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Dalakoglou, Dimitris; Kallianos, Yannis

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The distant proximity of infrastructural harm: the contested and (in)visible dynamics of waste politics in Athens, Greece

Yannis Kallianos ^a and Dimitris Dalakoglou ^b

^aUrban Institute, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; ^bDepartment of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the entanglements of waste infrastructures and harm in the wider Athens region. It focuses on Fyli landfill, which is currently the only formal waste management facility to serve the entire region. Associated with pollution, privatization, and allegations of corruption, the landfill has been formative of differential modes of uncertainty, interruption, and (in)visibility. By paying attention to the infrastructural contestation surrounding Fyli landfill, we conceptualize waste infrastructures as techno-political devices that engender harm. Our paper, first, examines the ways in which the spatio-temporal modalities of harm play out within this context, and secondly, rethinks modes of contestation and (in)visibility in relation to urban infrastructures. It argues that thinking through harm further elaborates the complex enmeshment between spatio-temporal and moral dynamics of infrastructures and forms of disruption, accountability, and participation. Hence, while we rethink waste infrastructures through harm, we also attend to the infrastructural codifications of harm.

KEYWORDS

Waste; contestation; harm; invisibility; spatio-temporality; infrastructure

Introduction

Italo Calvino (1974, pp. 114–116) portrays the fictional city of Leonia as refashioning itself every day. The city ‘renews’ itself through a metamorphosis which is technopolitically determined by the discarding of its rubbish. Calvino’s Leonia represents a twofold, complementary process. On the one hand, Leonia wakes up every day in new bed linens, surrounded by brand new household appliances and unused materials. It ‘purifies’ itself by throwing away the previous day’s waste. As Calvino notes, though, the refuse that Leonia generates to feed this everyday ‘purification’ ritual

