

# *In the village of All together*



*The stories of the migrants who crossed the border and arrived in Mytilene, the narratives of the locals who were involved in the making of a self organized and open reception center in a former camping space for children (PIKPA).*

*Life paths, so different, that cross, interweave for a few days and separate again, producing spaces and practices of coexistence and solidarity, subverting the borders of “Fortress Europe”.*

*PIKPA* Mitilini 2012



greece 2.50 euro  
germany 4. -euro



*August 2012*

*Operation "Xenios Zeus" in the center of Athens reinforcement of the police force in Evros with 2000 policemen, fence.*

*After a three years of no refugee arrivals, small groups of immigrants arrive in Lesbos. The newcomers are detained in police stations' cells. Their nationalities: mostly Afghans and Syrians, in smaller numbers of Iranians, Palestinians, Somalians and other African national states.*



*September 2012*

*The arrivals have increased in Lesbos and the flow is now constant. Immigrants are piled in police stations all over the island, the detention is long and inhumane. In a cell for a maximum of 25 people more than 100 refugees are imprisoned. Among them, children, pregnant women, minors and vulnerable cases (sick people, disabled people). No possibility for them to apply for asylum. Anyone who dares to make a request is detained from 3 to 18 months.*

*The network "Village of all together" submit to the authorities a proposal for the creation of an open first reception center for refugees in ΠΙΚΡΑ (municipal summer camp, 6 km from the center of town). Volunteers guarantee the function of this open place.*



*An incredible ping pong game between the authorities involved starts. Municipality and Head of the Police ask one another to approve the demand, and no solution is given.*



*Oktober 2012*

*The police authorities give their own solution to the crowded suffocating cells and the workload that refugees arrivals are for them. They stop arresting refugees leaving them in the streets for days and exposing them to all kind of danger.*

*Not being arrested means that refugees don't get the deportation order and it is impossible for them to travel legally to Athens. Desperate they find shelter in the cities' parks, in abandoned buildings, prey to traffickers and fascists' attacks.*





*November 2012*

*E*xtreme weather conditions for those who are forced to live in the streets several days. One of the many homeless groups of unregistered refugees was transferred by the police van and left in the port.

*MSF (Doctors without frontiers) and members of the "Village of all together" met them in the port late at night.*

*Twenty eight people, among them 2 pregnant women and 2 children. It was really cold and rainy that night. One pregnant woman from Eritrea was transferred to the hospital immediately, her life and the life of the child was saved as she was suffering of a serious low blood pressure. The rest stayed overnight in the cold.*



*During that night a passing car has thrown stones at them. One stone has injured the pregnant woman from Afghanistan who was transferred to the hospital by the network members. Members of the solidarity network "Village of all together" supported this group of people and stayed next to them for 3 days until the Coast Guard finally "accepted" to arrest them and put them in the container-cells .*











## *End of November 2012*

*Over a hundred homeless immigrants find shelter in parks and streets. A group of 60 people spend 2 nights in front of the municipal theater.*

*Many citizens run to support them as they were threatened by the extreme cold and racist attacks.*

*The authorities had to face the social pressure, the worsening of weather and the upcoming visits of international organizations to report on the living conditions of refugees in Greece.*



*As a result the network has got the permission to run unofficially a short term open reception center in PIKPA.*

## *1st Day in PIKPA*

*While the volunteers were still cleaning the place, 70 refugees were transferred to PIKPA by our cars and by the police van.*

*To protect our volunteer work in PIKPA,  
we made clear our demands to the  
authorities :*

*Firstly, a rapid processing of refugee  
registrations and the distribution of their  
deportation orders, essential to avoid people's  
accumulation in PIKPA for an unknown  
period to a point that we wouldn't be able  
to offer them humane living conditions.*

*Secondly, the use of the unspent funds in  
the Ministry of civil protection, responsible for  
the refugees' first reception, so that they will  
send to PIKPA provisions, clothes and  
medicines as humanitarian help, ensuring its  
long term function.*





### *PIKPA, 3 weeks of exemplary function*

*During the three weeks of PIKPA impeccable functioning, we relied exclusively on volunteer work and the offers of the citizens of Lesvos .*

*We didn't receive any support from the authorities, after the concession of the place's keys by the municipality, and we frequently faced the delays in the registration process. So for several days, volunteers had to deal with 140 refugees.*



*As we kept on making public the deficits in the refugee reception policy, demanding changes, the authorities' reaction was to empty PIKPA, to arrest all refugees (60) in a day, and to give us an oral order not to host any refugees in PIKPA.*



*As the network of NGOs which created PIKPA never took any orders from anybody to open this place, it was obvious that we wouldn't take any orders to close the place. So we kept it open, preparing it for the next influx of refugees.*

*Many days after the evacuation of PIKPA, people were still arriving in PIKPA to offer food and clothes for the refugees, which we were delivered to the police station.*

*But to our surprise, in many cases the food didn't reach the refugees. What happened with this food? The authorities throw into the garbage what was offered in solidarity by the whole local society, and we can't tolerate that any more.*



*\*PIKPA reopened for a week at the end of January, as 50 refugees were sleeping in the streets during a boat strike.*

*The story I'm going to tell, started one Wednesday afternoon when the 'Village of all together' was gathered for a discussion. It was then that somebody called to inform us that some people had thrown stones at a pregnant woman. This pregnant woman had stayed in the street the previous night and was among a number of 32 other refugees. It was then that the 'village' undertook action because no one else was doing anything.*





*Initially the refugees had waited outside the police station to be arrested but the police loaded them into a van and took them to the port to be under the authority of the coastguard. But the coastguard didn't arrest the refugees either. This led some 'clever person' to throw three stones, one of them hitting the pregnant woman. This caused a hullabaloo. We waited for the coastguard to arrest the refugees and pointed out that if they didn't, we would make a protest by organizing a sit-in. At the same time we found a building and checked the amenities, there was no electricity. Later on we sent a delegation to the coastguard and they, the coastguard, finally decided to arrest the refugees but pointed out that they weren't able to provide food. As a consequence both the 'village' and a monastery provided food.*

*Vassiliki*



*What sticks in my mind is the evening we put pressure on the coastguard to house the refugees in containers. It was my first contact with the refugees, they were from Somalia. There were two men and some women, they were very upset. I couldn't look into their eyes. It was the first day we gave them food. Men and women were in separate containers in very bad conditions. I talked to the women first and then went to see the men.*

*I saw one of the men smiling from behind barred windows as he was looking at his wife in another container. That contact has been embedded in my memory.*

*Evgenia.*



*I*t was noon , the first day we would open PIKPA, and got here right after work. I hadn't been here before and I liked it a lot. We started going in the wooden sheds which were disused, all things brand new, the mattresses the pillows, but it felt as if there was an earthquake and the people fled and left everything behind, that's how it was. And swallows had got into the sheds, other birds, animals, it was a mess.

But there were some friends and we found two miserable brooms, we had so much zest that we started cleaning up. And the smell of the wood was very nice. When we started cleaning the mattresses, the idea that people who were distressed -as they had slept outdoors the previous day, would come in these cozy sheds, on clean mattresses, they would lie down and rest, was a very nice feeling. We prepared everything and then we came in this room (the store room in the main building) and said: good, this will be our "headquarters".

And we liked it so much that we said if things get worse we will all come here to stay too. And as we were discovering things, you know, we found the switch for the fridge



*ahahaha! joy, we found the valves for the water hooray! we have water! We couldn't find how the electricity worked down at the sheds, what to do? We tried some power switches, we found it!*

*When the people arrived we put the families on the first floor (of the main building) which was more comfortable than the sheds (there were bathrooms).*

*That was a very nice experience to see people who were in the streets to be, next day, in clean, warm places. From that moment on everything functioned smoothly and each day brought the miracle of the following day.*

*Lena*





*We were very lucky to cross the sea. When we reached the town of Mytilene we went to the police station, two hours, three hours, we waited.*

*The policeman told us “leave, come tomorrow”, I say “we have nowhere to go, we stay here, outside here, if you don’t take us, we’ll sleep in the rain, “and we don’t care” he answered ». After three hours they took us.*

*We got in the detention center, Wow what was that! It stank! A hundred people inside crap, just crap. It was very cold. I told the policeman we were five, we didn’t even have a blanket, I asked him to give us one.” I don’t have, get one from the others”, he replied. But the others didn’t have either, everyone had just one, some had to share.*

*We slept the night on the floor, the others gave us two blankets, all night we were trembling until morning.*

*Fortunately it was only one night. They gave us papers the next afternoon but we missed the boat.*

*And we came here at PIKPA to sleep for the night. Here, nothing to do with the police station, they are people, they helped us, they gave us whatever we asked for.*

*Adham*





*I* come from Tanzania and I am 17 years old. You know in Africa, in most countries, even if there is a government, people don't live happily as they do here, so if you ask me to tell you how it was at home and how it is here I will answer that here is better even though my family is back there.

*We are here to make the things in our life better. I wanted to study, I like physics, geography and Math and I couldn't finish there, so I came to study here. Then I'll go back to help my family.*

*Here we have problems when we come. The worst moment for me is when we were crossing the sea and our boat started to sink. When we reached land there was a forest with big mountains. We got lost there with my friend from Tanzania.*

*I found 6 Afghans and I followed them. I was the seventh. But they left and I was again alone.*

*I asked a Greek where to go and he saw the way. I thank this man . I came out on a road, I saw a car. I waved to stop but it was a woman and she didn't stop. The next car stopped and it was a doctor. He took me to hospital because I didn't feel well. There I was completely alone, I had no relative or friend,*



*I felt so bad on this island, it was not what I imagined.*

*We have to leave by boat but we can't enter a boat without papers.*

*Under these circumstances nobody cares who you are. This is something we couldn't imagine.*



*But I thank god that I found this doctor, he asked me questions, he talked to me. Then he went home. Probably he forgot me but I will never forget him.*

*After that, a policeman came to the hospital and he brought me to PIKPA. Here I found my friends and the people I was travelling with.. Here I found relief. It is nice here, this camp of volunteers. It is good, we thank you all. Under these conditions someone become strong, even though he's still young.*

*Bob*





*I am Jamal and I want to tell you a story from my journey that started 5,5 months ago from Somalia. I will tell you how I passed from Turkey to Mytilene.*

*At first I was in Smyrna and then from the coast we got a plastic boat but it started to sink. As we didn't have anything else we started using our shoes to empty the water from the boat. That's what we did all night, we were 39 people and the boat was so small. It was a miracle that we survived.*



*At 6:30 in the morning we reached land and we walked to the city. We started asking people how to leave and where to go but nobody helped us.*

*The police sent us away and told us to go to PIKPA. It was 2 o'clock and we were hungry and soaking wet from our journey.*

*Then we met this very kind man whose name I don't remember and I am sorry about that. This man called Anthi and she came by her car, she talked to us and called other people and they came by cars and took us to PIKPA. We thank them all from the bottom of our hearts.*

*Jamal*



*Four days ago a resident of a village just outside the city, at Pyrgoi Thermis called me on my mobile. He told me that that as he was going back home he saw 6-7 people at the side of the road round a fire they had lit to get warm.*

*And he got food from his home and gave it to them and he wanted to do something more. He said he had called the police but since he didn't know if they would do something he contacted us as well.*

*I called immediately the doctors explaining that the situation was urgent and we had to go and see what was going on with these people. Personally I didn't believe that we would find*

*them there, I believed that they would have got in a taxi and left. But even though it was late and we were exhausted having spent the day at PIKPA, we decide to go and find them.*

*And, to our surprise we saw 6 people 2 women and 4 men who had actually lit a fire at the side of the road at a big junction and couldn't even speak because of the cold.*

*In fact we tried to speak to the younger member of the group but because of the cold his mouth was trembling and he couldn't speak. It was unbelievable, I have never seen such a thing and while we were in this process, we tried to talk to them, because, ok, you can't put people in a car without explaining who we are and what we do, another volunteer of the village of all together who had seen them on this way home came and brought them some hot tea and cups. He offered to them all and that's how they were able to talk to us.*





*These people were from Syria, they arrived one day after the shipwreck of last December . They explained that they wanted to leave, to reach Athens and after that go wherever they could. And that's how we found ourselves at 3.30 in the morning heating soup at PIKPA to make them recover from the cold and we put them to a room .As we were leaving a woman fell in my arms and started to cry and she was saying thank you in her language.*

*And the next day when I saw them there was an incredible change, they were outside in the yard and they were playing football. When I saw them I approached them and they threw me the ball and we started to play and it was an unbelievable change.*



*T*hat is how you realize that from one moment to another the conditions that push people to be impoverished, exhausted and marginalized can be easily changed.

*The only thing that we did that night was to move them to a warm place and give them food and immediately their look completely changed and their self image changed as well.*

*They, themselves told us “we feel very bad”, “we don’t want you to feel sorry for us, we don’t want any charity but you understand at this moment the situation in Syria is difficult”.*

*They put themselves in a position to apologize the next day because they might have tired us because they caused trouble to us. It was a very strong experience.*

*Anthi*



*I want to tell you a story that Father Kyrillos told me about a man who wanted to do a memorial service for his dead parents and instead of having a traditional commemoration he said «Father I want the memorial service to become the next meal for all the people of ΠΙΚΡΑ».*

*That is very touching, some of us are closer to the church, some not, but in this case, church is how church should be. What is happening here is amazing and unique, so many people are coming and offering goods, supporting this effort. It is unique in Greece as well as in Europe.*

*George*



*There was a refugee who was detained for a long time and yesterday he was finally released. He came here at PIKPA where people are full of worries thinking about their future all the time not knowing what will happen to them.*

*But in Pikpa he was very happy. He was imprisoned for so long so that he came here smiling and he gripped everybody, hugging them, kissing them.*

*The others, at the beginning, were looking at him puzzled, and were saying "why is he so happy?" He met some people who spoke Arabic and he would hug them and cuddle them. Even an old man, 75 years old, stood up and he also started laughing and kissing him. And it was as if the mood of all the people in PIKPA changed.*

*Dimos*



*We had to come via Iran to reach Turkey from Somalia.*

*We were 9 people and there was a lot of snow at that time. We walked 15 hours a day in the snow and it is difficult for us because we are not used to snow.*

*Some people who were with us were wounded in their feet, because of the snow. A man had to cut both his legs in Turkey as they had got frostbitten. His goal was to reach Europe, get a visa and find a job. That's what he wanted. But now he can't walk any more. I have managed to reach Europe, now I feel really lucky. I want to leave Greece and go to other European countries because there are lot's of jobs there.*

*Bimar*



*Remember the day we had here 140 people and we didn't have enough food portions to feed them all. And the moment we were talking and thinking how could we manage to find more, 3-4 women showed up with pots, without having arranged anything like that, and the quantity was not only adequate but we had food for the next day too. There was a response from the people that was unexpected, from men, women even children who responded spontaneously to such a story.*

*Evrís*





*What impressed me was this miracle with the food.*

*No matter how many people there were, how many food portions we needed, there was always enough food. From somewhere, somehow, a pot would arrive, we would dispense it and never run out of food. That was a small miracle to me.*

*I work at a school for adults called "Second Chance" and we always try our school to be involved in the society, the community, have contact with the people, with their problems. We have adult students, working people, who try to finish High School. So we always take part in such actions.*

*Michalis*



*We were trying to fix the bathrooms so they could have hot water to take a bath. There were different views, to wait for the municipality to clean up the mess, or to do it ourselves, things like that. The bathrooms upstairs (the main building), which was functioning, had a leak, it was leaking downstairs where we kept the clothing, so we were forced to shut them down.*

*Therefore we had to find a solution immediately. I found a Tanzanian and I told him I wanted two people, I would give them ten euros, to clean the bathrooms. He came with me, saw the baths and told me he would do it himself but I would give him twenty euro. The others agreed, probably he didn't have*

*any money and he needed it, maybe he wanted to collect money for the boat ticket to leave.*

*We gave him the materials, I left at noon, and in the afternoon when I came back he had cleaned them , perfectly. He got his 20 euro and then he said to me: you are my father .*

*I laughed and told him I have two children and I don't want any more.*

*George*





*I am 15 years old I come from Afghanistan and I have been travelling for 3 months. My best experience was when I reached Mytilene and I managed to call my brother and tell him that I arrived. It is nice here, the people are so willing to help us.*

*When we reached Mytilene we were walking for many hours. It is 45 kilometers from here to the point we came out and we did 30 km on foot. As it was raining we were soaking wet and when it became dark we stopped somewhere to sleep because we couldn't see to walk further. While we were walking we asked the cars to stop but nobody stopped, not even the police. Then somebody stopped and picked up me and my sister and brought us here at the camp.*

*I have never been to school. In Iran it is forbidden because I am Afghan so I worked as a tailor since I was very young, I used to make bags. My dream is to go to school, to learn a profession and then be the protector of my mother and help my country. I want to return one day. I hope my mother will be always happy.*

*Farid*



*I arrived here on Tuesday and soon found myself in deep water. We came here in the morning and about noon we heard that there were more refugees that had arrived in Mantamados, in a boat. And they were coming to Mytilene, on foot, trying to find ΠΙΚΡΑ. So me and George headed out on the road to find them, to see how many they were, what was going on and everything. I didn't know how far it was and I realized that it was about 30km away.*

*We were going and going and we reached a point pitch dark, no village around and then we saw them in the night, walking, about thirty people in groups some in front some in*



*the back, many families with children, all of them exhausted and they were all asking how far is the camp.*

*I said to George, "let's pick up some of them" I don't know" he said," it's illegal to transport them", " I don't know if we should, we shouldn't break them apart". And then it started raining heavily and we saw a family standing in the middle of the road, the baby was crying, his father in terrible condition, rubbing his child's feet, the little one absolutely exhausted from walking, his mother in bad shape too and next to her another family with a pregnant woman.*

*George said to me, "ok, that's it, we take them, there's no way we can leave them here like this". We gave them something to eat, we had some sandwiches for ourselves, the child had some bites, we got them in the car, we talked a little with the rest, we took the three women with us and their child and Amir on my lap because there was not enough space left. His mother told me " will you take him with you?" ok, they weren't speaking English or anything, it was more the body language and I took him on my lap.*

*The moment we started, we had turned on the radiator, I could feel him, you know, lean on me and fall asleep. And as I was holding his little hand to see if it was warm enough he tightened his grip. I have never felt anything so overwhelming in my whole life. Yes, we were tired, we were soaking wet, my feet were all wet, I had woken up at 5am this morning but still this was the reward not just for the day, for the whole year.*

*Manina*



*She was one of the women that had arrived at night, she was cold, her clothes were wet and she sat where we had the kitchen, we offered her some tea and tried to warm her up, we found some dry clothes for her to wear. She was pregnant and she had come with one of her children. Her husband was left behind, somewhere near Mantamados and he was coming on foot. And she in her anguish, she had just arrived, she didn't know where her husband was, she took out of her pocket some nuts and raisins and offered them to us, a person that has nothing offering something to us. Ok, this was a moment that will stay with me forever.*

*Maria*



*The first night I arrived at PIKPA I met a young Afghan woman. She was pregnant and she also had a small child, of about 2 years old. She was very sad and I learned that some people met her on the road, walking from Mandamado, they took the women and the children in their car but there wasn't enough room for the men. So they left them behind, to pick them up later. When they returned, though, they didn't find them on the road.*

*The woman was crying because she thought her husband was lost. Though we tried hard we couldn't comfort her. The next day a car went out again to look for her husband and found him, walking on the road. When she saw him, she couldn't believe her eyes. And her husband, Ruhola, later shared with us his experience from that night.*

*Marily*

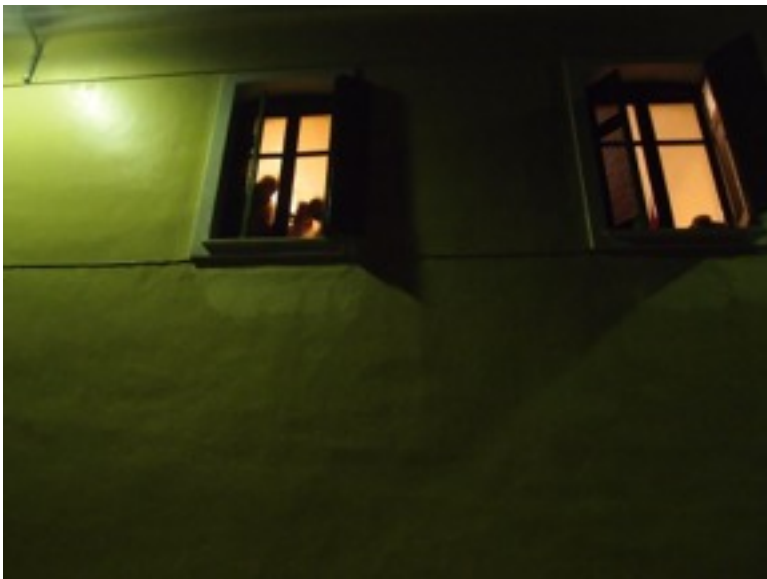


*I* come from Afghanistan and I want to go to France.

*When we arrived in Mytilene, after we walked for 7 hours in the rain and were very cold we saw a church and we went inside.*

*After a while a woman came to pray, she lit a candle and left. Afterwards a man with a taxi arrived. He told us how much the fare was to take us to the city but we told him we didn't have that money. The taxi driver told us that we should stay here, in the church. He brought us food, clothes, blankets, everything.*

*I couldn't believe that there are so kind people in Greece. That they are so willing to help, that they would bring us food,*



*clothes, shoes, trousers, sweaters. I thought they would kick us out from the church. He even asked us what we want to eat, we told him that we don't eat pork and he brought us chicken.*

*This was the most beautiful experience that I had during the journey. And I thank you that we can stay here in PIKPA and for everything you offer to us.*

*Ruhola*





*L*eaving Lesbos I traveled in the same ferry with 3 Afghan families that were staying in ΠΙΚΡΑ. When we arrived in Piraeus we walked together to the train station. They wanted to go to the center of Athens. They were so happy that they had arrived to Athens.

The one who spoke better English, a mathematician in his country, told me “now, finally, we will be free”. I was wondering if they will find what they are looking for or they will be seized by fear and disappointment. A small girl walking by my side was looking impressed all around her: the buildings, the streets, the cars, the people.

When we entered the train she sat next to me. It was almost Christmas and a street musician with an accordion, an old man, was singing traditional carols. I gave some coins to the little girl to give him and he told her “I will sing in your wedding”. I nodded to him that she doesn’t understand Greek, “Tell her”, he insisted.

Another woman, sitting close by, made the sign of a ring with her fingers, to explain the marriage. The little girl was looking strangely around her, the train, the buildings, the people.

*Olga*



*It was a sunny day in PIKPA and the doors were wide open. Nargis, her mother and her younger sister are still waiting. It has been 10 days now and they still haven't been given the papers by the police. When are they going to arrest us? She asks me. In this question, no one can answer.*

*Unfortunately, I know its not logical, but only the police knows when.*

*Two days later, the three women are behind bars. We provide them food, they are hungry. They are depressed and their faces don't look peaceful anymore. I wonder what this humiliation is for, what it serves. I also feel a victim of this nonsense violence. Why those people who are begging to be arrested, are then locked in a jail. Do they thing that they will escape? It's a joke! I ask the officer, I follow orders, he said. Nonsense and arbitrariness became orders, here.*

*These months we stood next to people whose only alternative was an inhumane detention, which is very hard to accept and totally absurd for us. We know that we fought, next to them and we have been also affected by the police repression but at least we were not absent, we shared, we didn't let them alone in their complete weakness and the darkness that the policies of violence and fear had spread upon them.*

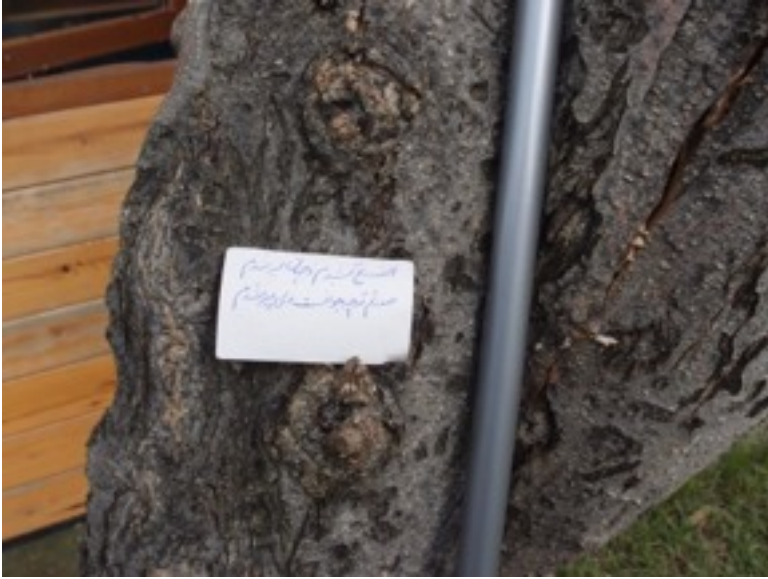
*PIKPA has been closed some days now, and the refugees are kept in the police station. Some people are kept there for two weeks, a minor was there for over a month.*

*Detention under these circumstances is a torture, can anybody hear us ? It is also useless and nonsense. Who are they that you put in jail? Are they criminals? Are they dangerous? Is this the way of preventing them not to migrate? When you are chased, you run away.*



*When you risk your life in a very dangerous crossing, the police violence and detention might be insulting for all of us on the other side of the border but can't stop the refugees. We keep on fighting against detention in Mitilini, no refugee will be alone, no one in the darkness of the state repression.*

*Efi*



*Found in ПИКРА on a tree , friday 21 dez 2012  
After all refugees had left to the police.*

*To the world:*

*I saw lots of sorrows  
That even the world is telling me: hey stop!  
I am full of sorrows!  
I can not see the sorrow in your face anymore.  
My face might look young,  
but i am not younger anymore,  
I am old.*



*The Village of All Together is a network of 27 different NGO's and individuals in Mytilene. It is based on the already existing solidarity initiatives of the local community aiming to expand and co-ordinate the attempts of the people of Mytilene to support each other . Our first actions concerned medical support, food providing, refugees support, education, environmental protection, exchanging of goods and services in the way of an alternative economy , selforganisation.*

<http://xoriooloimazi.blogspot.gr>

<http://lesvos.w2eu.net>

<http://migrant.diktio.org>





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*stroux-<http://lesvos.w2eu.net>, bierdel-<http://borderline-europe.de>, and stelios kraounakis.*



*The Village of All Together has borrowed its name from the fairy tale of Sokratis Matzouranis a writer originated from Mytilini. It's a fairy tale talking about a world based in different values that the writer offers as inheritance to his grandson. As the writer comments in his articles in "The road of the Left": Comrades, I am very proud that you pick me as the godfather of this great effort of you.*

*I wish you to prove that The Village of All Together is not just a fairytale.*

*Mytilini,  
March 2013*



*PIKPA has guests again*



*solidarity goes on!*

