



Pity, Solidarity & Justice in the light of the current refugee crisis: From Aristotle to Rawls, Hanna Arendt and back.

>The case of Volunteers in the Informal Camps of Eidomeni, Piraeus Port, and Victoria Square-Athens: Forming Interaction – Forming Identity

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Οίκτος, Αλληλεγγύη, Δικαιοσύνη. Από τον Αριστοτέλη έως τον Ρόουλς, την Χάνα Αρεντ και πίσω στον Αριστοτέλη. Υπό το φώς της προσφυγικής κρίσης.

>Η περίπτωση των εθελοντών στους άτυπους καταυλισμούς της Ειδομένης, του Πειραιά και της Πλατείας Βικτωρίας.

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Abstract

As part of searching for the refugees' identity in the refugee flows who entered Greece in 2015 and 2016, during the Network Sociology Seminar of the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean, a research for the volunteers active along the refugees' course/route, from Lesbos to Eidomeni was carried out. From early March to May 2016, 4 research visits and 50 open interviews with volunteers were completed in the areas of Mytilene, Victoria Square, Piraeus Port and Eidomeni (this article presents and analyzes data from the Settlements in Piraeus and Eidomeni). The purpose of the research was to determine whether the interaction between volunteers and refugees establishes a new social space, political stances and a field for creating a new identity for both sides, beyond the basic tasks executed by the volunteers and aiming at serving the basic living needs of the refugees and of the children in particular.

Social and political theory for the refugee crisis

The theory of the refugee's label attributes particular importance to the constitutional practice of bureaucracy and the NGOs, and does not have the opportunity to turn towards the dialectic dynamics between the person who 'seeks' help and the one who 'offers' it. This dipole is understood to a large extent only through the interpretation of practise and feeling of 'pity' (Nussbaum, 2008) or through the individual rational choices that serve, at the same time, the volunteers' life strategies. We want to see how pity¹, egoism and altruism fit together according

¹ Weber (2005:487) criticize Nussbaum, that she has not a clear concept to distinguish between emotions and norms 'I believe that her analysis suffers insofar as she does not always clearly distinguish between



to in Aristotle's theory of political animal. The terms must not be mutually exclusive following the example of volunteers². In this way, the live life relationship that the volunteers seek and that the refugees and immigrants often accept is suppressed or ignored. This happens, in particular, in frameworks with a low degree of institutional representation and a high degree of self-organization and cooperation in their daily operation. The image of unofficial settlements conveyed by the media is usually particularly negative in terms safety and hygiene issues, and it is largely affected by the discontinuous and selective observations demonstrated by media reporters and crews. This picture is made even more dramatic by the constant presentation of the conflicts arising mostly between younger refugees, which, however, are not uncommon in big city quarters. The focal point in this research is that it was directed towards recognizing the volunteers' attitudes toward the refugees' needs, and the latter's presence not only as recipients of help, but also as independent persons with the ability to make decisions, have desires, make friendships and life strategies for their future and that of their families. This approach contributes another dimension of reality to the life of the people who experience extreme circumstances. Modern literature and research on the detention centres for illegal immigrants (Agamben 1997; Minca 2007; Vaughan-Williams 2015a, 2015b) critically point out the animalistic metaphors in relation to the people confined there, the refugees, especially in terms of their nutrition and the satisfaction of their physical needs. The authors came across similar

(a) an emotion's basic constitutive conditions and the associated constitutive or "intrinsic" norms, (b) "extrinsic" normative conditions, for instance, instrumental and moral considerations, and (c) the causal conditions under which emotion is most likely to be experienced'.

² NE VIII. 2, 1155b33-34; compare the definition of *philia* in Rhetoric 11.4 (1380b36, to want good things for another 'for his sake and not for one's own'), cited by John Cooper in 'Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship', *Review of Metaphysics*, xxx (June 1977), pp. 621 ff.



dramatic descriptions about the informal settlement of Calais in France. According to Davies and Isakjee (2015):

These camps are a stark reminder that the phenomenon of the Mediterranean' migration emergency is a more-than-maritime crisis. The struggles that migrants face do not stop at the shores of Europe. Instead, the Mediterranean journey is merely one phase of migrants' struggle. From our research we know that migrants who have come to Europe and applied for asylum through official channels have often ended up without provisions of food or shelter.

Comparing the refugees and their living conditions in the settlements of Eidomeni and Piraeus to the life of animals originates, mostly, from the intention of the press to stress the tragic conditions that the refugees face, as well as from another, opposite direction, namely from the people and political groups who wish to impose an animalistic identification between the refugee, particularly the illegal immigrant, and lower forms of life, which are not worth living among us. The latter include the group of general population with extreme xenophobic attitudes, part of which constitutes the so-called extreme right fractions (Chtouris, Zissi, Stalidis, & Rontos, 2014). The restriction of unofficial settlements to the "image" of the animal and the picture of Death, as imposed by the xenophobic right fractions' policy, cuts off a central representation of the reality that there is a life out there, beyond the confinement and slow death involved in exclusion. In addition, recently, a number of academic commentators have sought to emphasise that camps and detention centres in Europe are often sites of resistance against border



security practices (Katz 2015; Minca 2015). The authors wish to add to these dimensions of the refugees' reality the experiences involved in the dialectic formation of life that we encounter in the volunteer/solidarity citizen-refugee acknowledgement and which creates and establishes a relationship of creative solidarity with both sides crossing a closed border, real and conceptual. Very often we see a political action and cooperation instead of a simply support of pitiable persons³.

The research was mainly based on the core of dialectic methodology, as recently developed by the University of the Aegean's research group (Chtouris, Zissi, et.al. 2016) as a qualitative research targeting the creation of an instrument that will analyze social data based on the interactions of the participants and on the dynamic dialectic of the social phenomena as these emerge.

The Independent Volunteers' Motives and Practices

Moral Attitude.

A common statement among most volunteers the authors met in the difficult field of unofficial settlements, as regards the reason for linking their personal life with the refugee issue, is that they review and renegotiate their social formation and moral attitude. The volunteer

³ With a reference to Agamben states ' *The contemporary animalization of man represents the last theft of what remained of his political being after modernity's many bloody affirmations of it; unlearning to pity the results of that theft may be our Pitiable or Political Animals? 101 greatest contemporary political task? to force the passage back from the "pitiable" to the "political" for what is still human in the human.*' (Murphet, 2005:100-101)



seems that accept and *legitimize with refugees* **'a contract is made for mutual advantage on a basis of equality'** as Rawls (1971) has proposed in his **Theory of Justice** . Most of them declare that it was impossible to remain indifferent to the images of the refugee populations they watched on the media or saw during their first visits to the settlements. A central motive for the majority, resulting in undertaking various activities in the settlements, was to ensure human conditions, to treat refugees as humans and equal citizens and to meet the children's needs. Access to Eidomeni and Piraeus was mainly provided by the existing NGO networks or through friends and acquaintances who had already some experience with the settlements. In many cases, groups of people or friends emerge, who form a framework concerned about the refugee issue and end up undertaking practical activities as well. The individual moral attitude is mainly presented as the outcome of inner struggling, search and a self-critical view of lifestyle, rather than as a criticism of 'society's morality' or the indifference of others. The experiences acquired in the settlements are described as providing a new dimension to their life and a sense of moral completeness which they previously lacked. Another contributing factor is the generally positive acknowledgement of this practice by their family and social milieu: *"they are proud of me," "they approve and now wish to get involved, too, but they cannot because of other... commitments."* Friendship on the basis of equality between volunteers and between volunteers and refugees is an important motive for the participation an activities of young people in the informal camps.

Skills and Volunteering.



Many volunteers seem to decide to get involved in volunteering and solidarity work not based on a complete plan, but through the interests that emerge in a general framework of a social crisis. Another contributing factor is the present lack of clear courses (structures) in their professional and educational life. Most new volunteers are going through a period in their life when they are looking for another chance which will help them give new meaning to the terms “work” and “profession.” A “profession” however that is not provided in a clear and organized way as in the past. Many of them are unemployed or looking for work. In many cases, they are young people who are going through an educational milestone; their studies are either to be completed or to start soon. For them, volunteering is a bridging of life-segments between the alternating periods of work-education-unemployment. Following the experiences they acquire in the settlements, they come up with a reorientation and reinterpretation of their practice, as well as new, updated life plans, which are not limited to what they were doing or wanted to do in the past. Most of them state that volunteering and their involvement in solidarity activities now form “*part of my life.*” Life (and not the living needs they face in the settlements and which they do not wish to accept for the refugees) is a main motive for selecting their social and professional activities.

Volunteering as a Profession.

For many new volunteers, the professionalization process is not a taboo. This is a negative choice for the solidarity citizens, who link their activity to their ideological viewpoint on the refugee issue in general. Certain volunteers, even at the beginning of their activity, did not reject a professional cooperation with NGOs or other institutions supporting the refugees.



A significant problem with this choice is the on-and-off cooperation with NGOs and the lack of transparency they often come across during the selection procedures and the training programs. Several volunteers are looking for the chance to develop skills as part of independent volunteering activities, as well as for opportunities for their networking in the activities of the “civic society.” Major NGOs, such as PRAKSIS, Doctors without Borders, Oikopolis,⁴ and “The Smile of the Child,” offer opportunities and important training programs for potential volunteers to participate so that they can later take action in the field. The structured integration in NGOs is only one of the alternatives for independent volunteers, after a period of action in the field. In the major NGOs, there are professional opportunities in “volunteering,” which certain independent volunteers contemplate as interesting, while others consider them restricting and alienating. Certain NGOs, such as Oikopolis, actively involved in the volunteers' nutrition in Eidomeni and Diavata, also take on many volunteers after a brief familiarization with the settlements and provide greater flexibility in terms of the methods for their cooperation and participation. In general, as regards the professionalization issue, the authors come across several volunteers who, while providing a convincing and reliable image of the authentic volunteer, also show interest in a more solid profession, either immediately or in the future. Both these interests are consistent with previous work by Chtouris, Miller, Stalidis, and Rentari (2015) as to career aspirations⁵.

⁴ Oikopolis, a member of ecological movement of Thessaloniki. Interview with Odysseas Hiltidis.

⁵ In4Youth Research 2012-2015, Social and Labor Market Integration Processes of Young People during Continuous Economic and Financial Crisis, "Excellence" Action, EU "Training and Lifelong Learning", co-funding (ECB and national resources), Scientific Coordinator: Chtouris



Individual Responsibility - Collective Autonomy.

In many cases, the contribution of volunteers, particularly senior ones, consists in the skills and experience they have already acquired as part of the profession they exercise or have exercised. Cooking, legal services, organization and management, medical and nursing services, journalism and the news, are just a few of the professional activities and skills contributed to the independent volunteering action in the unofficial settlements in Eidomeni, Piraeus and Victoria Square. Several experienced volunteers were already retired and their contribution has a major impact on efficiency and organization out in the field. In Piraeus, volunteers had undertaken, without any other institutional responsibility, the complete organization of the refugees' nutrition and care; as a result, the state bodies and the Hellenic Navy which provide the meals are fully coordinated and harmonized with them, which is extremely unusual for state bureaucracy.

The independent volunteers and solidarity citizens are the ones offering the possibility of self-organization to the refugees in unofficial settlements, together with the organizations providing a high sense of autonomy to volunteers (e.g. Oikopolis). The refugees have the possibility to get involved in the organization, classification and distribution of the available materials, while they also undertake a major part in storing and distributing food, and in



addressing the children's and babies' special needs. Certain refugees are integrated as interpreters in the daily operation of the settlement and in the resolution of disagreements and conflicts with the teams showing up in protests. They also participate in assessing the families' actual needs and in intervening for transportation and the provision of emergency medical services. In two gates in Piraeus, the independent volunteers and the partnerships they have created have organized fully self-managed settlement frameworks, in which refugees also participate to a large extent. The NGOs that remain in the area for a short time also participate in this practice occasionally, lacking the ability to develop their own framework. The volunteers and political activists expressing **solidarity** (Allylegii) play a major part in self-organization⁶, since they are considered 'prestigious people' and have devoted substantial work to it on a daily basis.

.Political Ideology and Solidarity

The political choice and ideology is an important element of self-determination for a substantial group of political activist acting as volunteers who define themselves as solidarity citizens (Allilegyi). Solidarity became for many young activist a political and Life concept, and community building project and as a form of action which is very closed to the solidarity concept of Hanna Arendt.⁷ The researchers had some difficulty in accessing this group of

⁶ A similar experience has been observed in the settlement of PIKPA (Patriotic Foundation of Social Welfare and Security), Mytilene, Greece which is not presented in detail in this document.

⁷ 'It is through solidarity that people establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited. The common interest would then be "the grandeur of man" or "the honour of the human race" or the dignity of man. For solidarity, because it partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind. But this solidarity, though it may be aroused by suffering, is not guided by it, and it comprehends the strong and the rich no less than the weak and the poor; compared with the sentiment of pity, it may appear cold and abstract, for it remains committed to "ideas" -to greatness, or honour, or dignity-rather than to any "love" of men.... Terminologically speaking, solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action' (Arendt 1983:84)



volunteers due to the distrust created by the systematically negative image created about them in the media. In order to talk with them, the authors had to prove that they were not journalists nor interested in presenting the news or commentary on TV. These volunteers report they were “radically different,” from the volunteers with moral incentive, because they recognize in them the risk that their practice may only lead to the reproduction of the prevailing ideology. The authors observed a very good cooperation between these two kinds of volunteers in the field, in terms of serving the refugees' needs and carrying out the practices for ensuring the refugees' self-service. Their main incentive is to connect their political and ideological project and political autonomy, with the refugees' claim and right to free movement in Europe and the opening of the borders. The presence of solidarity citizens in the unofficial settlements raises major concerns among the authorities and the Units for the Reinstatement of Order (MAT) which occasionally intervene in case of small uprisings and conflicts within the settlements. The Solidarity Citizens are a functional unit of the independent volunteers, creating, at the same time, living communities around the settlements. Their special characteristic is that they link their social contribution with social resistance against the alienation of internment and the dehumanization of refugees. It is obvious that the presence of Solidarity Citizens in the unofficial settlements that we have visited, together with the Independent volunteers, creates an image of human daily life, which resists the Agabian animalistic landscape, well-known in political theory. At the same time, they ensure the refugees' safety and protection from state interventions and extreme forms of control and violence, such as those they came across in FYROM, for the short time period of their stay or their ‘illegal’ entrance there. The Solidarity Citizens, the volunteers and the refugees who have created a small refugee Parliament in front of



the exit of the train towards the closed border with FYROM, and they form a bond which is necessary under the hard circumstances along the refugees' course in order to preserve human dignity, in a world constantly flowing and changing. The images of new refugees and volunteers—solidarity citizens who play the guitar in front of a tent or wait together in the queue for food, or even of children who play with them for hours games from their multi-cultural childhood, stay deeply engraved in the memory of all those people who came along prepared to face only the landscape of the refugee than at politics (Agamben, 1997).

A pluralistic and contradictory landscape of moral and political stances according the human conditions and Safety of the Refugees

During the recent refugee crisis, the refugee issue was directly identified with issues of safety, protection and addressing the multiple risks connected to issues of life, health, delinquency, free movement, obstructing financial activity, etc. The label of the person and the group at risk had and still had plenty of recipients and managers. First and foremost, it is a fact that the refugees themselves have faced threats against their life and physical integrity, which also entitles them to apply for asylum and protection in the European Union. Moreover, the risks and safety issues are always highlighted by the media and, often, by the representatives of the communities which host the settlements for refugees and immigrants. This happens whether the settlements are unofficial or organized, by establishing spaces for hosting, registering or containing the transit refugee flows. Most of the recorded destructions and risk references proved to be smaller than expected, taking into account the size of the flows and the insufficient



staffing of the frameworks and services that hosted the refugees, as well as the limited resources used. The quality difference between potential and real risks was created and secured by the human factor in the form of the volunteer and the solidarity citizen who became active as an individual or as a member of an NGO. This human factor originates from the communities hosting the refugees or from the transit groups of volunteers from all over Europe, even from the occasional volunteering practised by the people next door; however, its massive action and the resources made available by it were extremely efficient in addressing the humanitarian crisis. This effective involvement of citizens and mainly the volunteers is based on pluralistic moral motives and political stances as we have presented in our typology. The volunteers seem also to be motivated by a deeper political stance. They treat the refugees as humans in need but equal, regardless of their origin and religion, which is the basis of an informal but in the same time unstable community. The Aristotelian concept of 'zoon Politicon' can be here easily applied to the volunteers and political activist (allylegious) of the informal camps.

The activation of the European Institutions and Mega-Structures for the protection of the member states and their alliances emerged relatively slowly during the refugee crisis and had a rather small impact on the refugees' protection; rather, their presence was more related with the control and the direct or indirect protection of the borders. During this second phase of the present refugee crisis which is actually starting now after the decrease in the flows, and which is related to the need for the refugees' permanent settlement and integration, the inability and often the absence of state and European institutions is obvious in terms of the application of effective policies and measures



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