Between the land and the sea

Refugee experiences of the lighthouse as a real and symbolic border

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Abstract

In the context of the refugee crisis, seascapes are taking on new dimensions with borders shifting from the shoreline to being redrawn in the water itself. As such, refugees are now crossing waters that have become extended sovereign borders. This is manifest in increased maritime surveillance to prevent refugees arriving by boat and landing on Europe's and Australia's shores. In this context, materially and symbolically, lighthouses mark out the space between the sea and land and in so doing, delimit these territorial and maritime borders. Although the function of the lighthouse is to warn those at sea of the dangers on the coastline, steering them away from coastal hazards and guiding them through a safe passage, for many sea travellers it can also represent the safety of the land, of arrival. This article explores the ambiguous roles and effects of lighthouses; uniquely placed as sentinel posts along the coast they can aid military surveillance and control while at the same time enabling humanitarian assistance. It explores these conflicting functions focusing on how the lighthouse, as a border between land and sea, simultaneously protects and excludes offering beacons of hope as well as signalling danger. The article draws on the arrival of refugees at Korakas lighthouse on the Greek island of Lesvos to illuminate these variable functions.

Keywords: refugees, lighthouses, welcome, coastal zones, land and sea borders

Introduction

As the refugee crisis extends across Europe and elsewhere, seascapes are taking on new dimensions, with borders being redrawn away from shorelines. Refugees are now crossing waters that have become extended to constitute newly forged sovereign borders that are subject to increased maritime surveillance, organised to prevent refugees landing on European and Australian shores. This has reinforced the significance of the distinction between land and sea and foregrounded the role of the lighthouse as a material and symbolic border marker. Lighthouses occupy an edge between the sea and land, delimiting these territorial and maritime borders. Although the lighthouse functions to warn those at sea of coastal dangers, steering them away from hazards and guiding them through safe passage, for many sea travellers it can also represent the safety of the land, a herald of arrival. This article considers these shifting land-sea borders and explores the ambiguous roles and effects of lighthouses in marking these coastal zones. Uniquely placed as sentinel posts along the coast, lighthouses can aid military surveillance and control. Yet, while it acts as a marker to a border that restricts entry and controls sea mobilities, the lighthouse is an ambiguous structure; it warns of physical danger, illuminates the coastline to guide seafarers, marks proximity to a zone of exclusion, and for some has become a site of welcome, refuge and solidarity, a place from which humanitarian assistance has been extended.

The article begins with a discussion of the borders between land and sea, so often envisaged as definitively delineated yet increasingly acknowledged as fluid. It highlights the extent to which these boundaries are difficult to identify, often blurred and incessantly changing. This fluidity necessitates a rethinking of

the land-water edge as a changeable coastal zone within which various connections and encounters are forged. The article subsequently explores the historical, material and symbolic roles of the lighthouse—as a signifier of a border, and as an ambiguous site of safety that offers a beacon of hope but also symbolises danger and exclusion. The final section draws on the arrival of refugees at Korakas lighthouse on the Greek island of Lesvos to illuminate these different, often conflicting and variable functions. It demonstrates that while the lighthouse can represent a border between the safety of land and the perilous sea it also embodies the dynamism and fluidity of the land-sea edge.

Between the land and the sea

While lighthouses are often understood to denote coastal borders, demarcations between land and sea are not always clearly delineated. Indeed, shorelines are ever shifting through human and non-human processes, disrupting the notion of a clearly defined, fixed coastal edge. This blurring of the land/sea border is most obviously apparent when attempting to identify the boundaries of islands, localities where multiple forms of agency come together and intersect. The very size and shape of islands ceaselessly shift through the non-human actions of tides and winds, and human interventions such as mining, raking and dredging of sand. These processes mean that the limits of water and of land are perpetually changing, on a daily, seasonal and cyclical basis. Recent research on a small island in the Indian Ocean illustrates these shifting thresholds (Kothari and Arnall 2019). On one side of the island is a spit at which the beach narrows to a point. Here it is difficult to discern where the land ends and the sea begins; sandbanks appear and disappear with the tides such that it is not only the water that is moving but also the land. At certain times of the day, the sand spit connects with the sandbanks to extend the area of land while at other times, the sandbanks disappear under water. This process of attachment and severance incessantly modifies the outline, shape and form of the island, challenging attempts to delimit what constitutes an island by creating an ever-changing zone of land-water (Kothari and Arnall 2019). In this way, the border of the island is continuously being made and unmade.

As McMohan (2013, p. 64) argues, attempts to clearly delineate the land from the sea underestimate the extent of this 'dynamic flux'. Instead, the coastal

edge is a vibrant, movable, shifting space (Ledwell 2002, p. 4) that cannot be fixed in one place. As such, the perimeter is better understood as a zone between land and sea, one of 'shifting liminality' (Beer 2003, p. 33), a realm that is incessantly shaped through relational processes that transcend finiteness and boundedness (Peters 2018). Despite this, attempts to delimit coastal places and to mark the separation of land and sea persist. Land is often perceived as dwelled in and homely in distinction to the seemingly uninhabited, forbidding and unwelcoming sea, a binary reinforced through representations of the land as the 'space of stasis, home, safety and society, and the sea as its antithesis' (Steinberg 2018, p. 205). These distinctions extend to include differences in forms of governance and regulation of land and sea, whereby, 'land is envisaged as spaces that are ordered, rational and regulated' and sea is comprehended as comprising 'disordered, chaotic and unlawful spaces' (Peters 2018, p. 124). Furthermore, compared to often densely populated spaces of land, seas and oceans are frequently configured as placeless, evacuated and empty (Anderson & Peters 2014, p. 1).

Exploring differences in attitudes to sea and coastal spaces Balint (2005) challenges this notion that the seas are empty. She highlights the impact on fishermen in West Timor when Australia expanded its territorial boundaries into the sea in 1979 driven by the myth of *mare nullius*, the idea that the sea was empty and that no-one would suffer the loss of them. Similarly, in their research in Colombia, Satizábal and Batterbury (2018), show how understandings of territorialisation in the oceans, where political and legal framings envisage the sea as an open-access public good, neglect the existence of marine social processes held by Afro-Descendant communities. Berber (2005) also critiques European representations of coastal space showing how for some indigenous people in coastal areas in Australia, it is the relationship between fresh and saltwater that is more significant than that between the land and sea.

The ascriptions of the sea and the distinctions and separations forged between land and sea identified above, also reveal a problematic 'landward bias' in understandings of territories and identities (Peters 2018). This terracentrism remains largely unchallenged with a few recent and notable exceptions such as Peters, Steinberg and Stratford's important book, *Territory beyond Terra* (2018). They suggest that envisaging the sea as placeless and devoid of

interactions conceals the multiple ways in which it is central to the perceptions, livelihoods, experiences and practices of those whose lives are less terracentric. For example, many fisherfolk in the Maldives see their time on their islands as constituting only brief interludes in a life largely lived at sea, as do Filipino merchant seafarers who each year spend up to nine months dwelling at sea. Similarly, Jackson reminds us that indigenous worldviews are not always as terracentric as western ones. She demonostrates how pervasive European perceptions that mark distinctions between land and sea are challenged by the 'images and concepts of nature that indigenous cultures in Australia construct' (1995: 87). Thus, there are multiple and varied ways of seeing the sea. For those whose lives are largely lived at sea and for those whose lives may be mostly lived on land but who nonetheless experience close maritime connections, the sea is not perceived as placeless. Instead, it is where they dwell in multiple and varied ways (Ingold 2000) with saltwater.

Importantly, as Steinberg (2001) argues, the material qualities of seawater facilitate certain kinds of mobilities, providing surfaces on which numerous connections between people and places can be forged. Accordingly, he suggests, there is a need to rebalance perspectives towards the sea to reveal the significance of the ocean in enabling manifold movements, networks and forms of situatedness. Far from being bereft of interactions, the seas have enabled travel and communication in an increasingly interconnected world (Arnall and Kothari np) and lighthouses have aided these through guiding travellers and demarcating the outlines of coastal places. The identities and relationships of those whose lives are deeply intertwined with the sea are profoundly shaped by these human and non-human tidal and weather processes. Thus, the oceans make an important contribution to a sense of place and to shaping coastal identities (Brown and Humberstone 2015). Additionally, as Peters (2017) reminds us, far from being unregulated, the seas, like the land, are also mapped, governed and militarised. This is reiterated by Mountz (2013) who writes, that complex and dynamic spatial arrangements of sovereign power are found not only on land but at sea and that these include, for example, the exercise of maritime law, commercial trade and military exercises. These forms of surveillance often enabled and symbolised by the power and presence of a lighthouse.

These attempts to re-place the seas emphasise the fluidity of the land/sea border and suggest that the coastal edge may be better understood as a zone. Moreover, they illuminate that rather than placeless and empty, sea waters enable mobilities, the forging of connections and the shaping of coastal identities. Importantly, the landward biases that have construed the seas as unregulated are being thoroughly challenged by the intense contemporary surveillance of national maritime borders.

Yet these important advances in challenging the reification of the borders where land and sea meet are being complicated in a context in which refugees are being compelled to cross watery boundaries (Walters 2008), as evident around the Mediterranean shores of Europe and the waters surrounding Australia. For many refugees fleeing across the water, rather than being blurred and fluid, distinctions between sea and land are literally, metaphorically and imaginatively marked. As has become starkly evident, for many refugees, the coast is not necessarily envisaged as a malleable zone but as a fixed border, a line between safety and uncertainty, between being invited or repelled, and between life on land and death at sea. Thus, despite interpretations of seas as spaces of mutability, Ballinger suggests that they are also delimited by boundaries (2013: 424) and as such, water can be simultaneously fluid and unyielding. And, as Mountz and Hiemstra (2014: 383) highlight, boundaries become increasingly rigid at key border crossing sites at which migrants come under intense scrutiny. Thus, in Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders regime and the *Mare Nostrum* (Our Seas) border protection programme in Europe, borders are being redrawn, often in the sea, and are becoming increasingly 'inelastic' (Ballinger 2013, p. 435). As refugees attempt to cross the seas in overcrowded unseaworthy vessels, the water does not necessarily enable a smooth passage but creates frictions, complicating notions that the sea provides a surface that facilitates the journey. Accordingly, the threshold at which land and sea assemble may seem blurred but is increasingly a realm in which 'sovereign power is reconfigured through new geographies of border enforcement' (Mountz & Hiemstra 2014, p. 383). The processes through which the sea is increasingly acknowledged as a key element in the construction of coastal identities and relationships also reproduce territorial divisions within which only certain people are said to belong and

from which others are excluded, distinctions all too often founded upon ethnic and national difference (Ballinger 2013, p. 423—430). Yet, simultaneously, as refugees journey across the seas to reach land, the shoreline and coastal places are also newly constituted as compassionate contact zones (Peters et al, 2018) in which multiple, varied encounters are taking place and through which new connections and solidarities are being forged.

Lighthouses: marking shifting coastal boundaries

Refugee journeys by sea have brought to the fore the various meanings and values attached to the sea, to the land and to the coast. Importantly, they have also revitalised the material and symbolic role of the lighthouse, a structure that stands where land and sea meet. This edge, of the land and of the sea, has become the site of arrival for many refugees in Europe. In an environment in which an array of digital and virtual bordering technologies that divide, exclude, control, govern and protect are not always rendered so visible (Ball 2012), the lighthouse appears as a materially evident contrast. Indeed, biometric data, for example, creates borders that are delocalised, dispersed and potentially everywhere, while the lighthouse stands firmly in one place. As large, vertical, long-standing, rooted, solid and material structures marking the coastal zone, punctuating the surrounding land and seascape, the lighthouse represents a highly visible and situated border. Furthermore, its visual prominence in coastal landscapes disrupts terracentric binaries of land and sea: lighthouses are both of the sea and of the land. As Steinberg writes, 'asserting a verticality that literally rises above both land and sea, the lighthouse offers a geography that transcends facile divisions of space' (Steinberg 2018, p. 203). It is created 'at the meeting point of water and earth' (Blake 2007), 'perched on the threshold of land and sea', providing 'a place of betweenness' (Adey 2018, p. 250). Lighthouses straddle 'the littoral zone, a physical and a figurative borderland' (Wood 2018, p. 224).

This inbetweeness is reflected in the multiple, ambiguous, entangled and changeable roles of lighthouses. Indeed, lighthouses are saturated with meaning (Edensor 2017) and serve numerous functions. Historically, many were installed to signify political and economic control. They act to extend colonial authority and mark the borders of empires, to secure national strategic

and military interests and to aid the expansion of imperial trade routes. Thus, many lighthouses have been symbolically and materially entangled in processes of colonisation (Strang 2018), and as Sidaway writes, 'empire is especially legible at frontiers and borders' (2018: 2). Tagliacozzo (2005 p. 327), writing about colonial expansion and coastal lighting in south east Asia, reveals the significance of lighthouses to the geography of British and Dutch colonisation, explaining why 'certain areas of the world were lit and others remained in darkness'. He writes that better lighting of dangerous seas and the need to demarcate colonial territorial borders were imperial acts 'to be undertaken in the interest of shipping generally and empire specifically' (Tagliacozzo 2005, p. 311). Lighthouses were necessarily positioned in what were considered the most strategically important places to ensure colonial rule and governance, 'mapping a grid of colonial vision onto a vast maritime domain' (Tagliacozzo 2018, p. 192; see also Lallah 2018).

This ambiguous role of lighthouses in aiding sea mobilities and providing safety alongside exercising (colonial) power and control is invoked in the work of the artist Stephen Copland, who considers how as 'architectural forms on the edge of the continent' (Pattenden 2009, p. 12), lighthouses frame and mark the Australian coast. His 2009 work, *Border Protection*, featured an installation of 147 miniature paintings of every lighthouse in Australia. In this 'map', lighthouses serve as a metaphor for a 'coast that is in a state of flux and change' (Copland, 2013: 50), destabilising and blurring the sense of place of Australia, an island continent, but also standing as a symbol of hope and salvation. For example, in the late 1800s, Cape Otway lighthouse on the coast of Victoria signalled the first landfall light for nine out of 10 migrants seeking a new home in Australia, marking the borders of the country. Its beam signalled the end of a long, gruelling journey and symbolised the promise of new beginnings. Yet these arrivals are also reminders that the possibilities of new beginnings had disastrous consequences for others as the new settlements these migrants built colonised older, existing ones. This reinforces how the growth of lighthouses in some parts of the world were intimately connected to imperial expansion as coasts and seas were mapped and charted, facilitating the movement of colonisers and settlers.

This role persists when the lighthouse is incorporated into systems of power and

control, and acts as an icon to symbolise the values and ideologies of national governments that fund its construction and maintenance. Indeed, by marking out the limits of national and imperial power, lighthouses are invariably part of larger systems of surveillance, governance and control. As Millington writes, 'There is also a political dimension connecting lighthouses to the process of nation building. As visible territorial markers, and as technologies of surveillance and control, these structures became symbols of state authority and power' (Millington 2018, p. 191). Surveilling the coast to guard against potential military threats (Petts 2018, p. 84), and serving as material and symbolic expressions of state power, lighthouse technologies have symbolised the unfolding of an increasingly coercive, surveillant and controlling world (Millington 2018), projecting power as well as light.

Although the functions of lighthouses have changed over time and vary across space, their primary purpose relates to navigational safety. Beaming a light out to sea has meant that lighthouses have always been crucial coastal landmarks. Indeed, at one time, 'the lighthouse would have provided the only visible illumination for mariners, signifying the presence of land and other humans. Its beam would have been an immense source of relief' (Edensor 2018, p. 86) enabling 'seafarers to be certain of their whereabouts in relation to the land and hazardous coastlines' (Peters 2018, p. 123). Peters stresses this navigational role when she writes, 'Lighthouses, casting light out into the blackness, have long ensured the safety of life at sea. Pinned to the edges of land or on rocky outposts, each with a unique pulse of light, they enable seafarers to be certain of their whereabouts in relation to the land and hazardous coastlines' (Peters 2017, p. 123). Consequently, lighthouses have acquired iconic status for their 'steadfastness and vigilance, safety and salvation'. Yet even in this primary role as a navigational aid, ambiguities are revealed. Placed at the boundary 'between light and dark and life and death' (Strang 2018, p. 29), the lighthouse attracts travellers but also alerts those at sea to the dangers on the coastline, steering them away from coastal hazards, dissuading them from approaching and guiding them through a safe passage (Magnani et al. 2017): 'The lighthouse guides, and it warns; some guide into port, while others warn away from dangerous rocks or shoals; its light is followed to safety, or ignored with terrible consequences' (Maber 2017, p.

64). In their liminal position, simultaneously symbols of life and danger (Watt 2017), lighthouses elicit fear as well as desire (Strang et al. 2018).

Lighthouses as contemporary sites of welcome: Korakas lighthouse

While some suggest that today 'everyone loves a lighthouse' (Cannon 2013, p. 4), that they are a 'source of fascination' (Strang et al. 2018, p. 10) and are perceived with affection, for others their presence is more uncertain, sometimes signifying a welcoming place, at other times an ominous border marker.

The multiple roles of lighthouses as marking spaces of both danger and welcome, and of ambiguous legal status, was starkly highlighted in June 2016 when 17 asylum seekers were found clinging to a lighthouse seven miles off the coast of Florida Keys in the US, after fleeing Cuba in a rickety, self-made raft. Attempting to reach the US by boat, they scaled the 136-year-old Shoal Lighthouse when their vessel became unsafe, instigating a legal controversy over whether or not the lighthouse represented and delineated a US territorial border. The US 'wet foot, dry foot' policy allows Cubans who have set foot on American soil (that is, have 'dry feet') the opportunity to remain in the US but those intercepted on the waters between the two nations (have 'wet feet') would not be allowed to stay and would be sent back to Cuba or a third country. Lawyers defending the migrants argued that they had 'landed and disembarked on a US federal building that was on US federal property. And that constituted a landing with feet that were literally – and legally – dry' (Grimm 2016). However, the federal government argued that while the lighthouse is US property, it is not US territory and thus climbing up an offshore lighthouse cannot be considered the same as landing in America and reaching dry land. Moreover, they asserted, the migrants had jumped into the water and swam to the lighthouse and so literally, and legally, they had 'wet feet'. The legal challenge that ensued focused on determining if the lighthouse could be considered US 'soil'. Ultimately, the federal judge ruled that the Cubans had to return to their home country. He said, 'No one has resided in the Lighthouse since at least 1963. As an abandoned—and dangerous—structure over seven miles from the closest dry land, no one today would live on the Lighthouse …It has never been connected to dry land', and because the migrants 'would

necessarily require transportation from the Lighthouse to the mainland in order to survive, landing on the Lighthouse is essentially no different than having been interdicted at sea' (RT Question More 2016). Subsequently, some were returned to Cuba while others were taken to a migration centre at Guantánamo Bay for assessment. Under an arrangement between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organisation for Migration and settlement countries including Australia and the US, 17 of these refugees 'were assessed by Australian government officials and having met the criteria for refugee and humanitarian visas, they were settled in Brisbane' (Davidson 2017).

This incident provides further illustration of the extent to which land-sea borders are confounded, since the Shoal Lighthouse, situated in the water off the coast, complicates where the national border lies. Located in the sea, the lighthouse represents an extension of national territory but does not necessarily constitute US soil. In order to fix this fuzzy delineation of the national border, the US government reified the distinction between land and sea by establishing the wet foot, dry foot policy thereby distinguishing people arriving from Cuba according to whether they crossed by sea or overland. Here, a border was marked not by a line between land and sea but between dry land and water, and this embeds the notion that dry land represents safety while waters are places of danger. One of the refugees recounted that when they were crossing the ocean on the broken raft, they were excited to see the lighthouse, envisaged as a place of safety. His mother, fearful of the perils of the sea, was worried upon hearing that her son had embarked on a dangerous boat journey but when she saw TV footage of him on the lighthouse, it brought her hope (Shoichet 2015). He was now safe, out of the water and on the lighthouse, a symbol of steadfastness and safety. Yet, as it transpired, the lighthouse demarcated a site of exclusion that had to be negotiated by those attempting to pass from sea to land.

Although the demarcation between water and land is not always well-defined, as highlighted above, in other circumstances it becomes abundantly clear. Indeed, when more than one million migrants arrived in Europe by sea in 2015 and more than 4000 died in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean, the land-sea border becomes more delineated. Some in the media argue that Europe

needs sentinel posts along its coast to ensure exclusion, and here the lighthouse becomes a trope for 'the dangers that the sea spits up on Europe's shores: migrants, Muslims, terrorists' (Steinberg 2017, p. 203). In these circumstances, lighthouses evoke 'the fluid anxiety that needs to fix a clear line of demarcation when faced with issues of difference' (Pattenden 2009, p. 12). Others suggest that instead of militaristic forms of surveillance for the purposes of deterring and excluding, Europe needs beacons of hope to direct victims of the seas to safe havens (Steinberg 2017). After all, 'lighthouses have long helped sailors to identify ports and offered hospitality and invitation to the traveller' (Shaw 2017, p. 230).

The humanitarian catastrophe of millions of refugees attempting to flee violence and persecution in their places of origin and being compelled to embark on traumatic, dangerous journeys across water, further reveals the lighthouse's material and symbolic ambiguity. For sea-crossing refugees, the sight of a lighthouse can invoke fear and dread about what awaits them on land, alongside emotions of hope and the reassurance of reaching dry land. It might represent a warning of the hostile territory of the land beyond, symbolising state control, or denote the end of an arduous journey, signalling arrival and even welcome. For some, lighthouses represent a border, not simply a political distinction between water and land but between the dangers of the sea and the safety of the land. Moreover, in delineating the extent of sovereign, national borders, the lighthouse acts to defend, protect and include some while simultaneously repelling and excluding others, and in so doing 'reveals, animates and embraces difference' (Adey 2017, p. 250). As such, when the relationship between movement, technology, power and control are examined through the lens of the lighthouse, it becomes increasingly evident that 'lighthouses are not neutral' (Magnani et al. 2017, p. 125).

Despite this ubiquitous equivocality, for many refugees crossing the Mediterranean waters between Turkey and the Greek island of Lesvos, the lighthouse at Korakas was especially symbolic as the first point of contact on approaching landfall and as a site that facilitated diverse encounters between people and places 'joined together through complex and shifting relations' (Pugh 2016). At the height of the refugee crisis in 2015, the Greek island of Lesvos was the busiest European entry point for refugees. Most were fleeing

the Syrian civil war (56%) while the rest came from Afghanistan (32%), Iraq and Pakistan (UNHCR 2015). The island became the centre of media attention due to the arrival of almost 400,000 refugees on the small island with a population of 88,000, and to the scale of the humanitarian response that followed. Receiving over 57% of the total arrivals by sea to Greece, Lesvos became a central node in the refugees' migratory route because of its geographical location, 10 kms from the Turkish coast (UNHRC 2015). Because of its geographical proximity to Turkey, where many refugees had arrived after crossing the border from Syria, in 2015 Lesvos became a place of transit for nearly half a million refugees. They were ariving at a rate of 3,300 per day. While during 2015, many refugees passed through Greece on their way to other EU countries, they are now largely held at the island's reception center at Moira (https://www.dw.com/en/greece-expects-100000-more-migrants-in-2020/a-51716555). In April 2019, there were still 14,000 migrants living on the island and Greece is predicting up to 100,000 asylum-seekers arriving on its islands from Turkey in 2020 (https://www.dw.com/en/greece-expects-100000-more-migrants-in-2020/a-51716555).

Attempting to reach Europe, many refugees embarked on what was a treacherous boat crossing from Turkey to Greece across the Aegean Sea. Shipwrecks and other incidents at sea were almost a daily occurrence (UNHCR 2015). As such, what has been taking place at Korakas lighthouse on Lesvos since 2015 necessitates a rethinking of the boundaries between water and land and reveals a re-imagining of the lighthouse's role for refugees traversing dangerous waters and for the coastal communities where it is situated. As for other refugees compelled to cross the Mediterranean in unseaworthy vessels in search of safety, the lighthouse at Korakas signified safety from perilous waters and from conflict in their places of origin. As such, the lighthouse has acquired a renewed material and symbolic status for fleeing refugees. Although it no longer serves as a formal, official and funded navigational aid for maritime travellers, it has once more become a site of coastal watch, acting as an aid to navigation but also reinvented as a site of welcome, a transformed symbolic role (Strang 2018, p. 202) identified by its use as a focal point for the arrival and welcome of refugees. This reshaped the identities of the inhabitants of this coastal island community (Magnani et al 2017), rekindling their own historical

experiences as former refugees from Turkey.

One of the most profound and widespread developments in the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe has been a visual language of 'welcome'. These included friendly banners, handmade placards, shop signs, street art and graffiti combined with tactile gestures or the provision of blankets over the shoulder, at sites of arriving refugees such as Malmo Central Station or Copenhagen's Comfort Zone. Lesvos's Korakas lighthouse similarly offered a welcome to refugees. As Yeginsu and Hartocollis (2015) report, as darkness falls and the last of the shorefront cafes in Bodrum clear their tables for the night, dozens of migrants pour out of a waiting bus. In the gloom, before the fall of night, they rush towards the sea, dragging a large rubber dinghy. Their smugglers point them toward the flashing lighthouse on the Greek island, as little as 25 minutes away in a good boat. In 2015, thousands of refugees were arriving in this way every day on the shores of Lesvos.

Refugees used the light from Korakas lighthouse to guide them in their attempt to reach Greece. Allured by the captivating regularity of its beams the lighthouse symbolised not exclusion, restriction and surveillance but a point in a journey where land appears to be safer than suffering on-going passage in makeshift, overloaded boats. For as Brydon-Miller remarks (2001, p. 254), 'Capturing both the hopes of safety and the possibility of being tossed helplessly upon the rocks, the "glimpse of a lighthouse" is a compelling metaphor for the refugee's experience of resettlement'. However, the precipitous cliffs and rocks make the surrounding shore an extremely dangerous place to land. Perched at the highest point, the lighthouse failed in its original function as a symbol of warning and had the adverse effect of luring boats onto the rocks, resulting in many tragedies. One rescue volunteer wrote, 'you see a lighthouse, you think of safety, but it's actually the opposite... the lighthouse will blink its lights and the refugees think, oh, that's where we have to head to, so they head to it but it's sheer cliffs and rocks, it's a very bad place to land, and volunteers do try to direct them over there during the day but people land at night in pitch black' (Morrow 2015). Another said, 'we were manning Korakas lighthouse, which was meant to warn of the danger, but it attracted refugees like moths to a flame' (Northern Echo, 2016).

During the winter of 2015, over 30 refugee-laden boats arrived on the shores of Lesvos every day but there were no NGOs to help them. Subsequently, motivated by the thousands of dead and wounded refugees who had attempted the sea crossing, *Lighthouse Relief*, a Swedish NGO, was established on the island to provide immediate crisis response to those attempting to reach safety along the dangerous shoreline. Korakas lighthouse provided the inspiration for the name of the NGO because this is where their rescue operations began. Invoking metaphorical representations of lighthouses, their stated aim is 'to act like a lighthouse, to stand firm in harsh conditions, lighting the way to guide people in need' (Lighthouse Relief 2015). Volunteers use the beam of the Korakas lighthouse, perched high on a cliff on a remote and windswept site, with a wide view of the north Aegean, to scan the sea at night, searching for incoming boats from Turkey. Once they sight a boat, members of *Lighthouse Relief* run down to the rocks on which many had previously perished to guide refugees in safely and pull them ashore. But the Korakas shoreline presents a further danger, the material legacy of those who have earlier attempted the journey is evident in over 600,000 discarded life jackets and 10,000 punctured rubber dinghies that litter the shoreline, a mountain of debris that makes landing even more hazardous and difficult. They also represent a different kind of shifting coastal border.

To illustrate the role of the lighthouse and to exemplify the significance of a land/sea border for refugees, Lighthouse Relief recall an interview with Stratos, a fisherman from Lesvos:

> It was early morning and dark at the lighthouse in Korakas. The wind, going north, was strong and the waves reaching high. Coming fast against the hard rocks was a boat carrying refugees, as people have always been fleeing to Lesvos. Stratos, together with two other fishermen, Dimitris and his father in law Yorgos, were the only ones there to help them. The rocks surrounding the lighthouse are the worst place to land on the whole island. The boat crashed hard and fast on the rocks. The refugees didn't wear life jackets, and half of them were already unconscious …. He jumped into the water … Ten were saved from the water. Ten died. Two hours later the Aegean Sea was calm again' (Steadman 2016).

The work of a group of volunteers coming together exemplifies how the

lighthouse is a contradictory symbol; while often 'emblematic of solitude, it is nonetheless part of a collective public work' (Purdon 2017, p. 114). As inferred above, Korakas lighthouse has significant historical resonances. Many volunteers from the island felt compelled to help those fleeing persecution in recalling that their families had also once been refugees from Turkey, underpinning historical connections between people and places as articulated through the material and symbolic lens of the lighthouse (Shaw 2017, p. 229). This underscores how lighthouses are deeply embedded as archetypal place-signifiers but also as part of larger spatial networks and historical connections that reveal their role in producing a relational sense of place (Massey 1994).

Yet as 'every lighthouse embodies the cultural history and identity of a community and the place in which it is located' (Strang 2018, p. 158), a new significance as a local icon of place-identity emerged for Korakas lighthouse. It was reinvented and reframed as a site of welcome and of safety on land to acquire what Strang (2018) refers to as 'a new lease of life'. Though technological advances mean that lighthouses are automated and no longer have keepers, the arrival of refugees has peopled the lighthouse again, reshaping the coastal identity of its island inhabitants. The lighthouse has thus become a new space of compassion and solidarity, a symbolic site of encounter, and for many refugees, it offers protection and a place of brief respite in the long exhausting process of migration. For them, as for many other sea travellers 'at the end of the voyage, if you are lucky, you catch a glimpse of a lighthouse, and you are grateful' (Behar 1996, p. 3).

Yet for these refugees arriving at Lesvos, the lighthouse represents only a single point, a brief lull in an extensive and gruelling journey. Furthermore, it only becomes a symbol of safety once nearer the shore. For as Peters reminds us (2017, p. 123) 'for those further from land and its rocky shores … there remains a need for light to navigate dark seas. There are multiple invisible hazards for vessels traversing the oceans'. Refugees still have to traverse an expanse of oceanic darkness in overcrowded boats, before the beacon of the lighthouse draws near and they can begin to feel any sense of security. And, for those refugees who survive the journey, once on shore they are transferred to the Island's detention centre which resembles 'a prison where migrants are detained for days or months in order to be registered and identified by the

local authorities before they are set 'free' to move on to the mainland' (Alberti 2010, p. 138). Accordingly, as Steinberg (2017, p. 206) writes,

> it is easy to think of the lighthouse as the embrace at the conclusion of an arduous journey, an end point, a destination. But, as the experiences of countless refugees suggest, it is more ambiguous: a liminal point in a journey where the future may be only a marginal improvement on the past; a node of brief respite in a series of journeys that, in the case of the refugee, will now proceed on land.

Conclusion

Lighthouses have had multiple, conflicting and shifting roles yet these have largely revolved around aiding sea travellers, whether to safeguard imperial trade, to expand colonial territories or to mark the boundaries of a nation's authority and control. However, despite their vital historical navigational and imperial roles, more recently the role of lighthouses has changed. Many have become abandoned due to a decline in the maritime economy and because of the introduction of new navigational and lighting technologies. Some coastal areas have taken advantage of their heritage value and reinvented lighthouses as historic monuments and tourist sites as part of regeneration strategies (de Brito 2020, p. 233), while others have been creatively converted into hotels and dwellings. Furthermore, as 'sites rich with emotional and spiritual symbolism' lighthouses have also become important icons of popular culture in art, literature and film (Cooper 2017, p. 107). As I have discussed above, they have also been redefined and reinvented for many refugees, as sites of beginnings and endings, where journeys start and end. On Lesvos, Korakas lighthouse is making a difference to thousands of refugees but not in the way anticipated when it was built. While it is also a site of risk, loss and even death, it has come to symbolise a site of encounter, compassion and solidarity.

This renewed role of the lighthouse on Lesvos can also contribute to rethinking the land/sea border. In signifying the safety of land after experiencing the sea as a space of danger, the lighthouse can serve to reify a distinction between land and sea. Yet, lighthouses are changeful places that also resist attempts to fix the edge between land and sea. They challenge terracentric binaries between land and sea because as Steinberg (2018, p. 205) writes, 'neither the refugee experience nor the lighthouse is rooted in a simple geography

where land is the space of life and water is the space of death'. Instead, he contends that the lighthouse transcends simplistic spatial divisions that shape understandings of welcome and danger that are unproblematically associated with land and water respectively. Indeed, as is evident from grasping the historical, political and geographical factors of the conflicts that led to people fleeing for safety, their problems did not emanate from the sea but from the land. Thus, as Steinberg suggests, the experiences of refugees can undermine the traditional dichotomies of land and sea: for migrants making these perilous journeys, the sea may not represent chaos and danger, and land may not provide security. This notion that water may not be the central danger in the lives of refugees although they may be seeking refuge from the sea during their journey, is well articulated by the poet Warsan Shire who writes, 'you have to understand, that no one puts their children in a boat, unless the water is safer than the land' (Shire 2013). Indeed, both land and water can epitomise life and death. And, in this context, the lighthouse assumes an ambiguous role, representing danger, conflict and exclusion as well as safety, welcome and solidarity.

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