

Master's Thesis

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Cover Photo: solidarity banner created by volunteers
at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, Ecopolis.

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Abstract

As an outcome of a three months ethnographic fieldwork in Thessaloniki, Greece, this thesis offers a novel approach to the relational understanding of volunteerism as a modality to enact citizenship *de facto*, for both citizens and non-citizens who volunteer in the humanitarian field for refugee aid.

The aim of this thesis is to trace the ways in which citizenship *de facto* plays out in the context of voluntary work at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, as a citizenship in flux, whereby actors of citizenship (volunteers) engage in acts of citizenship. Research participants include citizens from various countries and asylum seekers, who volunteer for refugee aid. Thus, citizenship *de facto* and volunteerism represent the thematic core of the thesis. Volunteerism is conceptualized as a tool both citizens and refugees utilize to experience and/or reshape their sense of citizenship in practice.

In terms of theory, I employ the concepts of gift-giving, solidarity, and acts of citizenship, in a relational manner, in order to analyze volunteers' motivations, experiences and actions regarding voluntary work, the concepts of citizenship and gift-giving constituting the theoretical debate I am addressing.

Key words: *de facto* citizenship; acts of citizenship; volunteerism; gift-giving; solidarity.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>The Field</i>	6
<i>Theoretical and methodological considerations</i>	7
<i>Chapter I: Bonding through Gift Exchange</i>	10
<i>“Karma is my inner compass”</i>	14
<i>Reality and duty</i>	18
<i>“Solidarity guides me; solidarity guides us”</i>	21
<i>Chapter II: Discovering a New World</i>	23
<i>3 in 1 - Gift-giving, Solidarity & Citizenship</i>	25
<i>The Insulated World of Volunteering</i>	27
<i>A failed act of citizenship</i>	36
<i>Chapter III: Does This Road Lead to Integration</i>	39
<i>Saving Urrab</i>	42
<i>Escaping liminality</i>	45
<i>Returning to Reality. Concluding thoughts</i>	47
<i>Conclusions</i>	49
<i>Bibliography</i>	51
<i>Appendix</i>	56

Introduction

A staggering number of people worldwide cannot enjoy benefits entailed by formal citizenship. Forced to flee their home countries, myriad find themselves dispossessed of their citizenship, constructed as refugees, in legal limbo, between citizenship and alienage (Sassen 2006; Cabot 2018). Globally, the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict, exceeded 70 million in 2018; 25.9 million are refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers (UNHCR Global Trends 2018). Accordingly, refugee migration and forced displacement have been critical issues in both the academic and societal debates over the last years.

According to a UNHCR Report, 4985 refugees were living in Thessaloniki and the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki in 2018 in total (UNHCR 2018). Non-governmental organizations and agencies supporting refugees play a fundamental role in a city where, to this day, thousands of individuals cannot enjoy the benefits entailed by formal citizenship.

Thessaloniki is known as ‘the mother of refugees’, or ‘the mother of migration’, titles attained due to its history of providing refuge to both Greek population from Asia Minor following the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922, and to the 21st century refugees fleeing conflict and persecution (Kasra et al. 2020)

Being one of the most affected countries in Europe by a twofold crisis, an economic crisis and a refugee crisis, Greece has not been able to respond properly to the influx of refugees and the societal unrest. Where the state apparatus was absent, civil society organizations tried to fill in the gaps (Evangelinidis 2016: 33), out of a need to cope with precariousness brought by severe austerity measures (Cabot 2018) and a state unable to provide for its citizens, let alone for refugees and asylum seekers, solidarity came to be at the core of various humanitarian initiatives, as a unifying force, having brought together Greek citizens, internationals and refugees. Many of these humanitarian organizations rely to a large extent on voluntary work. Numerous collective actions that have emerged in response to the European refugee crisis are guided by a solidarity leitmotif.

The Field

The fieldwork for this thesis took place in Thessaloniki, Greece, at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, for three months, during February - May 2020. I chose to spend the last stage of the research period in Greece as well, in consequence of the global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. During the first few weeks of the fieldwork period, before the restrictive measures to contain the virus were imposed, I spent around six hours per day at Alkyone, where I observed volunteers, while volunteering myself. The organization remained closed from the 15th of March until the 21st of April, when the employees were allowed to return to work. Moreover, before the lockdown took effect, part of the international volunteers at the center returned to their home countries. Therefore, from March until the end of the fieldwork period I relied on online interviews with former volunteers at Alkyone, on online ethnography and on literature research, due to the impossibility of being physically present with my research participants.

My previous experience as a volunteer at Alkyone granted me access to conduct this research, as I have created and maintained contacts and even friendships within the organization with other volunteers and with the employees as well. I volunteered at Alkyone for about ten months in 2018-2019. During this time, I had the opportunity to experience volunteering, its complications and, at times, biases, experience which inspired me to address the issue of citizenship in the context of volunteering. Both Alkyone and Ecopolis, the two support locations of the organization (Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki) rely almost entirely on voluntary help for providing services for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable groups. Both spaces are located in the city center of Thessaloniki, however in different buildings. I conducted most of the field work observation at Alkyone, as during the first few weeks before the lockdown I did not manage to gain access to the cooking team at Ecopolis which is formed largely by elderly Greek Women. Although I had initially planned to look at internationals, Greeks (citizens), refugees and asylum seekers (non-citizens) who volunteer, due to the unexpected course of events produced by COVID-19, I had narrowed down the research focus to international and refugee and asylum seeker volunteers, most of which I had met and observed at Alkyone.



Painting on a wall at the 6th floor at Alkyone Day Center for Refugees

Theoretical and methodological considerations

The academic debate on citizenship has not been concerned in a long time exclusively with citizenship *de jure*, which implies only rights and duties, but revolves more around citizenship *de facto*, and its various manifestations (Yuval-Davis 2011).

Whereas past research has produced manifold, valuable analyses of volunteering, few ethnographic studies have explored specifically the domain of voluntary work for refugees and asylum seekers in relation to the citizenship debate. Exceptions include Cabot's study (Cabot 2018) of social solidarity clinics and pharmacies as grassroots initiatives in Greece, which provide assistance to citizens and non-citizens in need. The article draws attention to the emergence of what Cabot is calling the 'humanitarian citizenship' - "the replacement of both social rights (afforded to citizens) and human rights (afforded to refugees) with humanitarian logics and sentiments, positioning both citizens and non-citizens in a partially shared continuum of precarity" (Cabot 2018). A study conducted in Fargo, United States, during 2007-2008, which examines the ways in which volunteers embrace and contest hegemonic forms of the neoliberal discourse of "worthy" citizenship (Erickson 2012). Bernát, Toth & Kertesz (2016) investigated the mobilizing effect of the refugee crisis

among 3% of the Hungarian population, and their motivations for volunteering, showing that some volunteers have altruistic motivations, whilst others are driven by the political context of the crisis. Other studies produced empirical insights into volunteers' motivations and the main practices of volunteering for refugee relief (Reinhard 2016; Sutter 2017; Kalogeraki 2018; Hoppe-Seyler 2020).

With this in mind, the aim of this research is to gain in-depth understanding into how citizenship in practice manifests in the context of volunteering for refugee aid, with the central research question being:

How does citizenship in practice manifest among volunteers for refugee aid at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki?

A key aspect in analyzing the ways in which contemporary citizenship transforms and stretches beyond the nation-state is to pay attention to specific groups' rights and citizenships and their struggle for recognition within a given community. Therefore, my analysis takes into account the experiences and initiatives of both citizens and non-citizens who volunteer.

Through means of participant observation, informal conversations, interviews and online research, I have assembled ethnographic evidence aimed at portraying manifestations of citizenship in practice, as observed at Alkyone Refugee Day Center and Ecopolis. This thesis enriches existent empirical research on volunteering to support refugees in Greece, by exploring interactions and relations between refugees and internationals who volunteer and demonstrating the role volunteerism plays in their experiences of citizenship in practice. This research brings valuable insights that continue to be needed, as the refugee crisis in Europe continues to affect lives in Greece, while volunteerism plays a crucial role in the NGOs and other initiatives' struggle to improve the circumstances of those in need.

The first chapter of this thesis is an exploration of the connection between volunteerism and the gift giving concept, as a basis for a subsequent and relational understanding of citizenship in practice experienced through volunteering. The second chapter portrays interactions/exchanges, in the gift-giving sense, and moments of solidarity between volunteers, as acts of citizenship. The third and last chapter of this thesis focuses on acts of citizenship brought to light through various circumstances,

including the volunteers' struggles during the pandemic and in view of the latest government policies regarding the refugee situation.

Chapter I: Bonding through Gift Exchange

The main rationale of this first chapter consists in employing the concepts of gift exchange and solidarity as a lens to analyze volunteers' motivations to engage in volunteer work, and how they make sense of their volunteering experiences through their narratives, in order to subsequently uncover how *de facto* citizenship manifests among internationals and refugees who volunteer. I consider these two concepts to be appropriate for this analysis of citizenship in practice due to their similarities in manifestation and characteristics. Both gift giving and solidarity are two abstract concepts and although very related, they have remained separate to a large extent in the scientific and academic realm (Komter 2005). Thus, throughout this chapter I will guide you through various interpretations of the anthropological concept of gift-giving and how I saw it manifesting at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, in order to then understand how gift giving and *de facto* citizenship play out in the context of volunteer work, as they are correlated in their manifestations.

The multitude ways of defining volunteer work and volunteers' motivations and positionalities, added to my personal experience as a long-term volunteer in the humanitarian sector, specifically for refugee relief, gave rise to my interest in understanding how volunteers – citizens and non-citizens – experience and reshape citizenship in practice. Volunteerism has been simply defined as engaging in unpaid work, with no obligation to do so, willingly, within an organized setting, for the benefit of other individuals, organizations, or the society at large (Shure 1991, Cnaan et al. 1996, Komter 2005). Other definitions include aspects related to motivation and gains, like the one offered by Smith (1981: 22-23), which describes the volunteer as someone who undertakes activities for which they will not receive a monetary compensation, but may be motivated by the expectation of psychic benefits of some kind (Smith 1981: 22-23).

Although these definitions do not explicitly mention either gift-giving or citizenship, volunteerism is, in my opinion, defined in a relevant manner for a better understanding of the abovementioned concepts. From this perspective on volunteer work we can already start to discern how tightly aspects of gift exchange and

solidarity are interrelated (obligation, motivation, benefit, gain, and organizing for the benefit of the society at large). An analysis of the ways in which the gift giving phenomenon and solidarity unfold within the volunteering sphere, is necessary to further dive into the meaning and manifestations of citizenship for citizens and non-citizens who volunteer.

Volunteering has also been analyzed in relation to citizenship, as a helping, voluntary action, aimed at helping or improving the welfare of the underprivileged, which may be interpreted as drawing on a discourse of the good citizen, depicting the volunteer as a caring individual, as it touches on current ideals of citizenship, such as community participation and social responsibility. Thus, volunteering is idealized as a practice of good citizenship (Miles 2006; Yap et al. 2010). Such a perspective on volunteerism, in terms of citizenship, became especially interesting for my research considering the diversity which characterizes my field, consisting of research participants/volunteers of various nationalities, race, gender and different social and citizenship statuses. For both categories of volunteers, citizens and refugees, volunteering may be a tool for either acceding to a specific standard of citizenship, or to gain access to benefits entailed by citizenship.

With this in mind, I consider the anthropological concept of gift giving appropriate, if not necessary, to tackle and understand the volunteerism–citizenship relation, in this particular setting, among volunteers. Looking at volunteerism through the lens of gift giving, may allow for a better understanding of motives, expectations and outcomes regarding volunteering among citizens and non-citizens. We will first look at different interpretations of *The Gift*, its connection to solidarity, how the two play out in the context of volunteering, and what are their meaning and importance in terms of volunteers' experiences of citizenship.

Contemporary societies inherit the gift exchange system, gifts, both material and nonmaterial/symbolic, are being circulated and reproduced, and volunteerism is no exception. Giving and taking create and maintain relations and social adhesion (Mauss 2002, Berking 1999, Godelier 1999, Osteen 2002). Traditionally, the idea of gift entails receiving a gift back, but the gift can also be interpreted as being its own reward (Eckstein 2001). Although gift giving has been associated to a large extent and for a long time with exchanges between members of an extended family, its true

significance can be observed within social interactions between strangers. (Kowalski 2011). For this reason I consider volunteerism to be a very suitable context in which the gift giving phenomenon can be observed.

Simply defined, the gift is any action of sharing goods or services, without a guarantee or promise of return/compensation, *“with a view to creating, maintaining or regenerating the social bond”* (Caillé 2000:47). Thus, we understand that offering gifts, such as time, items, conversations, company etc., fosters solidaristic relationships. Such gifts are then seen as reciprocities, and are in fact social acts which, from what I have observed in my field, most often are not based on interest, but not disinterested (Adolff & Mau 2006). Therefore, we can understand the gift as being situated between the lines of “interest in”, “interest for”, duty and spontaneity: *“If, asymptotically, it approaches one or two of these four poles of action, a gift-based relation is transformed into an economic exchange, pure love or an ethics of duty”* (idem: 108). To look at the gift giving phenomenon as being situated between these lines and not strictly defined as this or that is paramount for understanding the complexities which characterize interactions and motivations for said interactions.

In terms of material gifts, the gift-giving system can be observed at Alkyone in how beneficiaries are encouraged and volunteers allowed to take and return items and services for redistribution (such as clothes, using the washing machines etc). The volunteers’ coordinator and the volunteers advise beneficiaries to return any items that no longer serve them. Volunteers are sometimes allowed to take or borrow items, but it is expected of them to bring back said item or to replace it. Many international volunteers take the initiative to donate their clothes to the center. Tara, a volunteer from Portugal, undertook an initiative to collect clothes and send them to Alkyone, by partnering with Erasmus Student Network, once she went back to Portugal. International volunteers who donate clothes to the organization set in motion a process of the gift which, more often than not, does not take place between equals; it is asymmetrically oriented, since it may express a social position or a place in a hierarchy (Adolff 2004). Their gifts are also carriers of identity or status. On the other hand, these alms are intended for strangers, since the volunteers do not donate the clothes to/for a certain individual. Instead, they give for those who are perceived as unfortunate victims, deserving of help. Thus, alms can be considered disinterested

gifts, while also being unilateral gifts to strangers. Unlike the Maussian gift, donations made by volunteers at Alkyone are given without an expectation of return, and they entail no obligation on the receiver (the beneficiaries).

I have observed one of the volunteers, an asylum seeker, Maleek, who refuses to accept unsolicited help from other volunteers or employees of the NGO, nor does he ever ask for help. Maleek did accept a 'gift' from some volunteers in 2019. He became friends with Sami, Tara and Patricia, all of them international volunteers. Maleek was living on the streets until the volunteers invited him to move in with them. He accepted their offer and lived there for a few months, even after the internationals left Greece. Unfortunately, the next volunteers who moved into the apartment did not want Maleek living with them, so they asked him to leave. Since then I could always sense a strong, deeply grounded, hesitation and initial refusal coming from Maleek every time anything was offered to him, except company; whether it is a job opportunity, a place to sleep or help with a personal or legal problem.

The bond created by gift giving between the benefactor and the recipient is remarkably strong. In this case, these four volunteers consider and speak of each other to this day as family. At the same time, Maleek found himself in a position of dependence upon the donor, both emotional and material dependence to some extent. As a result, when the donors (his family) left, Maleek experienced a double loss; he may have felt both abandoned and deprived of the gift he accepted from them. Being a recipient of gifts, most likely put him in a vulnerable position when the gifts were taken away and his friends (the donors) left. Now, seemingly he avoids being in a similar position again, that of the recipient. He is repaying the debt of the gift through volunteering, as a donor. Accepting a gift can be dangerous. This bond was created between volunteers, by the exchange, by offering and accepting the offer, followed by an obligation to repay (Mauss 1966: 59-60). Such an obligation does not act merely upon the person who accepted the gift, but upon the donors as well, since the exchange acts as a binding force. The donors became responsible for the recipient from the moment the gift was accepted, and they too became emotionally attached. This bond keeps them connected to this day. Therefore, it appears that the relationship between the volunteers (donors) and the recipients is an ethical one, like most social exchanges (Wilson & Musick 1997).

Sami calls Maleek every so often. Tara wrote him a letter during the March - April 2020 lockdown and sent it to me because she could not be sure about Maleek's address. Otherwise, they all check up on each other through texting every chance they get; Maleek does not hesitate to constantly share photos on social media platforms from the time they spent together here in Greece, letting them know how much he misses their company. Long-lasting relations and friendships between volunteers, connections I also had the opportunity to experience as a volunteer at the same organization, stand as proof for how intense these ties generated by an exchange system are, whether they are exchanges of favors, offering company, advice, emotional support or acts of citizenship. Steen (1993) also emphasizes the ethical aspect of the relation between the donor and the recipient, uncovering how refugees find themselves in an unequal position of power in relation to their benefactor (paid worker or volunteer). Additionally, the benefactors might (unconsciously) expect compliance in return, or simply a return of their gift, in another form, at a different time. As I further discuss, this expectation of return is 'translated' and expressed by some of the volunteers I interviewed as Karma.

“Karma is my inner compass”

Volunteering itself, donating one's time or an item, brings the volunteer what Marcel Mauss (1966) called an equivalent return, turning the gift from something that could have been a potential loss into something with the quality to reproduce, to return to the donor in another form. I found this aspect of gift giving particularly interesting once I realized that Karma was a recurring theme in a number of conversations and interviews with my research participants. I was surprised to discover a strong connection, although not evident at first glance, between gift exchange and Karma. During one of the first interviews I conducted, I naively asked a former volunteer, Sami, if he sees voluntary work as a form of gift giving. To my surprise Sami stated that he read something about gift-giving, and that, simply put, the concept of gift-giving translates to him as: “you only do something because you expect something back”. Then, visibly disturbed, he added:

I see volunteering as doing something right. It makes me happy because I do not think about the outcome... then, if I *receive something back*, I feel like there is ‘justice’, balance in a way. At Alkyone, I felt many times that I made someone’s day just because I was kind or caring, without feeling that I gave them something that they could take, it was just the way I was approaching them. Then, one day I lost my phone on the bus on the way home and the next day I got it back, which is somewhat unbelievable, to find your lost phone in Thessaloniki. So, I felt there was a balance. *Karma* is my inner compass. If I am in a position to help someone, I will do it the best way I can. When I will need some services, hopefully other people will approach their position in the same way. I do not believe the world is an ugly place where people do something only because they expect something back. I just think that *if you do anything the best way you can, good things will happen*. (Sami, Montenegro)

Sami made a clear distinction between Karma, as a spiritual principle of the cause and effect cycle, meaning that a certain action or behavior will attract a certain consequence/outcome, and the gift-giving principle, which, as seen by him, entails an expectation of return, as the only motivation to engage, to give. For him, this dynamic, of the gift-giving system, only takes place in “an ugly world”. The separation between Karma and gifting points to the negative connotation he attributed to gifting in voluntary work, and as a way of living in general, contrasted by his conception of Karma, as a positive philosophy to live by. Karma may be in this case a way volunteers make sense of their expectations of volunteering, which are in fact part of the gift exchange equation. What they describe is an expectation that a good deed, behavior or intention will be rewarded accordingly. Thus, they unknowingly describe *the equivalent return* of the act of giving.

Reciprocity in the context of gift exchange is understood as assistance in situations of social need, assistance which for the giver is linked to the expectation of being able to count on the support of the community in a similar crisis (Adolff & Mau 2006:115) As Sami stated: “When I will need some services, hopefully other people will approach their position in the same way”. These passive expectations of reciprocity that volunteers describe in terms of Karma, indicate a *positive attitude toward redistribution*, by engaging in solidarity, through volunteering, they give something which will inevitably be of use to someone, redistributed and possibly returned to the giver in another form. In other words, I believe that by gifting and engaging in solidarity, volunteers contribute to a *cycle of solidarity* as gift-giving, by making their

resources available without an active expectation of return, or guarantee of immediate response. According to Gouldner (in Adolff & Mau 2006), the motive to give and the reciprocity evoked are or should be seen as separate, because the giver may subjectively feel they are giving without the expectation of a counter-gift and yet, at the same time, they objectively set a cycle of obligations in motion. “It is also conceivable that the donation which to the outside appears spontaneous may be felt by the giver to be an expression of gratitude or debt” (idem: 116). Gouldner (1973) considers reciprocity to be a universal norm, usually internalized by the actors of an interaction. Following Durkheim, Gouldner emphasizes that obligations are met not only because of dependence between the partners of an interaction, but also because they are bound to a moral norm. Two requirements have been identified for this norm of reciprocity: “one should help those who have helped one, and one should not injure those who have helped one” (Adolff & Mau 2006:103). Refugees and Asylum seekers motivations to engage in voluntary work may include feeling a need to respond, as a social pressure, even if not consciously perceived, to a ‘debt’, to help fellow refugees and fellow volunteers in the same way they have once been helped. Raman, a Kurdish asylum seeker, one of Alkyone’s former volunteers, told me: “Once I learned the language (Greek) I wanted to work in an NGO, to help refugees, because I was a volunteer myself in an NGO”. Raman’s need to respond to the gift he once received, support from the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, materialized into a wish to work in the humanitarian sector, thus engaging into a cycle of solidarity, while at the same time responding to the norm of reciprocity.

An interesting approach belongs to Godbout (2000), who introduced the model of *homo donator*, as an alternative to *homo oeconomicus*. *Homo oeconomicus* is a concept of economic theory, which portrays the individual as a rational, self-interested agent, who acts to maximize utility as a consumer and profit as a producer. Opposingly, besides a natural drive to take and receive, *homo donator* possesses a *drive to give* (39). Therefore, it may be interpreted that reciprocity is secondary to the gift. Such interpretation of the gift is greatly valuable in the context of voluntary work. Many of my research participants talked about *a need to help* as their core motivation to volunteer, although being aware of gains as well. Marjorie, from France, volunteered at Alkyone for four months, while being an Erasmus student at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Having been through an Erasmus experience

in Thessaloniki myself, knowing how easily one gets lost into what is called the Erasmus life, I was surprised Marjorie even thought about volunteering:

When I am aware of a problem, I cannot just be passive. I was always concerned by the refugee situation and I thought if I can help, why should I not? My Erasmus scholarship was for two semesters, so in my second semester I decided to do something besides going out, going on trips and partying. I thought we needed some people that were there to help, otherwise it cannot work. I had a lesson a few years ago about engagement; the discussion was – do you always engage in something just to help the others? Or is there another motivation for which you are doing this? And it's called prosocial behavior – you do it just because you feel compassion for the others, and you want to help? I think, even if it's not conscious, you always also gain a bit of satisfaction for doing something. You do it for others, but at the same time you gain something for yourself. So, it's never motivated by pure desire to help. There is always even a small, small interest even if you are not entirely aware of it, maybe you feel better after this, because you felt useful. I know I did. (Marjorie, France)

When Marjorie mentions a need for people who want to help, she uses the plural personal pronoun “we”, which speaks of solidarity, a call to solidarity she felt coming from the humanitarian sector.

Rena is a German volunteer who also works in the humanitarian sector in Greece. She beautifully described how this cycle of giving, receiving and exchanging (“I only have pasta, but you have salsa”) creates strong social bonds (“It's nicer to eat together”).

I gained the fact that I was doing something useful, to bring my skills into service, for the good. But not only that, it wouldn't be enough... it's like a puzzle that fits together. *I can give something that they need*, so it's perfect. I would never do work that I don't like, and I wouldn't also do something only to feel useful. Maybe this is because I don't have the feeling that I am doing something so special, I am just doing something that is now, today or in this moment important for someone, and I can give it. It's like *I only have pasta, but you have salsa and we share them. It's nicer to eat together*. (Rena, Germany)

As Erving Goffman (1967) emphasized, the world is built on daily small sacrifices people make for each other, in the sense of gifts that do not entail guaranteed return. These small gifts, as I have observed at Alkyone and Ecopolis, consist of barely

noticeable actions, like tactfulness, politeness, face and name saving, to more easily recognizable ones, such as donating items, taking interest in the well-being of fellow volunteers and beneficiaries, offering help, support in times of need etc. Such small *gifts give rise to a world of social recognition*.

A number of social interactions can be re-thought in terms of the theory of gift-giving and reciprocity. Gifts establish and maintain relationships of solidarity even before any self-interest exchange of goods can start (Adolff & Mau 2006:97). Gifts are also manifestations of commitment to a relationship and it is the interest in the social relation that drives the exchange. Thus, a return or response does not have to be immediate; it can remain pending, creating a useful tension that will eventually produce a response (Kowalski 2011). Thus, volunteering seen in terms of gift-giving may be interpreted as an adhesive for social cohesion. As Godbout & Caillé (1998) have previously emphasized, the rule of profitable return does not apply to volunteer work. For this reason, I consider the idea of unilateral gifts to strangers to be appropriate for analyzing interactions between volunteers. The act of engaging in voluntary work can be interpreted as a gift to strangers (Godbout 2000).

Reality and duty

I saw and understood what our beneficiaries were living with daily. There were times when I would leave Alkyone, go to the gym and I would just start crying, because at the moment it felt like so much. Of course, you are not living their experiences, you are not living their traumas, but you experience vicarious trauma – when you hear about and understand someone else’s trauma you can sometimes take that... not as your own, but you can feel it. I think at the moment I was experiencing some of that. We would see them every day, sometimes we would get into arguments with them, and you see their children, you think about how they had to get in this country in the first place; we would also see people with actual physical trauma scars, and emotional trauma scars. Just seeing all of that day every day, I started to internalize it. But once I was able to work through it, it left me with such a perspective of my own life. Even now, with the whole Covid-19 situation I am thinking about the kids who are living at Lagkadikia, in shipping containers, who are not able to social distance, they have to just sit there; I think about their parents, having to take care of your children in that situation. The experiences with the people at Alkyone, made something that I was

always aware of even more tangible, that I am very fortunate to be who I am and in the position that I am in (Talia, USA).

It seems that in the eyes my international informants, the refugees become archetypal victims of Western imperialism, while the dialectical conflict, or a differentiation between self and otherness is recognizable in their perceptions, through the unworldliness they attribute to the refugees and especially the refugee families and their suffering. Refugees and asylum seekers tell of adventures and struggles, of resistance to violence and rejection, all experiences internationals had never been confronted with. Maleek was caught by the border police in Greece and deported back to Turkey seven times. Arya, a Kurdish 20 years old woman, together with her parents and other three siblings, traveled on the back of horses for 40 hours in order to apply for asylum in Greece, after leaving Iraq for the 4th time. Stories like this one, told by refugees who volunteer, added to countless other moving ones told by beneficiaries, bring some of the other volunteers in a need to forget, detach or return to reality. Rena, who has been working with and volunteering for refugees for a few years, told me:

The *reality* is not Alkyone, the *reality* is not Moria camp, it's an emergency situation that has to be solved, and if we want to stress that and to show it to politicians, we have to be in the reality as well. But maybe this is something personal. I really need my very normal life. My very normal Greek life. Going somewhere to eat, to drink, to talk about everything, but not about refugees, everyone needs that and none of us feel guilty about it, it's our lives, and I learned it is ok to enjoy it, despite the fact that there are people living in abandoned buildings for example. I see them from my balcony when they head to Alkyone for breakfast, but that is my balcony and it is my life (Rena, Germany).

This need to remain in the *reality* that some of my research participants talked about and expressed through a kind of affect management, by compartmentalizing, shows a need to avoid excessive identification with the other, as a protective measure against an emotional burden which might hinder their helping capabilities.

While conducting field work, I found it difficult to keep my analytical focus on manifestations of citizenship in practice, while trying to identify and make sense of these exchanges. However, connections between the donor, the gift and the reward, soon started to become apparent, once I began the data analysis. Another recurring

theme in the interviews was an expression of a *sense of duty* as one of the international volunteers' motivations to volunteer for refugee relief. They articulated a *need to help* as Liisa Malkki called it (2015). I interpreted this need as a feeling of duty toward refugees, originating perhaps in a feeling of (unconscious) guilt, for belonging, as citizens, to wealthier, welfare-wise-stronger nations. Most of my research participants expressed their dissatisfaction with how little their governments have done for the refugee cause. This sense of duty, which is a drive for their volunteer work, is demonstrated both through an obligatory prestation (volunteering itself, donating their time, taking individual initiatives for refugees etc.), and sometimes giving/donating material gifts. Layla told me:

I think it's healthy to get a reality check, to avoid living in your little bubble of welfare state and happy people. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that not everyone is living the way you are (Layla, Denmark).

At another occasion, she told me:

I felt that Denmark is not doing enough for refugees. They decided we cannot take in more than a few hundreds and I thought 'ok, Germany took one million and other countries like Jordan, Lebanon even more, and what about Greece?' In Denmark we have so much money and a good welfare system, we have the means to integrate people, but I guess it's not on the political agenda...

The realization of the refugee crisis' implications for other countries, less economically and strategically prepared countries, added to Denmark's decision to not step up, made Layla to no longer trust their political representatives in this particular matter: "I got another mind set, the way I view the world, I am more critical now about politicians here in Denmark, I don't accept so easily when politicians say 'we don't have enough space for refugees or we don't have this and that". Thus, volunteering gave rise to a greater interest in how 'the system' works and a desire to bring about change, while it is also a manifestation of the need to give back.

The interest internationals manifest toward the refugee cause reflects a refugee imago being situated at the core of their conceptualization of suffering, an embodiment of what is wrong with society today, and consequently creates a feeling of duty to challenge or change that. The image of the refugee, "the people", as most of my informants call the beneficiaries, is a palpable injustice that they feel the need to

alleviate, much like feeling responsible to repay for the gift of their status, of their citizenship privilege, to those who are deprived of it.

In Denmark we don't have that many refugees, you don't really see them every day, it's just something you hear about on the news 'the refugee crisis is still going on', so I got a chance to see where they actually are and how bad it actually is. Then, being there, it was harsh seeing the people in that state of mind, being desperate that was a bit difficult (Layla Denmark).

“Solidarity guides me, solidarity guides us”

Komter (2005: 2) draws attention to the parallels and similarities between gift giving and solidarity. Gifting is an act that creates and maintains social bonds, and social solidarity is the glue that keeps people together, through shared norms and values, through a sense of participation to a common good.

As an incentive, solidarity is at the core of most non-governmental organizations in Greece, as their functioning basis. The Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, and other solidarity initiatives, especially those supporting refugees, display solidarity as their formative and guiding leitmotif. Part of everyday Greek vocabulary, as Rozakou (2016: 187) points out, solidarity has turned into a noun. The 'solidarian' (alliléggios) is someone who engages in forms and areas of action, such as attending protests or volunteering. Solidarity most likely originates from hospitality (philoxenia). Literally translated as 'a friend to a stranger', *philoxenia* is embedded in the Greek culture, in its self-representation and attitude toward immigrants and refugees, toward strangers in general (Herzfeld 1987, in Rozakou 2016). As arising from the informal conversations I had with volunteers, as well as from the interviews I conducted with them, solidarity is evoked as what guides them in supporting refugees through volunteering, much like a work philosophy or mantra. One of my informants, Rena, told me:

Solidarity guides me, solidarity guides us. As a very inclusive idea, it means that everybody is able to give at a certain point something for the community. This is what defines our environment. A feeling of community in which anyone who can give something – time, money, and items, whatever they can – they will give it. I have the

time and the knowledge; this is what I give to the community, which can be the NGO, Thessaloniki, Greece and then Europe. I see that people feel that they have to help. It's *filoksenia*¹ (φιλοξενία), it's about helping other people.

This solidarity leitmotif, rooted in *filoksenia*, is passed on to and embraced by international and refugee volunteers as well. Discourses of solidarity are present from the beginning of their arrival as volunteers at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, which manifests into various initiatives they undertake, as I will further discuss throughout the chapters. Messages and calls for solidarity are often distributed on the center's Facebook page.

We are grateful for 700kg (!!) food that we got today from Heimatstern e.V.. We will use it for the distribution to families and for the meals for homeless refugees that we will start to cook soon at the weekends at Oikopolis Οικόπολις - μια παράλληλη πόλη. For the Refugee Day Center Alkyone Κέντρο Ημέρας Προσφύγων Αλκυόνη we got some boxes with protection shields to protect employees and visitors of the Day Center. We cannot thank enough for all the solidarity we received in these difficult last months! #WeContinueTogether (15th of March 2020)²

We, the people of Alkyone refugee day center, wish you happy holidays without inequalities, many opportunities for personal and collective creativity, power, love and more solidarity. (24th of December 2019)³

By employing the lens of the gift-giving concept in my analysis, I was able to observe it manifesting as a social phenomenon which uncovered the cyclicity of the social interactions and solidarity that bond volunteers. Moreover, the gift-giving phenomenon appeared as a strong social adhesive which created and maintained friendships between volunteers.

¹ “Filoksenia, literally filia (love) of the ksenos (stranger, pl. kseni), is central to the Greek cultural and social imaginary for dealing with alterity and is at the core of how the Greek state represents itself” (Rouzakou 2012: 565).

² Support refugees in greece Facebook page of the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, <https://www.facebook.com/SupportRefugeesInGreece>

³ Refugee Day Center Alkyone Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/alkyonedaycenter/>

Chapter II: Discovering a New World

I begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of the contemporary view on citizenship in practice, and of the theory of acts of citizenship in particular, as well as accounts from the field, connecting citizens' and non-citizens' narratives and experiences. I then introduce the insulated world of volunteering, as observed during my fieldwork, as a site of citizenship (in Isin's sense) where exchanges (in the gift-giving sense) are made between volunteers as acts of citizenship.

As it has been previously agreed, citizenship is not exclusively experienced by those who hold formal citizenship, but it can be enacted by other categories as well, such as asylum seekers and refugees (Bassel 2008, Isin & Nielsen 2008, Isin 2009). In a broad sense, citizenship entails civil status and participation in the civil society and has been defined as membership in a community, comprising civil, political and social rights and responsibilities, which are not solely determined by the state, but may be determined by other collectivities as well (Yuval-Davis 1999), such as a volunteering community. In other words, we understand that citizenship can be conceptualized beyond the state (Hall & Held 1989; Yuval-Davis 1999; Ong 1996; Isin 2002; Gordon & Stack 2007; Holston 2009; Isin & Nielsen 2008; Isin 2009; Stack 2012; Lazar 2012; Lazar & Nuijten 2013; de Konning et al. 2015).

Stack (2012) displays a type of citizenship as *civil sociality*, entailing the obligations that come with being part of a broader society, in contrast to other rights-based notions of citizenship (875). Similarly, Katerina Rozakou (2016) addresses *socialities of solidarity* in relation to the gift taboo in the contexts of the refugee and economic crises in Greece. According to Rozakou, socialities foster everyday human encounters and interactions, stimulating *political potentialities*. I consider these observations on solidarity socialities and gift exchange compatible with the notion of the act of citizenship, and useful for understanding how citizenship is experienced in this specific context, by volunteers at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki. Experiencing political potentialities may translate, in the case of international volunteers into exercising their citizenship in a way that can help a non-citizen discover their political potentialities, or integrate. Thus, when I refer to exchanges

between volunteers, in the gift giving sense, I refer to an exchange of citizenship, between citizens and non-citizens.

I believe that volunteers constitute themselves as citizens by establishing certain conditions and encounters, through gifting and exchanges (of time, items, ideas, support etc.) as acts of solidarity, which can ultimately be considered acts of citizenship. Therefore, the most relevant notion for my analysis of this volunteering community, composed of both citizens and non-citizens, as a site for *de facto* citizenship, is Isin and Nielsen's (2008) eye-opening approach, which introduces a new vocabulary of citizenship. Isin (2009) also distinguishes between the well-known active citizen and the activist type of citizen, by conceptualizing citizenship through actors, sites, scales and acts. A site of citizenship is defined as a field "of contestation around which certain issues, interests, stakes as well as themes, concepts and objects assemble" (Isin 2009: 370). In order to identify acts and sites of citizenship, one needs to investigate everyday events and find not only what is called politics, but acts which can also appear as ethical, cultural, sexual and social, "in that they instantiate *ways of being that are political*" (Isin & Nielsen 2008:2). Volunteering itself is considered an act of citizenship (Isin 2009: 386).

Once I started looking at volunteerism as a locus, a site which allows and facilitates acts of citizenship, my ethnographic lens turned, from struggling to find organized political action among the volunteers (which in my perspective would have reflected an active type of citizenship), toward any kind of acts (deeds) that constitute their sociality and citizenship potentialities. As such, encounters between citizen and non-citizen volunteers appear as acts that challenge predetermined definitions and lines of power and conduct, imposed by what being a citizen typically entails. Citizens, strangers, outsiders and aliens appeared as beings who act and react with others through acts of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen 2008:39). I then started viewing the volunteers as actors performing acts of citizenship, and volunteering as both an act and a site.

3 in 1 - Gift-giving, Solidarity & Citizenship

It is the 12th of February. Another morning at Alkyone. Late morning! and Maleek is not here yet. He is always here by the time I arrive at the center. I wonder if something happened, so I ask Ariadne, the volunteers' coordinator, if she knows anything. She does not and I can see she is worried. We both know Maleek is homeless again. Some hours pass, it is almost the end of the program and I see him entering the room with a frowned look upon his face. He says hi and goes in the back (in the warehouse). I decide to let him be and wait until he is ready to talk about it. Another half an hour passes and Maleek comes to tell Ariadne and I that he had lost his identification paper. "If they catch me without the paper they will arrest me". I suspected Maleek chose to not share this with the other volunteers out of his usual avoidance to 'ask' for help. Though for some reason he told us.

Next day, on the 13th of February 2020 I wrote I my field notes:

Ariadne is visibly nervous about Maleek going by himself to the police station to ask for a reissue of his documents. I wonder why? B. (one of the cultural mediators at the center) offered to go with Maleek. B. speaks Greek... Ariadne and I are alone now and she tells me: "No, I don't think it's a good idea for them to go together and by themselves." I ask 'why?'. "Because you know... Maleek is an asylum seeker and B. is a refugee. And they're racists, it's dangerous. I'm afraid they will not let him (Maleek) go. Plus, I really cannot go with him today...". 'I will go!' I said. But when we told Maleek he refused me politely. He insisted on going by himself. "I will be alright, it's gonna be fine, they will not do anything to me" he said. Worried that Maleek will not be able to find the right police station, Ariadne insisted on printing him the online map. She also begged him to wait until the next day so she could go with him. But Maleek refused to take the map and once the program ended he went to find the police station. I didn't get a chance to accompany him. I hope he will make it. Am I being irrationally worried? It's fine. I'm sure he can do it!

Next day he was at the center, so we felt relieved, although his attempt was unsuccessful. He was told by the police officer that his document can only be issued by the police station in the neighborhood where he resides. Ariadne became slightly frustrated hearing this, knowing that Maleek does not have an official address. Very

few asylum seekers do. He was, like many of them, homeless. She firmly told him “This afternoon we are going together. We will figure this out!” That day Maleek played guitar in Alyone, lifting everyone’s spirits up. Playing guitar is one of his gifts for the center. In the afternoon, after closing time for the beneficiaries, Maleek, another volunteer and I went all together to the closest police station, one street up from the center. Ariadne was going to join us once she would lock the whole floor. We spent more than one and half hours in the waiting room. Then Ariadne arrived. Shortly after, she and Maleek entered an office. I felt nervous, but all we could do was wait. After a few minutes they came out of the office smiling. Maleek got a replacement for his document. He immediately came to us, hugged us and thanked us for going with him. I felt his relief and gratitude.

Looking back on that afternoon, I believe it to be a good example of an interaction between volunteers, which can be considered a deed, an act of citizenship, incorporating elements of gift giving, solidarity and trust. Trust is another element I identified in the equation of gift-giving. Trust is a form of gift to others, whilst it is closely linked to solidarity as well. Trust is a core mechanism of social relations. In other words, trust is necessary in order for people to act as if a social relation already existed between them; it is the gift they give to each other, which leads to a fabrication of a social relation in order for it to become reality (Wenzel 2001 in Adolff & Mau 2006: 109). Trust between individuals functions therefore as a gift, as assistance with no expectation of return or of a particular response (Caillé 2000), but with the intention of building a social relation. Despite his previous tendencies to distrust and refuse help, Maleek eventually accepted our gift that afternoon. Only later I realized we were the first ones to accept a gift from Maleek - his trust. I believe that was the experience that bonded us. It was the moment a social bond was created, a friendship started to materialize.

The Insulated World of Volunteering

Volunteering gave me a chance to help in *my little world*. Maybe I will not help all refugees or all disadvantaged people, but we have to start somewhere, and in my little world I can do it through volunteering (Patricia, Italy).

I consider the insulated world of volunteering to be a site of citizenship due to some of its specific characteristics that I will next describe and discuss, as well as for its inherent solidarity theme, which influences and unites interests and common goals. Based on my personal experience as a volunteer at Alkyone for one year in 2018-2019, complemented by these three months of fieldwork, as well as resulting from interviewing and discussing with current and former volunteers, I established a few characteristics of this space of existence.

One of its most perceptible characteristics is the fact that English becomes the first language for everyone, being the language spoken at work when volunteers go out and even at home, between volunteers of the same nationality who live together – some of them told me that when they leave Alkyone, they often continue to speak English with each other for hours, on the way home, at home, until they realize they no longer need to, then they switch to their native language.

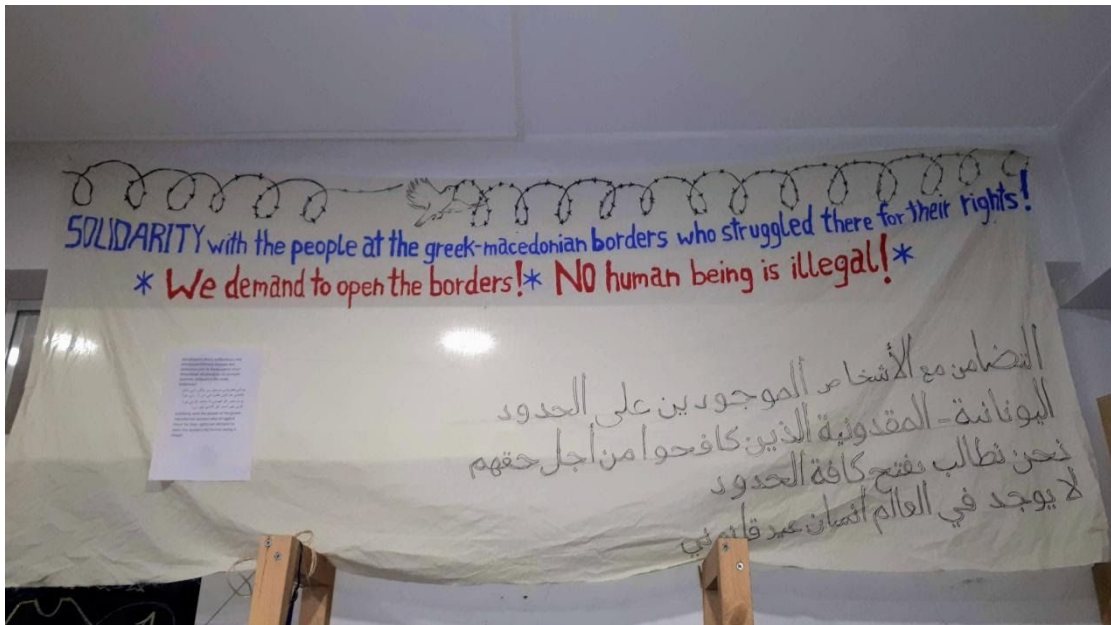
Speaking ‘Refugee’: a dialect which emerged as a result of being in contact with refugees from a variety of countries and cultures, and out of necessity to communicate; from the interaction between volunteers (internationals and refugees) and beneficiaries. The beneficiaries rarely speak advanced English. Therefore, this interaction gave rise to a dialect which volunteers called ‘Refugee’. It entails combining terms from a multitude of languages, such as basic English, Greek, French, Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish, in order to facilitate easy and fast communication with the beneficiaries, and between international and refugee volunteers as well. Those who were volunteering for a longer period of time got accustomed to communicating in Refugee at work and then passed it onto the next group of volunteers.

I see the effort put by volunteers into developing, adopting, using and passing on the Refugee dialect to the next volunteers, as an act of citizenship. Some volunteers go even further as to study Arabic. These efforts demonstrate a *solidaristic act of citizenship* (Isin & Nielsen 2008:19) on behalf of the refugees (beneficiaries and fellow volunteers). As a solidaristic act of citizenship, this deed can also be interpreted as a gift made out of solidarity, a gift from citizens to non-citizens, a gift which acts as an adhesive for their interaction, ultimately a fundamental way of being with others (ibid: 3). This logic shows the relevance of the gift giving system, including the obligation of return, for the interaction between actors. In other words, being part of this insulated world of volunteering which enables acts of citizenship, volunteers are entangled in a solidaristic relationship with each other, kept together by the adhesive of gift exchange, but driven by other circumstances as well. Being in a solidaristic relationship with each other means they are generous, beneficent, hospitable, accommodating, understanding and loving toward others – values and practices highly cherished both in NGOs for refugee relief and the Greek society at large.

I was reminded about another example of a solidaristic act of citizenship when shortly after the lockdown was lifted in Greece, Ariadne (the volunteers' coordinator) gave me a call. She said she missed me and that she thought I might feel lonely these days, having to work on my thesis, not being able to go out during the lockdown. She was right and I was so grateful for her sense of intuition. We met up for dinner and drinks the next day. Inevitably, we ended up reminiscing about former volunteers at Alkyone. We discussed about Bess, a girl from Germany who was with us for a few months in 2018-2019. Bess was a quiet person and she mostly worked in the warehouse of the center, sorting out donations, or in the 'shop', the room where clothes were displayed for the beneficiaries to choose, keeping it in order. She rarely got involved in activities and meetings with the rest of the volunteers, outside of 'work'. However, one day she told us she is working on a 'small' project, a banner, that she would like to see displayed in Alkyone.

She worked on it for one week and asked the cultural mediators from Alkyone to help her with translating the message in Greek, Arabic and Farsi. Ariadne pointed out at the impact this banner still has on both beneficiaries and other volunteers to this day. We called it "Bess' legacy". However, I also call it an act of citizenship. It manifests a

political potentiality; it has *power to unite people in solidarity*, even in the absence of its creator. It is a continuous exchange of citizenship between a German citizen and those stripped off of their rights and citizenship benefits. Beneficiaries stop to admire it, take photos of it and send them to their relatives and friends; they take interest in the person who created it and ask the other volunteers to send their regards to Bess. Volunteers take interest in the banner as well and in its creator.



Solidarity Banner at Alkyone

The banner states: **SOLIDARITY** with the people at the greek-macedonian borders who struggle there for their rights! We demand to open the borders! No human being is illegal!

At that time, false rumors about borders opening were circulating among refugees and asylum seekers. Countless refugee families, especially Kurdish refugees, left the cities and went toward the borders, toward the life they were dreaming about in other European countries. Unfortunately, the borders did not open, and hundreds of people found themselves stranded there. This incident inspired Bess' creative act, reflecting, at the same time, her general wish and demand, for the borders to be open for refugees. Bess' deed is an act which builds upon other acts; it involves a decision and an accomplishment, and it has *continuity within itself*. It accretes over time (Isin & Nielsen 2008:23). It is thus a form of communication, a creative act of citizenship, which promotes and maintains solidarity between volunteers and with refugees, by

being displayed on a wall in the main room of the 5th floor (Alkyone), having high visibility and ensuring the propagation of Bess' voice, while being an inspiration for new voices to emerge.

In addition to volunteering as an act of citizenship, such initiatives stand as claims to justice, to a need to help others, less fortunate, to redress injustices and tackle inequalities. Acts of citizenship have the power to transform individuals from subjects into claimants, therefore, they are referred to as political, but acts can also be ethical, sexual, cultural or, as I have mentioned before, social (i.e. solidarity), having the potential of becoming political. Volunteering for refugee relief enables a special context in which certain initiatives/acts become political, a context which gives rise to innovative ways of acting political (ibid:44). Bess' initiative constitutes a political act because of its creativity which disrupts the everyday though being a creative performance which breaks the habitus, while also addressing the refugee situation, a political issue.

Another characteristic of the insulated world of volunteering is that time is telic, marked by a beginning and an ending, as well as by a shared goal. This telicity points out to the insulated characteristic of volunteering, as one's volunteering experience can actually be visualized as an island where volunteers' perception of time is somewhat distorted, as many former volunteers have told me. This leads to relations, encounters and people to be assessed and valued differently than outside of this temporary insulated universe.

It's like you go to *another world*, where everything is intense and the people you just met, it's like you know them since... forever. Maybe because you know everyone is there with the same purpose and you can feel when someone is an outsider. The person who is not here for the good. You know it, but you can also fix it I think. We can offer them a new perspective by discussing and not letting them be outsiders. When you are there everything is intense: friendships, interactions with the people (beneficiaries), with Greeks, even the way you reflect upon them and upon yourself and your actions. It makes you enjoy every interaction, every moment, each person. You want to make the best out of it (Tara, Portugal).

This volunteering world is also perceived by some of my research participants who engage in voluntary work, but not as a primary activity. From one person's statement the dichotomy volunteering world – reality is especially recognizable:

I think it is not healthy to do only this and for a long period of time; you lose the sense of reality and it becomes very hard to go back, because the other people will not understand you anymore (Rena, Germany).

Another volunteer told me:

While you are gone, everyone moves on in different directions back home. Even if I know this, it is still strange and there is always a period of adjustment after I come back home (Patricia, Italy).

Feeling out of place (Said 1999) at home is another characteristic of the insulated volunteering world. Feeling out of place in their communities/home countries, is often a reason for looking to feel at home, accepted, having a purpose, as part of the volunteering community, which, for some, is a place where they find a family (as it happened with the three internationals and Maleek). Marco, a German volunteer, told me he chose to volunteer abroad for one year “to add a different chapter to his life, between studying and starting to work” – this also relates to the time aspect and the insulated world - reality dichotomy. In his case the reality is where he left from and what he was going back to (to start working) after leaving the volunteering world. He also mentioned that some of the most important things he gained out of the volunteering experience were friendships and improving his social skills – ways of being with others. These affirmations point to the aspect of feeling out of place at home (in Germany). Coincidentally, another volunteer from Germany, Rena also expressed this feeling out of place phenomenon:

I just feel at home here, I feel right, I don't feel wrong anymore with so many things, with working as a volunteer, with being loud and gesticulating a lot. I mean, I had a good community, I didn't suffer there, but now, being here, I realize how wrong I felt before, and I also feel it when I go back there. It is, of course, also because I am part of a certain community here, not every Greek is like that. And my plan is to stay here, I cannot imagine going back to Germany (Rena, Germany).

In Maleek's case (as it is probably the case for most asylum seekers and refugees) feeling out of place is most likely a permanent state. Volunteering however offers him an alternative, a chance to feel integrated, accepted. It took many days until Maleek revealed his country of origin to me. Later on, he told me he hates everything about his country "Everything! You cannot imagine how it is there, the people, the politicians... I had nothing and I would have never been able to have. There is nothing there, except so much hypocrisy!" – his frustration and sadness were obvious; he resented his origins. In general, his answer to the much-asked question "Where are you from?" was always a variety of: "I am from nowhere; I am from everywhere; I am international; I have no country". About Greece he spoke with hopelessness in his voice, about wanting to stay here - "if they would accept me...".

By renouncing his country of origin, while also stating he is "from everywhere", or "international", Maleek was, at the same time, challenging what Liisa Malkki (1994: 62) has called *the national order of things*, as well as his construction as a refugee, a construction institutionally or discursively approached as *an international humanitarian problem* (Malkki 1995: 499). The national order of things is of great importance for those who cannot claim belonging to a state, particularly refugees and stateless people in general (ibid). Here I want to emphasize the element of otherhood, necessary for a group of people to define themselves as a group, using an Other, to measure against it, who and what it is not (Barth 1970). Even if nations and communities have their own *Others*, against which they can measure and compare themselves, the ultimate Other is the individual who does not have a nation at all. By not disclosing his country of origin, and avoiding mentioning he is an asylum seeker, Maleek is managing to position himself away from the other, the refugee. Moreover, he is rejecting a segregation of nationalities (Malkki 1995: 498), by challenging his construction as a refugee, a deed which may be considered an act of citizenship. In this way he constitutes himself as a subject.

By revealing these characteristics of the insulated world of volunteering, which I identified by reflecting upon my own volunteering experience and based on informal conversations and interviews with former volunteers, I intend to offer a well sketched image of the volunteering world, as a site of *de facto* citizenship.



Representation of the insulated world of volunteering containing a word cloud from one of the interviews

I call this volunteering community an *insulated* world because it acts as a closed micro-society, protected from ‘*reality*’, as some informants pointed out. It is characterized by a self-preservation quality, maintained through exchanges and social bonds (in the gift-exchange sense). The obligation of return entailed by the gift is based on the relationships one has with another. I look at gifting and returning the gift as acts of citizenship, although this process is most likely vaguely perceived by the actors (read: volunteers). As I have previously mentioned, volunteers from wealthier countries conceptualize volunteering as an opportunity to repay the debt of being a citizen of a certain nation, or simply for being more fortunate than other people.

It’s about being helpful for other people, because I feel lucky for being born in a good family, in Italy, and not in Syria or Afghanistan. I received a lot; I want to give. I had a lot of chances in my life, my parents always supported me, so I want to give what I have received, I feel really responsible about this. I cannot help all of them, but I can help some, so I will (Patricia, Italy).

Static formal citizenship is considered to be a system of obligations, which organizes needs and relationships between individuals, and between citizens and society (Isin & Nielsen 2008:49). While Isin and Nielsen (2009) do not point out precisely the gift giving phenomenon and the obligations it inspires, I consider the relation between obligation (in Isin's sense) and the gift exchange obligation (in Mauss' sense) to be useful for a better relational understanding of citizenship practices among the volunteers in the insulated world, at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki. Meeting this obligation of returning the gift (of citizenship), through volunteering, is followed by a social satisfaction for volunteers, which some of them perceive or acknowledge to some extent.

I gained satisfaction from not losing my time without doing anything, and I felt useful, I felt that I did something good that helped people (Marjorie, France).

The most important to me was that I learned how to deal with things in a better way, different aspects in different areas: from budgeting, to how to deal with stress, and leading classes, conflict resolution. I learned how to chill as well, because I tend to be a perfectionist, so I think I learned how to not pressure myself too much and how to not let myself feel used. For me this was an important lesson. I didn't know how to cope with a situation like this before; I used to be pretty naïve (Sami, Montenegro).

This was an experience that I will never forget all my life. It had a huge impact on me. I gained self-confidence, and the ability to manage myself better, especially emotionally. It made me stronger. And it made me want to continue doing this (volunteering) (Tara, Portugal).

These are some extracts from interviews and conversations with international volunteers whom I asked what it was they gained out of their volunteering experience. Most answers brought to the surface themes such as connection/friendships, feeling useful and self-sufficiency, independence, and last but not least, the existence of the insulated world of volunteering, but also a recurrence of the solidarity motif.

What I gained is the satisfaction of seeing solidarity working. Maybe that is the activism in me, showing others: 'look! It's working!'. I am dreaming of a world of solidarity and it will happen. None of us are rich and somehow, we always make it work (Rena, Germany).

Rena tells of *solidarity and trust*. By being united, people can “always make it work”. *Gifting is a unifying process* (Mauss 1969). It engages people into positive interdependence, fostering mutual trust and giving rise to lasting relationships (Abraham & Millar 2011).

As evidenced by numerous informal conversations with research participants, as well as from the interviews I conducted with some of them, complemented by months of being a volunteer myself, the world of volunteering, although perceived by us, volunteers, as an insulated realm, with special characteristics, different than the rest of the world (reality), it is not so different after all, at least in one regard: the gift-giving system. Regardless of existent differences between volunteers (country of origin, race, religion, citizenship status, social status, gender), all coming together in solidarity for a common good, the gift-giving cycle is operating inside the volunteering world, ensuring continuous exchanges between volunteers, which in turn (sometimes) give rise to long lasting friendships and solidarities. The asylum seekers and refugees who volunteer will accept the gift, given unconditionally by other volunteers, and they will feel grateful and obliged (although probably unconsciously) to return the gift. The response does not have to be immediate and does not have to be returned necessarily to the person who was initially the donor/giver - as Raman returned the gift he once received by choosing to work in the humanitarian sector. We can look at the gift giving system, within the realm of volunteering, as a cycle of offerings and returns of gifts, between various actors who constantly switch between the donor/receiver positions. Volunteers' commitment, especially refugees', to continue with volunteer work can be interpreted as a way to give back, to return the gifts they once received from other volunteers/organizations. Efforts to maintain the social relation/friendship once resulted from a gift exchange between volunteers, can also be interpreted as an effect of the gift exchange cycle. The long-distance and long-lasting relations of friendship that I witnessed between volunteers stand as proof of the intensity of social ties created by exchanges, solidarity and acts of citizenship.

Through various citizenship practices, both international citizens and refugees who volunteer, give rise to a new space for their existence, as a socially approved one, thus contesting (formal) citizenship. Volunteerism becomes a site where the actors (the volunteers) constitute themselves and others as subjects of rights (ibid:371), through their deeds and interactions.

A failed act of citizenship

Not everyone who volunteers at Alkyone becomes immersed in the insulated world of volunteering. Remus, Veronica and Hortense never became a part of it, despite the fact that they have been volunteering at Alkyone for over six months. Back in February, during my first days back at Alkyone, as a researcher this time, I remember judging these volunteers in my field notes. They were the first volunteers to communicate merely in their native language, even in the presence of others, unless it was strictly necessary for them to speak English; they did not adopt the Refugee dialect, which made it often difficult for them to communicate efficiently with the beneficiaries. They often complained out loud about their tasks as volunteers. Why were they so cold with other volunteers and seemingly disinterested in their work? I remember asking in my field diary. Three months and a global health pandemic later, I realized why. Firstly, when Remus, Veronica and Hortense started volunteering at Alkyone, for more than a month, Maleek and another asylum seeker were the only other two volunteers at the center (until my arrival). Faisal, the other volunteer, only speaks his native language and Greek, so he could not have introduced them to the insulated world of volunteering. Maleek could have, he was part of it, he found his family being part of this insulated world, but their relationship started on a bad note. When R., V. and H. arrived in Thessaloniki, Maleek was still living in the apartment previously occupied by Tara, Patricia and Sami who invited Maleek to move in with them. Now, the apartment ‘belonged’ to the new volunteers. They did not feel comfortable with Maleek living there so they asked him to leave. Although he never seemed to hold a grudge toward them, this incident never allowed them to become close, so there was no one to help Remus, Veronica and Hortense discover the insulated world. Moreover, after two months from their arrival, the Covid-19 outbreak caused a nationwide lockdown, and a temporary shutdown of most public services and organizations. Thus, the center was closed for almost two months. The volunteers decided to stay in Greece, but they were not able to volunteer, they were self-isolating. After Alkyone reopened, the volunteers’ coordinator, Ariadne, told me that their attitude completely changed, they seemed more eager than ever to fulfill any task, anytime. Shortly after the conversation I had with Ariadne, I met with one of them, Veronica, for a conversation about their overall experience as volunteers at Alkyone. She confirmed without me asking what Ariadne had told me – they were

more than happy to be back at Alkyone, working again, “feeling useful again is so good” she said. After this meeting I remembered what Tara, a volunteer from Portugal, had told me during one of our Skype conversations about the volunteering world: “I think that kindness and goodness are contagious, I felt this during my volunteering experience. It’s like you go to another world, where everything is intense and the people you just met, it’s like you know them since... forever. Maybe because you know everyone is there with the same purpose and you can feel when someone is an outsider for whatever reason, you know it, but you can also fix it, I think. We can offer them a new perspective by discussing and just not letting them be outsiders”. Remembering Tara’s words, I felt remorse for the way I judged them during the first weeks of my field work, for not showing enough interest, for not complying to the ‘rules’ of the volunteering world I used to experience. I felt guilty for not understanding the reasons they never had a chance to be assimilated into the volunteering world, and I felt guilty for not doing what Tara said we should do when someone is an ‘outsider’ - striving to help them discover and integrate. However, my focus during those weeks was to be a good observer, not a good fellow volunteer or a friend to them. I was unable to find a balance between the two from the beginning. I was trying too hard not to intervene. However, toward the end of the fieldwork period, about when I was starting sorting my data and analyzing it, I recognized the importance of this course of events, which, for some time, I considered a mistake on my behalf. However, its relevance, I realized later, lies in the fact that, by not becoming a part of the insulated volunteering world, this group of volunteers could potentially stand as proof for the importance of the volunteering world as a site of citizenship; a site which enables acts of citizenship, and cradles social relations shaped on the basis of gift and solidarity exchanges. At the same time, the incident which involved Maleek being asked to leave their apartment demonstrates a failed act of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen 2008). An example of citizens claiming their rights, while imposing an obligation on an asylum seeker (non-citizen), may appear as an act of citizenship, but it is rather a *one-sided act of incivility* (Nielsen 2008: 271), as the citizens used their status as an abuse of power in relation to a non-citizen, and not as a claim made in order to challenge an established practice, status or order, neither for the benefit of their citizenship, or for Maleek’s state or status.

Acknowledging the existence of the volunteering world was a crucial step, for me as an observer, toward a better understanding of the volunteering experiences of internationals and refugees who volunteer.

Chapter III: Does This Road Lead to Integration

But it is also about the mentality. I remember one project I was part of (The Route of Solidarity) with neighboring countries – Croatia, Spain, Italy and Greece – we had 8 meetings on Lesbos Island, in Rome, Thessaloniki. In Thessaloniki we did a workshop with a classical German group, not rich, but wealthy, 65+ people (these kinds of groups were always visiting Alkyone), and we spoke about where can we find links and the conclusion was that no one wanted to work with German volunteers, everyone wanted to work with the German state, because there's money. During one of the stages of the workshop we talked about where and as what we are working: as volunteers, as activists, in a state organization, in a non-governmental organization, and we realized in Greece there are no state organizations, and in Germany, most of them have been in government organizations, but almost no activists or volunteers. Germany is more organized, Greece isn't. Here people learned, and that is the mentality, that *we have to cope with our problems alone, they will not help us*. That is what we saw even now; all they did was to say we cannot go out anymore, they closed everything, but they didn't care for tests, for masks, they just closed everything, so *people here are used to doing everything by themselves*. The other thing regarding the mentality here, which better suits my mentality, is that *people want to help* (Rena, Germany).

Restriction measures were first imposed on March 6 with the closure of the schools, businesses were shut down in groups, while citizens were allowed to leave their homes only with “movement permits” since March 23.⁴

Greece found itself under strict measures imposed in order to keep the pandemic under control for almost two months. The government's early steps to contain the virus ahead of most of Europe and the Prime Minister's decision to prolong the country's lockdown in mid-March produced good results in terms of keeping down the numbers of infected people (Perrigo & Hincks 2020).⁵

⁴ Keep Talking Greece. (2020, May 28). Roadmap of lockdown lifting in Greece. <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2020/04/28/greece-lifting-lockdown-roadmap/>.

⁵ Perrigo, B. Hincks, J. (2020, April 23). How Greece Avoided the Worst of the Coronavirus Pandemic. <https://time.com/5824836/greece-coronavirus/>.

However, as far as humanitarian NGOs for refugee aid are concerned, as Rena also mentioned, the measures were not sufficient or appropriate, while state assistance was almost nonexistent. The refugee day center Alkyone was closed to beneficiaries until June 9th 2020, while volunteers were not allowed to work for safety considerations. The organization was overall struggling for weeks to find ways to continue their work, to help ‘the people’, as we all call the beneficiaries. Calls for donations of money, goods and time were made on the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki’s Facebook page:

Since this Monday we have to send an sms or to have a paper with us that we fill out every time we go to a doctor, the supermarket, the bank, to give help, or to go out with a pet. Additionally we have to carry an ID with us. There are fines if we don't have them. It's a clever move from the right-wing government to get rid of the refugees who live in the streets, who don't have papers or one of the above-mentioned reasons to be in the streets. We are trying to figure out how to support the refugees in our city. We have ideas, we don't have many capacities to go out, we have the will, and we still have some supplies. But not as much as we need. That's why we still and again depend on your help. Please share this crowdfunding, we will need every cent.

Times like this offer a tragic opportunity for the realization of privilege. As far as this research is concerned, the privilege at issue is formal citizenship. The tragedy for so many is its absence. In times like this, organizations were closing, international volunteers were leaving, circulation was restricted, but the refugees were still refugees without proper state protection, lacking fulfilment of their basic needs.

I mentioned sensing hopelessness in Maleek’s voice when he stated he would like to stay in Greece (“if they would accept me”). Maleek is not the only asylum seeker in this situation. In recent months, it has become much more difficult than it used to be for migrants to receive asylum in Greece.⁶ Not all asylum seekers wish to establish in Greece, but the numbers of people who are being granted asylum has dropped considerably over the past few months. A new controversial law on asylum has been

⁶ Amnesty International Public Statement. (2019, October 24). Greece: Proposed Bill on Asylum Downgrades EU and International Law Standards on Refugees Protection. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/greece-systematic-detention-of-asylum-seekers-and-migrants-would-be-gravely-irresponsible/>.

introduced in Greece, entailing drastic changes in the criteria for eligibility for refugee status. Although 85% of asylum seekers arrive from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo, or other countries with violent conflict, the Greek government is arguing that Greece is not facing a refugee crisis anymore, the majority of asylum seekers are economic migrants and they should be deported.⁷

Rena disclosed her anger, regarding this new attitude toward the crisis, in one of our discussions:

I am tired after all these years of the EU-Turkey Deal. I am tired and angry because Europe doesn't act, so unbelievably angry. I want it to stop. I don't want to see this situation anymore. In Moria camp, for example, I heard the phrase "there are now too many people" countless times! Right now, there is also the situation with the virus and still, nothing is happening! The only measure they took was to transfer a few refugees abroad. Alkyone was not able to stay open and work during the pandemic, to help people, and the rest of Europe worries about having to sell their second car. It is an emergency situation! Instead, Europe has decided it is not an emergency situation anymore (the refugee crisis), and so the emergency situation became the normal (Rena, Germany).

The law was implemented as migrant arrivals continue to increase to their highest numbers since 2015 (many Syrians and Afghans are fleeing renewed violence in their home countries). Another worrisome aspect of the law are the amendments which encourage detainment of asylum seekers whose initial claims were rejected. UNHCR stated that this law could lead to denied rights, and asylum applications being denied without people getting full access to international protection. The new law extends the amount of time that an asylum-seeker can be detained from three up to 18 months, the maximum time allowed by the EU. Most human rights organizations including Amnesty International - Greece have criticized the new legislation. According to them, the new law will result in major rights violations, making it more difficult for people to access protection, leaving thousands in limbo, and doing nothing to improve the situation for almost 100,000 refugees and migrants in Greece (NIEM).

⁷ NIEM. (2019, November 13). The new law on asylum in Greece. <http://www.forintegration.eu/pl/the-new-law-on-asylum-in-greece>.

“This law is going to aggravate the system,” said Lefteris Papagiannakis, the former vice-mayor of Athens in charge of migrant and refugee affairs. “We’re going to see a lot more people without documents and a lot more obstacles to access asylum. And that will mean added pressure on services already at breaking point.”⁸

As evidenced by various online sources and reports, as well as statements made by some of the volunteers I spoke with, the new law on asylum is not received well, especially by those working in the humanitarian sector, all the more in the context of a pandemic which disproportionately affects the migrant population, the non-citizens.

Saving Urrab

Rena has been living in Thessaloniki for more than two years now and besides her job in an NGO for refugee support, she also volunteers at the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki. Whenever she can, she comes to the center (Alkyone) and helps the other volunteers. Otherwise, she organizes workshops and takes various other initiatives at within and outside of the organization. I view these initiatives as acts of citizenship. One such deed is a campaign she started for Urrab, an asylum seeker who arrived in Greece in 2017 and managed to integrate, even though he did not receive asylum. Urrab has been volunteering for the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki ever since 2017, at Ecopolis, he learned Greek and is now working for an NGO for refugee support, as a cultural mediator. In light of the latest legislation for refugees and asylum seekers, Urrab is amongst those who will be deported, unless he receives the refugee status.

We are around 4-5 people who started this campaign for Urrab; three of us are family to him, also him to us... People now get rejected for asylum, people whom we never thought will get rejected. What we are doing is playing the ‘time’ card. We are trying to gain more time. It’s good to see what people can do and create, how it is when you just do and give something because you feel that there is a need you can take care of. Our hope is that when it will be time for him to renew his card, in June, there will be no final decision. Because if there will be a negative decision, he will not be allowed

⁸ Smith, H. (2019, November 01). Greece passes asylum law aimed at curbing migrant arrivals. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/01/greece-passes-asylum-law-aimed-at-curbing-migrant-arrivals>.

to work anymore. If there is no decision, he will be given a card again for six months. This means he will get to stay and work a little longer. For the next few weeks we are planning to meet again with a lawyer and work more on the campaign (Rena, Germany).

Rena and the rest of their team created a Facebook page for Urrab's campaign. Together with him, they walk the streets, informing people about his case; they visited organizations countless times in order to gather signatures from those who wish to show support for Urrab. The signatures have been sent to the Greek Asylum Committee.

Greece wants to deport a refugee who has become a symbol of solidarity. A call on the Greek Asylum Committee to grant Urrab political asylum. To the Greek Asylum Committee. In two months' time, the future of a young man is going to be decided upon by the Greek Asylum Service. After the initial rejection of the claim for political asylum, Urrab's hopes of ensuring a safe future are dwindling. If he returns to Pakistan, his life will change dramatically, and he will be faced with threats from his past. During his two year stay in Greece he has learned the language so quickly that he has obtained work as an interpreter and has been active in many solidarity groups and organizations that work for human rights. In a short period of time he has made himself indispensable to these groups by making an invaluable contribution to them. He has been an active member of the Ecopolis Social Space and the Thessaloniki Ecological Movement as well as volunteering with many other organizations in the city. On his own initiative, Urrab has been instrumental in efforts to set up feeding programs and other forms of aid to homeless and destitute Greek citizens as well as refugees in Thessaloniki. Urrab is a fighter and a dedicated activist who has helped hundreds of others in need through his efforts even while facing numerous difficulties himself. He is a very sensitive and serious person who embodies the values of humanism, solidarity, democracy and justice and proves it with every opportunity given (Facebook campaign page).

Thessaloniki's culture, respect, solidarity, opportunities and big embrace, for the first time, were embodied in Urrab's smile. Kindness, selflessness, good intentions are a very small sample of the traits that make him up as a personality. It doesn't go unnoticed how busy and charismatic he is. Endless hours of volunteering, workshops, foreign languages, music, cooking, solidarity meals with locals, refugees and immigrants. It is remarkable that he can accomplish, and with enormous success too, what he has achieved. Recently, talking to Urrab, we realized that we were born just

four days away from each other. That afternoon I learned the story of Urrab. I learned what was behind this smile. How much strength and optimism he showed facing the tremendous and frightening difficulties he met as I was discussing my "problems" coming from a safe and supportive family environment. My relationship with Urrab has changed the way I interpret the values of life, it has taught me to think with optimism and not to exaggerate the simple problems of everyday life. But what really stayed with me the most is to chase my dreams and not give up at any cost and difficulty. Urrab is a role model for a modern European society. We are struggling to make our own Thessaloniki such a society and that is why we need him! Political asylum for Urrab. Urrab is one of us! Urrab is part of us! We are on his side! (supporter statement retrieved from Facebook).

Numerous people consider that Urrab deserves to be granted asylum. Their Facebook testimonials, hundreds of signatures and all those who got involved in the campaign stand as proof for Urrab's deservingness, which according to those close to him, he won through hard work, as a volunteer for refugee relief, and through his nature and way of being with others.

Those involved in Urrab's campaign engage in acts of citizenship, constituting themselves as agents. Furthermore, through these efforts, Urrab constitutes himself as a subject, performing acts of citizenship. Through these acts of citizenship, which vary from volunteering, participating in protests, workshops, to starting this campaign for his recognition, Urrab challenges his construction as an asylum seeker by exercising his political potentialities as an activist type of citizen, demanding acceptance into a society in which he feels fully integrated.

The volunteers involved in this campaign are rupturing the given habitus, in a pursuit to demonstrate Urrab is deserving of some kind of official acceptance. Their acts involve an intentional decision with a specific outcome in mind (Isin & Nielsen 2008:23). These acts may also be considered social acts (in Reinach's sense), since they enact (through linguistic and non-linguistic means) "a need felt by one party to be heard by another"; while it is at the same time an act of citizenship because it is a fundamental way of being with others (ibid:19). If an act involves "neither arriving at a scene, nor fleeing from it, but actually engaging in its creation" (ibid:27), then I acknowledge that Urrab and his 'team' have set in motion acts of citizenship (as creative acts), becoming responsible for the creation of the scene, as agents. An act

does not need a political scene/space in order to be considered an act of citizenship, nor does it require formal citizenship. Therefore, Urrab's struggle is a manifestation of his agency and freedom, despite his lack of formal citizenship, while it is also more than an isolated, lonely action or sacrifice. Together with the other volunteers involved in his campaign, they created a strong social relation (a family, as Rena has called it), which indicates once again the connection between acts of citizenship, gift giving and solidarity. An entire gift exchange system has been put in motion once Urrab became part of the insulated world of volunteering. He gave time and ideas, support, solidarity, friendship and so on, when he started volunteering for the organization. He touched many people's lives, and now, some of those people are returning his 'gift' by using their status, as citizenship bearers, and the benefits that come with their citizenship, to honor the social relation that has been created between them and Urrab. Through their acts they produce effects, fulfil functions and exert influence (Isin & Nielsen 2008:22). Thus, volunteering appears in this case as a site of contestation around a certain issue (Urrab's right to asylum), around a certain theme and concept (the gift exchange and solidarity cycle).

Escaping liminality

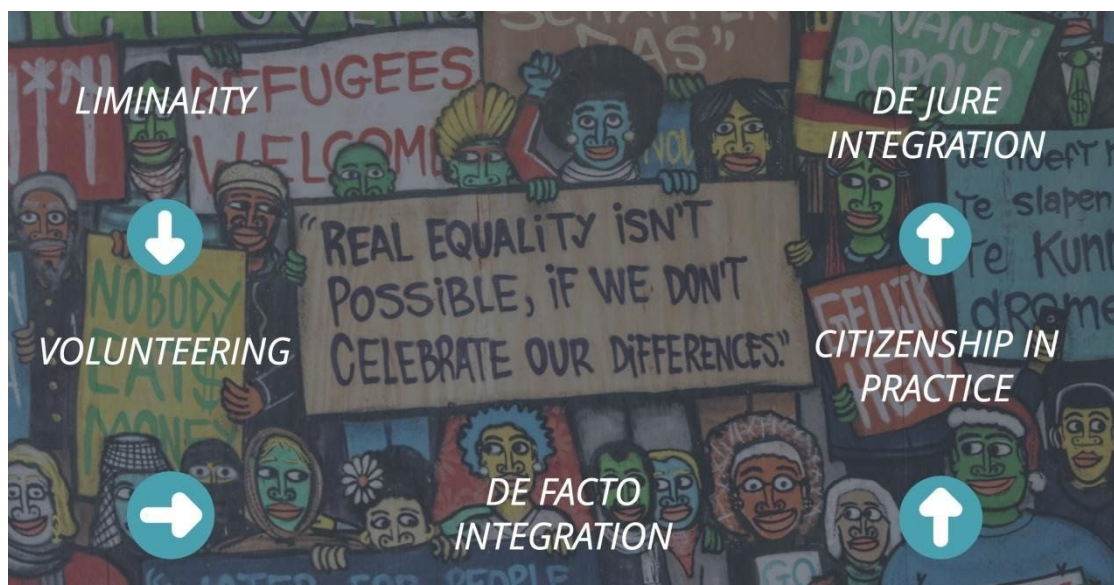
Much like Urrab, most refugees and asylum seekers find themselves in a state of liminality. Based on Victor Turner's (1974) analysis, Beneduce (2008) elaborated on the liminality issue in the case of refugees, who as individuals in a liminal state, they are both inside and outside of the world, processing very few social attributes, being "at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner 1967:96); "in between home and host, part of society, but sometimes never fully integrated" (Thomassen 2009:19).

De facto integration entails informal processes, like finding cash-based work, and more formal processes, such as receiving a social security number as an asylum seeker. In Greece there are four initial steps toward *de facto* integration: 1) receiving a 'White Card' (asylum card); 2) registering at Diavata Camp; 3) being accepted in the urban housing program (being provided with accommodation usually by an NGO); 4) receiving an AMKA (Greek social security number) and a Greek tax number (Kasra

et al. 2020). Those who have passed through these initial steps have better prospects for *de jure* integration because they are able to live in the city or close to the city, which makes jobs and social services more accessible, as well as help provided by various NGOs. However, these steps do not guarantee integration. They depict the beginning of a long, difficult process. Volunteering may be seen as a supplementary tool in the process toward integration.

As for many people, performing voluntary work is somewhat a privilege, while for asylum seekers it is also a matter of luck. For most migrants, volunteering is not an option. Maleek, Urrab and Raman are part of just a handful of migrants who had the chance of gaining access to the volunteering world. Therefore, *de facto* integration through volunteering may be considered a chance, a first step to escape liminality, although an increasingly more difficult stage to achieve in Greece due to the new adopted legislation. Refugees and asylum seekers find themselves forced to resist an everyday system of exclusion, determined by their construction as non-citizens.

If volunteering is a site that allows refugees who volunteer to experience political agency, similar to that of citizens, then volunteerism is potentially a tool toward integration. What I describe is a gradual process that can be visualized as presented below:



The Road Out of Liminality

Within the insulated world of volunteering, refugee volunteers' efforts to break out of liminality and move toward *de fact* integration and citizenship are supported by international and Greek volunteers through various interactions and forms of commitment to social relations (and to the refugee cause in general), manifested along the lines of a gift-exchange system and solidarity, which sometimes become acts of citizenship. These acts of agency offer what society fails to provide, especially to those who lack *de jure* citizenship, while in this equation, gift-giving acts as a glue which enhances future cooperation between volunteers and between volunteers and the insulated world of volunteering.

Returning to Reality. Concluding thoughts

Working on this thesis has taught me a number of valuable lessons, one of which is spotting the thin line between seeing things as they are and idealizing an environment that I hold dear. The realm of volunteering and this volunteering community in particular has been more than just a safe space for many of us. For many of us, volunteering has been a source of opportunities. However, what this research has shown me is that for those volunteers who do not hold formal citizenship, the reality is often austere. Despite everyone's efforts, Urrab might not be allowed to stay in Greece. Similarly, Raman's asylum application was rejected. During the lockdown and for almost two months he was nowhere to be found. At the end of July we managed to finally meet.

I'm better now. I'm trying to stay positive. I had two months to lay on my bed, depressed, but I still have to work and I can't let my mom see me like this. She was crying every day. Her hair was falling off. In the beginning I thought it's my fault. But now I'm trying to ignore this thought. I did good. My grades are good, I'm going to med school soon. I learned Greek in one year and now I'm working in an NGO for almost one year... What more could I have done? (Raman, Iraqi Kurdistan).

The importance of Rena's words, "we must stay in the reality", is echoing in my mind as I understand how different reality is for me than for some of my research participants. Although volunteer work can be a wonderful source of opportunities, such as research (in my case), finding a family (Maleek), friends, or experiencing a

different kind of citizenship, for some volunteers, reality is a place where their efforts to make their existence and agency acknowledged, might be overlooked or ignored once they step out of the insulated world of volunteering. For some, the realization that volunteer work was not enough to win their place in the Greek society can be a source of both self-doubt and feeling betrayed, as it has been for Raman. Volunteer work is indeed, for both internationals and asylum seekers, a means of gaining visibility and symbolic and social capital. For asylum seekers, stepping out of liminality though volunteer work can lead to being accepted in the markets of citizenship (e.g. in the asylum procedure) (Hassemer 2019) and, later on, in the labor market. However, volunteerism alone is not a winning formula, it does not ensure this process. Nevertheless, a space such as the insulated world I had observed, cradles necessary conditions for volunteers to create strong ties, exchanges of solidarity and to experience citizenship in practice, regardless of their official citizenship status.

Conclusions

The first chapter of this thesis explored the correlation between gift-giving and solidarity, in order to demonstrate that gift-giving acts as a binding force between volunteers, although in a different way than the classic Maussian understanding of the gift. The focus has been on a variety of ways in which exchanges take place between volunteers, driven by solidarity. In some cases, as I had revealed, the equivalent return of the act of giving is conceptualized by volunteers as Karma. Karma appears to be a driving force which establishes later on during the volunteering experience, providing the actors with incentive.

At the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, gift-giving manifests as a cycle of reciprocity. Although the givers may give without an active, conscious expectation of a counter-gift, they set in motion cycles of reciprocity, through their interactions and acts of solidarity. Although volunteers' engagement and acts may seem spontaneous, they are often an expression of either gratitude or the need to compensate or help. Some internationals spoke about their privilege as citizens of wealthier countries, thus denoting a feeling of duty toward refugees. As the refugee *imago* is situated at the core of internationals' conceptualization of suffering, an embodiment of an injustice, a feeling of duty arises, as they may feel responsible to repay for the gift of their citizenship status, by gifting their time to those who are deprived of it.

By engaging in exchanges (of time, of favors, of company etc.), volunteers commit to a relationship, while the exchange is driven precisely because of their interest in a social relation. Thus, volunteering seen in terms of gift-giving appears as an adhesive for social cohesion. Social ties are at the core of both solidarity and the system of gift giving.

Throughout the second chapter, volunteerism is uncovered as both an act of citizenship and a site of citizenship, where volunteers' deeds have the potentiality to become political, in the sense of acting and reacting with each other in order to challenge predetermined definitions and lines of power and conduct, imposed by what being a citizen typically entails. Thus they constitute themselves as actors,

experiencing citizenship in practice by establishing certain conditions and encounters, by gifting and exchanging time, items, ideas, support, as acts of solidarity, which can ultimately be considered acts of citizenship.

Throughout the chapter I exposed accounts of solidaristic acts of citizenship taking place within the insulated world of volunteering between volunteers, as well as creative acts of citizenship, as forms of communication, expressions of solidarity, and claims to justice. Volunteers become immersed in the insulated world due to gift-giving acting as an adhesive. They are entangled in solidaristic relationships, showing generous, beneficent, hospitable, accommodating and understanding, behaviors which often culminate in acts of citizenship. Thus, the insulated world of volunteering provides an environment of potentialities to transform individuals from subjects into claimants of justice.

The third and last chapter puts forward an account of volunteers experiencing citizenship in practice by engaging in acts of citizenship, as exchanges of solidarity. The complex campaign the volunteers from Ecopolis are running with and for Urrab, offers him the opportunity to challenge his construction as an asylum seeker, by exercising his political potentialities, by making demands to justice, in a struggle to prove his deservingness for acceptance, thus allowing him to experience citizenship in practice. Such acts of citizenship, in which volunteers engage intentionally, are fundamental ways of being with others. Urrab and his team are agents responsible for creating a new site of citizenship. Therefore, volunteers' struggle is a manifestation of their agency, regardless of their citizenship status. Such a manifestation of agency was made possible due to a strong social relation, which proves once again the correlation between *de facto* citizenship, gift-giving and solidarity within the insulated world of volunteering, an integrative space for refugees and asylum seekers, a space that supports them on a journey along the integration axis.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide Questions

Background & Expectation:

1. Name; age; country; profession/studies; migratory background.
2. Memberships (political, cultural, religious).
3. How long were you volunteering here in Greece (period) and where (which NGOs/projects)?
4. Have you ever volunteered in the past? Do you plan on volunteering again in the future?
5. How was the project/NGO presented to you before your departure? What did you think you will encounter/ how did you imagine it will be?
6. How did you imagine the lives of the refugees before and after starting to volunteer for refugee relief?

Motivations: During the volunteering experience – thoughts/reflections:

1. Why have you decided to volunteer?/ Can you recall and describe the process you went through prior to deciding to and where to volunteer?
2. Many volunteers see their volunteering experience as a break from their predictable and routinized lives. How do you see yours?
2. Would you say that social media played any role in ‘asking’ you to volunteer?
3. What does it mean (for you) to volunteer for refugees?
4. Do you consider the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki to be important or vital for the refugee cause?
5. What does the NGO mean for you? How is it important to you?
6. In what ways would you say volunteering was/is valuable or significant for you?
7. Social change motivations? – Activism vs. Volunteerism: what is your opinion regarding this statement: Volunteerism generally means helping individual cases, while activism is for social change, but volunteering for the refugee cause can be considered a way of protesting the way in which refugees are perceived, treated by the government and the host society – taking a political stance. Do you agree/do you relate?
8. Did you participate in other humanitarian initiatives/projects/protests? Did you take any individual initiatives for the refugee cause or within the NGO?

Do you consider yourself to be an activist?

9. What is your work/volunteering philosophy/mantra? What guides you in your work?

Outcomes: After the volunteering experience – thoughts/reflections:

1. How would you describe yourself being transformed after volunteering?
2. Do you feel like you sacrificed something to have this experience; or did you sacrifice or compromise something during your volunteering experience?
3. Can you recall how working at Alkyone made you feel on a daily basis? What were the most prevalent feelings? And how did volunteering there make you feel about yourself?
4. How did you help yourself by helping others, by volunteering?
5. What did you gain through/after volunteering?
6. How did you manage to balance your volunteering experience with your personal life?
7. Can you describe Greece by making a comparison between your image of it before volunteering and after you lived and volunteered here? What did you observe in relation to your experience as a volunteer? / How did volunteering change your perception about Greece/refugees/volunteering?
8. Would you say that a strong presence of the humanitarian sector (NGOs + volunteers) reflects a lack of state responsibility (or state failure) in providing these services? Is then volunteering crucial; in what ways?
9. In your opinion, is voluntary work appreciated in your country/community?
10. In what ways did volunteering challenge you?
11. Why do you think refugees volunteer?
12. What does citizenship mean to you? What kind of citizen are you?

COVID-19:

1. How did you take the decision to leave Greece when the pandemic started? / Did you consider leaving Greece when the pandemic started? What made you stay?
2. Which factors did you take into consideration?
3. How did you feel about interrupting your volunteering experience and returning home?
4. Do you plan on coming back and continue with the same project/NGO? / Do you plan on volunteering again when things get back to normal?
5. How does this whole situation make you feel in general?