

Early Report

ASHES OF THE FAILURE OF EUROPEAN HUMANISM

09/09/2020 By *Salim Nabi*



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Moria camp in Lesvos, Greece burned down almost entirely, and it was long overdue; it should have been burned down years ago as a gesture of Europe's respect for everyone's right to life as part of its legacy of European humanism. However, the camp was continuously extended, the conditions continuously worsened, and all that with the clear gesture of European support for the continuous dehumanization of people fleeing European policies in their own countries. Moria should be left in ashes as a reminder that Europe has still much to learn from its past when after World War II millions of denationalized people stepped forward from the ashes of the war with the demand for the right to life, whence the Convention on the Status of Refugees was envisioned. To this day, Europe has not learned what it should have learned then, and the result is nothing short of dehumanizing camps like Moria.

The ashes of Moria on the borders of Europe shall serve as a reminder that to this day we have not understood the responsibility that the words freedom and humanism bring with them, and that the right to life is nowhere near the priority it should get over national and international policies and corporate profits.

Over the night of September 8 to September 9, 2020 a fire broke out in the largest refugee camp in Europe, the notorious Moria Camp. It is not clear what caused the fire, although Greek media and politicians, including prime minister Mitsotakis, rushed to blame it on the reaction of the refugees to the health measures (complete lockdown of the camp). What is, however, also clear as witnesses in the camp stated, there was a demonstration against the situation which was met with the teargas response of the riot police that guards the camp. No one has questioned so far as to whether a teargas grenade can cause fire in a place overcrowded with tents. But let us put that aside, the fact remains that the camp burned down, and what remained of it is burning as we are composing this report on Wednesday night, September 09, 2020.

The fire in Moria was not a new thing, fires are a routine occurrence; an electrician who worked in Moria once said: "If you don't have a fire with all those make-shift electrical wirings, it will be a miracle."

And a miracle it was that for so long the authorities managed to keep the "hell" going, and a miracle, too, it was that the dehumanized population managed to avoid burning down to ashes the hell that was designed and manufactured for them. But alas! It eventually happened. And, of course, needless to remind you that people who knew Moria closely enough shouted over their lungs, time and again, that this dehumanizing camp was a disaster in the making.

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But all that fell on deaf ears – deaf ears of politicians, deaf ears of the media, and the blind eyes of what we have to term so proudly the “civil society”. Not much of that civility was ever felt in Moria. But what now?

From March 2020, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the camp has been on a lockdown; given the overcrowded condition of the camp, the lack of sufficient sanitary facilities, the lack of medical support, and last but not least, the lack of preparedness for the onslaught of the virus upon the population, those who were monitoring the situation did not hesitate to warn European public and politicians about the disastrous possibility of the pandemic making its way into the camp. But all those pleas fell on deaf ears – again, of politicians in Greece who are riding an anti-immigrant slate, the politicians around Europe who are riding the same horse of anti-immigration, and of course, the media which is predominantly preoccupied with the desire of hate-filled right wing, corona-deniers.

But the reality on the ground was obvious for those who were there:

Covid-19 will eventually make its way into the camp, it will spread like a wild fire, and it will become unstoppable if that happens.

Then the nightmare of 2020, Covid-19, arrived in the camps. It was in this context that a quarantine section was created in Moria for the case that the virus will appear, and it was in this context that the protest began, which then led to the fires. The fire swallowed most of Moria, and the following evening, Wednesday September 09, 2020, another fire broke out which is currently consuming what is left of the camp. In the meantime, the following is the “news”:

While more than 12,000 people, approximately 40% of them children, who were seeking a home and a life found nothing more than a tent or a container to live in, in the aftermath of the fire they are now faced with absolute homelessness; in the language of academic description of poverty this amounts to “absolute poverty” in which one does not have a roof over one’s head.

In the morning of September 09, 2020, the Greek prime minister held a ministerial level meeting to address the situation; immediately after the meeting a “state of emergency” was declared for Lesvos. What the measures imply and contain are still unclear, but what can be discerned from the move is that all of the state’s resources, including the military and other repressive branches, are, now, at the disposal of the government to deploy on the island in order to meet its objectives. What the objectives are remains more, or less, clear:

As of 18:00 Athens time, it is clear that four hundred (400) unaccompanied minors will be transferred to the mainland, and the latest news on the ground is that they have partially departed from the airport for Thessaloniki. According to the briefing of the authorities, another thousand vulnerable persons will be transferred to the mainland by ships, one commercial ferry and two naval ships.

The rest of the inhabitants of Moria will receive tents, which means rebuilding Moria. **Rebuilding Moria, however, means a completely closed structure.**

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In February 2020 Athens attempted to build a closed camp in Lesvos north, which was met with the harsh resistance of the local population, but under the pretext of Covid-19 the current government quickly moved to turn Moria into a completely closed camp by November 2, 2020; and now on the ashes of the “hell of Europe”, the government in Athens believes it has found the legitimacy for its closed camps.

However, already the local population, although with strong anti-migrant sentiments, have already started mobilizing against the reopening of Moria or the establishment of new camps. Nevertheless, what resistance to the government policy and plans may mean under the conditions of a state of emergency remain unclear, as the state of emergency, by definition, gives the government powers that it legally does not have under “normal” circumstances.

One thing is, however, clear: under circumstances where the national government and local authorities drum for war against migrants, vigilante far-right elements will always feel empowered, and in Lesvos the situation is no other way.

In the aftermath of the fire refugees, NGO workers, volunteers and other people who tried to help the refugees fleeing the fire came under attack of such vigilante far-right groups, and in the coming days and weeks, just as in the aftermath of February 2020 riots, we can only expect an increase in attacks on all non-Greeks and any Greek that works for an NGO or stands in solidarity with the refugees.

And concerning the fate of the residents of Moria there is only one thing to say: **Moria shall never be opened, again; its ashes should serve as a reminder of the failure of European humanism for 5 consecutive years;** and, last but not least, all the refugees must be transferred to the various European countries as part of the EU spirit of shared responsibility, otherwise Europe has already signed its resignation from its claims to solidarity and humanism. **Evacuate the camps on the islands!**

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