow travellers and those they meet along the way". The spaces just mentioned above are most of all the spaces where volunteers spent together their free time, thus aggregate and enjoyed the holiday's side of the experience. This is also a type of relation that brings volunteers to recognise themselves as a sort of "imagined community" (Di Matteo 2021).

5. CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

As I show in these pages, Lesvos has emerged as a crossroad for human mobility, both historically and contemporarily. This island had been an important centre for trades and culture for many centuries; it was a fundamental node of exchanges not only of goods, but also of people, also because of its different governments, from the Greek to the Genovese to the Ottomans (just to mention the most recent times), which brought with them differences which have at times enriched the island, as at others led to crises. It was a land of arrival of people from different places, refugees, and with many differences, it is still today. It has been a safe space, as it happened with Sappho's Tihasus, that was a closed space of safety and culture for women made by women, but also the chance for young women to meet, live together, get an education and be initiated to love through homoerotism (Cavallo 2019).

Also nowadays, Lesvos is a centre of intense global flows and exchanges (after being for centuries a fundamental east Mediterranean centre). This is not only due to its location at the border of Europe, but also to the fact that it is a space encompassing "historical and contemporary landscapes of mobility, encounter, displacement, and contradiction" (Mountz 2015, 642). In this sense, I see in Lesvos the application of Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll's (2014) "counter-islandness approach" that considers islands in terms of movement and circulation, immersed in logics of globalization and involved with human (but also non-human) mobilities. Lesvos clearly show this point: the arrival of migrants, subjects who are actually constrained in their movement and risk to be stuck in these spaces (as complete immobilisation is never fully possible, Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll 2014), attract and activate other forms of mobilities, those often allowed by the mobility (in)justice theorised by Sheller (2018). Personnel of national and international institutions, military forces, staff of organisations, volunteers, tourists, in other words kinetic elites, they all move to and around this island because it is the island of migration. This movement of people also means a movement of capital, to the point that Franck (2018) (drawing on Klein 2007) defined "disaster capitalism" the dynamics that revolve around the migration crisis.

Moreover, in this frame, volunteer tourism is a peculiar expression of the intersection of people on the move and creates peculiar encounters and ways to relate both to other groups of people who live the island and to some specific island spaces. Indeed, some spaces become safe space for people to meet and live the "normality" of the island.

To conclude, an island is the concrete incarnation of one possibility among many [9] (Cavallo 2013), thus the concept of islandness itself is always relative and plural and depends on the historical and anthropogeographical characteristics as much as on the physical ones. Also, the relations with what is external to the island is important to the definition of the island identity: "a complex play of exchanges, material and immaterial flows mould it" (Cavallo 2013, 183). It is from this point of view that I looked at how those who are foreigners relate on Lesvos. King (2009) wonders how to define the exact boundary "between islanders and non-islanders, insiders and outsiders. Given islands' long histories of migration, both in and out, who is an islander?" (57). Indeed, as Cavallo (2013) reminds us, islands have always been borderlands and, as such, permeable and mongrel. This last remark brings a reflection on the contemporary form of exchange and encounter between insiders and outsiders: between permanent residents, temporary residents held on Lesvos for an undetermined time (migrants), and more or less temporary visitors (tourists) that on Lesvos create their own community. "Less than a link in a chain, the island appears as a land of resources and constraints, which is traversed, lived, and even appropriated" (Bernadie-Tahir and Schmoll 2014, 49).

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[9] Here, I do not lean towards exceptionalism, seeing islands as "too unique" (King 2009, 56), neither towards the generalisation that wants islands to be a microcosm of the world (Brunhes 1920).

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