

Migration, vulnerability, resilience: A series of unfortunate events?

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Introduction

In what is often called “the long summer of migration” of 2015, over one million refugees and migrants reached Europe across the Mediterranean, mainly through Greece and Italy, according to the UN Refugee Agency. A number that continued to increase in the following years and has been predominantly labeled in the public debate as “refugee crisis”. This “crisis” triggered a wider discourse and the establishment of new policies on migration. These policies were not only the result of how migrants and refugees have been perceived from 2015 on, but also the practical application of a large and complex framework that has been drawn by development agendas since roughly the turn of the century. Migration has been baptised as a “risk” and later as a “crisis” but also as an “opportunity” for the capitalist growth and development. And this has led to the need for the implementation of a new risk and crisis management tool, that could function both as the medium and as the goal of a “managed” migration, beneficiary for any future development. The notion of resilience appeared to be the best solution.

In our joint paper we argue that the labels “refugee crisis” and “resilience” are anything but innocent, neutral or objective and are indeed the way through which neoliberalism manages to establish a new and global power mechanism for the survival, reproduction and development of the capitalist system. We claim that this mechanism could be schematised, regarding migration, in the transition from human rights obligations to flexible vulnerability and from vulnerability to resilient neoliberal subjects.

An analysis of neoliberalism is far exceeding the limits of this paper. However, it is important to underline what will be crucial to our argument. As Peck, Theodore and Brenner explain, neoliberalism is “a multi scalar phenomenon: it reconstitutes scaled relationships between institutions and economic actors, such as municipal governments, national states and financialized capital”.¹ This multi-scalar character will be central to our paper, since we try to show how this human rights-vulnerability-resilience trajectory is translated into specific policies, applied on various different levels and fields, as well as through a multitude of different agents and institutions. Therefore, a critique to International refugee law focusing on the figure of the migrant and issues of protection and political

¹ Peck, Jamie, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner. “Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations,” in *SAIS Review* 29 (December 1, 2009): 51.

subjectivity is engaged with a critique to the notion of resilience and its effects on urban policies.

In order to better explain our argument we will be focusing on migrant/refugee question in Greece. We aim at contributing to the dialogue on the Global Protection Regime for Refugees and Migrants bringing into the discussion some broader theoretical arguments on human rights and resilience, as well as empirical evidence from the Greek experience in the European context. We believe that Greece's role in this context can be enlightening, since it marks the peculiar grey zone between what is generally conceived as the global North and the global South. Ranabir Samaddar, in his book "A Post-Colonial Enquiry into Europe's Debt and Migration Crisis", gives us a very interesting framework, which will be crucial to our argument.

First, Samaddar notes that what Europe is doing today, as strategy to cope with migration, marks a broader transition of the continent towards becoming a neoliberal empire. Instead of political subjects, refugees and migrants are conceptualised as subjects of global development linking issues of care, protection and security to market economy. Second, he stresses the structural link between the debt crisis and the so-called migration/refugee crisis. Third, he argues that the debt-migration nexus is hard to analyse without an understanding of the post-colonial world, its histories of debt, war, peace, and resistance, and of course the anti-colonial revolutions. Therefore, he analyses the post-colonial bind of Greece, pointing out that Europe also has peripheries, its South, its neo-colonies, and depends on neo-colonial domination. And last but not least, he develops a critique of the European Left and relates capitulation and decline of the Greek government to Europeanism, the absence of an alternative plan towards rupture, the hesitation to revolutionise the masses, and the inexorable governmentalisation of the party, politics, and strategy.

Coming back to the question of migrants and refugees in Greece, in the first part of our paper, the aim is to intervene to political and legal debates regarding migration, human rights and European policies. Given the peculiarity of Greece regarding Europe's North/South divide and the contradictory social and political context, we stress the legal and political implications of the "EU-Turkey refugee deal" of 2016, focusing on its effects on the international refugee protection regime. Thence we will be examining the role of "vulnerability" in the protection regime, its relation to eligibility for social services and issues of victimisation and exclusion.

In the second part, after a short introduction to the notion of resilience, we will try to situate within the above critique, how resilience works as a means of subjectification, creating the figure of the migrant/refugee both as a "threat" and as an agent of development, Spreading from security policies to development agendas, we will try to demonstrate how the malleable notion of resilience can very conveniently bring together a wide range of institutions, from NATO to EU, UN, World Bank, central governments and local authorities.

From human rights to vulnerability

If imposing austerity measures was the nadir of Syriza economic politics, we argue that implementing EU-Turkey deal was its counterpart regarding the protection regime for migrants and refugees. Ioannis Mouzalas, former Minister of Immigration Policy, and one of the founding members of Médecins du Monde, was quite explicit as to what can be done with the refugee question, in a televised interview: “At this moment, as a Minister, I see more clearly the bigger picture. I understand that many of the demands I had as an activist cannot be implemented in practice”.² This was the translation of the “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) doctrine in the field of the protection regime for migrants and refugees. In the name of this “capitalist realism”, what was actually implemented in practice resulted in a complete abandonment for thousands of migrants and refugees trapped after the shut of the Balkan corridor and the EU-Turkey deal. From Idomeni, “Europe’s biggest favela”, as was reported in the Guardian³ to Moria camp, for which the New York Times have offered the title “‘Better to Drown’: A Greek Refugee Camp’s Epidemic of Misery”,⁴ the living conditions definitely amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.

“How are these things still possible in the 21st century?” is an everyday question, usually rhetorical, raised by people with good intentions, human rights activists, critical scholars etc. Recalling Walter Benjamin, this kind of astonishment is “by no means philosophical. It is not the beginning of knowledge, unless it would be the knowledge that the conception of history on which it rests is untenable”.⁵ Often it is based on humanitarian reason and is accompanied by the assumption that since the violation of international law is so evident, it is a wise move to ask for the restoration of the “rule of law”. In the pages ahead, “humanitarian reason” and “liberal legalism” will come under close scrutiny as frameworks for research and orientation on migration and refugee studies.

The EU-Turkey Refugee Deal in a Global Perspective

The EU-Turkey deal is important to be examined in a global perspective, viewing it as a turning point as well as in continuity with the new global paradigm. In August 2016, more than 2,000 leaked incident reports from Australia’s detention camp for asylum seekers on

² Mouzalas, Ioannis. interview on Alpha TV, 22/3/2016. Retrieved from: https://www.alphatv.gr/show/aytopsia/ekpobes_autopsia/?vtype=player&vid=297&showId=843&year=2016

³ Smith, Helena. “Migration crisis: Idomeni, the train stop that became an ‘an insult to EU values’”, The Guardian, 17 March 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/17/migration-crisis-idomeni-camp-greece-macedonia-is-an-insult-to-eu-values>

⁴ Kingsley, Patrick. “‘Better to Drown’: A Greek Refugee Camp’s Epidemic of Misery”, The New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/world/europe/greece-lesbos-moria-refugees.html?fbclid=IwAR0IB9Qqbhk-tlr7U3tZKzwU418yY1olzsbwS0bHDo8btsGpOj7yplUh8xY>

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, available at: <https://folk.uib.no/hliis/TBLR-B/Benjamin-History.pdf>

the remote Pacific island of Nauru were published by the Guardian. Released from inside its immigration regime, the 8,000 leaked pages set out, as never before, the assaults, sexual abuse, self-harm attempts, child abuse and living conditions endured by asylum seekers held by the Australian government, painting a picture of routine dysfunction and cruelty. Some months earlier, in May 2016, African civil societies issued a joint statement condemning heavily the European anti-immigration policies: “The lure of European financial aid to fight against migration transforms the African political authorities in real persecutors of their brothers and sisters who are looking for work to live and feed their families. This could recall the time of slavery abolished there only two centuries”.⁶

Moreover, they give the example of Libya, as a sad illustration with heavily armed anti-immigration brigade, supported by the European Union, which tracks day and night the sub-Saharan migrant workers cram in detention centres instead of effectively combating traffickers and Libyan smugglers.

In order to see the biggest picture, it would be useful to relate European externalisation of migration borders and deals with the African political authorities to the history of imperialist aggression, military invasions and European colonisation of Africa, including the recent western intervention in Libya. All these considered, instead of astonishment regarding the developments in Greece, we argue that research and orientation on migrants and refugees might benefit far more if based on the following assumption: Far reaching implications of EU-Turkey deal including, among others, refugee camps, resembling the ones in Nauru, and heavily armed anti-immigration brigades with the support of European Union, resembling the ones in Africa, constitute a situation that is part of the post-colonial bind of Greece. Quoting again Samaddar for a definition of post-colonial: “Post-colonial critique does not aim to provide any alternative theory, but a dialectical mode of analysing contemporary capitalism and suggest that there is much to learn from the vast reservoir of anti-colonial politics in the present phase of the global struggle for ending capitalism”.⁷

“Humanitarian reason” and “liberal legalism” as frameworks to address questions of protection

In terms of protection, it is important to note that, more and more, it is restricted to the most vulnerable among those who are persecuted. Vulnerability is related to what Didier Fassin has identified as the new moral economy, centred on humanitarian reason, pointing

⁶ African Civil Society. Joint Statement: “African civil society condemns the hunt for migrants on the continent”. Signed by The West African Observatory on Migrations (WAOM), The Pan African Network for the Defense of Migrants' Rights (PANiDMR), Caritas - Migration and Development Network (MADE) – Africa, Moroccan Transnational Network on Migration and Development (RMTMD). Retrieved from: <http://madenetwork.org/latest-news/african-civil-society-condemns-hunt-migrants-continent>

⁷ Samaddar, Ranabir. *A Post-Colonial Enquiry into Europe's Debt and Migration Crisis*, Springer, 2016: 119

out the displacement of human rights from the political sphere to that of compassion.⁸ That said we do not underestimate emotions in everyday political practice. We instead argue that when the vocabulary of humanitarianism is adopted, as well-stated by Fassin, “inequality is replaced by exclusion, domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, and violence is expressed in terms of trauma”.⁹

The pattern goes as follows: Human rights obligations are redefined and tightened, applying only to those most suffering. The transition from a protection regime for migrants and refugees to protection only to those identified as vulnerable is accompanied by a flexible definition of vulnerability. Flexibility ensures that legal definitions are adaptive to the conjectural and strategic needs of capitalist production and reproduction. The experience in the Greek/European context is revealing from this perspective. According to the legally non-binding Joint Turkey-EU Statement “all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to the Greek islands and whose applications for asylum have been declared inadmissible should be returned to Turkey”.¹⁰

According to the Greek law following the Joint Statement (Law No 4375/2016),¹¹ newly arrived applicants who fall within the family provisions of the Dublin Regulation or who are considered vulnerable are exempted from the Fast-Track Border Procedure. Vulnerable groups are considered to be the seven following categories: a) Unaccompanied minors, b) Persons with disability or suffering from an incurable or serious illness, c) The elderly, d) Women in pregnancy or having recently given birth, e) Single parents with minor children, f) Victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation, persons with a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in particularly survivors and relatives of victims of ship-wrecks, g) Victims of trafficking in human beings.

In other words, there are three possible ways not to be returned to Turkey: a) one has the right documents for a family reunification claim, b) one is identified as vulnerable, or c) one’s asylum application is found admissible, considering that Turkey is not a safe third country in her case. As if exempting thousands of migrants and refugees from basic rights was not enough, direct and indirect pressures started with the aim to tighten the concept of vulnerability. Most notably, the European Commission has recommended an end to the

⁸ Fassin, Didier. “Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.20: 3, 2005: 371.

⁹ Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2012: 7.

¹⁰ European Parliament. “EU-Turkey Statement & Action Plan”. Legislative Train - Towards a new policy on migration, 9/2019. Retrieved from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-turkey-statement-action-plan>

¹¹ Greece: Law No. 4375 of 2016 on the organisation and operation of the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority, the Reception and Identification Service, the establishment of the General Secretariat for Reception, the transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EC [Greece], 3 April 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/573ad4cb4.html>

exemptions for vulnerable groups and people eligible for family reunification from the requirement to remain on the islands and go through the fast-track admissibility process aiming at increasing the number of returns to Turkey.¹² Ultimately, the newly elected right wing government has proposed in October 2019 a new asylum law redefining and tightening the vulnerability, eliminating PTSD as a reason for vulnerability concept and complicating medical certificates accelerating what Élise Pestre describes as “instrumentalizing the refugee's body through evidence”.¹³

In this context, the language of compassion, sometimes well-intentioned and sometimes not, cannot be effective to raise issues of protection. In order to turn for a while from law to politics, the Greek left movement has its own experience of this ineffectiveness as far as the debt crisis is concerned. Even among progressive and sympathetic communities and networks across Europe this last decade, statements full of compassion, pity and kindness about the “poor Greeks who are suffering” might have been well intentioned. However, without addressing uneven development and structural inequalities in the Eurozone and European Union, compassion proved to be ineffective to win on moral grounds the mainstream argument that Greeks are lazy and deserve anything but punishment.

“Between equal rights, force decides”

Returning to the rule of law, it is anything but surprising that the same pattern of redefining and tightening legal concepts has been followed regarding the individual judgment for each applicant as to whether Turkey may be considered a safe third country. Part of this story can be followed through a public statement by 18 members of the Asylum Appeals Committees (PD 114/2010), including the second author of this paper, commenting, among others, on direct and indirect pressures by the European Commission and the Migration Policy Minister to acknowledge Turkey as a safe third country, as well as the concomitant amendment, with which the examination of asylum appeals was assigned to new “Independent Appeals Committees”.¹⁴ The fully substantiated legal reasoning cited in dozens of judgments by the Appeals Committees (PD 114/2010) was not considered “independent” enough because it was not in line with the objective of mass returns in Turkey.

¹² Human Rights Watch. “EU/Greece: Pressure to Minimize Numbers of Migrants Identified As ‘Vulnerable’”, 1 June 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/01/eu/greece-pressure-minimize-numbers-migrants-identified-vulnerable>

¹³ Pestre, Élise. “Instrumentalizing the Refugee's Body Through Evidence”, *Recherches en psychanalyse*, vol. 14:2, 2012.

¹⁴ Letter by members of the Asylum Appeals Committees of Greece (Presidential Decree 114/2010), regarding the latest developments in the asylum claims review process, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2016/jun/greece-Letterof-the-Appeals-Committees-Members.pdf>

The decision of the Full Chamber of the Greek Council of State in September 2017 (cases 2347/2017 and 2348/2017) is illustrative of the reasons why getting one's hopes up about the rule of law is not as promising as it may appear. The Council of State rejected two Syrian asylum seekers' application for annulment against the negative decisions of the Independent Appeals Committees. Suffice it to say that according to the Supreme Administrative Court: a) the protection provided in Turkey is in accordance with the 1951 Geneva Convention despite the fact that the temporary protection can be withdrawn by means of a Council of Ministers Decision, without prior verification of the cessation provisions of the Geneva Convention in every individual case, b) the safe third country is not required to have ratified the Refugee Convention without geographical limitations, c) the developments in Turkey that followed the failed coup d'état in the summer of 2016 did not negatively influence the protection provided to Syrian refugees and d) the role of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Greek asylum procedures, fast-track border procedures, as well as the Ministerial Decisions regulating the Independent Appeals Committees are in conformity with the relevant provisions of the Greek Constitution.¹⁵

If Marx was not wrong to argue that “between equal rights, force decides”¹⁶ and if Susan Ferguson's and David McNally's descriptions of the migrant worker, as the ideal precarious labourer of the neoliberal era,¹⁷ are accurate, then, the systematic economic and social abuse of migrants deprived of their basic civil rights is the consciously hidden scene of the liberal illusion that migration can “work for all”. Instead of a promising restoration of the rule of law, our argument is based on the assumption that law is constitutive of relations of exploitation of domination. As opposed to the liberal understanding, we advocate that law is not neutral and viewing it as such is a naive underestimation of the structural bias. Simon Behrman notes that “the post-war Golden Age of refugeehood was primarily a result of political economy, not law”.¹⁸ Peter Hallward is more explicit when he refers to the shift in global political economy over the 1980's against organised labour and popular movements building on the hypothesis that “without a strong figure of the worker there can be no effective response to the so-called 'immigrant question'”.¹⁹ Then, it's more productive to turn our attention to the balance of forces aiming at a displacement from the sphere of compassion back to politics.

¹⁵ European Database on Asylum Law. “Greece: Council of State on Turkey as a safe third country and aspects of the Greek asylum procedure”, 22 September 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/greece-council-state-turkey-safe-third-country-and-aspects-greek-asylum-procedure>

¹⁶ Marx, Karl. *Capital*, Vol.1.

¹⁷ Ferguson, Susan, McNally, David. “Precarious Migrants: Gender, Race and the Social Reproduction of a Global Working Class”, *Socialist Register*, Vol 51,2015.

¹⁸ Behrman, Simon. “Legal Subjectivity and the Refugee”. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol. 26, 2014: 10.

¹⁹ Hallward, Peter. “Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice”. *Culture Machine*, Vol. 4, 2002.

More and more hopeless lawsuits have turned many lawyers, especially those committed to the social movements, desperate. How could we then proceed? First of all, we should not forget that human rights can also be deployed to subjugate the weak and reinforce their domination, as Nicola Peruggini and Neve Gordon have persuasively shown in their book “The human right to dominate”.²⁰ In a finely nuanced approach to a specifically legal strategy that draws from the Marxist tradition, Robert Knox notes that the “opposition is not between ‘using the law’ (as a liberal) or ‘abandoning it’ (as a nihilist). Rather the question is on what terms it is possible to use the law without fatally undermining longer term, structural considerations”.²¹ Knox develops the idea of a ‘principled opportunism’, where international law is consciously used as a mere tool, to be discarded when not useful.²² Likewise, Behrman posits a distinction between making demands of law and demanding recognition by law, since “for the refugee, seeking the latter entails placing herself in a reciprocal relationship with a structural form that has systematically stripped her of humanity”.²³ While Behrman, like Knox, does not underestimate the struggle by refugees, lawyers and campaigners to demand legal rights, he points out that for refugees it is not legal subjectivity that needs reclaiming but political subjectivity.²⁴

From vulnerability to resilience

What could be the best answer to deal with the so-called “refugee crisis”? The same answer given to economic blows, natural disasters and pandemic diseases, in short to everything today defined as a “crisis”. The need for the implementation of a new crisis management tool, one promoting a holistic approach, has been answered through the notion of resilience, abstract and malleable enough to encompass different fields, like those of ecology, high finance, defence, urban infrastructures, migration, psychology.

Resilience turns out to be the notion that can connect very smoothly economic crises, climate change, the cities, the banks, NATO, the poor, the migrants and the refugees. They are presented as the “threats”—or, more elegantly named, the “challenges”— individuals, cities and societies should learn to cope with. Everything is considered a danger threatening us in the same way, equating natural and social phenomena, political and economic crises, neutralising social problems, power relations and the implications of specific political choices.

²⁰ Peruggini, Nicola , Gordon,Neve. *The Human Right to Dominate*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

²¹ Knox, Robert. “Strategy and Tactics”, *Finnish Yearbook of International Law*, Vol. 21, 2010:215.

²² *Ibid*: 221.

²³ Behrman,S. (2014). *Cit.*:21.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

What exactly is resilience?

Resilience is defined as “a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables”.²⁵ For the social sciences, it describes “the ability of human communities to withstand external shocks or perturbations to their infrastructure, such as environmental variability or social, economic or political upheaval, and to recover from such perturbations”.²⁶ We suggest that what resilience guarantees is first and above all the survival, security and reproduction of the capitalist system itself and of capitalist growth. In this sense, resilience is structurally linked to neoliberalism, and as a development imperative it embodies its theoretical and practical corpus. Above all, resilience proves to be the most effective tool, since like we mentioned before regarding neoliberalism, it establishes a strictly hierarchical and multi-scalar approach.

The structural link between resilience and late capitalism becomes evident once we trace, even briefly, the theoretical origins of the term. Emerging from the science of Ecology, resilience thinking continues the wider functionalist dialogue of the 1960s and 1970s around the notion of *adaptation*, that reads society only through its utilitarian function, as a means of survival. Resilience proposes an approach focused mainly on how societies react (as systems) to stresses, rather than on the actual causes of the stress. Influenced by the Darwinian logic of natural selection it concentrates on the effectiveness of adaptation. Biology constitutes the perfect medium between the natural and the social worlds since it can claim the “neutrality of science, “the nomothetic idea of science, with its emphasis on universal laws”.²⁷ The use of complex systems theory, cybernetics and complexity theory is indeed ideological, since it reproduces a certain hierarchical structure —which it does not question— and underlines the notion of constraint rather than choice in hazards contexts. Resilience is a very specific form of adaptation, that does not include exchange or any dialectical relation, as Marx meant adaptation. Instead, it is about socially adopting unconditionally the concept of natural selection, of winners and losers, of adaptive and maladaptive, of resilient and non-resilient.

The practical use of the term was limited, until the turn of the century in the military. It is initially recorded in the US army manuals concerning the developing world metropolises with high social and economic inequalities, searching for methods of suppression of possible

²⁵ Holling, Crawford Stanley. “Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems,” in *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973): 14.

²⁶ Adger, W. Neil. “Social and Ecological Resilience: Are They Related?” *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 3 (September 1, 2000): 347.

²⁷ Wallerstein, Immanuel. “Time and Duration: The Unexcluded Middle, or Reflections on Braudel and Prigogine”. *Thesis Eleven*, 54(1), 1998: 79.

uprisings.²⁸ Resilience has been introduced in the political discourse during the Clinton presidency as part of Homeland Security where it has been completely established after 9/11.²⁹ As a crisis management rhetoric it is empowered after the Katrina disasters in New Orleans in 2005 and becomes the absolute strategy after the 2008 capitalist crisis. We could therefore distinguish three pillars on which resilience rhetoric evolves: the armouring against “terrorism” (often connected to islamophobia), against natural disasters (connected to infrastructures, urban development as well as migration movements) and against economic crises (connected to austerity measures and the reproduction of the capitalist system).

Resilience contains two other notions, adaptability and security. It is structurally and dialectically connected with the threats it is supposed to protect from. In order for resilience to exist, the threat of disaster must be permanent. Capitalising on catastrophe, the main argument is the constant emergence of non-preventable crises, creating a permanent *state of siege*. Thus, resilience becomes the new tool of neoliberalism, since the consequences of neoliberal restructuring are legitimised as natural phenomena against which we shouldn't resist. The new security-resilience nexus promoted is in fact the means of a class policy that allows the ruling class to maintain its dominance and its profits in periods of crisis. So, resilience emerges as a global way of thinking, a global way of analysing the relation between uncontrollable subjects and their environment. And hence it becomes the most advised solution and one of the central imperatives of every development plan.

Resilient subjects, agents of development

The new approach to development places human agency at the centre and is measured, as David Chandler explains, in terms of individual capabilities.³⁰ An argument that is all too familiar, in accordance with the famous Thatcherist phrase “Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families”.³¹ Thus, resilience is a useful concept, precisely because it is a capacity of life itself.

Subjects can no longer hide behind their vulnerability. Instead they ought to become resilient. This shift from vulnerability to resilience marks “a significant loss of the idea that it

²⁸ See: Taw, Jennifer Morrison, Hoffman, Bruce. *The Urbanisation of Insurgency: The Potential Challenge to U.S. Army Operations*. United States Army, 1991 | Norton, Richard. “Feral Cities,” in *Naval War College Review*, No 56 (4):97-106 (Autumn 2003)

²⁹ See for example: US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), special topic Resilience (<https://www.dhs.gov/topic/resilience>).

³⁰ Chandler, David. “Development as Freedom?: From Colonialism to Countering Climate Change,” in *Development Dialogue* 58 (2012): 115–29.

³¹ Thatcher, Margaret. Interview in *Woman's Own Magazine* (October 31, 1987). Retrieved from: <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/106689>, last accessed in September 19, 2019.

is socio-economic systems themselves that expose people to different levels of risk”.³² Rather, the resilient subject, true to the neoliberal demand for individual responsibility, owes to be self-secure against any kind of calamities. They must “prove themselves by bettering their individual and collective self-reliance”.³³ The resilient subject, deprived from any possibility to imagine alternatives, is called, in order to exist, to embrace and adapt to the disastrousness of its reality. Resilience is in fact reproducing the TINA rhetoric, by creating subjects that have to adapt to situations extending far beyond their control. Consequently, resilience bears the seeds of neoliberal social Darwinism, according to which only the most capable and adaptive ones can make it.

However, the notion of the resilient subject is differentiated, depending on her social and economic context. Sarah Brake distinguishes two types of resilient subjects, formed through adapting to different threats and dangers.³⁴ First, the resilient subject of the global North, who feels threatened mainly by terrorism and demands securitarian and social control policies in their more classical form. Second, the subject of the global South who has survived colonisation, exploitation, and wars. “We might call this a subject of subaltern resilience, or the resilience of the wretched of the earth”. Their main aim as resilient subjects is survival “in conditions of often unbearable symbolic and material violence”,³⁵ mainly imposed by the North. To put it differently, the resilience of the global North depends on the dispossession of the global South.

Security, the prerequisite for development

Security appears to be the fundamental prerequisite for any future development. As Hilary Benn, former Secretary of State for International Development of UK, argued, “development without security is not possible; security without development is only temporary”.³⁶ First step to “security” is to define the threats. Migrants occupy the first place in the long list of threats of the “European way of life”, connected to the vocabulary of fear, insecurity and violence, but also to climate change to which migration is presented as an adaptive response. The UN leads the way:

³² Cannon, Terry, and Detlef Müller-Mahn. “Vulnerability, Resilience and Development Discourses in Context of Climate Change.” *Natural Hazards* 55 (December 1, 2010): 632.

³³ Duffield, Mark. *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007: 69.

³⁴ Brake, Sarah. “Bouncing Back. Vulnerability and Resistance in Times of Resilience.” In *Vulnerability in Resistance*, edited by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, 52–75. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.60.

³⁶ Benn, Hilary. *A shared challenge: promoting development and human security in weak states*. Speech at the Centre for Global Development, Washington (June 23, 2004).

It is clear that in the coming decades, the rural poor will be tested as the impacts of climate change manifest. There are no cities in the developing world large enough or wealthy enough to absorb the migration of the poor who have no buffer against these dangers, and can find no means to adapt. The political and social instability inherent in such potentially massive movements of people is of increasing concern to the international community. [...]. The consequences of not acting may well test the depths of our compassion.³⁷

In the contemporary development discourse both the issues of climate change and migration become central. They are both recognised as “necessary evils” with which the developed world should cope. Since migration is considered to be more and more massive, it becomes a “crisis” and an “emergency” which demands both securitarian policies and the correct disaster risk management. In short, the implementation of resilience policies. As argues the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities programme (100RC): “The mass migration we are witnessing today is not a temporary state of emergency, but the beginning of a new reality. Most likely, the factors pushing migrants to cities will only become more common and impactful”.³⁸

Resilience becomes, in a glimpse, the desideratum of all agendas drawn by the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, NATO, the EU, as well as various Philanthropic Institutions and Foundations and NGOs.³⁹ Although this discourse does not pathologise migration, the promoted idea of a “managed” and “orderly” migration, helps avoid the risk of a chaotic, disordered and violent migration. In other words, as Bettini explains,⁴⁰ the

³⁷ United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank and World Resources Institute. *World Resources 2008: Roots of Resilience – Growing the Wealth of the Poor*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2008: ix

³⁸ 100 Resilient Cities. “Global Migration. Resilient Cities at the Forefront. strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration”. Report of the Network Exchange Programme: Cities and Global Migration Crisis. Athens, Greece, 7-9/9/2016, p. 17.

³⁹ Notably: United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). *Living With Risk: A global review of disaster reduction initiatives*. 2004 version - volume I. New York, Geneva: United Nations, 2004 | UNISDR Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: *Risk and poverty in a changing climate. Invest today for a safer tomorrow*. New York, Geneva: United Nations, 2009 | UN Development Programme, UN Environment Programme, World Bank, World Resources Institute. *Roots of Resilience: Growing the Wealth of the Poor. Ownership, Capacity, Connection*. World Resources Report. Washington D.C., 2008. | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations*. Off print of the Journal on Development, 9:3, 2008 | Global Sustainability Panel (United Nations Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Global Sustainability). *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing*. New York: United Nations, 2012 | World Bank. World Development Report. *Risk and Opportunity: Managing Risks for Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2013 | 100 Resilient Cities - The Rockefeller Foundation. *City Resilience and the City Resilience Framework*. January 2015. | 100 Resilient Cities - The Rockefeller Foundation. *Resilient Cities, Resilient Lives: Learning from the 100RC Network*. July 2019.

⁴⁰ Bettini, Giovanni. “Climate migration as an adaption strategy: De-securitizing climate-induced migration or making the unruly governable?”. *Critical Studies on Security*, 2, 2014: 180–195.

migration-as-adaptation motto allows the creation of a biopolitical rule that promotes managed migration as a beneficial development practice, separating migration into “good”, which is promoted, and “bad”, which is policed. Resilience can work both as a means and an end for the migration-security-development equation.

Migration as a threat: the resilience-security nexus

If you don't help us help yourself, we are forced to comply with the laws of nature.
Survival of the fittest, Max! And we've got the fucking gun!
from the movie “π” (Pi), D. Aronofsky

In our case, Greece, both types of resilient subjects (of the global North and South) and the separation of migration into “acceptable” or not become evident, since it marks the place where both resilience-security and resilience-survival meet. Within the “uneven geographies of protection and labour market [where] the globe is conceived in terms of sanctuaries, third countries, hotspots, border zones, safe corridors, legally run labour regimes, remittance-centric segments of global economy [and] places with multi-stakeholder operations”,⁴¹ Greece finds its own special place, as the frontier not only of the EU but also of NATO. The former Supreme Allied Commander Transformation explains:

“An arc of insecurity is stretching along NATO's borders and periphery, defining the two strategic directions, East and South [...]. The Alliance's member states need to increase their resilience and civil preparedness against the continuous attempts to destabilise our societies, coined as ‘hybrid threats’. While these threats often emerge locally, their consequences in terms of insecurity and civil unrest have a global reach”.⁴²

Within the context of the capitalist crisis, the Athens city-centre was entitled to claim its own “crisis”. Gradually, the dominant discourse built an image of a city that from being prosperous and developing during the Olympic Games period, ended up being a “Sin City”. Migrants were presented to be the main factor of this decline: from the “migrants lacking permanent residence titles” of the Ombudsman,⁴³ the “undocumented migrants” of the Special Parliamentary Committee for the Environment,⁴⁴ to the “illegal immigrants” of

⁴¹ Samaddar, Ranabir. Promises and Paradoxes of a Global Gaze: p.3.

⁴² General Denis Mercier, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, foreword in: Cusumano Eugenio, Corbe Marian [eds.], *A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats*. Switzerland: Palsgrave Macmillan / Springer, 2018: p.V.

⁴³ Greek Ombudsman. “Evaluations of the Greek Ombudsman for the historical and commercial centre of Athens”. Deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights, Athens, 13/7/2010.

⁴⁴ Special Permanent Committee on Environmental Protection. “Cities Regeneration - Athens Historical Centre. Report: A Plan for the Historical Centre of Athens”. Hellenic Parliament, Athens, 29/3/2010.

the various municipality development plans.⁴⁵ As it is clearly stated in the Integrated Plan for Athens (SOAP): “the main reason of insecurity is the accumulation of marginal and migrant populations in the capital”.⁴⁶ They are supposed to affect not only “safe living”, but also “safe commercial operation” and the “economic legality”. The proposed measures focus almost exclusively on the intensification of repression and the expulsion of the migrants from the city-centre, as well as the strengthening of border control.

The “refugee crisis” of 2015 marked a high point for the above rhetoric. Athens’ resilience plan for the 100RC programme, defines “refugees” as one of its main “challenges”. Moreover, the mayor of Athens, in a common letter with the mayors of Paris and Rome, demanded to adopt a leading role in the discussions for the Global Compact on Refugees, connecting the migratory movements with the first terrorist attacks in Paris. They demand that “the big european cities have an active part in the discussions between the European Commission and governments for the formulation of the Global Compact on Refugees”, given the fact that one of the cities’ main aims is “the security of citizens, the regulation of migratory flows and the protection of our borders”.⁴⁷

Border protection is where cities are called to cooperate, through resilience agendas, not only with the EU and Frontex but also with NATO. Specifically, resilience constitutes one of the central principles of NATO’s security strategies:

“Each NATO member country needs to be resilient to resist and recover from a major shock such as a natural disaster, failure of critical infrastructure or an armed attack. Resilience is a society’s ability to resist and recover easily and quickly from such shocks and combines both civil preparedness and military capacity. Robust resilience and civil preparedness in Allied countries are essential to NATO’s collective security and defence”.⁴⁸

In this context, in the Warsaw Summit of 2016, the Allies, in order to confront future “hybrid/terrorist” attacks, agreed on seven baseline requirements for strengthening their resilience, which is perceived as the “first line of defence for today’s modern societies”.⁴⁹ One of these requirements is the “ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of

⁴⁵ Namely: Inter-ministerial Coordination and Athens Municipality. “Action Plan for the centre of Athens”. Athens, 2010. I Laboratory of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly. “Research for an Integrated Urban Intervention in the centre of Athens - A2 Complete Proposal and Action Plan” (SOAP). Volos, December 2013.

⁴⁶ SOAP (2013). Cit. p. 35.

⁴⁷ Kaminis, Yorgos, Marino Ignazio, Hidalgo Anne. “The migrants and the cities”. Common article in *Ta Nea, La Croix, Il Messaggero*. 13/05/2015.

⁴⁸ NATO web page on Resilience: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm

⁴⁹ NATO. *Resilience, the first line of defence*: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2019/Also-in-2019/resilience-the-first-line-of-defence/EN/index.htm>

people”.⁵⁰ In this case, resilience strategies focus on the “deterrence by denial: persuading an adversary not to attack by convincing it that an attack will not achieve its intended objectives”.⁵¹ And this, in practice, is embodied in the drowning of migrants arriving to Greece through sea, the confinement of migrants in hotspots and concentration camps on the greek islands as well as the inhuman living conditions they have to face there. They are in fact relegated to a subclass of human existence. And so, the subjects of the Global North can achieve their resilience, securing themselves from the looming threat of the migrants.

Migration as development: the resilience-survival nexus

So what becomes the surest guarantee of smooth entry (i.e. to flow without friction or resistance) is the capability to evidence compliance in advance of the proposed journey.

Brad Evans, *Liberal Terror*. 2013:152

The image of a “fortress Europe” and of a “fortress NATO” is one of Janus’ faces. The other, which legitimises the first one, is the humanitarian reasoning, embodied in notions such as vulnerability, social cohesion, migrants integration. In practice, it is about those migrants that are considered to be “selectable”; the adaptive migrants, the resilient migrants. The part of migration that is claimed to have “beneficiary effects” for the global development. As the World Bank’s 2010 report argues:

“[...] policies designed to restrict migration rarely succeed, are often self-defeating, and increase the costs to migrants and to communities of origin and destination. In facilitating migration as a response to climate impacts, it is better to formulate integrated migration and development policies that address the needs of voluntary migrants and support their entrepreneurial abilities and technical skills”.⁵²

Migrants, the subjects of subaltern resilience, become agents of development. The very existence of a Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) is a proof of the practical implications of this nexus. The GFMD, formed in 2007, is presented as “the largest informal, non-binding, voluntary and government-led process, bringing together expertise from all regions and countries at all stages of economic, social and political development”.⁵³ Its 2017-18 agenda placed resilience at the centre, with a Roundtable session titled “From vulnerability to resilience: recognising migrants as agents of

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² The World Bank. *World development report 2010: Development and Climate Change*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2010, p. 109.

⁵³ Global Forum on Migration and Development site: <https://www.gfmd.org/process/background>

development”.⁵⁴ Resilience will help to address “the challenges and opportunities of settlement, including [...] housing, healthcare and education, access to work and livelihoods, and interventions to foster social cohesion, prevent discrimination and xenophobia, and tackle labor exploitation”, thus adopting a more positive meaning. However, behind this humanistic façade the only “acceptable” migration is the economically productive one. Hence, the goal is “to ensure that migration occurs in a way which maximises benefits to the individual, and both source and destination communities”.⁵⁵

Cities become important partners in this context. The 100RC programme is indicative of the way migration is seen as a “challenge” and an “opportunity” for development. One of its most prominent works is the “Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront” report, composed by 8 member cities, among which Athens.⁵⁶ Migrants and refugees are named “newcomers” and “new arrivals”, thus attached to more positive connotations. Under bold titles such as “thrive together”, “lead to change”, “shared pursuit of opportunity and prosperity”, the report talks about “valuing and leveraging the talents of migrants [in order for the] cities to harness the economic energy of new arrivals”.⁵⁷ Or as it is eloquently noted, the objective is the “effective use of migrant human capital”.⁵⁸ In this case migrants are not only seen as a labour force or as remittance-carriers, but also as a way of attracting capital: “Hosting large numbers of displaced persons can attract significant international investment”.⁵⁹ In this sense, it is not surprising that MasterCard is one of the key contributors to this report, as a “Partner in Action”, whose main contribution was “humanitarian prepaid and remittance services”, that distributed “prepaid debit cards to eligible refugees traveling through Serbia and Greece”.⁶⁰

Aligned with the neoliberal demands for individual responsibility, one of the main objectives of all resilience and development agendas is for migrants to become “self-reliant”. A different way of defining resilience as survival. They ought to become resilient against any form of labour conditions, any form of exploitation and so on. As Bettini rightly points out:

⁵⁴ More information on: <https://gfmd.org/md-forum/roundtables?fbclid=IwAR1nI8xN7Lcv8Clya0U0wSL0CLDHkldPRXWjLnnYP2YQdUOMVOXLF0fkLmw>

⁵⁵ The Government Office for Science. *Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change. Final Project Report*. London: 2011, p.10.

⁵⁶ 100RC-The Rockefeller Foundation. *Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront. Strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration*. Network Exchange programme, with the participation of Paris, Los Angeles, Athens, Medellín, Montreal, Amman, Ramallah, Thessaloniki. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 2016.

⁵⁷ 100 RC (2016). Cit., p.10.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.90.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.18.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.81.

“the subjectivity envisioned/fantasized in the figure of the resilient [...] migrant is that of a docile and mobile individual able to put herself on the (inter)national labour markets – a good entrepreneur of herself. What the docile migrant should follow, as a part of her becoming resilient, are labour markets and economic efficiency (primarily for capital), which become the main vehicles for adaptation.⁶¹

Conclusion

It is the wisdom of crocodiles, that shed tears when they would devour.

Francis Bacon, *Essays*

The transition from human rights to flexible vulnerability and from there to resilience marks a deep mutation in the formation of political subjectivity in our neoliberal era. The fundamental human rights are replaced by a “charity” for the weakest among migrants and refugees, shifting from the political to compassion. Instead, what is promoted is the apotheosis of victimisation in terms of multiple divisions and investment in trauma. As Mark Neocleous sharply points out:

“the language of trauma and anxiety, and the training in resilience that is associated with these terms, weds us to a deeply conservative mode of thinking, with the superficial ‘humanitarianism’ supposedly captured in the discourse of trauma in fact functioning as a means of cutting off political alternatives”.⁶²

The formation of the resilient subject individualises the responsibility of survival in terms that reproduce dominance in the higher level of internal divisions of the subaltern classes. As Anthony Willden argues, “science, ideology, and economics all became united around a conception of the individual and the organism [...] as isolated systems [...] The ‘free’ individual was in fact –and still is– a metaphor of her or his status as a commodity in the marketplace”.⁶³

What we tried to show in this paper is that beyond and against resilience agendas, an effective approach to issues of migrant and refugee protection depends on a creative relation between grassroots organising and legal struggles, a dialectical relation between defensive struggles within the existing coordinates of “differential inclusion” and “strategies of rupture”,⁶⁴ committed to an anti-capitalist strategic vision to end the “varying degrees of

⁶¹ Bettini, G. (2014). Cit. p.189-190

⁶² Neocleous, Mark. “Don’t Be Scared, Be Prepared’: Trauma-Anxiety-Resilience.” *Alternatives* 37, no. 3 (August 1, 2012): 189

⁶³ Willden, Anthony. “Ecology and Ideology” in E. Idris-Soven, M.K. Vaughan [eds.], *The World as a Company Town: Multinational Corporations and Social Change*, 73-98. World Anthropology Series, Berlin, Boston, New York: DeGruyten Mouton, 1978.

⁶⁴ Knox, R. (2010). Cit.: 225.

subordination, rule, discrimination and segmentation”.⁶⁵ Hopefully, from critical migration and critical citizenship studies to Marxist approaches for social movements and international law, collective political agency and a left-wing vocabulary is brought back into the discussion. More importantly, even at the worst cases of racial violence by employers, fascists and anti-immigrant brigades, migrant communities have accumulated experiences of organising resistance, building alliances and fighting back. From migrant worker strikes, social centres, housing projects, anti-racist mobilisations and justice campaigns, the Greek experience before and after EU-Turkey deal offers many relevant practical examples of a radical view on human rights and subjectivities, where justice has been demanded quite effectively in workplaces, public spaces and courts. Two indicative examples that require our attention are the Bangladeshi farmers’ struggles after being shot by employers for demanding unpaid wages in Manolada in 2013, which resulted in the conviction of Greece by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in a landmark forced labour ruling,⁶⁶ and the role of migrant communities in the “Civil Action of the anti-fascist movement in the trial of Golden Dawn”, which acts both politically outside the court and legally inside the court as co-plaintiffs in the trial of the neo-nazi criminal organisation.⁶⁷

The importance of migrant struggles in Greece for rights, dignity and survival is undisputed, but we should never forget Amilcar Cabral’s reminder: “Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories”.⁶⁸ The protection regime is in crisis, because the labour movement and the social movements are defeated. Neoliberalism and the humanitarian machine were born out of the defeat of popular classes. This is the crisis we should be concerned with. It is all about how to think against the dominant reasoning that reproduces the TINA doctrine not only through the process of adaptation to the perpetuate capitalist economic dispossession but also through the dispossession of the possibility to imagine and claim a different world. Instead of the “duty to integrate”, we could try to rethink resistance strategies offering the possibility to imagine and claim a different world. There is no peaceful resolution of existing contradictions. It’s either the survival of capitalism or the survival of migrants, refugees and the popular classes.

In a nutshell, research and orientation on migrants and refugees will seriously benefit from reloading Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis:

⁶⁵ Mezzadra, Sandro, Neilson, Brett. *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, 2013: 159.

⁶⁶ ECtHR. *Chowdury and Others v Greece*, Application No. 21884/15, 30 March 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/ecthr-chowdury-and-others-v-greece-application-no-2188415-30-march-2017>

⁶⁷ For the Civil Action by the antifascist movement in the trial of Golden Dawn. Retrieved from: <https://jailgoldendawn.com/2013/11/01/for-the-civil-action-by-the-antifascist-movement-in-the-trial-of-golden-dawn/>

⁶⁸ Cabral, Amilcar. “Tell no lies, Claim no easy victories...”. 1969. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/cabral/1965/tnlcnev.htm>

“The philosophy of praxis does not aim at the peaceful resolution of existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the (impossible) deceptions of the upper class and –even more –their own”.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Gramsci, Antonio. Quaderni, Vol.II, Q10ii, §41xii, 1320 (August–December 1932) –Gramsci, Further Selections: 395–6

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