

DUMP SHAMES THE SMUGGLERS WHO TRADE IN MISERY

Fake lifejackets... a sick memorial to migrants who died seeking freedom



RISKING ALL
Refugees arrive
at Lesbos in 2015

EXCLUSIVE
BY TOM PARRY
Special Correspondent, in Lesbos

TUCKED away in rocky hills on this idyllic island, out of sight of any passing tourists, tens of thousands of torn and tattered lifejackets have been dumped.

They are evidence of a still-unfolding tragedy, one that the leaders of Europe would rather forget.

Many of the buoyancy aids were useless – thin, foam-filled fakes incapable of saving a life.

Yet they were worn by desperate refugees seeking sanctuary here in Lesbos on their short but perilous sea trip from Turkey.

Few knew the jackets would be bogus and just another vicious con from scheming people smugglers.

One mum still traumatised by the journey said: "I felt certain we would all drown."

Her fear is completely understandable because in recent years more than 27,000 migrants have drowned in trying to get into Europe via Greece and Italy.

Among the flimsy orange jackets in the vast tip are splintered dinghies and fishing boats dumped here by the Lesbos authorities.

There are also personal possessions, such as a child's car seat, reminders of what families were prepared to sacrifice in their flight from the Taliban and Islamic State to what they hoped would be a better future.

But these dreams lie crushed in the sprawling Moria camp, an abandoned Greek Army base, where 10,000 of the world's most unwanted people now exist.

Lesbos is where most refugees from Turkey head and Moria is Europe's biggest refugee camp.

We were told migrants from Afghanistan are now charged less than £300 per person for a place on a boat.

Yet instead of the trafficking cartels' promised land, they face years of restless nights in flimsy tents.

Dimitris Vafeas, deputy commander of the detention centre, says: "The smugglers have adapted their prices to attract poorer Afghans. In 2015 at the height of the mass movement of middle-class Syrians it was 5,000 euros to cross; now it's 300."

"Lesbos has become a destination for fortune seekers from all over the world. There have been 58 nationalities registered here. We have had people from Haiti and Jamaica in the Caribbean. Yet it is a transit camp.

"Even though arrivals have fallen off since 2015 when the war in Syria was



VOYAGE TO DESPAIR Wrecked boats on tip



DAILY ORDEAL
Kids crushed in
scramble for food



CHILLY
Children by
a DIY fire



LEFT TO
DECAY

The vast pile of useless lifejackets

Pictures: ROWAN GRIFFITHS

“A lot of people here have post traumatic stress”

CAROLINE WILLEMAN
MSF COORDINATOR

at its height we are still getting an average of 50 a day. They are all considered vulnerable so all claim asylum.

"They cannot be returned until their application has been processed, but they cannot get any further.

"People here have been sold a product telling them they will find the way to Europe, now they won't. Borders are closed."

The surge from Afghanistan has been caused by Taliban insurgents strengthening their grip following the withdrawal of British forces. Attacks on civilians are at record levels.

At daybreak a biting wind whips

through the muddy olive grove where five-year-old Afghan refugee Amirali burns branches in a can to warm up.

Down the hill young girls sent to queue for food scream in pain as they are crushed against a wire fence in the fight for breakfast bread and water.

This is the squalid reality for tens of thousands of migrants after leaders including ex-PM David Cameron signed a deal with Turkey to pull up the drawbridge.

Siblings Naem Azrati, 15, Saem, 10, Tahar, six, Benjamin, four, and Essan, three, all left the Afghan city of Kunduz after indiscriminate Taliban attacks.

Naem says Taliban gunmen killed his brother with a grenade after he refused to join them. He knew he

would be next in line. Farzana, 20, from Herat, Afghanistan, says her departure was prompted by suicide bombings, one of which targeted many women at a local mosque.

With her husband and children, she marched across Iran and Turkey for four months.

"They would have killed us," she insists. "They want to murder all of the Shiites Muslims like us. My children have known only terror and war.

"The journey was terrible; we had to walk every night with the children crying all the time because they were so hungry and tired. In Turkey the police beat us badly.

"Being in the boat was even worse; we screamed. I felt sure we would all drown. We are very unhappy here in

Moria, but we cannot go back. This place is dangerous too." Most of those of Afghan origin are in the unofficial shanty town outside the heavily guarded main camp.

They tap into the camp's electricity and sneak through the fence to queue for food and asylum appointments.

Mr Vafeas says the Greek authorities are so stretched many waiting in Moria will not get their appointment for asylum until 2020. Some believe the slow process is deliberate to get them to head back to their country of origin.

I visited Lesbos after medical aid agency Doctors Without Borders (MSF) announced it had to suspend rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

It says its ship has been forced to remain in port in Italy. Meanwhile the

charity says the British government is fuelling the suffering of tens of thousands by enabling the coast guard in Libya to forcibly return migrants

On the Aegean the UK Border Service ship HMC Protector is rescuing travellers, but controversially returning some to Turkey under the 2016 deal.

Last year Theresa May agreed the cutter would be deployed to "break the link between making the illegal and dangerous journey across the Aegean and remaining in Europe".

When we visited it was docked in Lesbos' main city, Mytilene. Mr Vafeas tells me the Turkish coast guard has returned 900 boats this year, more than have made it to Lesbos. The returns continue even as many

migrants I spoke to complained of being badly beaten by police in Turkey. Meanwhile unknown numbers of migrants are still drowning. Caroline Willeman, coordinator for MSF in Lesbos, says the migrants' summer tents are unsuitable for winter.

"There has been pretty much non-stop rain, so bad flooding in the camps. There are not enough water and sanitation facilities and because there is no hot water children don't want to wash.

"A lot of people here have psychosis caused by post-traumatic stress disorder related to trauma from sexual violence and torture. Some self-harm and have suicidal plans.

"We are talking about people who have been traumatised in their country of origin and traumatised on their

journey. It is so much more difficult to deal with in a place like Moria. We have some patients who have been here for two years. Some return to Afghanistan. They feel they are losing their dignity living in a tent in the mud."

MSF's tent there is one doctor for hundreds of children who arrive daily. More than 500 under-18s in the camp are unaccompanied. Among them is Qusai, five, whose dad Mohamed Aktifan, 28, says they fled the Gaza Strip because Qusai has only one kidney. He needs treatment unavailable in Gaza because of Israeli blockades on supplies. They too followed the yellow brick road to Europe – and discovered they are not welcome.

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SQUARE EYES

with Nicola Methven & Mark Jefferies

Si's owling at Mouse

Simon Cowell fans must see CBBC's double-length Danger Mouse Christmas special. It stars teacher Simon Owl, who gave DM a mean roasting for his singing at school. Our insider says: "Poor Danger Mouse, below, was left terrified of singing and musicals." The finale of the show, a pastiche of Frozen called Melted, demands our hero has to sing. Will he conquer his stage fright? Find out Monday at 6pm.

Carrietastrophe

SHARON Horgan admits she feels "angry" with her co-star Carrie Fisher for dying.

The Star Wars actress, who had a heart attack in 2016, played her tetchy mother-in-law Mia in Sharon's Channel 4 show Catastrophe.

Launching the fourth and final series, out early next year, she said she greatly missed Carrie. "It makes me angry. Angry with her because she had so much more to give. She was an incredible writer. She would

improvise." Fisher, who died aged 60, agreed to join the hit show after meeting Horgan at the Attitude Awards.

She was the only star allowed to improvise, with Sharon revealing she even made up lines in the first scene they did.

"It was just me and her on the phone and I'm supposed to be inviting her to our wedding and we ended up just insulting each other," she said. "It was ferocious."

Mia is killed off late in the new series. Guest stars include ex-Corrie fave Julie Hesmondhalgh and Sex and the City's Chris Noth.

QUITE A FORCE Sharon and Carrie

Last dance saloon

Julian Clary feels sorry for the Strictly contestants these days, saying it was all far easier when he did the show back in 2004.

Julian, 59, who finished third with his partner Erin Boag, says: "I watch Strictly nowadays and I think, 'Those poor souls'. "We did 10 weeks. They work so hard."

The comic, who will tour with his new show Born to Mince next year, adds: "In my day you did your turn and then went to your dressing room and had a snout."

"Now they have to stand there gurning in the background."

200th
Monday brings a milestone episode of Channel 4's brilliant flagship series 24 Hours in A&E

COMEBACK CORNER

John Barrowman has joined the clamour for his Doctor Who spin-off Torchwood to return. A fan account started the motion by writing: "Retweet if you think Torchwood should return." Fresh from the jungle, John - who played Jack Harkness in the series - not only retweeted it but wrote: "Torchwood should return!" It also dovetails rather nicely with his plans to spend more time in the UK...

