



noborder

During Noborder Lesvos 2009



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// Place of the Infopoint before, during and after //

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EDITORIAL

Lesvos, in the summer of 2009: A NO-BORDER CAMP took place at one of the key sites where the European border regime clashes with many immigrants' attempts to enter the European Union.

Refugees who arrive in this area usually pass through quickly, trying to reach northern European destinations instead. They find themselves trapped on an island where they are either caught by the police, registered and put in prison for up to three months, or they have to wait for a ferry for several days. Everybody who wants to travel further has to go through the bottleneck that is the harbor of Mitilini.

An Infopoint was set up at this site of wait, hope and the search for possibilities. Refugees, tourists, activists, migrants, and everybody in-between, had a role to play on this site of exchange and support. As a result, it was possible to question the distinction between »the european activists«, »the migrants«, and »the refugees«. It was possible to overcome individualized travel and struggle. People who involved themselves in the project created a corridor of information that helped to abolish borders, spread hopeful commitments of resistance – of the possibility to say »No!« to the border regime.

We, the authors of this booklet, are a group of (German) anti-racist activists. We have been involved in antiracist struggles, of which the *Noborder Camps* are only one element, for ten years or more. We believe that it is important to organize and lead the antiracist struggle together with those who are affected the most by the attacks of a racist society. For us, such struggle includes efforts to overcome barriers between us, to become aware of our own privileges, and to recognize the approaches, needs and demands of people who have a different background and status in society. Also, the struggle relies on sharing our experiences and on disrupting the confrontation of ›white activists‹ on one side of the spectrum, and ›black victims‹ on the other.

On Lesvos struggles were merged successfully: Some people managed to continue their journey to Europe; others could leave the detention center Pagani earlier than their release was scheduled; we were able to reach a large audience

and put a lot of pressure on the government of the island; we managed to establish a precedent when a group of immigrants was registered without prior detention. Finally, Pagani had to be closed completely two months after the *Noborder Camp*, because the authorities were unable to contain ongoing revolts inside the prison.

Once more we realized that in joined struggles such as this, one has to be prepared to work with people who have no access to basic human rights and essential resources. In simple words, you cannot fight together without sharing your food with those who are hungry.

Nobody had planned to set up a place to welcome and provide concrete support for newly arrived refugees as part of the *Noborder Camp*. We were not prepared at all for this. Next time, we will need to assess the situation beforehand and ask ourselves questions such as: Whom are we going to meet? What are their needs? What are their conflicts? What are their hopes and dreams? What can we realistically achieve? What do we need to support a struggle?

This booklet shall provide us a space to evaluate some of our experiences and enable us to do it again. We want to share our experiences so that we can continue the struggle. We are happy to report that in February 2010 an old warehouse in Calais, where many refugees try to cross the channel, was turned into an autonomous gathering space. In Mitilini, *Hartino Karavi*, an infopoint and meeting place will start to work permanently in April 2010. A web-based Refugee-Guide will go online in March 2010: www.w2eu.info. Underage refugees tell stories about their journeys in the blogs *birdsofimmigrants.jogspace.net* and *shengendangle.jogspace.net*. There are plans for further noborder activities in the Aegean Sea in summer 2010. We will introduce some of these projects at the end of this booklet, because we think that they are forms to continue our search for joint organizing.

We need more spaces to meet and get together, to share rich tales and stories with each other, and to pass on multiple ideas. We want those spaces. We hope to see you there. Keep moving!



CIRCUS TENT TOWARDS A WELCOME ISLAND

»Tomorrow when we continue our journey, we will be refugees again. But until the last minute we will be just people here tonight, friends celebrating together. Who would've thought that on this island we wouldn't have to hide in the woods and that we would get the gift of a night of freedom amongst friends!« (Milad, coming from Afghanistan)

These words speak volumes. They are the words of a young Afghani man on the last night of the *Noborder Camp* that took place near Mitilini, the capital of the island of Lesvos in summer 2009. The background of his words is set by the impressive events of those days, in particular at the Infopoint which was set up along the harbour right from the start. Within a few days, this self-organised »Welcome Centre« became a central meeting point for (paperless) newcomers and detainees released from »Pagani«, the reception prison for refugees. A space to rest, to exchange information and for collective action. This booklet collects different points of view about this special experience. The picture will not cover every perspective, but in the following pages we will try to outline moments of a »welcome island« – to show what such an island could really look like.

HOTSPOT OF TRANSITMIGRATION

»Where I have to go, I don't know. But as long as you are alive you will be walking. You are not going to stop. Just walking. Til wherever you arrive. So where we are going to arrive, we don't know. Just that we are going to forward, we are not going to back.« (Mister X, coming from Somalia)

For a few years the Aegean Sea is one of the key sites of the external European border regime. Refugees and migrants, especially coming from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia choose to cross the narrow strips of water between Turkey and the Greek islands to enter the European Union. The Frontex Operation »Poseidon« operates here, and together with the Greek border patrols they try to drive back refugees to the Turkish coast – more than 22.000 in the year 2008, according to the Greek coordinator of Frontex. Those who manage to escape the surveillance face a chokepoint in their journey: Nobody can go on from Chios, Samos or Lesvos except by

ferry. In this situation most refugees can't avoid to be registered by the police and taken to prison for up to three months, before they receive a paper that allows them to leave the island this way.

In late August 2009 about 500 Noborder activists from all over Europe arrived in Lesbos to do actions together and engage with one another at a *Noborder Camp*, one of many similar experiences in the last years all over Europe. Every night newcomers land on the island. The islands in the Aegean are spaces of transit and crossing. The arriving migrants carry their stories of migration and what they escaped from – and a lot of hope for a better life, a dream of another »Europe«. In Pagani in the detention prison it will be discovered as illusion, but the dream of a safe and better life will stay strong enough and there is no way back.

In the air above Lesbos thousands of SMS messages oscillate. If you could read them on the horizon, they could tell you stories about departures and arrivals, about waiting and of hope. They fly to the ones left behind in Afghanistan or Somalia, to the ones still waiting in Izmir for the best chance to cross the sea, or to the ones that are already waiting for the sender, in Norway, Germany or UK.

The harbour of Mitilini is a decisive moment: if captured and registered, the fingerprint taken and stored in the European Database for Fingerprints of Refugees »EURODAC«, the European border regime will write the future into the body of the traveller. The agreement of »Dublin II« says refugees have to apply for asylum in the first country of entry into the European Union. Especially Germany or France want to hold on to this agreement, as it allows them to send most refugees back to countries that form the border of the EU: Greece, Italy, Malta or Spain. These countries in turn claim that not only they, but all European countries should take responsibility to take up asylum seekers.

In Calais for example, where refugees gather later on in their journey and try to cross the channel towards UK, they often try to get rid of their fingerprints by burning or etching their own fingers.

SLIDING INTO AN INFOPOINT

There was no plan to set up an Infopoint as part of the *Noborder Camp*. The idea emerged from the concrete need and until the end it remained an improvised project:

It was the 20th of August in the evening. The last ferry had left the harbour of Mitilini when a group of 40 refugees arrived. It was a diverse group: Afghanis, Somalians and Eritreans, one of the women heavily pregnant, and there were also small children amongst them. They came down to the city from the prison that was nearly bursting. 1000 people of all different kinds had been shouting »Freedom!« all day and now a small group had been released. Soon they recognised that there was no ferry any more, most of their money had been stolen by police and they didn't know what to do, so they slept on the floor in the harbour without any blankets. Some policemen drove by with their car: »This is the freedom you have now. Laying in the dirt.« The next day there were no tickets for the ferry, all were fully booked. A group of Noborder activists passed by and invited the refugees to the *Noborder Camp* in Charamida, 20 kms from Mitilini. What to do now? We could welcome all the refugees to the *Noborder Camp* – but what would happen when we left after this week? We had come to say that refugees should be welcome in the whole Europe. We had seen the horrible situation in the prison of Pagani, but we also knew that it is not only about Pagani. Some Ukrainian activists had told us about the detention camps in the east, and we had also heard about hidden camps in Libya. It was not only a matter of hygienic standards in Pagani. Together with the refugees we were demanding no prison at all – and instead an open reception-centre and freedom of movement. We didn't want to hide the refugees – we wanted the European Society to take sides with their demands.

Faced with the arrival of a group of refugees in the Camp, many activists entered into an emotional debate about different political approaches and resulting from different political experiences, a polarisation of »social work« versus »political activism« evolved. Some activists feared getting lost in dealing with individual cases, and the Camp might lose its focus on actions. Local activists objected that we would disappear after one week and everything would be the same again. Others said we should not take on the social responsibilities of the state, or hide away the »problem« of migration by taking its subjects to us far away from the public. In the discussion, certain objections had ugly undertones: »The place for the *Noborder Camp* is nearly full and we await hundreds of activists«, ensues over the problem of a possibly limited infrastructure of toilets and space, which turned into an argument not to take up refugees »additionally« to the hundreds of ac-

tivists still awaited to come. Maybe it can be seen as a sign of insecurity towards the circumstances, maybe as an expression of a political attitude that inside a «How to camp in Lesbos»-guide the advice was given never to take a refugee without papers to the campsite, because it might lead to misunderstandings and produce hopes that could never be fulfilled.

Others argued that we could not land here like UFOS, engaging in symbolic protest without becoming a part of the situation we find. They advocated for a common struggle with refugees, relying on past powerful experiences – and argued that it is necessary to also deal with the concrete needs of everyone involved in a common struggle. As a sort of compromise, the Camp decided to build a place where people released from Pagani could stay in the middle of the city, free to chose to go to Charamida if they needed a rest, and to combine it with a temporary Info- and Welcome- point. It aimed to bring the demands for an open welcome-centre instead of detention-prisons into a broader public. It should become a place to give the local society the possibility to take a side. It was the expressed will to give practical and direct support in a public space. And it became a kind of counter-concept of migration policies.

We are producing this booklet as a result of this experience. As you might imagine we have argued strongly for this option of encounter and exchange, out of various experiences we had made before in common struggles.

THE INTERTWINED CHALLENGE OF MIXED ORGANISATION

The experience of this experiment shows that it is possible to come together, even with migrants in transit who are very much concentrated on continuing their journey, and to fight together. Never before have we experienced a *Noborder Camp* on the outer borders of the EU at which political protests and social struggles for freedom of movement were as intertwined as they were in this summer in Lesbos. Nevertheless it remained a big challenge. Communication between activists of different countries & political currents is often complicated, but it becomes really difficult in the turbulence of an emerging space where people with such different needs, goals & backgrounds engage with one another so intensely.

There were now two spaces: the *Noborder Camp* in Charamida, on the beach 15 km south of Mityli, and the Infopoint in the middle of the city centre. The distance was

sometimes problematic, especially concerning common decision-making. Some days it seemed like divided worlds. On a social level a lot of refugees soon took their space inside No-border and used it for recreation as well as to find contacts to a lot of activists. It was fun to listen to the experiences of refugees who attended an activist assembly the first time! Most of the activists dropped by the Infopoint on a daily basis, mainly to inform themselves about ongoing actions and events in the city but also to make contact and meet refugees there. Nevertheless, there were a lot of differences in daily practices of the two spaces, which created communication problems. On the campsite assemblies took place for hours, and it was seldom possible to communicate all of the outcomes to the »outside world«. At the same time, the crew around the Infopoint often missed the opportunity to carry the ongoing processes in the city back to the campsite. In the last days, people were often too tired to attend the assemblies. Yet from the beginning there was the problem that some of the most important happenings at the Infopoint could not be spoken about openly in an assembly, like the big number of unregistered people without papers. For the future it seems necessary to improve the flow of communication and information. In this booklet, you will find some thoughts about some of the main problems in terms of communication-flow and decision-taking-processes (see: *Help yourself*, p.27).

FRONTEND AND BACKYARD

A lot of things were happening at the same time: In the first hours it was just a small circus-tent that was set up between the prefecture and the public theatre, in a very public space and with the Frontex ship in sight on the pier opposite it. After a day it became a space of recovery, shared knowledge and planning, and of tales, of tears and laughter. And after some first irritations it also became a space where a lot of people living in Lesbos expressed their hidden support for refugees. We had problems like: how can we cut one grilled chicken into more than 30 pieces? And there were phone-calls even from Norway: »Did you see my family?«

On the desk in front of the tent – we called it »frontend« – information flows in both directions. Arriving and departing activists could find their buses to go to the Camp. They could also find out about where the next action was going to take place or just what might be happening anywhere at that mo-

ment. Local inhabitants and tourists were informed about the situation of refugees on the island. Tacit supporters brought clothes, shoes, blankets and food – and most of them also told their own personal stories. A lot of contacts were made – often across language barriers as very often there was not one Greek-speaking person present.

What we called »the backyard« became the centrepiece of what for us up to now is a unique example of cooperation and a very lively space where a lot of the practical problems that refugees encounter were solved. The group living in the backyard was getting bigger every day. The *Noborder Camp* kitchen did an amazing job of feeding a lot more hungry mouths than they expected. A doctor bandaged a lot of injured feet and helped with medical aid in various cases (see: *Medical advice*, p. 33). Newcomers contributed language skills to help with translation. Lawyers from all over Europe gave information about the situation for refugees in different countries, and especially in Greece.

Very quickly, a strongly connected division of work between »frontend« and »backyard« developed. In both places the active people were confronted with the question of which role to take. From the beginning, our concept was to make it as self-organised a place as possible between the exhausted newly arrived refugees, the recovered and experienced ones, who were busily planning their further journey, and the over-stretched activists. As an activist, you often felt like a service-provider, thrown every minute into another problematic situation to solve. In the backyard especially, the distribution of donated clothes provoked some loud and hectic discussions, and it took a lot of self discipline not to intervene if not necessary. The same went with food: sometimes it seemed easier to take over and distribute it like an NGO would, but most of the time we tried to arrange it all together. In times when chaos is high, communication certainly gets complicated. It will be one of the challenges to create a more organised and at the same time very flexible way of communicating between the different »working places«.

Especially in moments when there is also chaos coming from elsewhere, communication brakes down. On one of the last evenings some local racists seemed to threaten the Infopoint. We as »the Infopoint-crew« weren't able to judge the situation, and were not sure at all about the reaction of the inhabitants of the backyard. With the support of the people from the Camp, we decided that the situation was too dangerous, and evacuated the people staying in the backyard to

the Camp in Charamida. We gave up most of our political and social pillar in the city on the last night. But fortunately it turned out to be a good step to bring Infopoint and Camp together for the last days.

TALES IN THE NIGHT

At night when the city slept was the time of talks and explanations about what war looked like, what hunger was, and how it felt to live without any perspective other than leaving for another place. They spoke about dead bodies in no man's land between Iran and Turkey. Young boys and girls who carried the responsibility for younger brothers, sisters and parents on their shoulders explained their sorrows about the ones they left behind. »Be careful« they said when some of us started crying. »You are not used to war and a life like that, stop listening if you can't stand it any more. Take care of yourself. We need people like you being our voices as long as we have to stay hidden.«

There was a lot of space to learn during these nights. It was the experience of encounter from very different points of view, social backgrounds and from totally different levels of privilege in an atmosphere of mutual respect created the possibility to overcome one's own boundaries. One young Afghani man was very surprised that another man massaged his back as he sits in the sand. He was shivering after his escape from the hands of the police, together with three other men and two Somali women, forced to run: »Never in my life was I a brave man! I ran away from every conflict. I never thought that I would pick up those crying women who were not able to move because they were so frightened. I don't even know how I did it. But I could not leave anybody behind!«

ACTION DURING THE DAY

The Infopoint did not only provide a service, but was also a source of common political expression.

The action-day against Frontex made for a spectacular scenery with all the rubber boats against the Coastguard – not just on the water. Refugees, for the most part undocumented, brought forward a gigantic banner in different languages to express their demand for freedom of movement and support for the many tiny rubber boats that were floating in resistance to the coastguard-ships.

But it is especially the case of Pagani that demonstrated the strong connection of struggles inside and outside the

prison. International press coverage about the detention centre Pagani was considerable during the week and activists returned from Lesvos with many new impulses for transnational networking. The struggle inside the prison reached its peak some weeks after Noborder in October 2009, when the revolts inside the prison were taken to a next level when the cells were burned down (see also: *We really didn't feel like refugees* (p. 34) and *Last days of Pagani* (p. 39)). You can never understand a revolt in all of its meanings, but we can be very sure that the connection to the people outside and the knowledge that they were aware of the problems inside and were just as angry, played a very important role in strengthening the protest.

The special situation with 500 activists, 1000 prisoners in Pagani and the world watching a video of underage refugees talking about the awful situation inside the prison created a lot of challenges for the authorities on the small island. This created unexpected possibilities for us. Due to this situation we managed to put pressure on a lot of smaller decisive moments. Two Afghan families succeeded, with our support, to register in a temporary open camp near the airport. They were not detained, which is what usually happens (see: *We saw things can be possible!*, p.23). For a short moment even some of the normal proceedings got out of control. One day the police even refused to take new arriving refugees to registration and to imprison them. They seemed to be totally overstretched with the bursting prison and a lot of activists that they could not keep under control. So they just sent the newcomers to the Infopoint-tent! This led to a lot of misunderstandings, as the newcomers thought they faced an official reception centre. One of the refugees said later, his voice full of surprise: »Nobody asked us for papers during these days – thanks to Noborder!«

STARTING A SECOND JOURNEY

After a week the circus-tent was taken down. On the square there were people dancing. One young woman summarised her experience: »*What I am most thankful for is that I learnt that there is more than one journey. When I left my home, I left for a secure and better life for me and I wanted to help my family. I am no longer under any illusions. I see clearly what Europe looks like and that it is not the secure place I hoped to reach. We are put in awful prisons, and Europe sends armies to fight us at sea. I never learned so much in such a short space of time. It was hard learning it, but I learned even more. In the*

last few days I have come to understand that I have just started a second journey. In these days we began to see all the others travelling in the same small boats, struggling to survive and to go further. In the last days together with you in this tent here in Mitilini I have glimpsed an idea of how it could be if we travelled all together. Perhaps towards another place that might exist in the future.«

With this booklet we have wanted to reflect on some of the experiences we had together in order to continue the journey. For us, this summer in Lesvos was very special. We know that it is possible to do it again and to continue such encounters (See: *I would like to follow a star* (p. 45) and *Hartino Karavi* (p. 46)).

... and finally to continue the party!
Azadi! Freedom! Eleftheria!

P.S.: The first SMS reached an activist mobile before the NOBORDER CAMP had even finished: »I did it! I arrived in Germany.« One of the most heartbreaking stories began some days later at a Greek airport – with a casual encounter of some faces that had seen each other before (see: *A FLIGHT FROM GREECE TO GERMANY*, p. 46).

PICTURES ON THE WALL

The wall of the public theatre was used for public screenings. A big crowd attended the screening as the pier was always full of people in the evening: activists, tourists, passers-by but also the refugees living at the Infopoint, along with the day's newcomers. When the first pictures of the revolts inside the prison appeared on the screen there was silence. When you turned around you could see an impressive picture of different faces of grief, anger and silent determination in the circle around the screen. Sometimes silence says more than words.



Rubber boats I

Harbour action day: Supported by a demonstration in the harbour of Mytilini, 40 activists equipped with small rubber boats challenged the coast guard ships. As if acting on reflex, the coast guards immediately started creating waves and approaching the boats, trying to make them capsize, proving to the whole city that they were indeed killing people at sea every night in this manner. They also slashed one of our boats with a harpoon. Confronted with too many boats with too many determined activists, they retreated, giving the stage to the activists, who eventually even managed to liberate a boat seized by the coast guard. The fishermen at the port waved enthusiastically.



Rubber boats II

100 minors from Villa Azadi were invited for a trip to the beach by noborder activists. As it took four hours to walk from the isolated place in Agiasos where they were, they were happy to get out. The trip was prepared some days in advance and the rubber boats from the port-action and inflatable mattresses were taken along. The boys paddled enthusiastically and organised races. They had the opportunity to exchange their traumatic memories with rubber boats for some fun experiences. »Say thanks to everyone for all the actions!« some of them said afterwards, who had seen the rubber boats in action.



Rubber boats III

A nine year old boy was sharing the shade with me. When I asked him if he would like to have a rubber boat he was very happy. I explained to him where he could go to get one. He came back, carrying the rubber boat happily and proud like a king. I asked him if his friends would also like to have one. We decided to give each of the 12 kids in his class in Loutra a rubber boat. They were given out with the explanation of where they come from and what their former use was. The families in Loutra were happy about this idea.



// Fishermen & liberated Rubberboat //

// Blockade of the Port //

// Frontex demonstrating their Practices I & II //

// Boat Sliced by Border Police //



Frontex meets Noborder-Demonstration

UNBELIEVABLE DAYS

Azadi (21) is the eldest son of a former general of the Afghan army. His father, not willing to cooperate with the US army and the Karsai government, disappeared one day. Azadi and his family were brought out of the country to Pakistan without possibility to take their belongings.

Because the conditions in Pakistan were too difficult Azadi decided to leave his family for Europe, with 5.000\$ US, loaned by a friend of his father. He wants to work in the European Union to support his family.

After a long journey through Iran and Turkey he reached Lesvos almost two years ago. He arrived in a small rubber boat together with six other people, mostly minors. They were apprehended by the Greek navy and put into the »Welcoming Center«-Prison Pagani for some weeks. After being released from Pagani, Azadi tried heading further to central Europe – but he failed. At least he was able to apply for asylum in Lesvos. He has been living in Greece for more than one year now, waiting for his asylum case to be decided. (the full story of his journey is published by <http://schwarzemilch.wordpress.com>). His (and others) translating was somehow the basis of what was possible during these days.

We met again two months after the NOBORDER CAMP and interviewed him about his experiences with the Infopoint and the Camp.

How was your first day when you came to the Infopoint?

That night I came out from Villa Azadi¹ with my lawyer. She dropped me at Mitilini. There was no place for me to stay in the city that night. I ask her »What shall I do?«, – »There is an Infopoint from the *Noborder Camp*«, she said, »You speak English, you can help them with translation. You can stay there.« I hesitated, but she was sure. So I went to the Infopoint, I was wondering »What is this?« I took a paper and read it, it was about refugees. It was something I never thought would happen, that there are people fighting for freedom and for refugees.

When the people came back from the harbor action they invited me to stay and to work with them. So I was starting a new experience and it was unbelievable for me.

And very soon you became a very important person because you were one of the main translators?

Yea, after one or two days, everybody was taking my hands and saying »Azadi, translate here, here, here.« I was really happy cause I could do things for my people here in Greece. During that time they always needed somebody to translate and I thought »I have to do it«.

And you were also part of a delegation that visited the prison?

Yea. I was one of the delegation that went inside Pagani. The day before I was really scared, I was worried about my running Asylum process. What should I do? Go or not? Then the doctor took my hand and said: »Azadi is my private translator and he will be with me!« and then she asked me »Hey Azadi, maybe it will create some problems for you.« I thought and said: »Let's go, I don't care – If you are really fighting for freedom, I don't care about asylum, let's go!«

And so you took her hand and you went as her private translator...

We went inside of Pagani. I was translating there ...it was good that I was translating and it was painful for me, what I had to see...I saw some small children inside who were sick...the families and one Palestinian guy ...he was really, really sick and there was nobody to pick him up. It was good to be in there – but also painful ...cause I was stuck in there for two weeks one year before. This is not a place for humans to stay.«

What else happened...?

After four or five days of the *Noborder*, I went to the activist camp, it was my first time! I saw the tents, the people ...a nice place ...but, ok – I didn't stay that night. I had to go back to the Infopoint, 'cause they all needed translation, but next day I went to the camp and it was really nice – a place to relax for me.«

What happened after all the people left?

»It was painful also ...all the people left from Charamida² ...there was nobody ...the Infopoint was closed ...I was crying, you know ...I was feeling alone ...missing something very special. Those days also were hard ...but slowly, slowly it was ok.«

Did you meet people that you had seen before when they came out of prison?

Ya, I met some guys that were staying with us in the Infopoint and in the camp. When they came out of Pagani they had no place to stay and the ship was already gone ...so they decided to stay in the park. I offered some of them to stay with me, because I had a place, but they wanted to stay together.

Should we do it again next year?

(Laughing) ... it would be too good! Ya for sure ...ok, what we did in the summer, it was such a good thing. I think it was for the first time in Lesvos that somebody



was doing some action like this and putting some pressure on the government and I think we had a good result also ... ya for sure if its possible for the next year ... will be too good.«

Shall we do something different or can we do something better next time?

I think we can do something better because we had a good experience that year. Now we know what to do and how to do it.«

And you will join us again?

For sure, I will be the first man to camp.«

1 Villa Azadi in Agiassos is an open reception center for unaccompanied minors.

2 Charamida is the name of the little village which was close to the NOBORDER CAMP.



Rope of the Frontex Ship

SOLIDARITY IS...

... when a waiter applauded people carrying the rope of a FRONTEX ship as a trophy after it escaped from being painted.

... when the owner of the tavern at Charamida said after the camp was over: »I am so sad that it's over. It was like a kiss of life for me to be here with all the young people!«

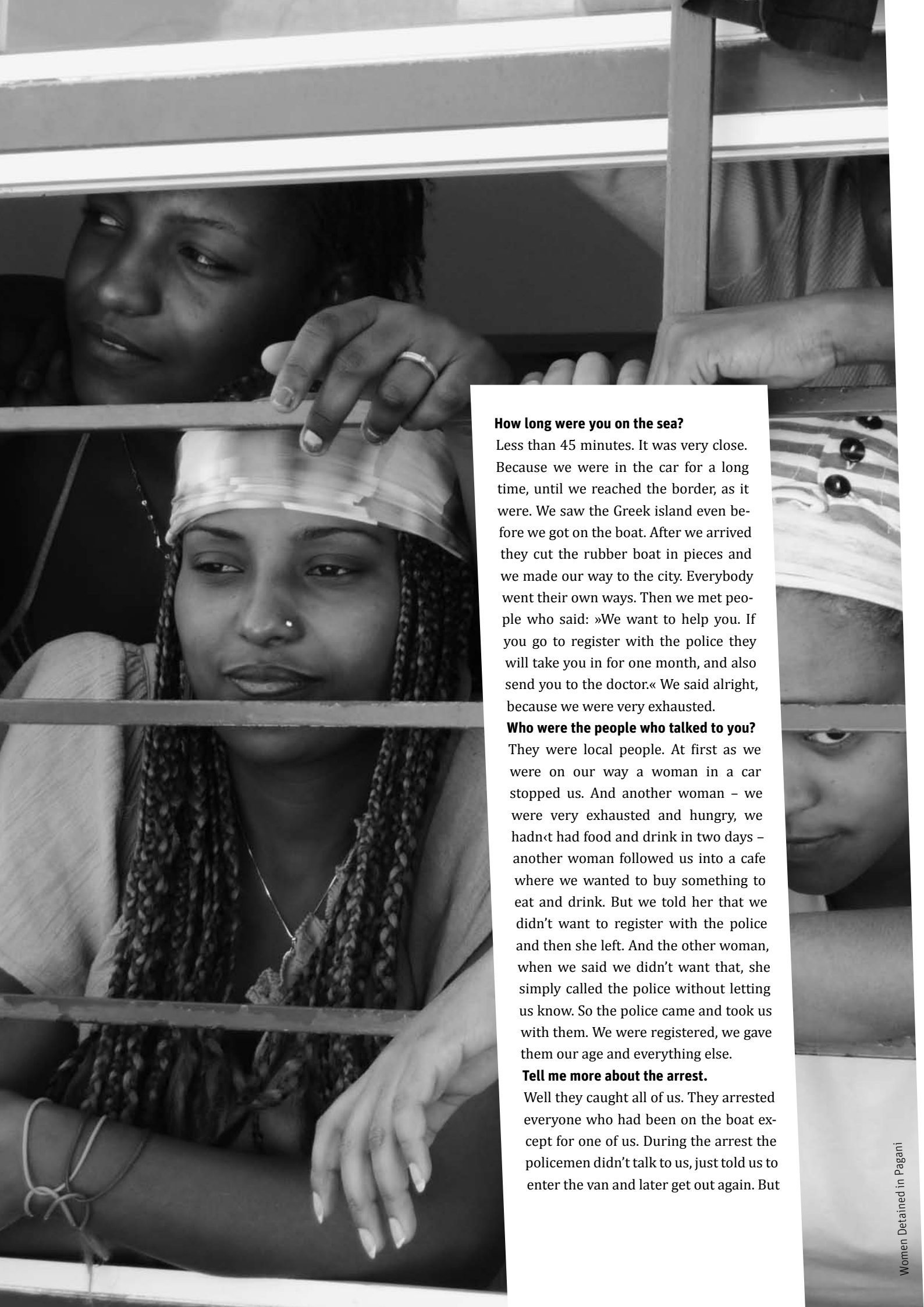
... when the baggage porter at the harbour was angry because slogans were written in English and he couldn't read them - and when he understood what it was all about, he was ready to search the whole ferry ready for departure to find a person who had the papers of another one standing at the quai in her pockets.

... when the bar besides the Infopoint charged the activists less.

... when the man at the 24-hours-kiosk offered mobile phone charging for free.



Minors Protesting inside Pagan August 2009



How long were you on the sea?

Less than 45 minutes. It was very close. Because we were in the car for a long time, until we reached the border, as it were. We saw the Greek island even before we got on the boat. After we arrived they cut the rubber boat in pieces and we made our way to the city. Everybody went their own ways. Then we met people who said: »We want to help you. If you go to register with the police they will take you in for one month, and also send you to the doctor.« We said alright, because we were very exhausted.

Who were the people who talked to you?

They were local people. At first as we were on our way a woman in a car stopped us. And another woman – we were very exhausted and hungry, we hadn't had food and drink in two days – another woman followed us into a cafe where we wanted to buy something to eat and drink. But we told her that we didn't want to register with the police and then she left. And the other woman, when we said we didn't want that, she simply called the police without letting us know. So the police came and took us with them. We were registered, we gave them our age and everything else.

Tell me more about the arrest.

Well they caught all of us. They arrested everyone who had been on the boat except for one of us. During the arrest the policemen didn't talk to us, just told us to enter the van and later get out again. But

EDEN

it was okay. They weren't exactly friendly, but they weren't too bad either. So then they took us to this prison. We had to stay there for one month. There were between 250 and 300 of us. One toilet and one shower. We suffered abdominal pain because we had to wait for so long to use the toilet. Many of us suffered abdominal pain. You had to queue. Mind you, you have to go and there are 50 people in front of you in the line. You have to go but you always have to wait for the other people. Some of us developed bladder problems because of these conditions. And only a few days after you guys arrived they began giving us reasonable medical treatment. The one doctor who was there did not take care of us. When somebody was dying and even when people were screaming nobody came. They always said that the doctor wasn't there. And when she happened to be there after all and they let you see her: »Oh get lost. You call that being sick? I have more important things to do.« She would send you away with that response. She would abuse you and send you away. But when you guys came we noticed some changes. They had already begun to separate the married and the unmarried and refuse to medically treat us. Then they began to let us into the hospital. I finally went to the hospital then.

Wait, I didn't understand the part about the medical treatment for married and unmarried people?

At first they let those who were married and those with kids into the hospital. But only after you guys arrived. And after that they also let us who were unmarried in to the hospital. The doctor also saw us, one after the other. There were now three doctors, but before you came there was only one. She was terrible.

Does that mean everyone of you who was in pain was able to go to the hospital? Or did the doctors come to the prison?

Not everyone was able to leave. Only those who suffered from a heart condition or something like that. I for example went to the hospital.

Were you suffering from a heart condition?

I had extreme palpitations. So the doctor saw me and sent me to the hospital. All of that happened only when you guys were there. Before that we tried multiple times to talk to her, S. for example often fainted, was weak and was bedridden most of the time. When she tried to get out of bed she would fall. But there was no one who would check on her. And we were telling the doctor that and trying to make her understand, but, whatever.

The doctor wouldn't see her?

Well she didn't even come into the cell. Only when you guys were there she started coming into the cell sometimes. I mean the blonde doctor. Before her there was another one who never came into the cell. But when the new one was there, they sometimes gave us painkillers against headaches, or something against a sore throat. After you guys arrived there were many changes. But before that, even when somebody was about to die, nothing...

Did one of you die in prison?

No, but there were many of us who fainted and fell. Because of the heat. It was incredibly hot, and that in a room with 300 people. Mind you, 300 people use up air. There were children in there and they got sick. The older women got sick. Everyone got sick. The policemen couldn't do anything: »What do you want to do? She's not here. The doctor's not here.« That's what they kept telling us. And under these conditions we were

locked up for an entire month. So in short: things only started changing after you arrived. We finally found someone we could talk to eye to eye, we could talk about our issues, there was a doctor who would come to our cell. She came all the way to the back of the cell and encouraged people. Also the policemen never came close to us, they always wore these mouth masks. But she came to the cell and asked about our problems. And even if she couldn't do anything for you at least she would console you. Only when you were here things changed. We could talk about our problems. And also, we got our papers and could leave. Only after your arrival they began to release many people at once. And when we left that prison and moved to the other one, that was good. We could go into the yard, go to the beach, and get groceries. That made a big difference. We're really thankful for that.

Tell me about your onward journey from Lesvos to Athens. What happened after you left Pagani?

So in the new camp (Pikpa¹) we received advice and support. She explained the papers to us that they gave us when we were released. E. and A. were translating. So we could learn what this law says in the first place. We didn't have to pay for the ferry either. Most of us didn't pay. Only those who didn't want to wait did pay. We took the bus to the ferry, a bus came and picked us up and took us there. The passage to Athens was okay. We arrived well.

Was anyone expecting you in Athens?

Yes, our friends took time off from work and picked us up. And they found this apartment for us.

¹ Pikpa was an official open reception center which was opened during the NOBORDER CAMP (see: p.27)

I JUST WANTED TO SAY, THAT

By car, Pagani is ten minutes away from the harbour of Mitilini, the capital city of the greek holiday island Lesvos.

Actually Pagani is the name of a suburb of Mitilini, but since last summer it has become known for the humanitarian dramas in the camps and the dying at the european outer borders, which surround it – but that said, Pagani also stands for the perseverance and ruse with which many migrants and refugees nevertheless reach their goal.

»HERE IT IS NOT CALLED A CAMP, BUT A JAIL!«

The refugee jail with the misnomer and very misleading name »Welcome Centre« is in a complex of buildings, which used to be a warehouse. The original purpose of the »jail« is unmistakable. Ignoring the fact, that a warehouse hall can't offer adequate accommodation for human beings... all people without papers are taken into so-called administrative custody there for »registration« from the Greek state. According to official information they planned for a total of 280 human beings to go through this process here but in summer 2009 around 1000 human beings have been detained in it!

»This was not that, what I imagined, when they talked about camp. This here is not called camp, but jail!« – Lydia (who was detained more than one month in Pagani during that time).

There were several cells, which all presented the same picture: round 200 human beings locked up and crowded. One of the cells was for women: »One toilet and one shower. We have had abdomen pain, because we had to wait so long for going to toilet.« tells Eden. »Just imagine that, you have to go to toilet and in front of you are standing 50 human beings in line.« Eden was also arrested in Pagani. In autumn I met her, Lydia and some other Eritrean women again in Athens. Eight of them later told in interviews about the events and experiences, which they have made on the way from Asmara to Athens.

We first met in Pagani that summer. I have been on Lesvos because of the *Noborder Camp*¹ and accompanied the team of *Ecumenical Refugee Program* and *Pro Asyl* in the camp as a translator and talked with the women. »There have been many, who often lost consciousness and collapsed. This was because of the heat.« Eden remembers later in her flat in Ath-

ens at tea. »It was uncanny hot and this in a room with 300 human beings. Just think the breath of 300 human beings. Children are inside there, who also fell sick. Older women fell sick. They all fell sick.« The entrance to the womens cell was located in the back part of the camp. A big blue lattice gate refused admittance to the yard and to some fresh air. Only the children could go in and out through the bars. Often they made a game out of it, not to get caught by the policemen. For an example, when they hang up wet clothes for drying at the opposite wall for their mothers.

»The same, if for adults or for children, there was no right for medical care.« says Ruth about Pagani. »I set an example for you. A little girl broke her finger by playing [...] She was at the doctor and came back again and just a piece of wood, like of a table leg, was tied her to it. After three, four days we said to the mother, she should go there again and ask, if they couldn't treat it right, but they said »You don't come out. It will heal by itself anyway. Now go!« The little girl had a broken thumb. It grew together again, but it is oblique. You can see it right.«

NO BORDER CAMP LESVOS ²

During the *Noborder Camp* a video recording, first published on youtube, made a scandal of the full situation and of the refugee jail at Pagani in the international media. In it, arrested minors document the inhuman custody conditions with a camera, which was smuggled inside during the protests, and demand the immediate release of the inmates. Inside Pagani there were hunger strikes and revolts. Outside refugees, who were released from Pagani just before, organised protest actions together with the *Noborder Camp*. Refugees and migrants, who just now have been arriving at the coasts of Lesvos during the camp days, not only took part in these actions, but took care of suspending the European border camps regimes. Instead of being arrested and taken into custody in Pagani and being registered, they took up the infrastructure of the *No Border* Infopoint, which was set up beside the residence of the island prefecture at one of the exposed places of Mitilini. Especially at this legendary Info-tent there were a new negotiation of identity politics, which let the seeming clear dividing lines between activist migrant and refugee become blunt.

Already during the *Noborder Camp* there was the release of about 500 human beings. Nearby, for the young persons and the women with children an open camp near the airport of Mitilini was made available. »I just went out of the camp

I ARRIVED FINE

very early and only returned late in the evening before the door was closed.«, Nathaniel tells me in Athens. He was one of the minors, who were transferred from Pagani to Pikpa, the open camp. »So they couldn't take my fingerprints. In Pagani they hadn't registered some of us yet. In the new camp they made up for it. But I was always away, the whole day in town with you.« But soon – after the end of the *Noborder* – Camp Pikpa was closed again. The new arriving refugees were again locked up in the refugee jail Pagani...

But for the unhoped, liaison between refugees, transnational activists and migrants together demanded the immediate closing of Pagani and this left its marks. Even weeks after the *No Border Camp* the revolts went on and made it impossible to go on running the camp! When the vice-minister for civil protection Spyros Vougiaris had paid Pagani a visit together with a delegation of UNHCR, the closing of Pagani was announced officially.

»NOW, IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF COMING OUT OF THIS COUNTRY.«

Eden, Lydia, Ruth, Nathaniel and many other Eritreans, who have been in Pagani and other refugee jails, left Greece already. When I asked Ruth about her future plans before her departure from Athens, she said: »I have nobody in Europe. I do all this alone. And I do that, for I can work, when I will have arrived. Not for hiding.« Rahwa had similar plans: »Now, it's just a question of coming out of this country. In this country, that's all no use, either if you ask for asylum or not, you can neither go away from here nor work, you have no rights, nothing.« Apart from an admittance quota, which is under one per cent, in Greece there are no minimum norms for the admittance of asylum seekers. That's why none of the women wants to ask for asylum in Greece. The situation of Sella, who lives in Athens already for more than one year »illegally«, is exemplary for refugees, who come to Europe: »I just had to give away my fingerprints (...) it's very difficult for me to go on travelling into any other country. Under the Dublin II ordinance the countries at the EU outer borders are responsible for the processing of a large part of the asylum seekers. Because of that, overcrowded and degrading camps like Pagani are a logical consequence of the refusal of the heart of the EU-countries to comply with their responsibility for charge and have also to be seen in this context. This responsibility, to which all EU-countries engaged by the ratification of the Geneva Convention on Refugees, is let countries like Greece,

Spain, Italy or Malta by the Dublin II ordinance. Greece has stressed their overstretch already several to the other member states and demanded solidarity. That the situation for refugees is unreasonable in Greece, also show the express decisions of the Federal Constitutional Court. Several it awarded temporary legal protection against a transfer to Greece to asylum seekers after they were in danger of a »Dublin II deportation«. Every time this decision was justified with the overload of the Greek asylum system, which leads to, that the access to a fair process is not guaranteed anymore. It's obvious, that the Dublin-II-Control is an additional barrier for refugees to protect their right of asylum.

All the women I met in Pagani, have now arrived in different European countries and asked for asylum. Just two weeks after our fare-well in Athens, Rahwa called me: »I just wanted to tell, that I arrived well. Tomorrow I'll have the interview and then we shall see.«

At the present time, the human beings who arrive at the coast of Lesvos, still are arrested and »accommodated« in Pagani for days, then bringing them to the neighbour island Xios a little later, which also possesses also a refugee jail. If a new camp will be opened, if it will be an open or a closed one or if Pagani just will be »renovated«, is not clear until now. In any case the refugee jail Pagani bear the marks of a successful revolt. A revolt of many, who have been arrested in there and still arrived in a European country of their choice!

1 The NOBORDER CAMP took place on Lesvos from 25th to 31st of August 2009. Arranged by European wide networked antiracist coherences, at this NOBORDER CAMP the criticism of the arresting and the custody conditions of refugees and migrants was the focus as well as the racist practice at the coasts of Greece through the coast guard in cooperation with FRONTEX. Beyond it the NOBORDER movement criticises general the European migration and refugee policy at the European borders, which risks life, and questions the legitimation of the existence of borders general.

2 See also the texts »SHUT DOWN PAGANI! AZADI!« of the group transact! and »AZADI« MEANS FREEDOM OF NOBORDER« activist Bernd Kasperek. Both offer worth reading summaries and reflections of the events during the NOBORDER-CAMP. To find at <http://transact.noblogs.org> and <http://www.hinterland-magazin.de>



Ferry leaving Mitilini harbour

Neither are these impressions from a summer festival in the seaport Mitilini on the Greek island of Lesbos. The ferry is on its way to Athens, but there are not only tourists ready to board. Among the people waiting for the ferry to leave there is a group of 20 refugees from Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea, who recently came to Lesbos via Turkey. Activists from the *Noborder Camp* are here to say good bye. They're on a journey towards the ›unknown land‹ Omed tells me as we walk in the loud and colourful ›Farewell Parade‹.

Omed arrived in Lesbos some weeks before, after an exhausting journey through war zones and across oceans. Menaced by border police and afflicted with hunger and pain, when he finally got here, he was imprisoned in Pagani. The so-called

›Welcome Center Pagani‹ has declared space for 250 people, and in August 2009 there are 1000 men, women and children detained there. With a lot of actions and above all the release of a video that was shot inside Pagani and showed the horrific conditions in there, noborder activists managed to get many of the prisoners released and moved over to the *Noborder Camp*. This is how I got to know Omed, who is standing beside me right now with his discharge-papers in hand. They are documents he was given when he was released from Pagani. They guarantee him 30 days of residence in Greece. Within the 30 days he is supposed to organise the journey back to his home country.



Pagani august 2009

WE ARE ON THE MOVE TO STAY

The sun is shining, the sky is blue and so is the sea. A huge ferry is ready to leave. There is loud music and down at the harbour a crowd of people is dancing and waving. They have smiling faces tears in their eyes.

These are not images from a Hollywood movie, Omed, a young guy from Afghanistan, and I are part of the crowd.

But Omed and the other refugees boarding the ferry won't be going back home, they will continue their journey. They will move on, hoping to be able stay somewhere at some point. Always on a journey to the unknown, their luggage is full of dreams, desires and plans for their lives. All this time they are accompanied by the hope that they can make them come true, and the determination to fight for them.

The Noborder activists don't want to say good-bye, but to wish them farewell. In a colourful and loud parade they accompany the group of refugees to the jetty. They have beach-mats, air mattresses, parasols and sun hats, and the top ten hits from Eritrea lead the way. By the ferry Omed gathers his papers. His belongings fit into a small backpack. We say good bye and Omed travels on, to settle down somewhere at some point. Perhaps in the Netherlands, perhaps in the UK.



Farewell in August 2009



Farewell Parade

The group of refugees has embarked. At the coast, the parade transforms into an enormous Laola wave, to which our friends respond on deck. In the background we still hear Eritrean music and slowly the ferry sails out of the harbour. Until it is barely to be seen on the horizon, we have tears in our eyes. This is not good bye, this is farewell. We wish everyone a good trip! All these passengers and everybody wherever they are on this planet on their journey into the ›unknown land‹. We wish everyone the possibility to arrive and to stay wherever their journey leads them. And what we want is simple, as the Communiqué of Mitilini says: »We want the right to travel safely. The legal codification of these pathways. The normal state of arrival and travel instead of a constant state of exception. So that everyone can arrive, unpack their suitcases and become citizens of Europe, if they so desire.«



Refugees detained in Pagani September 2009

WE ARE WALKING UNTIL NOBORDER

Mr.X became the spokesperson of a 30 people strong group from Somalia. Those were invited by Noborder activists to stay at the camp site since they were stuck at the harbor, without having a chance to get ferry tickets to Athens within the next few days, exposed to police bullying, having neither food nor shelter.

Mr.X and many of his group still are living in Athens, they all tried several times to continue their journey but without success so far...

How did you arrive at Lesbos?

We arrived here and we did not see any police during our travel in the sea, so we didn't face any problem. The sea was ok, so when we arrived early in the morning, we came down from the boat and started walking. We did not have any food and the pregnant women amongst us they were really tired.

We looked for the police and they arrested us and took us to Pagani-prison. We were 3 weeks in there. Inside Pagani there were a lot of people, too many people and only a very very small room for 100 to 150 people. We had to sleep in bunk beds. But the beds are not safe. One Afghan guy fell down from the fourth floor bed. It is a very bad living.

We have heard that all women and children are sick because the mattresses were wet...

Yeah – the water of the toilet is coming out, most of the women – also one under 18 – they are sleeping on the floor and most of them became sick. And there are so many pregnant women.

When we were coming out I asked the Greek police and the Mitilini police if they are going to pay for our ticket. But they didn't.

At the time we had to leave it was dinner

time, so we requested to get our dinner. But they said: »No, go, go!« Not even for the children.

From Pagani we went to the port, to see what ships were available. When we arrived there, they told us the ship had already left half an hour ago and the next ship with tickets available is only after 5 days. I was shocked and I said: »How am I going to spend five days? We have children, we have pregnant women, a lot of girls and everybody is asking me: ›Mr. X, what are we going to do? What are you going to do for us?« I said I can't do anything but I will try to find out if there is any ship available for tomorrow morning. But we couldn't get any tickets.

We slept that night at that port, very close to the sea. It was very cold for the children and for us. I didn't sleep at all. I went to the garbage area to find some cardboard to put the children under some shelter.

This was a very terrible night. Very hard night! Even when they came out of Pagani they had a cold and were coughing. In the morning there was no ticket and we got hapless.

Some of us were even saying: First we were saying: »Freedom, we need freedom! Now we are saying: we need prison, prison!« (giggling about his joke).

We were ready to stay those 5 nights in prison again. But they didn't let us.

I was hapless and demoralized when I came back from the police. I was walking like this, with the head down. Some organizations were there. I saw friendly people there. And when I saw them they had some biscuit and some bread for the children.

Then I was very, very happy because everybody was happy. We were laughing. And they invited us to their camp. With all the friends and all the organizations

that where there, we became ok. We got the blankets, we got medication for the children, we got milk for the children. There is no milk in the prison even if you offer to pay money. It's not allowed to have milk in this prison. To the babies they give potatoes only.

But when we come to the *Noborder Camp* all of us, our health, became ok.

When we invited you here (to the Noborder Camp), we were not agreeing all, some people said that we should have stayed with you in town, so that you remain visible, that people in Mitilini see that you are here and don't have anywhere to go. Do you think it would have been better to stay in town, and all of us around you and fighting there?

That's right but when we see the other side: We have children and we have pregnant women and we have some women that are sick, most of them can not stay in the city.

But I am saying if the men had been staying in the city that would have been ok. Maybe make a tent for the men and stay there to show the people of Greece and all the tourists that come, to see us sleeping on the streets to know what is going on. We don't have to cover the bad politics of the police, that they are throwing us out in the street and don't give us any ticket or any ship to just show the people what is done and what will happen.

It's not right when the police is releasing you to let you out in the street and you don't have any single money to go to get 30 Euro to get a ticket or go to look for a job.

It's not right if they give you that white paper to go out in Greek language only so nobody can understand.

Its not right if they give you this white paper dated on the 18th but they released us the 21st, so three days are over. Now

there is no ship and we are losing time.
Even this paper it is saying: You cannot
move forward, you have to go back.
Where do I have to go back to? I don't
know!

You are not allowed to go to Europe with
this paper, to get the train, to get the air-
plane, or the ship. You cannot go forward,
just you have to go back. But I don't
know where is back. We don't have any
back. We are just going forward, for-
ward, forward. We cannot go back. I
don't know what will happen and how
we are to go back.

Let me put this question to the Greek
government: When do we get the paper
to go out of Greece. Let us! Take us to an-
other country! Take me to my country to
die there or put me anywhere in the
world.

But as long as you are alive
you will be walking
you are not going to stop
just walking
till wherever you arrive.
so where we are going to arrive,
we don't know.
Just that we are going forward,
we are not going to back.

The world is round
and we are walking,
where it's going to finish,
we don't know
till the power will cut.
Or till noborders!



REVOLT FOR REGISTRATION

Sunday, 30th of August: The harbour was
controlled more strictly than ever. Many of
those who tried to enter the ferry returned,
some were caught. There was a lot of excite-
ment, sadness and anger. At the same time,
the military parade that took place every
Sunday started. It was accompanied by 60
local racists who tried to pick a fight. Fol-
lowing this, some people thought that here
might be an attack on the Infopoint. Most
of the refugees decided to move to the NO-
BORDER CAMP space. Within the chaos one of
our translators was attacked by professional
ticket sellers and had a nervous breakdown.
Five migrants who were arrested escaped
amidst the chaos and appeared again in the
Infopoint. On the way to the NOBORDER CAMP
one received a phone call that his brother
had been killed by Taliban. He can't stop cry-
ing. In this situation, a group of Maghrebin-
ian newcomers arrived in Mitilini. It's not the
first time that they are on their way to Eu-
rope, most of them have been deported 2-3-4
times from different countries. They asked a
policeman at the corner to take them to reg-
istration. He was busy and so he told them to
go around the corner where they would find
a circus tent where they would get help. They
landed in chaos and were evacuated to the
»camp«. As experienced migrants they knew
that you have to fight for everything and so
as the persons who seemed to be the social
workers at the camp were not willing to reg-
ister them directly, they started to shout for
registration – at the NOBORDER CAMP! It took
some time to clear up some of their misun-
derstandings. The next morning we met at
the kitchen. They were laughing about what
happened. They said they understood every-
thing now and as we were one of the funniest
travelling people they could possibly imag-
ine, they wanted to join our circus and to stay
some time with us ...

// Passing through Mitilini://

// Arrested // At the Ferry // Fareawell //

WE SAW THINGS CAN BE POSSIBLE!

This is the story of unexpected success. The picture shows an Afghan family who managed to leave Mitilini – most of them finally reached Germany and UK. They left Mitilini registered, but without being detained in Pagani.

THE STORY OF TWO AFGHAN FAMILIES WHO RESISTED DETENTION



Never before have refugees been registered without detention on Lesbos. It is a story of collective resistance in the face of circumstances arranging a sharp hierarchy of access. And it is also a narration about increasing possibilities in moving times.

One morning, two related Afghan families, altogether 22 persons, among them smaller children, arrived at the info-tent. They came directly out of the sea, with salty shoes and very tired.

There was an introduction translated into Farsi to explain to them in very short and simple words where they had landed. These words were spoken many times each day to welcome newcomers. »This is not an official refugee-camp and we are neither police nor social workers from the state. We have come to Lesbos from all over Europe because of the bad situation for refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. We are ashamed for the refugee-hunters Frontex at sea, who are the troops of our countries of origin. The situation for you will be very difficult in the whole of Europe. We are just people like you, without much influence or money. We cannot do much. We decided spontaneously to build this tent and to look how we can support refugees on their way. You can take a rest here, sleep a little and find food and water. And we can try to give access to information about the different options to continue the journey. There is no legal option to leave the island for Athens without getting registered. The ferry companies will ask for papers when you try to buy tickets. Some people nevertheless find their way through. The port is controlled and you can be arrested there and brought to the prison Pagani. The prison is overcrowded and the situation bad. Detained migrants are revolting everyday. If you go to registration, they will also bring you to Pagani after your fingerprints are taken. If your fingerprints are taken here, it is possible that you will be sent back to Greece when you ask for asylum in another European country, due to an agreement within the European Union. But there are some possibilities to continue your journey, especially for families with small children or for minors. We will try to bring Greek lawyers who can explain the asylum procedure in Greece, if you want to apply for asylum here. But the asylum system in Greece is very dysfunctional and it is difficult to get through. There are also lawyers from other European countries who can explain the situation for refugees in their countries. You are for sure very tired now and you will need maybe some time to think about

what to do next. You are very welcome in this place.« The families listened. They ate and then went to sleep. The next morning they had two meetings with lawyers. They phoned some relatives and talked to other refugees in order to take a decision. In the evening they came to us to discuss what they thought. They explained that they had not come to stay in Greece, as they had relatives in other European countries: »We want to go to Athens and to continue our journey as soon as possible.« They had lost one couple with two little children in the forest in Turkey. They were very afraid to lose any other members of their group. They could not imagine being able to get on the ferry together without registering. They estimated they would only lose the money for the 20 tickets if all returned after the first person was captured. So they asked us for help with registering – if possible without detention. They were pretty sure this would mean imprisonment. They were ready to go on hunger-strike and asked for support to their struggle from the outside, to get them out quicker. They wanted us to escort them to the police, because they would feel safer and more respected then. We said we would need some time to discuss the options and we all agreed to take a decision together the next morning.

It was a lucky moment for us that »Pikpa«, a temporary open transit-camp near the airport, was opened exactly on this day. We went there in the night to meet the first minors who had been resisting, arriving there from the bursting prison Pagani. The place was nice and on this first evening, the atmosphere was full of the happiness of those who had been liberated – who carried the knowledge their release was a result of their own struggle, but who thanked also God – and *Noborders*.

The question arose whether to go directly to Pikpa to register the families. Some informal talks started after this Pikpa-visit. Most activists were more than sceptical about this crazy idea with one most possible scenario: the families would end up in Pagani. This fear instilled unfathomable hopes – and in the final instance, depression. Most activists insisted: »It can never be our role to accompany people into prison!«

The next morning the two Afghan families gathered behind the info-tent. Two lawyers were present along with some activists. People were informed that Pikpa had opened the previous day. We made a hand-sign with very little space between the fingers to describe how small the chance is to

succeed: »They have never registered people without detention. A lot of people are afraid that it will not function. And we think they are most likely right. But we are willing to go with you and try if this is what you want.« We will never forget their tired faces when the oldest man of the group, grey haired, said: »It is not for me to decide! I cannot decide this alone, we will do it all together.« And then we decided to go. It was a lucid moment although the limits to really estimate the chances were clear – and also the limits of choices. It was a collective step, although some differences did remain. The families could go, resisting or without resistance, but their options were limited. They made it clear they didn't know the reality they had been stranded in and depended on our estimation about the options of the most efficient resistance. The adults were very tired and under stress, some of them with signs of post-traumatic stress disorders like strong headaches and stomach ache. Activists took on the role of counseling and caring, whilst also worrying about how things would turn out. It was a brave step from each side, to decide to move all together – against our fear of failure.

In the meantime in front of the tent some others gathered to try to occupy the prefecture. They wanted to demand the closure of Pagani, the establishment of an open Welcome-Centre, and freedom of movement for everybody. Some chaos appeared when the first wave of occupation failed and people withdrew to the Infopoint. Some riot-cops came closer, but most of the paperless migrants in the »backyard« stayed calm when they realized that there would be no shooting. A lot of things happened at the same time.

The Pikpa-crew started moving. We went to the open camp where the social workers had to deal with a lot of dirty blankets that had been sent from Pagani, and with a lot of people who were asking lots of questions about everything. They had not slept the whole night and the prefect just gave them the order to send us away. They told us that we should go and went on working on more urgent stuff. We started waiting – and sorting blankets in the meantime.

A team of international lawyers tried to start negotiations. But after a second group tried to occupy it, the prefecture was closed for the rest of the day. By coincidence, some of the lawyers met the head of the police in the street and spoke to him directly there and then. He said, »It will never possible to get registered in Pikpa! Bring the families directly

to the police station!« The lawyers refused and so he said he would call the interior minister.

In the meantime the prefect was losing his temper. He shouted at our negotiator to immediately »order her people back« from his prefecture. He said he just opened Pikpa and that all these activists were making further steps impossible. The woman on the phone just answered: »I cannot do anything about it. There are a lot of activists from all over Europe. They have never seen such an awful situation like Pagani before. It is obvious that this inhumanity touches people emotionally and they get out of control. If you want to stop this, you have to close down Pagani.«

With hindsight it seems that it was not just luck that led to the success of Pikpa: it was mainly due to the overall chaos of the situation. It seems the head of the police was willing to do whatever was necessary to prevent riots. The prefect had the same interest. Inside the prison the situation was boiling. They had to open Pikpa to get more people out of the prison – also due to the presence of international media. The whole situation made smaller successes easily possible, because the authorities were interested in not provoking more unrest. Maybe we should have done more concentrated media work on this precedent case of registration without detention. Three family members and some international activists gave an interview to the local television at the gate of Pikpa while waiting for a decision. But we were unable to make this visible in the national Greek media, where it could have been presented as an example of good practice.

A few hours later the tired faces had finally changed. Everybody was laughing – except the police officer who had to come and do the registration at a desk in the yard of Pikpa. In the same moment a bus full of women arrived, released from Pagani. Their laughing and shouting mixed with ours. These scenes were very touching, women finding friends and relatives again, embracing and crying. A lot of refugees started looking for the families »who managed to go through without Pagani«. All the laughing faces said: »See, it is worth fighting for something!«



On the Farewell Parade

HELP YOURSELF

In the following pages we want to describe our work at the Infopoint in Mitilini, Lesvos. The insights presented here draw on experiences we had in Lesvos during the NOBORDER CAMP 2009. It will not be possible to apply these insights to all future projects like this, but we do hope that they will be useful for similar work in the future. We start with a description of practical things like infrastructure, address the problem of collecting and passing on information. Finally, we will talk about the difficulties in communicating and negotiating different perspectives, desires and needs of refugees and non-refugee-activists operating the Infopoint or participating in the NOBORDER CAMP.

In speaking about ›our work‹ and ›our experiences‹, we have a hard time differentiating between ›us‹ as authors and ›us‹ as those who ran the Infopoint. Eventually, refugees, immigrants, as well as local and European activists contributed to one and the same project.

I. THE INFOPOINT PRESENTS ITS SERVICES

First, we describe how the Infopoint actually worked, i.e. which services were offered and which material resources were available. This is to show what was useful or necessary, and what our main activities were.

First of all, we provided a number of services that addressed the most urgent daily needs:

ACCOMODATION

In peak times, the Infopoint provided a roof (and never enough) blankets for up

to 70 people; over the course of one week, far more than one hundred people found shelter with us. We had a small circus tent and a few smaller tents, which Noborder activists had lent us. We were able to accommodate a lot of people in these tents, using cardboard boxes and banners to cover the floor. We also got blankets from local supporters and the local squat ›Binios‹.

The most important element of our infrastructure was a public restroom. A local resident, who generously supported our activities, took care of the WC. Eventually, access to this public restroom guaranteed access to toilets, fresh water and, in the end we were even able to install a hose that served as a makeshift shower. Without this public restroom, we would have faced catastrophic hygienic conditions in no time (see also: *A song in front of the restroom p. 33*).

FOOD

The camp kitchen crew did a fabulous extra-job when cooking meals for the many people who gathered at the Infopoint, and delivering it once a day. Activists' camp fees and contributions from the kitchen funded these meals. In addition, we received donations from local residents, from restaurants and individuals. In many cases these people simply offered their help, but we also asked for and collected funds or food in local stores.

MEDICAL AID

Many people who arrived at the Infopoint did not have enough to drink for a long time, and most of them had to walk many kilometres from the north end of the island, where the boats land at night, to the Infopoint. Thus, we needed huge amounts of water and bandages to treat

bruised and hurt feet. Some activists were trained as doctors, but the non-doctors among us also realized that the idea of professional medical care alone cured many injuries and illnesses on the spot. (see also: *Medical advice p. 33*)

POINT OF CONTACT BETWEEN REFUGEES AND PUBLIC

The front desk, where activists distributed general information and handed out leaflets, proved extremely valuable to inform the public and enable communication with people who dropped in out of curiosity. Local residents and tourists were able to learn about our project, but also drop off their donations. Residents of Mitilini often brought food, and they also contributed clothes, shoes and many other things for which we did not even ask. The local population was quite friendly and interested in our work, and people were obviously well informed about the role of Lesvos as a major hub for migrants en route to Europe. Also, human rights activists on the island had done a good job before the camp, such as when they collected donations for refugees. This might be totally different elsewhere.

In addition to these essential services, we tried to offer as much information as possible to people passing through the Infopoint.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INFOPOINT

Most refugees who found their way to the Info-point didn't know what to make of the people who organized it. Obviously, they did not expect to encounter a group of people who, based solely on their political principles and without pay, would organize such a space. We tried to explain to everyone who arrived

at the Infopoint who we were, and how the Infopoint typically worked. We tried to tell people these basic details immediately when they arrived. Later in the evening, when the daily bustle would calm down a bit, we held assemblies to discuss the events of the day, to identify what needed to be done the next day, and to give explanations to any questions about the Infopoint, what it was like and how it could be improved.

LEGAL ADVICE

There were many people in the *Noborder Camp*, and luckily, several lawyers were among the participants. Of course they were unable to provide individual counsel to everyone, but we organized information sessions where lawyers described conditions and options in countries that people might pass through, as well as in several countries of destination. At times, lawyers disagreed in their assessment, some focusing on the situation in Greece, others on the prospects in other European countries, and there was no consensus on what advice to give best. Nevertheless, within two days people were confident about our advice. Yet, we realized it was important to point out that we cannot give final answers about people's chances to make it to the final destination. We argued that all information needed to be checked repeatedly, as conditions might change while people are traveling.

CONSULTATION ON FUTURE PLANS

In addition to the lawyers' advice, we tried to give advice to migrants ourselves. Mostly, we explained the regulations of the Dublin II agreement (see: *I just wanted to say that I arrived fine p.16*). We also passed on practical information we had gathered from various sources,

such as about regular prices for tickets to use ferries and about overpriced informal offers. After a while, some people came with more difficult questions that we were unable to answer. One refugee from Afghanistan, for instance, brought a complete dossier about his application for asylum in Germany that had been denied and had resulted in his deportation. He wanted to know, when he might be able to try to enter Europe again, where he should go, and he asked us to check his papers and figure out, which mistakes he should avoid the next time he applies for asylum. Unfortunately, we did not even have time to read the documents.

A PLACE OF EXCHANGE AND NETWORKING

We were of course not aware of all the communication and organizing that happened among refugees independently. We only knew that a lot was going on, and we believe that all of it was very helpful and important for everyone involved. For refugees who had not been registered by the authorities, one of the main questions was, how they could get hold of a ticket for the ferry to the mainland. Immigrants can't simply buy a ticket, since sales personnel typically ask everyone who does not appear to be European for their passport. We will never forget moments such as when we watched refugees cutting each other's hair or giving advice on how to dress in order to appear as a 'proper European'. We are also sure that the Infopoint provided a space for refugees (who presumably did not look European) and activists (who did look like Europeans) to get in touch with each other. We believe that the Infopoint served as the basis for var-

ious forms of self-organization that helped many people during their next steps.

In order to do what we described so far, we had to overcome many problems. Often we felt we were more in the position to cope with challenging circumstances, rather than do the work we wanted to do. Therefore, we would like to describe the difficulties we encountered in running the Infopoint.

II. COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

One of the biggest challenges was to develop effective patterns of communication among each other. Most of the communication was based on English and translations into other languages. The front desk, for instance, lacked people who spoke Greek and who could interact with local supporters or people who just dropped in out of curiosity. In the »backyard« there was a great demand for correct translations into Farsi and Arabic, but most of the translators had never been in such a position before. Yet, communication is not just a matter of language. There were many pitfalls, and we found it very important not to lose our sense of humor and be able to laugh even in situations when we had messed up the situation quite a bit. (A nice story to laugh about see: *A revolt for registration p.22*).

OFFERING A »WELCOME« – BUT WHERE TO?

Refugees who arrived on Lesbos did not necessarily know where they landed. How well they were informed largely depended on the level of professionalism with which the facilitators (or smugglers) worked; they often do not solely

organize the trip across the sea, but also provide some information. Also, previous experiences of migration or information from other migrants are crucial. We often met people who thought they had arrived in Athens. Many of them did not expect to be so far from their final destination. Simple things like a map of Europe were helpful in such situations. We always tried to explain the situation people were in clearly, and alert them to the lack of rights they would face. Sometimes it was not easy to be honest about these details and endure the disappointment.

WHO WE ARE

Often, the first encounter is crucial in terms of establishing mutual trust. Immigrants who met us at the Infopoint did not know anything about us. In addition, would-be helpers had betrayed many of them previously. We did not fit into any of the categories that people knew, and so one of the first things for us to do was to explain that we represented neither police or state authorities, nor the UNHCR, and we weren't smugglers either. (One of the articles in this booklet describes such introductions, see: *We saw things can be possible!* p.23). These initial encounters often produced misunderstandings. For instance, the meaning of the word ›camp‹ was often unclear; different people associated different things with it. For many refugees, ›camp‹ usually refers to a refugee camp that is run by the state or the UNHCR. ›Camp‹ can describe an openly accessible space or one that is closed, or a prison like the one in Pagani. Many immigrants expected Pagani to be a rather open space and many would say that ›Pagani is not a camp‹, because conditions in the camp were so poor. We also tried to avoid us-

ing the word ›camp‹ to refer to the *Noborder* camping site, yet the term is commonly used in activist circles and many misunderstandings occurred.

WHAT WE WERE ABLE TO DO – AND WHAT NOT

Once we tried to explain to people who we were, sometimes unsuccessfully, several times we faced a situation in which immigrants would hope for more than we could provide. We had to be very frank in describing what we were willing to do, what we could do, and what we were unable to offer. Similarly, we had to stress that the information we handed out and our advice was not expert knowledge. Rather, we urged people to consult with professionals like lawyers who participated in the *Noborder Camp*.

We tried to assist individual people whenever possible; we lent cell phones, accompanied people to Western Union offices to receive money transfers, or organized a bathing suit so that people could take a day off and spend some time in the *Noborder* camping site in Charamida.

Certainly, such moments made the Infopoint special. But of course we could not fulfill every request, and had to acknowledge our own limits. We realized that people would look for other options once we openly told them that we could or did not want to help in certain situations. Since we were not an NGO, we did not have to follow a certain protocol in our work, and we were also flexible in terms of the hours the Info-point would be open. As a result, we were able to provide a wide range of support, and many acts of solidarity happened behind the scenes. And yet, it was clear that our resources would only last for the time of the *Noborder Camp*, or one week. In or-

der to set up a permanent space like the Infopoint, the whole enterprise would need to be organized differently.

ONCE MORE ABOUT TRUST

Many people told us their story, and we were curious to hear about them. Quickly we became aware that these stories followed their own sense of truth. It takes time to develop a relationship of trust. One will hardly ever learn about a person's experiences and journeys in the first encounter, and one won't be able to assess the chances for a successful asylum application based on such an introductory conversation. Reasons for the difficulties to find out the information necessary to do so are manifold; people don't trust each other, some are traumatized and are unable to talk about their experiences, and others tend to adopt another person's story and include it in their own account. We had to learn that we have to take responsibility for asking people to tell us about their lives. Asking a person who lived through a traumatizing situation to open up might result in the person experiencing psychosomatic illnesses, and we had to treat headaches, fever and other manifestations of re-traumatization.

Working in such an environment of rather brief interactions meant we had to be explicit about our position, that is, that we are supportive of the immigrants to matter what, and that there is no problem in not telling us everything, and even pretending an identity that is clearly not ›real‹.

TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATORS

We have no idea how many different languages were spoken in and around the Infopoint. Some of the translators were activists, but the majority of them were

actually refugees who spoke English. We often worked with translators who were not used to this role, and sometimes it was difficult for them to translate our style of communication. We had to learn to make sure that the translator was able to follow, and it proved useful to spend some time on discussing the process of translation itself.

It was very busy around the Infopoint, and translators often felt that their services were used, but that they were not acknowledged as persons with their own opinion. Thus, we had to clarify everyone's role and make sure that translators had a chance to express their opinions in discussions as well. Also, many translators were part of a community and could articulate what members of these groups, for instance refugees from a particular country, thought about specific issues. Finally, we learned that it is important to address not the translator, but the person one is talking to, and we tried to use gestures and hand signals to establish direct, personal contact.

III. EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

During the week at the Infopoint, we did not get a lot of sleep and many things were going on simultaneously, so that we all discovered personal limitations. We were astonished that refugees began to take care of us in moments of exhaustion. They would tell us that we should sit down and get some rest, sometimes even stopped us from our work, since they knew that we were to continue for a couple more days. We had people take breaks for several hours, but nevertheless we often worked in 48-hour shifts, and some of us had a breakdown of some sorts.

A major challenge was that we got to know a lot of people and learned about their difficult situation, which can be quite exhausting. Also, it was easy to get lost in the day-to-day work of providing medical aid, information etc. We had to work hard to not do that, but be able to keep up spaces for reflection and considerate decision-making, and to intervene sometimes to turn the mood from depression to activity.

PSYCHOSOMATIC REACTIONS TO STRESS AND TRAUMA

Most of the refugees went through difficult situations, during their journey generally and immediately before their arrival on Lesbos when they were on a boat to cross the sea. For some, this produced psychosomatic illnesses, or they were confused and disoriented. In many cases, this was a result of dehydration and fatigue, as people did not have access to drinking water and did not sleep for two days. Therefore, more than anything else we tried to briefly explain people who we were, provide them with lots of water, and made them get some sleep when they arrived. After a couple of hours we often faced a completely different person. (See also: *Medical advice*, p. 33) Several refugees later had to deal with headaches or stomach aches, and one of the few useful things we could do was to try to lay people to rest, which was sometimes not easy, given that we were in a circus tent full of people.

IV. OUR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE OF »PROFESSIONAL REFUGEE AID«

Immediately after we had established the Infopoint, we had to figure out how to deal with »professionals« who tried to sell tickets and false papers to newly

arrived refugees. They obviously enjoyed the fact that so many immigrants were all gathered in one place. Once we had found out regular fares for the ferry, we started to intervene when we noticed that ticket vendors asked for excessive prices. However, since these regular fares were still higher than official prices at the ticket counters run by the ferry company, it was of course hard to tell what would be a »fair« offer.

We tried not to put ourselves in opposition to the »professionals« and did not advise people to avoid using their services. But we did tell people about official ticket prices, and we also did not allow ticket vendors to enter the tent and go about their business in there. Sometimes, this created unrest and problems. In any case, we thought it was important to find out about different offers for tickets so that people would not pay more than usual.

V. ASSEMBLIES AND INFORMAL STRUCTURES

INFORMAL STRUCTURES

During the first nights of the Infopoint, we held assemblies in which everybody present participated, mainly to organize ourselves. Once more and more people stayed with us and the *Noborder Camp* had begun, much of the communication went through informal channels. Many refugees formed small groups or came as families, and we relied on one member of each of these groups or families to pass on important information to their peers. These contact persons were also responsible to facilitate decision-making processes within the groups.

A CORE-GROUP IN THE BACKYARD

We decided it was useful to create some-



Squatting the roof of Pagani during the Noborder Camp

A TOURIST FROM SWITZERLAND

One evening a guy from Switzerland appeared at the Infopoint. He was living in Switzerland for many years. A long time ago he arrived there, coming from Afghanistan. He was visiting Lesvos as a tourist. On his first sightseeing-tour in Mitilini he discovered the Infopoint and started talking with the Afghan refugees. He observed one guy who arrived at the Infopoint to pick up his family. He had been deported from the UK and his family had just arrived that morning. Out of fear they had hid in the forest and they had spent the whole day without food and water. Now it was getting dark. They had a mobile but could not describe where they were. The son was able to convince the family to go to a shop and find out about their whereabouts. Some people went there to pick up the family. They arrived late at night very tired: his parents and another son with his wife and a small baby. The guy from Switzerland stayed at the Infopoint until the end. He was sure that he could not be on vacation there. He helped out a lot at the Infopoint, took part in the actions, visited Pagani with a delegation – and most importantly: he was able to have fun with a lot of the newcomers. Already on the first evening he gathered some youths together and played Afghan music on his laptop. At the last party he danced and drummed all night: »I felt so much at home here!« he said on the last day.



Protestors barricade the prefecture

thing like a core-group who had an overview of what was going on in the »backyard«, and who would take responsibility for the whole project. For instance, it was essential to identify certain people who were known to everyone and who could intervene in problematic situations, or who would stay calm when lots of cops showed up. Also, these people were able to name refugees currently staying at the Infopoint at any given time, and passed on such information to activists taking over a shift.

It might have been useful to collect essential information and news messages in a book that could be deposited at the front desks. From the beginning, though, we were very careful not to keep a record of any individual data of undocumented refugees. And frankly, there was no time to do that anyway.

COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

We had to make many decisions on the spot, and often based solely on a sense of mutual trust. In most cases, these decisions were fine and there were no major issues with this procedure. Sometimes, however, there were bad feelings, because some people were able to decide quickly and on their own, while others preferred sit down and talk things out. It did us well to take time for reflection, and perhaps we should have worked harder to enable more of these discussions. Perhaps we should have set up a fixed structure that relied on the principle, »no matter what, we will meet at this or that hour to reflect and decide together«.

BEING A PART OF THE NOBORDER CAMP – OR NOT?

Especially in the beginning we experienced a great sense of insecurity about

the question, which information was allowed to be public, since most of the people frequenting the Infopoint had no papers and we did not want to endanger their stay or their lives. In hindsight, we think it was wrong not to discuss this question openly during the first assembly. Essentially, we did not communicate the situation out of fear of controls or police raids, as we had never done work like this before and expected confrontations with the police or other authorities. To our surprise, nothing of this sort happened, not once, on Lesvos. We don't want to generalize this experience and anticipate that a similar project in a different country might face a very different situation.

On the other hand, there were no secrets, police observed the place almost permanently so as to find out about upcoming actions or larger actions that might target the prefecture. Thus, police potentially had more information about the Info-point than the *Noborder Camp* participants. We need to be more careful in our assessment, what is »dangerous« and what is not.

The Infopoint quickly began to run on its own pace, and sometimes we missed a closer involvement in the activities and dynamics of the *Noborder Camp*. Often we had the impression that participants of the two projects each followed their own logic, sometimes even contradicting themselves. For instance, negotiations about concrete improvements were pitched against practices of direct action. Then again, direct action often created political pressure on those responsible and thus affected negotiations positively.

The Infopoint surely was a side-product of the *Noborder Camp* and benefited

from the presence of 500 international activists. Without their interventions and activities the Infopoint would have faced a lot more scrutiny from the side of authorities and police.

We are aware that it is often hard to coordinate and bring together various strands of activism, even when all participants want them to be elements of a common struggle. Sometimes, links between the different elements get lost, especially when things happen very quickly and various activities gain momentum. We cannot provide a final answer to this problem, but we argue that activists need to find ways to develop more transparency and communication between different parts of the movement. On Lesvos, there were at least three sites of activism – the *Noborder Camp*, the Infopoint, and inside the prison, and people in each of them worked on their own pace and followed their own ideas and internal logic.

We regularly face such a multiplicity of action, and we think it is one of the biggest challenges for the movement to create links between different sites of activism and communicate across differences.

MEDICAL ADVICE

MEDICINE – GENERAL ASPECTS

Being taken care of and getting attention are big issues so try to listen closely to the refugee's needs even in stressful situations. If you don't feel this is an option in a specific moment, then be honest about it and suggest a time when you will be more available.

Make sure to provide privacy and respect as much as possible. In case of doubt, mention it and look for a solution together (e.g. go to the toilet). It was very helpful and a great relief to be clear about the time you will be back. Don't make promises you cannot keep. Be honest about what you might not know or what you might not have.

Work with translators and be sure they understand what you mean. They notice a lot and often find better words to explain connections («You have a headache now because you didn't drink enough and taking another pill won't really help you» can be understood in two different ways – either as recognition of the situation or as a refusal to the request of more medicine.)

CONCRETE MEDICAL HELP

A big part consisted in attending to the refugee's feet, some of which were in a very bad shape. Long marches by foot without shoes or shoes of bad quality lead to blisters, pressure points and also to infections of wounded feet. Therefore a basin for footbaths and Betadine or something in that direction that can be added to the water should be at hand. (If nothing else is available, strong black tea can be used instead). Sterile dressing material and cannula to open up very large and painful blisters should be at hand as well. It is advisable though not to open up blisters because of the dan-

ger of infection. **Tip:** rest the feet in an elevated position and if possible cool them.

Other frequent symptoms were headaches and vertigo often caused through stress and missing access to drinking water. Always have hydration on your mind! Water and not Coke! Only give one headache tablet (i.e. Paracetamol) at once: Too many headache tablets at once in combination with stress and dehydration will only lead to a stronger headache and is bad for the liver. If someone has a headache so strong he or she can hardly walk, and in addition vomits or has irregular pupils, consider concussion: ask about injury or trauma. The incident may have occurred three days ago. In this case go to a doctor immediately.

A lot of the refugees had gastric trouble due to enormous stress and irregular and insufficient nourishment. Here Kaiser Natron (Sodium bicarbonate) tablets were a great remedy as they don't provoke any side effects (unless you take 20 of them!), help very well with acid indigestion and are very cheap here. Sore throat tablets (any kind).

Many refugees complained about hurting or burning eyes due to sun and sea water. Eye drops (i.e. Xymetazolin or the like) really did their job and are available on Lesbos without subscription for around 2€. Use: One drop in each eye about three times a day. In case you want to use the drops for several people pay *Attention:* Don't give the medicine away but give the eye drops yourself and be careful that the tip of the bottle must not get in contact with eyes or skin of anybody otherwise there is a risk to spread out infections which will not help anyone! If sanious eyes do occur then use antibiotic eye drops for at least 5 days 3-4 times a day! Be careful to remind the

patients that this is very contagious and that it is thus very important to wash hands and fingers.

Other things that are important: cloth and water to cool bruises, ibuprofen for menstrual pain, sanitary napkins and tampons, good bandages for different uses.

A SONG IN FRONT OF THE REST ROOM

The public restroom behind the Infopoint soon became an essential part of the infrastructure. From 7am till 11pm the man who worked inside looked for clean toilets and basins and filled up the soap. But more than that: daily, he defended the Infopoint against people who didn't want to share the toilet with refugees: «Where should they go instead? I'm not a racist: this toilet is open to everybody!» He installed a better place for people to wash hair and clothes.

One day a group of people went over to give him a bottle of Ouzo as a present for his efforts. Somebody started singing, there was clapping and dancing. After some minutes he was blinking as the tears welled up: «This is the best day I have ever had working in this place!»

WE REALLY DIDN'T FEEL LIKE REFUGEES!



Milad already experienced an eventful migration history. Born in Afghanistan, he spent some years working in Iran as a teenager. He reached Lesvos in group of other Afghan people, many of them under age. They arrived in the middle of the NOBORDER week and stayed until »the party was over...«. While trying to get on board the ferry to Athens, he and his friends got caught and were brought to Pagani for 23 days. Some of them we met again 6 weeks later in Athens.

AT THE INFOPOINT IN AUGUST 09

How did you come from Turkey to Greece?

We came in a plastic boat at about ten o'clock at night. We started our travel in-

side the water. From ten o'clock till half past eleven, then we were in Greece. When we reached the Greek border, we saw the coastguards and we were afraid of the police. We ran away into the mountains, we were about thirty people with the families. Two families were with us and we ran away in different directions. (...) We passed into the mountains and we slept for some time. In the morning we saw, that there is no city, no way, on all sides were mountains. We were searching for the way, we were searching for any city. We were in the mountains for two nights. The weather was very cold and we had many difficulties. Then we found the city, I think its called Molivos. We came from Molivos till Mitilini by foot, its about 80 km, be-

cause no one was able to take us with them in a car because there was also a lot of police.

Anything else you want to tell at the moment?

Yes! we have a message to European Union and United Nations: please, let the refugees free and finish these borders and give us our rights. We are also human, even when we are from Asia, but we are also human, we have some rights. And we are refugees due to our government. We have no government in Afghanistan and we left Afghanistan due to this. There was war and Taliban was persecuting people. So we came to Pakistan, Pakistan is also like Afghanistan. Everyday killing, kidnapping, bombing. We can't live there easily. We are afraid

of our lives. And we don't want our smaller brothers and sisters to live in Pakistan and Afghanistan, we don't want to let them live like us. We want them to study and we are working for them. We want to make them a doctor or engineer; we want to make them some relaxed. Not like us. Only because of that we are leaving our countries and we are coming to Europe and we agree to take that much risk on an illegal way. Every day is very dangerous for us but we agreed to tolerate all those difficulties, only due to this. At last once again I will say to European peoples, to send my message to all of Europe, to European Union to let refugees, not only Afghan refugees, every refugees that are coming to Europe from all over the world, let them free. Thank you.«

IN ATHENS, SIX WEEKS LATER...

Hey Milad, good to see you again! Do you want to tell us about the time in between and what happened after we separated?

Yes! First I want to define how was the situation inside this prison and how was the behaviour of police and doctors with us.

Some guys were sick for weeks, they were calling for a doctor, but nobody was ready to listen to our voices. There was no treatment for sick persons and the drinking water had a bad smell. If we asked for a doctor, for clean water or anything, mostly nobody was even listening.

They also did not have a good behaviour to the families with the small kids. One day I saw the kids had their ten minutes time to go out. They were playing football and one policeman was beating a small kid, he was about 8 years old, his mother was crying. Nothing was good in Pagani! The police

was saying: »You are not in jail, you are in camp.« How is this a camp? In 23 days they didn't let us go out even for 5 minutes to breathe in open air. When they were bringing us, they took us one by one out of the bus and put us into that store. They just open the door very short and push you inside. At first they gave us some soap, but there was nothing to really wash you or take a bath. They were giving tea to us, but there is nothing to make hot water. Some guys they make some steel wires, with these wires they make the tea and it is really dangerous. In the beginning we had light for all the day, then they switched of the lights. It was not only in our room. There were 8 rooms and about 500-600 people when I was there.

In our room there was one guy, who was kept inside for 50 days. And in the next room there was one guy, who stayed for 85 or 90 days. He was totally crazy. At night he was beating himself and shouting.

The situation in Pagani was not so good! But in Samos camp it is also like this, one of my friends was in Samos and we talked about it, only the drinking water was more okay in Samos.

And then you started struggling?

Yes, we started a hunger strike for two days and the situation was very difficult. For two days we did not eat and even did not drink any water. The police was asking us: »Why are you doing this?« We answered to them: »We want our freedom. We don't want to be here, we want to go forward.« We wrote some banners of hunger strike. But nobody was taking care of us.

So at last when we had been inside more than 20 days, we had to do something to fight for our freedom and to get our rights. Some guys were in a very bad

condition. They were ready to fight against the police. And some of them were even ready to lose their lives. Day by day they were going to be more crazy. At last they made a demonstration against the police. At first they took some wood and they started a fire inside the room, then they put some blankets inside the fire. We were shouting: »Freedom, Freedom, Freedom!« The police was smiling, they just did not open the door, they were relaxed as if nothing was going on here. There was too much pollution and we were feeling some unrelaxed, we couldn't even breathe. The windows were closed and we saw that outside of Pagani there was ambulance. And police was ready to fight against the refugees. They were ready to beat us. Ambulance and fire brigade was there. Police was releasing some tear-gas and fire-extinguisher was there. And at last we had to do something because we couldn't breathe! Nobody could see each other inside by the distance of one metre. It was totally black night. So some guys took the beds and broke the windows, they have broken the frame of this windows also, and then we came out, because we were afraid we will lose our lives. If we didn't struggle, in five minutes maybe we could die in that smog. And so we got outside, we needed free air. After we came out the police called the fire brigade to go inside Pagani. All the room was soon full of water. Mattresses and blankets and everything was wet. We were shouting: »We want to leave! Release us! We don't want to be here!« We were standing in front of the window in the first floor like balcony, not real balcony, it was a small place it was possible for 10 persons, but in that space we were standing with 80 persons. Some Arab guys were there, they became cra-

zy. They were ready to jump down. We stopped one. Before he had smashed the lights and he wanted to put his fingers inside – totally they became crazy in that prison, they didn't want to live any more!

In this situation some supporters and journalists came. They took pictures. The police was just standing, but earlier one of them had shown us a knife and they showed us their guns, they were shouting: »Stop this demonstration! Go inside!« Nothing was there to help us to go inside to breathe. After some time we saw that some people were still inside the room, like sleeping, but they were not sleeping, they were injured! At these moments everything had happened here and there – and by accident they fell down and they were injured by the broken windows. Some had the glass from the windows inside their foot and legs and some of them had like accident with the wall. When we saw them, we called for the ambulance. After a long time at last one doctor came that promised help. They took some of them out to the hospital. The door stayed closed.

A police-officer came and we discussed with him and they promised that we will be released after two days. Thereby the strength was coming more and more back to the room. After one day they really released us, about 60 persons. They promised also to give us a ticket for Athens, but we didn't get the ticket, we had to buy them. We came to the port by bus, we just were kicked out of the bus. We were too late for the ferry and we didn't have a place to stay for the night. We did not even have 10 Cents to buy anything to eat or to drink. When the police had taken our money and our mobiles we lost 3 mobiles and 300 Euro totally – we were 30 guys and the money

was not complete when they returned it. We told to anybody: »We did not get all of our money!« But nobody was listening to us.

Do you think without the revolt, they would have kept you longer imprisoned?

Yes! When we got released, we saw our pictures in the newspaper. And the people of Mitilini they had complained to the police: »Release them!« I think the revolt was really helpful for us. And really the journalists and media helped us. But police didn't allow them to get inside of Pagani. They were asking us there questions from outside of Pagani. Police was ready to fight with them and also with us. I don't think police inside this Pagani were human.

Can you also describe the situation in Athens, where you went afterwards?

The first time when we were let free, we just stayed in the Mitilini port. Really the situation was bad. We didn't have so much money. We lost our mobiles and contact numbers. Police even snatched from us our contact numbers!

In the first days our situation in Athens was not too good. Nowadays we manage a place to sleep and some money lent from here and there. And we all want to go forward! We are all under 18 years old, but nobody ever offered us a place to sleep. We try to care for everything for ourselves.

One of the first nights we spent in a park in Athens and some fascists came and they started beating people. The police came one hour after it happened. Police came – and they were also beating the guys and snatching their papers!

Finally about the days we spent together in Mitilini: what do you think about it?

When we reached Mitilini, we were thinking: »What shall we do? Where do we go now?« We didn't know anything

about the rules of Greece. We didn't have papers, we were totally illegal. Then we saw in a park some Afghan guys sitting and also refugees from Eritrea and Somalia. And they told us about the place with the tents. That you can stay here, that there is food. About one week we were with you. And really we were thinking it will be really difficult for us to manage.

When we passed seven days and we were inside the *Noborder Camp* in the end and we were ready to leave and to go to Athens, the guys told me to translate some things for them because they couldn't speak English. They asked me to tell you, that really *Noborder* was a nice camp. They were saying that nobody felt that we are refugees here. Nobody feels that we don't have place here. It was like our home. Some activist from all the countries, they were really like friends with us. We were feeling like we are at a picknick-point. We really didn't feel like refugees!

It was a crazy week!

Really: within 7 days nobody asked us about papers! Only due to this *Noborder Camp*! We were very relaxed. And until now we are missing *Noborder*. We are missing these days!

How did you experience the final party?

(Laughing) The last night it was a very important night in my life! It was a good place on the beach. There were all the activists and the refugees from all the different countries all together. It was our last night that we were at *Noborder Camp*. And really we enjoyed that night! We were dancing and singing and beating the drums. When the drummers got tired there were loudspeakers. We were free from everything! Nobody was disturbing us. It was an open area. Really we enjoyed that night! The songs were

about our country, about Afghanistan. One is from one famous singer... I cannot sing, so I cannot show it now. Our singer was Hamid, he is a really funny guy. Even in Pagani he was singing. He was singing, and inside the Dari song he was adding »No border! No nation!« It became a funny song and this night became a really special night. Until now all the guys are talking about that night. »At that night I did like this ... I danced like this ... you looked like this ...« We will not get this night again in our lives! It was first and last night. Even if we pay 10.000 Euro we cannot get this night. It was the one special night in our life!

And so you enjoyed it till the last minute.

We didn't sleep the whole night. When the time had come to move towards Athens, some guys were not ready to come. They were saying: »We will never get this night back!« They were not ready to go to Athens. They were ready to continue the party and to be with you. Within this one week we had a special relation, like family. We didn't think: »We are Afghan, they are Eritrean.« Or that you are from Germany. We were like a family. When we left I saw some of you were crying and some of us were also – but not in front of you, they were hiding it when they turned to go. Like leaving family members. It was a strong party till the moment we had to go.

And then you went to the port and directly into prison... and continued the party?

(Laughing) Yes, because we were missing that night! So to make ourselves some strong, Hamid was making the group to dance and to beat the drum. Even in Pagani we were dancing and singing for three days. Then we got tired. Police was not too good with us – they were trying to stop us: »Don't make

noise! Don't do this! Don't sing!« Only two or three days. We were ready to fight after that, because they didn't let us to go outside even for 10 minutes, so the guys were becoming tired. The situation was too bad.

Too bad to sing?

Not only to sing – even to breathe! Last day the situation was even too bad for breathing! Singing was good only for one or two days. (Laughing)

It was a heavy fight you were fighting inside. From singing till this final smoke!

And you and your friends, you were all the time together?

We met in the days of *Noborder Camp*. Our group is 26 persons. It is also due to *Noborder Camp*, because the camp was collecting refugees to make relation between each other. (Both are laughing).

You organised yourself! Do you think we should do something similar next year?

Next year? You must do this! Not should, you must! Really we enjoyed this week so much. And it really helped us. If you do it next year, some other refugees will be relaxed for some days.



LAST DAYS OF PAGANI

The story of this summer continued after the NOBORDER CAMP had ended. What happened afterwards would not have been possible without the strengthening experiences of summer.

The following pages tell the story of the last days of Pagani in October 2009. The first part belongs to a photographic report (see: www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/ereignis/lesvos_pagani09.html). The ›Declaration of the occupied Papatrisva building‹ in the second part could be seen as the local continuation of the information tent in summer: after a demonstration against detention of various local groups and of released refugees who could not leave because there was no ship available anarchists and students occupied a part of Mitilinis university and spent the night there together with the refugees.

»Last days« doesn't mean Pagani was finally shut down. It was officially closed but soon got used again for refugees when there was no boat available to transfer them to other islands for registration. Again it is now officially closed – and for the coming summer there are plans to open a closed container-camp instead, where Frontex may also play a role inside the detention camp!

But: not only the walls know by now how resistance works...

This is a report about 10 days in Mitilini in October 2009. About the path from revolt to freedom and how the closure of Pagani came about.

October is the most popular time for migrants to come from Turkey to Greece. The sea is still calm, the holiday season is over. Many try to use this last chance. The peak of the arrival figures is always in October.

When we arrived Pagani housed up to 800 people. Now, hunger and thirst strikes and riots are the order of the day in Pagani. The first time we visited the fence, we were in for a surprise! The minors were in the yard! So we managed to talk to them and learned that they had organised this themselves by rioting and setting their cells on fire. At night they were forced back into their cells and the lock was repaired. As we left, one of the boys yelled: we will revolt everyday, so that you come here.

The next day we managed to talk again. This time another cell had rioted: We can't live here anymore. We want our freedom to continue our way. The riot cops guarding the yard were aggressive and threatened to arrest 2 people every time someone was rioting. No matter whether they were part of the riot or not. They kept their promises which just increased the anger.

Since most of the migrants didn't know who we were, they tried to explain their situation to us. When we told them that we had been there before with several people and protested, one of them smiled and said: no border no nation stop deportation! He had been in Pagani for 4 months.

During our daily or nightly visits at the fence we asked them if they wanted their complaints and stories published in the internet. So we published them all on our site and the next day some of them told us that their friends in other countries had seen it. The feeling of being able to be heard outside of the walls of Pagani made them strong. They thanked us and Mehdi said: Sorry instead of love we give you trouble!

On the evening of October 21 we were told that the new vice minister of the interior (who is now called minister for the protection of the citizens) was going to make a surprise visit to Pagani. No one was supposed to know about this, so he could see the conditions there himself.

The next morning we came to the fence and had a surprise. The car wreck that had been in the yard for months had been removed. All the rubbish was gone as well. Instead

the migrants were walking about in the yard as if that this was normal. Some sat together in twos or threes. It looked like an arranged landscape.

Accompanied by people from international NGOs, Pro Asyl, UNHCR as well as the local prefect and the chief of police the vice minister arrived. The gate opened and everyone went inside. The minister went into every cell without the press and listened to the stories of the people. He went from cell to cell, many told him their special stories and he listened.

When he came to the cell with the minors, they told him that the evening before the riot cops had beaten them and threatened to beat them again if they told anyone. They told this to the minister, who tried to investigate, but without success. All the cell doors were open, when the minister held a press conference in the yard, with and said Dante's inferno was nothing compared to what he had seen here and that Paganani should be closed.

The migrants cheered because they were hoping for an immediate release. Temporary family reunions were photographed by everyone. Family members who had been locked up in separate cells for weeks could finally see and touch each other.

Then the minister left and so did we. Only the prisoners and the riot cops stayed. In the evening the anger of the disappointed people increased and they lit fires again. The riot cops kept their promise and dragged each one out of their cell and beat them. 6 migrants ended up in hospital, one of them after lying unconscious in the yard for 2 hours. Others had to treat themselves.

The next morning, when an NGO visited, they learned about the beating orgy. The NGO staff decided to file a complaint against the police. 147 migrants signed to have witnessed the events. That afternoon a lot more people than usual were released. We noticed that some of them had been witnesses of the events. This time they were released in time to catch the boat to Athens.

We still managed to do some interviews with them and they told us that the police had pressured them: Either you stick with your statement and spend another 8 months in Paganani or you withdraw your signature and we'll release you and 4 of your friends today. They all agreed to that. They told us the story and are still available as witnesses. Thanks to the many witnesses who they tried to get out of the way, many people were freed during the next few days.

But also the riots came to a head. From now on, every afternoon prisoners were released. The remaining prisoners lit a huge fire that made the cells uninhabitable for good.

Those being released were always brought to the harbour just in time to watch their boat leave. They stayed in the harbour without tickets, without food, without a place to sleep.

After the complaint, the police decided to withdraw from Paganani. They didn't want to be political pawns and only guarded the gate. The other staff left as well. Every day more cells were opened. People had meals outside and kids played football.

In the meantime a wooden boat with people from Afghanistan crashed against a rock. Only a few metres away from the coast of Korakas 8 women and children drowned. We went to the hospital to look for the survivors and were told that the prefect had moved them to a hotel. In the evening at the fence we met Arif Soldier, a survivor who was separated from his wife and his baby and put in jail. »A mishap« we were told, after we published this. The next day he was allowed to join his family. A fisher had saved them by jumping into the water himself.

In the meantime the riots continued.

In town, an open meeting was held by the different political groups and it was decided to hold a press conference and a demonstration at Paganani with to demand immediate closure. Papa Stratis also came to the press conference and distributed clothing and toys in his own special way. While he handed stuff over the fence, others helped. During the press conference Mehdi, a young Afghan, representing everyone behind the fence, spoke. All the local press was there and reported.

During our nightly visit, we heard people singing and dancing in one cell. They were celebrating, that the next day people would hold a demonstration in solidarity with them.

The next evening the demonstration was attended by those migrants who had been released the day before and had spent the night outside because they weren't released in time to catch the ferry and weren't given tickets by the prefecture. Because the weather had become cold and there were many women and children, it was decided to occupy a university building for the night. About 30 migrants were at the head of the demonstration followed by hundreds of people showing solidarity. The survivors of the boat accident

were also there. The demo then went to the university where warm rooms, food and hospitality were waiting for them.

The next day, the remaining prisoners were released. One guy jumped back in because he had forgotten something. When everyone had received the papers they had been waiting for, for so long, telling them that they had one month to leave Greece, only one person was left inside. Ironically, it was someone with a pink card who worked in Mitilini. He had been trying for days to have his case investigated but without success. By the evening he was also free.

The next day we had to make sure that Pagani was empty. Next to a pile of burnt mattresses was a key ring. While I took the photo, a uniformed cop sitting in a private car, demanded to know what I was doing with the keys. He claimed the keys were his. I said: we don't need the keys! The people want freedom. The gate was open, the cleaners were inside and so were we. Pieces of cloth were tied up everywhere with prayers, slogans, memories of Noborder. And everywhere the smell of fire in the air. The walls said: they know how revolts work and they are going to pass it on.

3 days later there were people who wanted to listen to the walls again: The only cell that was not totally burnt, with an open door and no staff, was being used by the prefecture as accommodation for new arrivals.

Pagani is closed.

All witnesses and experienced rioters are far away.

Released in exchange for silence.

Pagani is still used.

But not only the walls know by now how resistance works.

Pagani is closed

The state is not racist

Cops don't kill

and the earth is flat.



Release from Pagani // Burnt cells //

Pressconference in front of the gate // Burnt mattresses and keys



On the way to the ferry

NO TO PAGANI AND NO TO ANY PRISON

On Friday October 30 the »Initiative for the Defence of Refugees and Migrants« organised a demonstration in the town of Mytilene with the main slogan »Shut down Pagani and all detention centres«. Hundreds of residents of Mytilene participated along with 40 migrants some of them survivors of the shipwreck in Korakas.

These migrants had just been released from Pagani on a day when there was no ferry out of the island. That trick has been unashamedly used in some form or other to prolong the suffering of migrants. Thus, having no other choice men, women and children are forced to spend a night or longer on the streets. Despite the millions of Euros spent for the repression of migration, for entry deterrence, detention and deportation, there are no resources for cases like these neither from the state nor from the local authorities.

As an immediate reaction some of the participants in the demonstration together with the homeless migrants decided to occupy the Paparisva University building to provide them with food and shelter for the night. That is the minimum for all they have been deprived of, at the same time making the point that we need to take that extra step so that our dreams for a better world come a bit closer to becoming reality.

This action is not an actual solution to the problem but does temporarily satisfy a need and is an indication of essential solidarity. It once again gives meaning to the concept of university asylum: asylum for society and its needs and not just for an academic elite alienated from the real social issues that provide this elite with opportunities for research in the name of science and profit.

In Pagani, a concentration camp just outside Mytilene migrants have been piled in for years. It is nothing more than a human warehouse in which migrants, enduring deplorable living conditions, suffer for, punished and pay the price of

their, self-evident for us, freedom of movement right. From border control to state ›hospitality‹ and its practice for integration, the main concern of immigration policy is the reproduction of as many deprived, scared, obedient and easily exploitable subjects as possible.

For 2 months now the detained migrants in Pagani have claimed their freedom with continuous revolts, fighting a constant struggle that has broken the silence and set the conditions for the future. The latest rumours are referring to the ›shutting down‹ of Pagani. Of course this is contradicted from the official statements that refer to a temporary closure and renovation of the former warehouse. In any case, the issue does not stop at the closure of a prison neither does it change with the construction of ›state of the art‹ detention centres. The shame is not only Pagani; it is also Mersinidi in Chios, Fylakio in Evros, Vena in Rodopi and every other detention centre. The disgrace is not only Pagani; it is also the very essence of the detention policy, of guards and their threats. The crime is not only Pagani; it is also the repatriations and deportations to war zones and war ridden regions, registering people in European databases, holding migrants hostage in a state of illegality so as to pre-emptively ensure the consent of future workers necessary for further development of capitalism. Development that is based and fed on war, destruction of natural resources and the impoverishment of entire societies in the periphery, at the same time promising to all of us consumer goods, the facade of prosperity and the phony hope of social improvement.

SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS' STRUGGLES!



Inside the University



Demonstration in Mitilini

THE END, AND THE BEGINNING

I am waiting in the boarding area. My eyelids are heavy; I have trouble staying awake. Each announcement wakes me up with a start, I am afraid I could miss the call to board my plane. My mind is busy processing all the experiences, impressions and emotions I had during the last days. »Hello«, I hear, someone is speaking to me quietly. It takes me a moment to realize who is addressing me. Wearing lots of make-up, dressed in fashionable clothes, two women, 16 and 17 years old, are beaming at me. We've met a little more than a week ago for the first time, at the info point on Lesvos island. Everyday, we would nod or smile at each other, but barely spoke; I don't speak Farsi, they don't speak English, and the translators were usually needed in other places. And now we are sitting here together in the boarding area. All my attempts to find out where they will be staying after our late-night arrival in Germany, are futile. »Never mind«, we grin at each other, »don't worry, we'll find out later«.

Then, the call to board; everybody gets up. The two of them are on their cell phones, frantically talking to someone. Clutching the handle of their little red trolley, the women follow me closely as the crowd is rushing to the final passport and ticket control. When I look at them curiously, they proudly produce passports of an Eastern European country, smiling. At the same time, the excitement is written all over their face. Again and again they look at me as if asking for help. I keep my comments short, in English, partly to calm myself. »Everything is fine, we'll be leaving Greece in about 15 minutes!« The guard inspects the ID-cards from all sides, then waves both of them through the gate.

We stop briefly on our way to the airplane, smile at each other. One of the women shows me her hand; she is still trembling. The other one nods, we give each other a high-five: »Yeah!« After a few sentences in Farsi, spoken into the cell phone, we reach the airplane and plunge into our seats, exhausted. Using the phone's camera, the two women take pictures of us in the airplane. Their awe at the moment of take-off makes me think that they've never been on an airplane before. Soon, both of them fall asleep. They are petite and, lying down, the two of them fit onto three seats and sleep until we descend. As for me, I can't get a wink of sleep. I have no idea how I spent the time of the flight.

Upon arrival in Germany, my heart is throbbing. Several border guards line the crowd and observe the passengers. They pull out several men of darker complexion, asking them »Do

you speak German? Passport control!« Apparently, two young women do not conform to the stereotypical image of a refugee and thus do not require special attention.

We have to wait for more than an hour in the freezing cold until the two women are picked up in the parking lot. We keep calling the drivers; they have gotten lost and will arrive later than expected. We wait. I lend the women some pieces of clothing that are way too big, we share an apple, we hope. Eventually, the drivers arrive.

The women are welcomed with contained, yet palpable joy. Speaking fairly good German, the two men introduce themselves as distant relatives of the two young women; they are their uncles. I remember that the women are 16 and 17 years old; one uncle has been living in Germany for 17 years. That means they have never met before. As it turns out, the men live in the same town as I, and within minutes I am invited to join their ride home. I had planned to look for a ride-share the next morning, so I am more than happy to accept the invitation.

Once in the car, the women keep talking; every once in a while, someone translates. They talk about their journey, how we met, and they speak about Pagani. »You are a good person. You helped them a lot«, the uncle says at one point.

Soon, the conversation ebbs away, and the uncle turns on some music; video clips by Afghan and Indian artists show up on the screens built into the back of the car seats. Fields are passing by the window, cars, street signs. The two women are napping. Everything seems surreal, like a dream.

I wake up as we leave the highway. As we enter the McDonald's in the rest area, the men order huge portions. It is the time of Ramadan and the drivers haven't eaten all day. It is 3AM; we are the only patrons. My mind is bursting of questions, but the uncle urges us to eat first and then talk. We talk about the reasons that make people leave their countries, the situation on Lesvos island, and life in Germany. One of the women chips in that she can't believe we met at the Infopoint in Lesvos, where everything was so uncertain, and now we are sitting here, in this restaurant, in Germany. I share the disbelief.

When we arrive in our hometown, it is 5AM. They drop me off at my house. We say good-bye, and I wish the two women a good start. I say »Bye!« to the uncle, but he disagrees. »No, not >bye«. – »Auf Wiederseh'n« he says in German. It means: »See you again!«

I WOULD LIKE TO FOLLOW A STAR. BUT THERE IS NO STAR TO FOLLOW.

Youth without borders is a movement that has been fighting for the rights of refugees in Germany since 2005. The majority of its activists are young people living in Germany with a »Duldung« – exceptional permit to remain. In the summer of 2007 we created a social network online, called <http://jogspace.net>. Inspired by the blogging movement in Iran we had a vision of a blogging platform that would display the perspectives, thoughts and opinions of young refugees living in Germany under precarious legal status. Over the next two years, jogspace started to develop and grow. We set up a network page (<http://www.jogspace.net>) and a feed reader (planet.jogspace.net) to better coordinate the individual blogs. In the summer of 2009 we had 25 individual blogs running on jogspace.net. It was time to take the project to the next level. Obviously the problems the JOG activists find themselves confronted with are not inherently German. Young refugees are struggling with the internal and external borders of Europe on a daily basis. Nowadays a border is more than just a geographical line, separating one country from another. For some people all of Europe turned into a border. Talking to young refugees in Greece it quickly becomes obvious that they experience Greece as a border and find themselves in the paradoxical position of not being able to leave while not being welcome either.

»Here in Greece I feel trapped. I can't go back. I can't stay. And I can't go forward.«

Young refugees on their way to Europe are exposed to a particular everyday reality. They are faced with police repression, a general feeling and experience of rejection and structural discrimination while there is no safe place and, thus, no protection for them. The posts on »birdsofimmigrants.jogspace.net« give readers a little insight into these realities.

»We were four or five groups of refugees. Each group had the name of a fruit, our name was »pomegranate«. We hide in the bushes. The »traffickers« called names of fruits. We waited. If the fruit was not ours we had to be very quiet. Then he finally said »pomegranate« and we had to run and cross the border.«

Everyday, newspapers and magazines all over Europe cover stories about refugees who are desperately trying to reach Europe. Some of these polemical reports paint the scenario of a large-scale invasion or even a tsunami of refugees that is bound to flood Europe. Sometimes they report about the destitute, almost drowned refugees that are occasionally discovered by tourists on the shores of some European island. But there is more to it than only being a refugee. There is always a larger picture, a story and a personality behind

every single fate, and there are a million different reasons why people decide to migrate to Europe.

The blog »birds of immigrants« was created in August 2009 by under aged refugees living in Lesbos. The blog is supposed to give under aged refugees the possibility to speak up. To tell their truth, their hopes, realities, wishes, their opinion and to ask their questions.

»From the beginning until now, I told lies to everyone, nobody knows the reality...«

We set up the blog in Villa Azadi, a reception center for unaccompanied minor refugees in Agiassos, Lesbos. Most of the refugees who live in Villa Azadi are Afghan boys. For this reason, the blog became a shared blog maintained mainly by Afghan refugees. At the time we started, there was no internet connection at the centre. We talked about the content, the style and what else they hoped to achieve with it. They decided to call it »Birds of Immigrants«. After a week of planning, the internet connection was finally set up. The number of people working on the page constantly alternated between twenty to one to five. Taking stock of our work after the first month we were all very pleased with the results.

Gradually the boys living in Villa Azadi started to interview each other. Understandably, the first posts on the blog were slightly similar. It is of course not the easiest thing to write about one's problems or inner thoughts. Also, they took some time to get concept sense of what the blog was, and the things they could do with it. After two months it was almost impossible to keep up with all the material, pictures they painted, videos they added, and of course personal stories they had provided. As with most projects, starting a blog with refugees who are minors is a long-term process and a blog is certainly only the beginning. The main issue to be resolved remains the erratic internet access at the Villa Azadi.

Birdsofimmigrants.jogspace.net was just the beginning. A new blog maintained by refugees in Patras, Igoumenitsa and Calais recently went online: <http://schengendangle.jogspace.net> is about the every-day lives of refugees trying to get on lorries in order to move on to Italy and other European countries with better asylum conditions.

»...The Schengen Treaty gives some people the possibility of free movement in Europe but for others it makes it more difficult if not impossible to travel... Dangle we call it when we hide underneath a lorry, between the tires – we the unseen of Europe...«

HARTINO KARAVI A PAPERBOAT



Right in time at the beginning of the ›travelling season of boat people‹ an independent information point for refugees will open on Lesbos island in the Greek Aegean Sea. Starting April 2010 this will be the first welcoming and meeting point on European territory for arriving refugees (2009: 14.000 in Lesbos).

Hartino karavi (greek for: paper boat) will have a self-organised coffee bar to take a rest and also for public events, a counselling office, to supply information, for public relations and a free internet café. The meeting point will help to build sustainable connections between refugees in transit, international activists and local inhabitants through personal encounter, direct support, and political intervention and also by increasing public awareness. A paper boat – in the middle of the murderous breakers of the European border regime it will be an experiment to create a small welcoming island.

INSPIRED BY...

Hartino karavi is inspired by manifold experiences of similar kind in Greece and other countries and is planned as a continuation of good practice networking within the nobordercamp which took place in Lesbos during the summer of 2009.

The planned Mitilini social centre is supposed to be a continuation of the information and welcoming point of the nobordercamp. During the *Noborder Camp* in August 2009 a circus tent was set up in the centre of Mitilini. It became a temporary space for interchange, encounter and joint actions of refugees, migrants, activists and supporters. Before, during and after *Noborder Camp* took place local groups and individuals cooperated in a networking process, negotiations and actions on a common level of shared aims and purposes. Besides many other actions they demonstrated together for the closure of the detention centre and for open camps, they supported refugees with supplies for their basic needs (i.e. homeless refugees were accommodated by anarchists and students at the university campus – see also *No to Pagani and No to any Prison*, p. 43) and held a joint press conference (representatives of NGOs, political groups, the left wing and the green party).

Our ideas are also based on the experiences of refugee and migrant counselling projects in daily centres in different European countries. In Hamburg, for example, the *Café Exil* is a

voluntarily run meeting place across the street of the migration office which offers refugees assistance with their papers, counselling and contacts to lawyers, NGOs, interpreters etc. A good example of social centres in Greece is »migrants Steki« in Athens, Thessaloniki, Chania or Patra, which provides similar projects for a long time. They function on a daily basis as places for encounter, networking, learning and public action.

PLACE FOR ENCOUNTER

In its initial phase a small group of people started the project. In future more people are invited to participate with ideas and criticisms as well as helping hands. As a first step to include refugees into the development of the project, the youth hosted in the reception centre for unaccompanied minors in Agiassos, who are living for longer periods on the island, will be asked to participate with their own ideas in the creation of the facility from its very first steps to the daily functioning. From the very beginning it should be a common project so that it is regarded as their own creation and place. We also want to invite students (from the University of Mitilini as well as from abroad), trainees and political activists from different places and countries to join and work together on a temporary basis.

Thus, from the very beginning it should be a place created together in an open process. A place of and for everybody who crosses the door entrance and is interested in creating a »welcoming space« independent from legal constructions of »the citizen«. Everybody can be part of the project as an individual not as a group and everybody can be a guest. *Hartino karavi* will become a meeting point for refugees and migrants in transit, who want to continue their journey to Athens and different countries in Europe and offer them a place to relax and find some orientation. (Minor) refugees and migrants who stay on the island longer and look for engagement and activity are welcome to make it their own space. In short: it

will be a place for Greeks and non-Greeks, for all people interested in encounter and interchange.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The main focus of the project will be exchange and provision of information and communication. Thus, it will be essential to create an own website. We plan to work on communication and public relations in cooperation with activists and media about the situation of refugees and migrants on the island, since there is a constant need to inform and politicise the issue of immigration from a point of entry such as Lesbos. The work on existing internet platforms for (minor) refugees all over Europe will continue on and new ones will be set up. (See also: *I would like to follow a star*, p. 45)

In addition our aim is to inform refugees and migrants about their rights, their legal situation in Greece, the network of service suppliers and NGOs assisting them in Lesbos and Greece in general. Since many refugees lost family members early during conflicts in their home countries and also on their way to Europe we want to assist in tracing them. Meetings, discussions, music and film events, exhibitions, parties etc will offer more opportunities for information and communication.

ACCESS AND PROTECTION

Hartino karavi will be a space to take a breath, to spend time and feel comfortable, safe and free. A coffee bar will be the main space to spend time, find written and oral information about refugees in Greece, about the legal and welfare system for immigrants and refugees in Greece and a basic orientation on the island and the country for all visitors. It will provide free internet access, computer courses and other workshops.

If you are interested to support HARTINO KARAVI you are welcome!
Contact: hartinokaravi@gmail.com

INFO

FRONTEX

International Campaign against Frontex on frontexwatch: <http://frontex.antira.info>

DUBLIN II

Leaflets for refugees to give information on how Dublin II is implemented in different European countries have been produced in English, Farsi, Arabic, French and Greek.

You can download them here:

- www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de/content/welcome%20to%20europe%20arabic.pdf
- www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de/content/welcome%20to%20europe%20farsi.pdf
- www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de/content/welcome%20to%20europe%20french1.pdf
- www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de/content/welcometoEurope_2009_engl.pdf

Welcome-to-Europe-Webguide for Refugees: Information how Dublin II is implemented in various European countries. Soon more and more general information will be added on: www.w2eu.info

A Campaign against Dublin II with a main focus to stop deportations to Greece started in Germany in March 2010.
Website (in German): <http://dublin2.info>

GREECE

General information about the conditions for migrants and refugees in Greece:

- **»The truth may be bitter but it must be told«** Report from Pro Asyl and the Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants, Athens (October 2007): http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/proasyl/fm_redakteure/Englisch/Griechenlandbericht_Engl.pdf
- **»Out the Back Door– Dublin Regulation and Illegal Deportations from Greece«** – Report by NOAS, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and Aitima (October 2009): www.noas.org
- **»The Dublin Dilemma – »Burden shifting« and putting asylum seekers at risk«** – Report by the Greek Council of Refugees (February 2009): http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/proasyl/fm_redakteure/START-SEITE/Griechenland/Greek_Refugee_Council_DublinSituationNote.pdf

Antiracist initiatives in Greece: We may not name each antiracist initiative in Greece. During the last months a lot of new solidarity-groups appeared - and many of the available web-sites are just in Greek language. So as a placeholder we name only one website that gives a good overview and up-to-date-information on the diverse initiatives and actions taking place also in English language. It is a blog on migration and struggle in Greece set up by a group of immigrants and refugees of Thessaloniki: <http://clandestina.org>

OUTER (AND INNER) BORDERS

Calais

<http://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com>

Patras/Igoumenitsa

<http://schengendangle.jogspace.net>

Ukraine

<http://bordermonitoring-ukraine.eu>

Bordermonitoring from below

<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com>

UPCOMING ACTIONS

- **4th to 6th of June:** Caravan-Festival in Jena/ Germany: Unite against colonial injustice in memory of the dead victims of Fortress Europe – Open Air Festival against Neo-colonialism and Racism
- **1st to 4th of July:** European Social Forum in Istanbul/Turkey
- **Maybe later summer:** Noborder activities in Greece, where we will face the biggest sea-operation and probably also the involvement of Frontex in new screening-centers and in coordinations for charter deportations
- **24th of September to 3rd of October:** Noborder Camp in Brussels/Belgium
- **Around the 7th of October:** in Oujda and Melilla/ Morocco a protest in remembrance to the 5th anniversary of the storm and the deaths in Ceuta and Melilla
- **January 2011:** in Mauretania, Mali and Senegal, caravan-project for freedom of movement to the World Social Forum in Dakar

For more information see: www.noborder.org

The website of last summers' Noborder Camp is still functioning and gives information on the developments at Lesbos: <http://lesvos09.antira.info>

IMPRESSUM

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Published

March 2010

Printed by

imprenta

Photos by

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Designed by

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