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ABSTRACT

3 Kilometers away from the Skouries Forest: Gold mining, borders and political possibility in Halkidiki, in Northern Greece.

In the wake of crisis-driven market reforms in Greece and increasing local concerns over environmental conditions, gold mines in the Halkidiki peninsula in Northern Greece became political borders. Through these borders, systems of power redistribute socio-political tensions at the local, national, and international levels. Taking mines as ‘thresholds’ of knowledge, memory, and power, I ask: What sort of sociopolitical and spatial terrains are provoked by the presence of the mine? How the division caused by the extraction between the mining supporters and the anti-mining groups changes perceptions of the body, the space and the subterranean? How do anti-mining groups operate within and against these terrains to create political possibility and what sort of practices and actions are stimulated to do that?

After spending a year in villages of the Eastern Halkidiki peninsula, it became clear that the gold mine located in the heart of the Skouries forest had a more complex impact than *just* the environmental destruction and the reaction of the local communities. Social “pollution” between mining supporters and anti-mining groups, paralleled environmental pollution. As a consequence, social geographies have been altered and the mobility of bodies across space and place has been rearranged. The gold mine appears to be the ultimate border of the forest, highly militarized by the use of fences and the intense presence of private security and police patrolling and restricting access to it.

This paper has a three-fold purpose: first, the paper critically demonstrates how the process of “bordering” extends to and penetrates everyday life practices, bodies, relationships and strata of history and knowledge. Second, it dwells on how the liminality of borders is used to question

and challenge centralized and corporate power and therefore create political possibility. Third, the paper discusses how the experience of the border allows the anti-mining groups to draw connections with other environmental and political struggles across the world. Moreover, this embodiment of the border allows the anti-mining groups to design maps of alliances and challenge in their terms the imposed social and spatial exclusions and divisions.

This paper is the product of year-long fieldwork, participant observation and formal and informal interviews with anti-mining groups. During the time spent at the villages in Halkidiki, I had the chance to attend local councils, anti-mining struggle committees, local elections, trials, social actions and protests. I was particularly attracted to materialities and spatialities the anti-mining struggle generated and the way those contribute to the formation of political subjects.

With no prior anthropological work on mining in Greece and with the majority of scholarly attention on borders focusing on migration and geopolitical issues the mines invite a different reading of the borders. Thinking about borders through mines and the anti-mining struggles not only challenges the idea that the sovereign debt crisis is a homogenized national experience but it also presents us with a view of Greece as a fragmented assembly of local, national and transnational dynamics and frictions.

Effrosyni Rantou is a Ph.D. student in Anthropology at York University in Toronto. Rantou has a B.A. from Panteion University, Athens, and a M.A. from The New School, New York. Her work in Social Anthropology focuses on aspects of migration and borders, humanitarian aid as a state of exception and alternative forms of citizenship. Currently, her doctoral research explores subterranean politics, vertical and horizontal material dynamics and the formation of political subjectivities. She is interested in particular, in tracking the cross-scale relations between the disconnected subterranean practices with the politics and notions of everyday life by looking at the ways mines operate as vibrant political borders and maps through which systems of power redistribute sociopolitical tensions at the local, national and international levels. Her research is supported by the Onassis Foundation.