Reluctant Refuge: an activist archaeological approach to alternative refugee shelter in Athens (Greece)

Abstract:

Keywords:
Contemporary archaeology; forced migration; refugees; squats; cultural heritage; landscape

Main text:

Introduction

Say the words 'refugee shelter' and images of row upon row of identical tents emblazoned with non-governmental (NGO) logos come to mind. But such camps represent a fraction of the types of shelter that refugees encounter. The effect of the mismatch between the numbers of refugees that European host governments are prepared to deal with and the actual number of those seeking refuge is that many refugees find what I term 'reluctant refuge' – precarious, alternative shelter. The current Global Challenges Research Fund supported *Architectures of Displacement* project is a joint enterprise between the Refugee Studies Centre and the Pitt-Rivers Museum (University of Oxford), the aim of which is to use cross-disciplinary approaches to capture the full range of temporary accommodation for refugees. As postdoctoral researcher and one of three archaeologists on the team, I undertook fieldwork in Athens, Greece, in March 2017, data from which is drawn upon throughout this paper.

Refugees must take very little with them, typically just a little food and a few personal belongings. Having fled their homes, refugees must try to find shelter. They might find themselves accommodated in camps, 'villages' of tents or shipping containers, government detention centres or purpose-built 'IKEA' shelters (Wainwright, 2017). Refugees are often forced to take shelter in forests and rock-shelters, derelict industrial or agricultural buildings. They must make shelters beneath bridges and on unfamiliar streets, using all manner of discarded materials – cardboard, plastic advertising banners and security fences, for example. These actions and practices are explicitly material providing validation, if any were needed, for using archaeological methodologies to understand them. In approaching transient sites of alternative refugee accommodation using archaeological and ethnographic means, I develop more nuanced, humanised understandings of the lived refugee experience. In documenting the creative ways in which refugees help themselves - by adapting, reusing and recycling materials – my aim is to contribute narratives that counter problematic configurations of refugees as dependent victims. Instead, I reconstruct refugees as active agents, people making their lives the best that they can be[1].

Architect Cathrin Brun, with Iris Marion Young, has argued for the introduction of 'home as a critical value' when thinking about shelter for refugees (Young, 2005, Brun, 2015). Following Brun, I conceive of refugee shelter as encompassing not just architectural and material elements but also intangible social systems that form the 'enabling structure that provides a facilitating environment for making home' (Brun, 2015, p. 48). Indeed, as anthropologist Sandra Dudley has pointed out in relation to life in refugee camps:

'Attempting to feel 'at home' is part of coming to terms with everyday life within refugee camps, and together with seeking to make sense of the traumatic displacement processes that preceded that life, it

[1] As an archaeologist, it is not my place to decide whether or not a person is legally classified a refugee or migrant. In much of the current Refugee Studies literature the words 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', and 'migrant', are used interchangeably, and while I fully recognise that legal differences do exist (cf. Edwards, 2015), I have chosen to use the term 'refugee' throughout this paper. Those who cannot live at home are forced to *seek refuge* elsewhere. To my mind, this makes them refugees (cf. Rosakou 2012, 563).

is essentially a *cultural* process: an attempt to give meaning to experience…' (Dudley, 2011, p. 743, emphasis in original).

In this paper, I take an archaeological approach to tangible material culture and intangible practices at three sites of alternative refugee shelter, including routines and rituals that refugees and solidarity activists use in attempting to make them more like home. I first briefly theorise what I mean by 'reluctance' in this context, before introducing the concept of Contemporary Archaeology, in order to establish what makes fieldwork drawn on explicitly archaeological. Second, I contextualise my three sites of alternative refugee shelter within the context of immigration to Athens since the 1990s. I then describe my methodology before offering three portraits of sites of alternative refugee shelter and discussing how these feature in what I term as a landscape of reluctant refugee shelter.

Reluctant *filoksenia*?

In conceiving of the city of Athens as a landscape of reluctant refugee shelter, I wish first to acknowledge that there are nuanced reasons why Greece, and more specifically Athens, might be 'reluctant' to house refugees. First, Greece defies the usual 'push or pull' factor, common to international policy rhetoric (Van Hear, et al., 2018). That is, Greece is neither a desired destination for most refugees (pull) or a place from which people flee (push); instead, it is somewhere in-between and for this reason, it encourages new ways to think about how refugees are accommodated. Since the 1990s, immigration to Athens has led to huge transformations to central Athenian neighbourhoods, to which I return in more detail later in this paper.

Setting out to theorise 'reluctance', I consulted a broad range of literature for definitions. Although the term 'reluctance' is widely used across the social and political sciences and features in many article titles it is very rarely unpacked, the best conceptualisation that I could find coming from International Relations (see Destradi 2017). The etymological origins of the word 'reluctant' indicate that it derives from the Latin noun 'luctus'[2], meaning 'grief', 'sorrow' or 'mourning', collective terms that deal with notions of sadness, loss and change. These associations belie the currently accepted semantic relationship between reluctance and regret or less-than-perfect circumstances and also convey a sense of endurance or 'time lag' (Rosen & Tesser, 1970, cited in Destradi 2017). Reluctance can also refer to a 'lack of interest' (de Senarclens, 2013), an 'unwillingness' (Greenhalgh, et al., 2011), or a form of 'resistance' (Wilson, et al., 2010). As Destradi notes, reluctance is:

> '…most usually associated, among other things, with a **highly ambivalent attitude**, **hesitant behaviour** and a **selective commitment**…' (Destardi 2017, 319, emphases in original).

To these attributes and characteristics, I would add that reluctance can be the response to a perceived *lack of choice*. For example, many of the refugees with whom I spoke in Athens were reluctant to live in housing squats but described it as preferable to living rough in the city parks, in dangerous, squalid conditions.

Athens as a landscape of reluctant refugee shelter can be characterized as 'selectively committed' (Destradi 2017, 319). That is, the quality and safety of the squats and other informal refugee services that I documented during fieldwork varied enormously. I do not suggest that Athens is an inherently more (or less) compassionate place than other European cities rather, I wish to highlight that through a combination of pan-European political *recalcitrance* and *hesitation* (cf. Destradi 2017, 324) about how to handle the increased number of refugees, Athens (and Greece more broadly) has little choice

but to provide shelter. Although, as Katerina Rosakou (2017) observes, Greek cultural associations with hospitality or *filoksenia* (literally, 'love' and 'stranger') are well established.

With long cultural and historical legacy, the 'stranger' made welcome in Greece might have been the pilgrim or merchant, nineteenth century northern European on the 'Grand Tour' or the sunshine seeking tourist. The poor immigrant from Albania, Afghan asylum seeker and most recently, the Syrian refugee have also been recipients of Greek *filoksenia*. However, the Greek cultural practice of being hospitable to strangers also sustains boundaries between Greeks and 'outsiders'. As Rosakou puts it, *filoksenia*:

> '…is a practice of sovereignty and control over the stranger. It is a one-way offer and also a means of dealing with alterity. It is an act of interest and, at the same time, one of power.' (Rosakou 2012, 565)

Filoksenia then, like both the refugee camp and the squat, has a temporal element. Hospitality is extended to strangers on a *temporary* basis.

Throughout fieldwork, expanded upon below, specific areas of the city of Athens emerged as being more or less friendly towards refugees, more or less open to addressing their needs. I conceive of this landscape as reluctant because it is fragmented, hesitant, and ambivalent, complicated by tangible anti-refugee rhetoric in the form of, for example, the heavy presence of the Far-Right Golden Dawn political party and institutionally racist armed police[3].

What is Contemporary Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of material culture and its relationship with people, past and present. Archaeological data – landscapes, buildings, objects - are not passive things confined to particular periods of history but multi-temporal, politically active constituents of the present. Indeed, as Chris King observes in his response to James R. Dixon's article, which asked, 'Is the present day post-medieval?':

'Archaeology cannot make a place for itself by seeking out spaces which have somehow been left available by gaps in other written, visual or mnemonic records; our province is the whole sweep of human existence, and we are the richer for the new breadth of interest that studies of recent and contemporary archaeology provide.' (King , 2011, p. 323)

If the focus is the nature of archaeological methods and data then anything may be studied archaeologically – a megalith, a medieval mosque or the material culture of migration (cf. Buchli and Lucas 2001, 3).

Over the past thirty years, rather than standing aside from the political climate in which archaeology is practised, many archaeologists have sought to integrate values of equality and social justice into their everyday work. In the United States, anthropological methods have been incorporated into archaeology for over forty years (cf. Tax 1975) and, to some degree, my own style of archaeological work shares more in common with U.S. anthropological archaeology (cf. Shott, 2005, pp. 5-6). I prioritise working *with the people* whose material culture I study and unapologetically seek to practice contemporary archaeology as an explicit form of social activism (cf. Stottman 2010). I contend that by documenting the material constitution of contemporary social experiences, *alongside* those for

[3] I was accompanied on fieldwork in Athens by my mother and young son. My mother had her purse stolen while we were on the Metro train. The police told her that it was a migrant who had stolen it even though we know it was a Greek con-man because he spoke to us to distract us and was so quick to pickpocket the purse as the train left the station that we were powerless to stop him. Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld had a similar experience that he also attributed to entrenched racist and anti-migrant attitudes by the Athenian police. See, Herzfeld, 2011, p.23

whom they are a reality, it is possible to better understand the motivations of, and pressures faced by, particular groups (see, for examples, Atalay, et al. 2014, Dé Leon, 2015, Kiddey, 2017). Such approaches can lead to more 'authentic' (cf. Graves Brown, 2013) interpretations of contemporary issues. In some cases, such methods might lead directly to improved rights for descendant groups, for example, those whose ancestors suffered the worst atrocities of colonialism. In other cases, particular social groups may be empowered to take ownership of the ways in which they are represented. Finally, in prioritising non-expert community engagement, I favour archaeological methodologies which are accessible and inexpensive, for example, field-walking, counter-mapping, undertaking ethnographic interviews and the collaborative interpretation of material culture. Data gathered in this way contribute an explicitly material dimension to knowledge about contemporary social issues that are often otherwise explained using dematerialised legal or political discourse.

Athens: some background

Immigration is not a new phenomenon in Athens[4]. Unlike cities in many of the traditional 'pull' (Van Hear, et al., 2018) countries in western and northern Europe, Athens has a long history of housing refugees and ethnic diversity has conventionally been connected to transformations of the spatial hierarchy of the city (Kandylis, et al., 2012). In the last twenty-five years or so, economic and political migrants from Eastern Europe, Africa and South Asia have occupied the urban landscape in precarious conditions similar to those experienced by refugees today. In this section of the paper, I very briefly discuss the 'crisis before "The Crisis"' (Dalakoglou, 2013), in order to contextualise my fieldworks sites and show the city of Athens to be an already diverse, precarious urban landscape.

Greece experienced one of the European Union's (EU) highest rates of economic growth between the mid 1990s and 2007 when the recession hit. Shortly after this time, the Greek government hiked up taxes and imposed strict austerity measures, plunging many of those then living in the country into unemployment and homelessness, the pre-crisis economic boom having left thousands of Greece's poorest people excluded from material benefits (Kaplanis, 2011). As the most south-eastern of the EU nation states, Greece's geographic proximity to Turkey, made the country a key stop on refugee routes towards western and northern Europe.The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics show that in the year 2015, 856, 723 refugees arrived in Greece by sea[5]. Most were accommodated in large camps, flats and houses. Others found temporary shelter in squats or were living homeless on the streets. Most refugees planned to stay in Greece for just a day or two, intent on reaching countries in northern and western Europe, where many had relatives already settled. Until the EU/Turkey Deal, most refugees, many of whom were significantly wealthier than Greece's 'neo-poor' (Kaika, 2012), saw debt-ridden Greece as a place to pass quickly through on their way to the Macedonian border. All that changed on the 18th March 2016 when the EU/Turkey deal came into force. This deal promised that any 'irregular migrants' (including asylum seekers) who entered Greece after 20th March 2016 would be returned to Turkey. In return, Turkey would receive an expedited payment of €6 billion to help provide for hundreds of thousands of refugees. Under the deal, Turkish nationals would be granted visa-free travel to Europe and a number of migrants returned to Turkey would eventually be relocated to countries across Europe. Not long after the deal came into force, Greece's asylum appeals committees ruled, in many cases, that Turkey was not in fact a safe place for refugees, instead insisting that all asylum applications had to be assessed in Greece. At this point, with routes to the north and west of Greece closed off and borders strengthened, thousands of refugees found themselves stuck in Greece.

In 2017, the EU provided €135.5m to the UNHCR to deliver 22,000 urban accommodation places and pre-defined monthly cash grants (through a dedicated card) to refugees in Greece, under the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme (ESTIA)[6]. The intention of

[4] See, for examples of how the central neighbourhoods of Athens have been transformed over time, particularly since the 1990s - http://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/
[5] https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179
[6] ESTIA is funded by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

ESTIA is to move refugees out of camps and into apartments and to provide them with cash cards that they can use to choose for themselves how best to cover their basic daily needs. However, not all of the funds intended to help address the refugee crisis in Greece find their way to those for whom they are intended. For example, an EU anti-fraud office investigation has recently been opened following criticism that the Greek defence minister, Panos Kammenos, mismanaged EU funds. Kammenos, who has denied all wrong-doing, is accused of directing catering and plumbing contracts to businessmen linked to Greek government ministers without opening them for competitive tender and routinely over-charging the state[7].

Of the 60,000 refugees currently still stuck in Greece[8] some 2,500 men, women and children have found shelter in derelict or abandoned buildings, squats, and co-operatives in Athens[9]. These sites are the focus of this paper. In the sections that follow I examine how they are organised and constructed, how people use them, and what might be learned from them as models.

Methodology

In March 2017, I spent three weeks conducting archaeological fieldwork on sites of alternative refugee shelter in Athens. I travelled to the city having undertaken several months of desk-based research, including familiarising myself with the rich history of Athens' squat culture. I formed a loose plan that, upon arrival in Athens, I would meet two translator contacts (one of whom was a squatter himself) and physically go to squats where I knew refugees were accommodated.

Informal Familiarisation

Squats are highly politicised spaces, often protected like fortresses (cf. Vasudevan, 2017). I did not want to endanger any squat occupants –refugees or others - or *appear* to threaten anyone so I prepared to undertake fieldwork at a pace set by the people I met. To achieve this, I rented a small apartment close to the area where most refugees were accommodated in squats and spent my time 'hanging out' in squats, getting to know people, and attending 'assemblies'[10]. As far as is possible in three weeks, I familiarised myself with the places, routes and services that refugees identified as contributing to a sense of shelter in the city (Fig 1). Staying very close to the squats, I was able to respond quickly to particular events, for example, the eviction of the hospital squat[11]. Ideally, I would have volunteered as a solidarity activist in a refugee housing squat but at the time I was six months pregnant and needed to take extra care of myself and unborn baby. Although, it is important to emphasise that many pregnant and nursing refugee women have no choice but to live in squats that vary in levels of cleanliness, comfort, and safety.

Collaboration challenges

I had hoped that I would be able to work collaboratively with refugees to document and record their perspectives. To a degree, this was possible but there were obstacles to do with transience and the need to preserve anonymity. Many refugees with whom I spoke were interested in the concept of documenting their accommodation and agreed that their experiences of such shaped notions of self-identity, enabling or disempowering them as agents in 'the crisis'. However, the first difficulty that I encountered was that three weeks was barely long enough to understand the complexity of the full extent of squats in the city. I countered this by focusing on fewer squats. Second, the transient nature of both squatting and the refugee experience meant that it was difficult to work with the same people every day. Instead, I worked for short amounts of time with as many people as were willing to collaborate with me. A third point is that although many refugees were happy to work with me very few wanted to be identified. Reasons for this include that people were waiting for paperwork related

[7] https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/eu-investigates-corruption-claims-linked-to-refugee-funds-for-greece-z0ntn2bxp
[8] http://www.unhcr.org/greece.html
[9] https://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/05/11/number-of-refugees-living-in-athens-squats-on-the-rise/
[10] Lots of squats have regular meetings called 'assemblies'.
[11] https://cantevictsolidarityenglish.noblogs.org/post/2017/03/17/eviction-of-2-refugee-squats-in-athens-villa-zografou-the-hospital-squat-on-alkiviadou/

to asylum claims and felt that comment on their situation might jeopardise their success. Others wished to remain anonymous because they were from countries not recognised as producing refugees (for example, Morocco). I took the decision to anonymise people by default and in cases where people gave me permission to use their names, to use only first names. A further point is that some squatters and activists denied me any access to refugees, citing their protection as the reason. In some cases, this was due to a perceived difference in political ideology (for example, some anarchists would not engage with me because, as a researcher from the University of Oxford, I represented an elite arm of the establishment). In other cases, solidarity activists were paternalistic gatekeepers, speaking on behalf of refugees, refusing to acknowledge my research as an alternative form of solidarity activism.

I set out from my rented apartment each morning with a range of equipment, including: an iPhone (camera and audio recorder), paper and pens. As refugees were engaged daily in running essential errands (for example, seeking papers, legal or medical advice, attending language classes etc.) it soon became evident that it was futile to arrange meetings. Instead, I found it more effective to physically go to the places where I knew refugees would be and remain open to working with whoever was available. Working with two translators (one Greek, the other Arabic), I started by explaining the project and asking refugees whether they would be prepared to show me where they found shelter in the city, describing or drawing what it meant to them. Over three weeks I gathered a diverse range of descriptions, photographs and drawings. Together, these materials started to indicate that particular routes and journeys through the city were more heavily associated with refugee use than others.

Many sites identified by refugees were squats but several were NGO projects, co-operatives or crowd-funded enterprises. For reasons of comparative analysis, I present portraits of three sites identified by the refugees with whom I worked: 1) City Plaza (a squat); 2) Soho Hotel (run by NGO *Solidarity Now*), and; 3) Khora (a crowd-funded co-operative). These sites have been chosen because they offer the best range of alternative forms of temporary refugee shelter in Athens. Data presented here were correct at the time of my visit in March 2017 but owing to the highly transient nature of the subject, specifics might have changed in the intervening months. Observations and data remain relevant due to having some evident historic and international legacy (cf. Vasudevan, 2017).

Three Portraits

The three portraits that follow focus on sites that lie just outside Exarchia, the central Anthenian neighbourhood most widely associated with anarchism and squats. My point in focusing on these sites is to demonstrate the degree to which it is possible to interpret the wider city as a landscape of reluctant refugee shelter. A further reason for focusing on sites outside Exarchia is that, within that area, some anarchists promote a militant form of political ideology that can have the effect of excluding all other forms of social activism. While anarchists and other intellectually left-leaning volunteers were often involved in initiating housing squats, not all refugee housing squats in Athens abide by strict anarchist ideology. Equally, although City Plaza (see below) does not accept funds from the Syriza government (currently in power in Greece), the founding activists are in direct conversation with party organisations.

Throughout fieldwork, I relied on personal contacts and the discretion of particular volunteers to gain access to the sites described here. I was not always granted the same level of access, or access to all of the same types of areas, at every place that I documented. The challenges of negotiating fieldwork roles is well-recognised within ethnographic literature and, despite the fact that time was limited, I operated somewhere between ‘ardent activist’ and ‘buddy researcher’ (Snow, et al., 1986, pp. 383-384). With these caveats, I try to be consistent in the level of detail that I provide on the material surroundings that I encountered at each site of temporary refugee shelter detailed here.

City Plaza

City Plaza, located in Victoria, Athens, describes itself as a refugee housing squat (Fig 2). The seven-storey hotel building had been left unused by its owner for several years before activists opened it as a squat on the 26th April 2016, specifically to house refugees. When I visited City Plaza there were over

400 people housed there (including 180 children), from predominantly Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Entrance to the squat was gained by the main hotel entrance on a side street. The first time I went to the squat the informal volunteer security team asked who I was and what business I had. I gave my name, briefly described the research project and was directed to ask at reception to speak with Nasim Lomani, one of the founding activists based at City Plaza. The fact that the building had been designed to accommodate hundreds of tourists meant that it was more structurally suited to being repurposed as emergency accommodation for refugee families than some of the other disused buildings in Athens. The reception desk, situated in the old hotel lobby, was covered by two activist volunteers who answered the phone that kept ringing, answered residents' questions, and directed a near constant flow of academic researchers, film-producers, journalists, and photographers to various parts of the building.

My first impression of City Plaza was that it was well organised. It felt more like a community centre than any squat that I had previously been to. Nasim Lomani generously spared me half an hour, while all the time also answering questions from volunteers and residents who popped their heads around the door of the room in which we were speaking. I asked Nasim to explain how City Plaza had been repurposed to house refugees. He spoke quickly and eloquently, his phone vibrating constantly with calls and messages. In the thirty-minutes that I spent with Nasim, I heard him speak fluent English, Greek and Arabic, just three of the eight languages that he knows well. Nasim explained that City Plaza is run and maintained by its residents – refugees, solidarity activists, and volunteers. Everyone is welcome at City Plaza so long as they abide by a few strict rules - no racism, sexism or abuse of any kind. Nasim explained that, contrary to most refugee children, all of the children living at City Plaza attend local schools, enabling them to continue their education and their parents to integrate a little locally. Nasim said that he was happy for me to hang out at City Plaza and undertake fieldwork with residents so long as I respected peoples' individual wishes. I promised that I would not put anyone under any pressure to collaborate with me and that I would ask individuals for permission to take photographs. I also promised that I would not go up to the bedroom floors of the hotel, an area considered off-limits to all but City Plaza residents for reasons of privacy.

On the second floor of the hotel is a café and social space, a large dining room and an industrial kitchen. The café is the only place in City Plaza where residents have to pay a small amount for hot drinks and funds raised go to the City Plaza project. This is where I spent most of my time when I visited the squat each morning as it was the easiest place to start talking with residents, there being tables at which we could talk, write, and draw (Fig 3). Across the hall from the café is a large dining room and industrial kitchen in which refugees, activists, and volunteers work together on shifts to make meals for 400 people, three times a day. Everyone at City Plaza, regardless of gender or cultural norms, is obligated to take turns to cook, clean and take responsibility for various other domestic jobs. The squat receives no funds from the Greek government or NGOs, seeing its independence and the autonomous community that it generates as its essential strength. City Plaza is a friendly, safe, and comparatively comfortable place, a fact not lost to 4000 refugees living elsewhere in Athens who form the waiting list of people wanting to live there.

Soho Hotel

The Soho Hotel is also an ex-tourist hotel that was commissioned by the UNHCR to house refugees. Situated in a sorely deprived area of Athens widely associated with prostitution and drug-dealing, the eight-storey building houses over 200 men, women and children, from predominantly Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Entrance to the hotel is gained via a lift from street level to what was once the hotel reception. Each time I visited, a group of young volunteers huddled together behind tall screens. Each floor of the Soho Hotel is sparsely furnished with shabby, stained furniture more typical of squats than an officially sanctioned site of emergency shelter. When I visited the first time, single men, a few women and children sat on threadbare sofas around the edge of what had once been the hotel bar. Working with a translator, I asked the residents whether they would be happy to speak to me about their accommodation but all declined. Except for a collection of children's drawings taped to the screen that separates the volunteers from the residents, there were no material signs that the hotel had been requisitioned as emergency refugee housing.

On one visit to the Soho Hotel, I was given a short tour by the manager, Yannis Tentis, a clinical psychologist by training. Yannis took my translator colleagues and me to the eighth floor and showed us into a hotel bedroom that he had commandeered as an office. He immediately apologised for the mess. The furniture was tattered and the desk piled high with papers and cardboard boxes. "All the rooms look like this here," Yannis said, "It makes me angry that the owner is paid so much money by the UNHCR to maintain the building but clearly spends only the very minimum doing so." (Fig 4) The owner of the Soho Hotel is paid €3000 per day by the UNHCR to maintain the quality of the building and its furnishings; to change bed linen, clean the building and provide three meals daily for the hotel residents. It was very difficult to see where the money was being spent.

Khora

Khora is a co-operative, not a squat. It does not offer overnight accommodation, rather, Khora operates as a day-centre that offers a wide range of services for refugees, open daily between 8am-10pm. Khora was set up by a small group of humanitarians who met whilst volunteering in camps on the Greek islands. The group, from predominantly the U.K. and Sweden, dismayed by camp conditions, decided that more could be done to enable refugees to help themselves, which led them to crowdfund the money necessary to rent a building in Athens. Khora has an interesting relationship with the surrounding housing squats. Some squat collectives criticise Khora for renting a building rather than being part of 'the movement'. Khora told me that, while they support the broad aims of the anarchist movement in Athens, that is, to live more sustainably and efficiently, without reliance on state funding[12], they wanted to be able to plan for the long-term without the constant threat of eviction, hence why they chose a more secure form of tenure. Khora sits on the very edge of Exarchia, in Kolonaki.

Khora is entered via a brightly painted reception area with a busy information desk and several large information boards on which classes and useful numbers are written in coloured chalk. Several sofas allow people to relax while waiting to speak with volunteers. Here, refugees can charge their phone, use the internet and watch their children in an indoor play area. There is a small courtyard garden, open to everyone. At the information desk, volunteers speak English, Arabic and Farsi, as well as several other European languages. Khora has a Free Shop (in the basement), where refugees can take what they need from the well-organised rails and drawers of donated clothes and shoes. Venturing further up the building, there is a large community kitchen, much of the physical fabric of which was brought to the project by British volunteers who, on learning that a U.K. university was upgrading its kitchens, recognised that the stainless-steel units would be useful at Khora (Fig 5). In the internationally 'upcycled' kitchen meals are prepared by teams comprising refugees and volunteers who work together on shifts to serve between 600 to 800 meals, three times a day, and a snack after evening lessons. Khora serves only vegetarian meals so that all religious, cultural, and lifestyle diets are catered for and because it is more economical to do so, thus allowing more people to eat well.

There is a café on the floor above the kitchen with facilities so that people can drink fresh water and make tea and coffee for themselves at any time. The café is large and light, with sofas, benches, tables, and small balconies that let in fresh air. The benches and tables are hand-made by Khora project members in the workshop (see below), using waste materials found in skips around the city. During one of my visits a man named Hussein was making benches from dumped wooden shutters once typically seen at the window of many Athenian townhouses (Fig 6). A carpenter by trade, Hussein wanted to apply his skills in ways that were useful.

The remaining space in the Khora building is given over to various services and educational activities. There is a fully equipped workshop with power-tools and hand-tools donated to the project through online calls for specific items. There is a legal clinic, a fully licensed dentist's surgery, a music room, a women's space, a lending library, an I.T. suite, several language classrooms, and space where yoga is practised. When I visited the space, work was just starting on the roof terrace garden where project

[12] Khora accept no government funding or funding through the European Union, but they received £90,000 in their first year, from NGO *Help Refugees*

members planned to grow herbs and vegetables and create a peaceful area where people could take in spectacular views of the city.

Discussion

In the remaining part of this paper I discuss key themes that emerged during fieldwork. Some of these relate directly to the material environments encountered and these are prioritised. Others (for example, multi-lingualism) are not explicitly archaeological but contribute to the creation of an overall environment of shelter in which refugees attempt to make 'home' (cf. Brun 2016, 48, Dudley 2011, 743). But first, in order to meaningfully compare life at the three sites described above with life in humanitarian refugee camps, I briefly define the latter.

Michel Agier suggests that refugee camps are extraterritorial, exceptional, and exclusionary (Agier, 2014). Expanding on these categories, Simon Turner has observed that camps often remain unmapped (arguably because, to map a place is to risk making it permanent); that camps are simultaneously under the jurisdiction of the host society and exempt from it, and that those living in refugee camps are excluded from the host state (Turner, 2015, p. 141). While the fences that usually surround camps are often porous (for example, refugees leave the camp in search of work or other services and locals might venture into camps), a key feature of the refugee camp is that it remains delimited, with an inside and an outside. Camps are also, by definition, intended to be temporary places although, as Turner points out, those responsible for refugees do not consider camps to be a good solution to the problems of displacement:

'While large numbers of refugees reside in camps, none of the three durable solutions favoured by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—repatriation, resettlement and local integration—mentions camps. This paradox between intentions and practices means that millions of displaced persons live in situations that are deemed non-viable by those who are in charge of them'. (Turner, 2015, p. 142)

Inspired by Dudley (2011) and Brun (2017), I contend that refugee shelter should be designed with the intention of creating environments in which refugees can attempt to make (or remake) home, however minimally. I now discuss the various ways in which the three sites documented earlier in this paper may be seen to offer some potential improvements to current refugee shelter design.

Security

According to the refugees with whom I spoke variations of informal but consistent security was a tangible presence that contributed to feeling safer and more 'at home' (see Dudley, 2011 and Brun, 2016). At City Plaza, the security desk was crewed by members of the squat community. At Khora, security took the less visible form of surveillance by those staffing the information desk. Refugees in each case described how the presence of low level security, provided by members of the community, greatly enhanced the sense that each place offered real protection.

Choice and autonomy

At home, people have choices. They can choose when to leave/return, what time to get up/go to bed, what to eat, who to spend time with, how to decorate and organise their space, whether to wear shoes/pray/have pets etc. In the squats and co-operatives, the expectation that everyone is an active agent in their own right produces a similar sense of autonomy and choice. All the refugees with whom I spoke during fieldwork described the choice offered to them by the housing squats and co-operatives as imperfect but infinitely preferable to what they perceived to be total lack of choice in the camps. The people that I met at Khora slept each night at one of scores of housing squats across Athens. Although most of these offered only basic shelter, the level of choice available to refugees was improved by having daily access to Khora (and similar day centres, for example, the Melissa project[13]). The day centres offered choice in terms of finding legal/medical assistance, meals, opportunities to socialise, and attend language and other educational classes. One family – husband,

[13] https://www.facebook.com/Melissanetworkgreece33/

wife, two young daughters - travelled every day from the camp at Elleniko airport to Khora, a journey that involved an hour's train ride, followed by a half hour's walk, each way. Muhammed told me:

> *"We come to Khora every day because at the camp all we have is a small tent…no way to prepare food or wash properly…and there is nothing for the children to do. At Khora, we try to find out about relocation or at least how to make papers so that I can work. I don't want hand out…At home, we had everything we needed, a nice house, cars etc. My wife attends German lessons at Khora…our daughters can play safely here…we contribute to cooking meals...we can be a bit useful. At the camp, all we have is time, time and nothing to do."*

What Muhammed identified was the degree to which Khora enabled he and his family to retain limited but essential autonomy, critical for self-respect and dignity. His comment also speaks to the sociality of temporality in the context of 'protracted refugee situations'[14].

Food

Food – the type of food one eats, its preparation and enjoyment – can be materially defined and it can be utilised by refugees to make new places more bearable by rendering them more familiar (Dudley, 2011, p. 746). Conversations with refugees revealed the important role that food plays in making shelter places feel more like home. At City Plaza and Khora, teams of people worked together to prepare food in the kitchen. Each cooking team was encouraged to share recipes, flavours, and traditions. For example, at Khora, Swedish, Portuguese, English and Spanish food was prepared, as well as rice dishes, tabbouleh, breads and wraps that traditionally form Syrian and Afghan cuisine. One woman explained that being able to cook for her family was the single thing that she missed most from home and that Khora's policy of inviting everyone to cook profoundly helped to address her sense of loss and restore part of her personal and cultural identity:

> *"At Khora, I can be a little bit more myself because I cook for people…I hate to queue for a long time for plates of watery tomato sauce with spaghetti* [at the camp]. *This is terrible! I prefer even a simple fire, one pot, just a little vegetables and Za'atar, like a peasant! I prefer this…with this, I can make a good meal for my family. That is my job."*

At both Khora and City Plaza, food had the capacity to transcend conventional cultural and gender boundaries, contributing in valuable ways to increased tolerance and integration. For example, as Ibrahim told me:

> *"When I came to Greece…I started to cook, because eight months I am just cooking with volunteers in camps…Here in City Plaza there's…400 people…and we have very big kitchen...we all cooperate together…not just women…Men, women, everyone must cook. It is surprising for me but good because before, in Iraq, only my mother, only women can cook."*

Further to introducing Ibrahim and others to the convention of men and women taking turns in the preparation of food (and washing up and cleaning), the shared responsibility model adopted at City Plaza (and other squats) enables transformations of what it means to be Iraqi (Syrian, Afghan etc.). Simultaneously, recipes and traditions from across the Middle East are introduced and adapted using locally available ingredients, enabling refugees to perform important cultural practices at the same time as contributing positively to the host country. The joy of preparing and sharing food that is familiar satiates what Lust has described as 'hunger that is in the memory' (Lust, 1998, cited in Dudley 2011). In this sense, as Dudley says, '…food and drink become both metaphor for, and location of, an alienated past and an incomplete present…They sometimes convey a feeling of continuity between pre- and post-migration periods…' (Dudley, 2011, p. 749).

Embedded in the local neighbourhood

[14] http://www.unhcr.org/excom/standcom/40c982172/protracted-refugee-situations.html

In stark contrast to refugee camps that are usually located away from cities and other municipal centres (Turner, 2015, p. 141), the three sites of refuge shelter described above are embedded in the local neighbourhood. The proximity of each place to local shops, schools and public services was cited by refugees as extremely important in helping them to better understand and integrate into Athenian culture and also, valuable in helping to distract them from the trauma of leaving their homelands. City Plaza and Khora were particularly sensitive to the impact of their existence on local Greek residents and made efforts to facilitate integration between refugees and local non-refugees. As well as ensuring that refugee children attended local Greek schools (thereby also taking positive steps towards addressing the problem of trouble stored for later when thousands of children with no education would have little choice but to turn to crime), City Plaza was creative in enabling integration between refugees with the local non-refugee community. For example, I took my two-year old son to a City Plaza run children's party at Victoria Park that was intended to bring together refugee and non-refugee families. Similarly, at the time I visited, Khora was making a concerted effort to recruit local staff and volunteers, recognising the needs and talents of the Greek community. These approaches contributed to the improved local sustainability of each housing project.

Multi-lingual

Finally, although not specifically archaeological, the impressive plethora of languages that are spoken and understood among the refugee and solidarity squat networks contributes to the development of an environment of shelter where home becomes a critical value (cf. Young 2005, Brun 2016). At City Plaza, Nasim Lomani, speaks eight languages fluently, while most volunteers and refugees speak at least two. At Notara 26[15], a refugee housing squat located in Exarchia, I attended the weekly assembly[16] which is conducted in English but translated, real-time, into Arabic and Farsi, with clarifications made in Greek, German, French, and Spanish. The number of languages that I heard daily during fieldwork was formidable, and the speed with which accomplished translators could be found through informal networks was seriously impressive. Across the Athenian squat network, it is recognised that, for people to be genuinely empowered to take responsibility for their own welfare, they must first of all be able to participate in debates and conversations and this need is prioritised.

Conclusion

Clearly, squats and temporary accommodation alternatives such as those described here are not the perfect solution to the need to accommodate thousands of refugees in Europe. There are problems with squats, not least that tenure is insecure; occupants are vulnerable to trafficking, prostitution and drugs, and, in some cases, the political ambitions of factions who manipulate refugees for their own ideology. Also, state authorities do not know how many unaccompanied children are housed in squats across Athens[17]. However, with caveats, there are benefits to the smaller scale accommodation and data demonstrate that it is possible to deliver emergency shelter far more cheaply and humanely than via the so-called humanitarian camp. The 'D.I.Y.' units of shelter described in this paper afford refugees (and those who work in solidarity with them) environments in which they can consume and produce everyday items such as food and clothing, and engage in everyday maintenance activities, in ways that enable them to approach continuing familiar ways of life. This is not to suggest that life is not still distressing for refugees who live in squats and NGO flats. Rather, that in being enabled to take more responsibility for what they eat, wear, and how and where they spend their time, refugees preserve their agency and help to counter pernicious myths that they are passive dependents. The fact that the squats and co-operatives described here enable refugees to be actively involved in the day-to-day management of the spaces and take responsibility for quotidian aspects of catering, maintenance, and child-care, for example, helps to contribute to personal autonomy. Objects and other material culture play a vital role in enabling refugees to engage in familiar activities such as cooking,

[15] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Notara-26-Squat/191142627922103

[16] Assembly is the name given to weekly meetings at which all ideas and propositions are discussed, and further actions decided upon.

[17] I spent a day shadowing Faros, a Christian charity based in Athens whose sole aim is to help unaccompanied child refugees into safe accommodation and education. See http://www.faros.org.gr

socialising, and performimg religious and cultural rituals which are ‘practices of remembering’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 148).

The city of Athens has undergone huge changes since the 1990s and refugees, from many places have been part of the transformations, particularly in terms of housing. These changes have been compounded more recently by the effects of the debt crisis that plunged thousands of Greece’s poorest people into unemployment and poverty at the same time as leaving many large public buildings lying empty. The combination of both the so-called refugee crisis and the debt crisis attracted squatters and activists from around the world, which in turn has led to the creation of many more housing squats in the city, within and outside Exarchia. By approaching the city through a distinctly archaeological lens, it is possible to see how refugees (and those working in solidarity) use and empty buildings and adapt other materials in resourceful and creative ways that both retain pre-exile ways of life for refugees (for example, carpenter Hussein’s benches and tables made from discarded wooden shutters) and also transform cultural norms. In these ways, objects play key roles in enabling refugees to both hold on to their cultural identity and also, find other ways to be Syrian (Iraqi, Afghan etc.). It is not the job of archaeologists to allocate humanitarian resources, but we are good at identifying relationships between people, places, and things. As an archaeology of the contemporary world, this paper seeks to contribute usefully to debates on how lived experiences in refugee accommodation might be improved.

Bibliograohy

Agier, M., 2014. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government.* English ed. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity.

Atalay, S., Clauss, L. R. & McGuire, R. H., 2014. *Transforming Archaeology: Activist Practices and Prospects.* s.l.:Routledge.

Brun, C., 2015. Home As A Critical Value: from shelter to home in Georgia. *Refuge,* 31(1), pp. 43-54.

Buchli, V. & Lucas, G., 2001. *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past.* London: Routledge.

Chrysopolous, P., 2017. [Online]
Available at: http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/05/11/number-of-refugees-living-in-athens-squats-on-the-rise/
[Accessed April 2018].

Clayton, J. & Holland, H., 2015. *United Nations High Commission for Refugees.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html
[Accessed 12 January 2018].

Dalakoglou, D., 2013. The Crisis before "The Crisis": Violence and Urban Neoliberalism in Athens. *Social Justice,* 39(1(127)), pp. 24-42.

Dé Leon, J., 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: living and dying on the migrant trail.* Oakland: University of California Press.

de Senarclens, C., 2013. State reluctance to use alternatives to detention. *Forced Migration Revuew,* September, p. 60.

Destradi, S., 2017. Reluctance in internatinal politics: a conceptualization. *European Journal of International Relations,* 23(2), pp. 315-340.

Dickens, P., 1989. Human Nature, Society and the Home.. *Housing Studies,* 4(4), pp. 227-237.

Dixon, J. R., 2011. Is the present day post-medieval?. *Post-medieval archaeology,* 45(2), pp. 313-321.

Dudley, S., 2011. Feeling at Home: producing and consuming things in Karenni refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. *Population, Space and Place,* 17(1), pp. 742-755.

Edwards, A., 2015. *Refugee or Migrant - word choice matters.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html
[Accessed 13 December 2017].

Graves Brown, P., 2013. Authenticity. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeology of the Contemporary World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Greenhalgh, T., Russell, J., Ashcroft, R. E. & Parsons, W., 2011. Why National eHealth Programs Need Dead Philosophers: Wittgensteinian Reflections on Policymakers' Reluctance to Learn from History. *The Millbank Quarterly,* 22 December.
Herzfeld, M., 2011. Crisis Attack: Impromptu Ethnography in the Greek Maelsto. *Anthropology Today,* 27(5), pp. 22-26.
Ingold, T., 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill.* London: Routledge.
Kaika, M., 2012. The Economic Crisis Seen from the Everyday. *City,* 16(4), pp. 422-430.
Kandylis, G., Maloutas, T. & Sayas, J., 2012. Immigration, inequality and diversity: socio-ethnic hierarchy and spatial organisation in Athens, Greece. *European Urban and Regional Studies,* 19(3), pp. 267-286.
Kaplanis, G., 2011. An Economy That Excludes the Many and an 'Accidental' Revolt. In: A. Vradis & D. Dalakoglou, eds. *Revolt and Crisis in Greece: Between a Present Yet to Pass and a Future Still to Come.* London: Occupied London, pp. 215-28.
Kiddey, R., 2017. *Homeless Heritage: social archaeology as therapeutic practice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
King , C., 2011. Is the present day post-medieval? A response.. *Post-Medieval Archaeology,* 45(2), pp. 322-324.
Lust, T., 1998. *Pass the Polenta and Other Writings from the Kitchen, with Recipes.* South Royalton, VT: Steerfoth Press.
Rosakou, K., 2017. The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece: humanitarianism and the management of refugees. *American Ethnologist,* 39(3), pp. 562-577.
Rosen, S. & Tesser, A., 1970. On reluctance to communicate undesirable information: The MUM effect. *Sociometry,* 33(3), pp. 253-263.
Sabloff, J., 2008. *Archaeology Matters: Action Archaeology in the Modern World.* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
Shott, M. J., 2005. Two Cultures: Thought and Practice in British and North American Archaeology. *World Archaeology,* 37(1), pp. 1-10.
Snow, D. A., Benford, R. D. & Anderson, L., 1986. Fieldwork Roles and Informational Yield: A Comparison of Alternative Settings and Roles. *Urban Studies,* 14(4), pp. 377-408.
Stottman, M. J., 2010. *Archaeologists as Activists: can archaeologists change the world?.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
Tax, S., 1975. Action Anthropology. *Current Anthropology,* 16(4), pp. 514-517.
Turner, S., 2015. What is a Refugee Camp? Explorations of the Limits and Effects of the Camp. *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 29(2), pp. 139-149.
Van Hear, N., Bakewell, O. & Long, K., 2018. Push-pull plus: reconsidering the drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 44(6), pp. 927-944.
Vasudevan, A., 2017. *The Autonomous City: a history of urban squatting.* London: Verso.
Wainwright, O., 2017. *Why IKEA's flatpack refugee shelter won design of the year,* London: s.n.
Wilson, C. J., Deane, F. P., Marshall, K. L. & Dalley, A., 2010. Adolescents' Suicidal Thinking and Reluctance to Consult General Medical Practitioners. *Journal of Youth Adolescence,* Volume 39, pp. 343-356.
Young, I. M., 2005. House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme. In: *On Female Body Experience: Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Figure legends

Fig 1: map of sites of temporary refugee shelter in Athens, March 2017
Fig 2: City Plaza - exterior

Fig 3 Memory Mapping at City Plaza
Fig 4: Solidarity Now NGO refugee hotel - interior
Fig 5: Khora kitchen
Fig 6: benches ‘upcycled’ from Athenian shutters at Khora