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From Fortress-Europe to Menogeia (Brochure)

Historical Note

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Content

From Fortress-Europe to Menogeia

Sketching Fortress-Europe

Fortress-Europe means: strict guarding the sea and land borders of an imaginary, unified, “clean” European territory from the Others, the non-Europeans, those who live outside the fortress of supposed well-being. Fortress-Europe is the Dublin 2 law which forces immigrants to stay in their first country of arrival, trapping them there, destining them for deportation or an illegal journey. Fortress-Europe is the construction of visible (from the mines at Evros to Frontex) and invisible walls (see legal difficulties, minimal rights etc) that end up in deaths or deportations. Fortress-Europe means 4272 dead refugees, 3419 of which died in the Mediterranean, in 2014 only. A fortress built upon the corpses of the persecuted.

In the public sphere, the feeling that travel documents, visas, control of movement, detention centers for immigrants, deportations and all the discouraging anti-immigration policies are an integral part of our continent’s history. Of course this feeling created about an a-historical and a-chronic Fortress-Europe is bot politically crude and dangerous. The first anti-immigration policies which aimed to control the flows of immigration in Europe appeared in the 1970s and became stricter in the 80s. Before that there were no migration limits, rather for many hundreds of years it was the Europeans who enjoyed freedom of movement, conquering other countries and transferring populations around the globe. The history of colonialism however is kept quiet because it not only reveals the historical tragedy of the arguments supporting that migration is “uncontrollable” or “altering the European culture,” but also because it is a major factor in the current state of people’s lives in the so called “third world.”

So while the Europeans for hundreds of years ravaged other cultures and rallied their populations to colonize other countries (from the English to the Americas and South Africa to the French in Algera etc.) they now set boundaries to the freedom of movement. And it is not at all random that the anti-immigration policies begin with the globalization of the economy in the last 35 years. The fact that globalized capitalism frees capital from every limitation regarding movement and blockades the

people's freedom of movement is not only a tragic reminder of its crudeness, but also an integral part of the class orientated management of the economy.

This class orientated management is nothing but the complete devaluation of human lives, which are also, of course, viable labor power. The fortress, in reality, is not impregnable, since there is a need for labor power in certain places, at certain times. What, however, is necessary is exactly the artificial illegalization of people, aiming at exploiting them as "black" labor power, with whatever connotations that has for their work and living conditions (the recent example of Manolada is neither chronically nor geographically far from us). The tip of the spear for this illegalization strategy is idea of detention centers, between which is Menogeia.

Immigrant detention centers or else: Concentration Camps

On concentration camps

Glancing at the history of stigmatizing and marginalizing the "Others," the "foreigners," we see asylums for the "crazy," Spinaloga-type islands for the lepers, quarantines for the infected, exiles for the political opponents, ghettos for immigrants, concentration camps for everyone who is deviant (e.g. homosexuals, disabled people, gypsies etc.) This disgusting stigmatization could not be absent from here and now, resulting in the de-humanisation of thousands of immigrants in modern concentration camps, again constructed by Fortress-Europe.

The necessity of guarding national cohesion in a period where the crisis is causing the nation-state to crack gives birth to the creation of spaces of "exception," like immigrant concentration camps. Spaces, which are within society but also (and meaningfully) outside of it, as the beings imprisoned there live in a status of invisibility and contact with the rest of society, if existent, is under strict control. Spaces which every notion of humanness is demolished, a complete objectification of people takes place, and lives which seem unlivable for the western eyes are left to the insatiable appetite of the European states. The spatial separation of inside and outside comes to clarify the social distinction that we have accepted over the years in our everyday lives, between locals and foreigners. It is the prisons that deal is the external enemies before they manage to "infect" the "clean" locals.

The illegalization of thousands of immigrants and their imprisonment in concentration camps is the policy that comes to complete the countless murders that take place in the seas, at the borders and in the workplaces. This policy, a "necessary evil," for the survival of the system that feeds off of exploitation has of course been utilized in our country as well, a minion of Fortress-Europe.

Cyprus' immigration policy

Cyprus' immigration policy is an integral part of the wider European strategy that has earned the title "Fortress-Europe." It is based on recycling cheap labor power through the illegalization of immigrants.

Institutionally, this is done by the 5 year visa, where immigrants are "officially" desired only for a short period in order to work and then leave (so as to not be assimilated), and unofficially desired for off-the-books labor, which means full control of the employer over their hours, conditions, salary, and in the end, on their very existence. At this point the contradiction of the widespread racist rhetoric of "deporting all illegal immigrants" becomes clear, since they essentially create the conditions to exploit this cheap labor.

Immigrants, when they "don't fit" in concentration camps, are packed into blocks of prison, without them being separated from the other prisoners in their treatment (see blocks 9+10 in Lefkosia's

central prisons, or the police station at Pera Horio Nisou). This imprisonment was the norm for every “illegal” immigrant before the construction of the concentration camp at Menogeia. Thus, we face the “Europeanisation” of the inhumane treatment of immigrants, as special places are constructed for them.

Despite all this, we don’t have any misgiving that all “foreigners,” irrespective of class, are destined for the concentration camp. The racism of Cypriot (not exclusively) anti-immigration policy is clearly also relevant to class, as the ministry of interior stresses the fact that non-EU citizens can get a permanent permission to reside in Cyprus with the purchase of a private home worth at least 300 thousand euros alongside 30 thousand in deposits at a local bank. This blatantly highlights the devaluation of the wider socioeconomic position of every immigrant that is forced to leave their country with the hope of a more dignified life in developed Europe, thus making their legalization impossible. The less privileged immigrants, those who do not have the economic means to become permanent residents have a very different fate…

On the detention center at Menogeia

Cells, small periods of time outside, exit forbidden, deportations, racist violence, physical abuse. This is the reality awaiting humans whose only “crime” is their lack of papers, in Fortress-Europe. The “democratic” Europe drones on about how it protects the “real” refugees and persecutes and deports only those who don’t have papers to prove it. Who are those, however, who don’t have papers? Is it not political opponents chased by their own state, which also refuses to give them a passport? Is it not nationalities that are not recognized by their respective nation-state like the stateless Kurds of Syria? Is it not war refugees, like Syrians and Iraqis, that many times don’t have the chance to gather their papers before leaving home?

The hell of Menogeia, as a transitional space prior to deportation, then, is the fate of all the damned who vainly try to start a new life in Europe. What is the “detainment center” in reality? It is but a space of control and subjugation of a specific population group. Its function is the control of the body, from where and how it moves, to with whom it is allowed to communicate, from what it eats, to how it is allowed to behave. Despite it being a space outside criminal law, since the detainees have committed no crime, the treatment is as criminals.

This treatment begins with the detainment itself. The “sans-papiers” are packed into cells, which they are allowed to exit only a few hours a day. To use the toilet they must ring a bell so that a supervising cop escorts them. The gender separation is so strict that even families are broken up, since men and women are held in different sectors, and children are taken by welfare, regardless of age. In terms of food, it is of awful quality, many people have lost weight, and complaints are made because allergies are ignored.

In the detainment center there is no medical personnel. The guards decide arbitrarily is a disease is worthy of attention or not. If so, the immigrants are allowed a visit to the hospital, which happens under supervision and with handcuffs. If not, the guards themselves simply give painkillers, whatever the symptoms may be.

The detainees are allowed one visit per day for an hour, and have signal to make phone calls only certain hours of the day. Their communication with lawyers and NGOs is routinely blocked. There are instances of people who were punished with isolation because they reported the horrible conditions to NGOs. The immigrants are kept in the dark, both in terms of their legal rights and the reason for their deportation. They also do not know how long they will be held, and when they will be deported. There are cases of people held for over the maximum limit of 18 months, set free and then arrested again.

The awful conditions of living are reflected in the detainees' bodies. Either through their struggles with hunger strikes and blocking the institution's functions (like the seven detainees who staged a hunger strike on the roof, against their prolonged detainment), either through their despair, shown by the suicide attempts (the most recent one in July, when a Lebanese national tried to kill himself after the postponement of his case at court).

On barbarism and solidarity

When the immigrants aren't treated as infected intruders to the social body, they are treated as victims, worthy of philanthropy. This is but the other side of the same coin, with this treatment presenting the western subjects as heroes, washing them of their responsibilities on the reasons for immigration but also the western legal situation which makes immigration a nightware. Philanthropy obviously is not enough for everyone, so with small gestures, the state, in collaboration with some NGOs can show that it is trying to help, to convince its more progressive followers.

The racist rhetoric that says immigrants steal our jobs and make our salaries drop is a (social) part of their institutional management. It is part of the strategy that generates legal and illegal bodies, leaving the latter ones to be exploited by employers. It is not immigrants that lower salaries, it is the bosses, with the exploitation and devaluation of immigrants, marking the bottom of the capitalist pyramid and creating a rift within the working class through racist discourse. Thus, the bosses twist reality and present the results of their decisions as causes for them, and immigrants are targeted, creating the social space so that the state can treat them with the inhumane manner we see today. In this, the absence of common struggles and perspectives of locals and immigrants also plays its part. It is only one of the many separations within the working class itself, we can find others in the characteristic arguments between public and private sector workers.

Firstly, we attempt to network with locals and immigrants around issues of racism, in order to form a diverse community of people with the reflexes to support those who suffer at the hands of the racist state. We don't forget: the prisoners at Menogeia aren't waiting for us, they fight, with their bodies as their only tool. We try to put antifascist these forward in public discourse with counter information gestures, in order to create cracks in the domination of racism in the social sphere. Our attempts are dedicated to spreading solidarity to the detained and persecuted from elsewhere, to link our struggles with theirs.

Solidarity to immigrants concerns us for all the reasons in the world. It concerns us because the bosses use their bodies in order to map a grim future for ours as well. It concerns us because we accept no discrimination, either of race, or of gender and sexuality. It concerns us because in the neighborhoods, in the streets, the schools and our workplaces, we see those whom the state and the bosses want invisible. It concerns us because we neither want to, nor can live in a country with concentration camps.

Not in Cyprus, not anywhere!

Let's tear down all borders, all concentration camps and every racist perception until the final collapse of the fortress called Europe!

ANTIFA NICOSIA

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