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Solidarity in Transition: The Case of Greece

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Introduction

Between 2015 and 2016, about one million people (856,000 in 2015 and 95,000 in 2016 according to the UNHCR) passed through Greece on their way to Northern Europe. The vast majority did not intend to stay in the country but used it as an entry point to Europe; after a short period, they continued their journey. Most of them entered the country from its coastal border with Turkey, via the islands of the North Aegean Sea. Since December 2016, between 60,000 and 70,000 have been trapped in Greece as a result of the EU–Turkey agreement (19 March 2016) and the gradual closing of the borders; one-sixth of them are staying at camps—official and unofficial, open and closed—on those islands. At the same time, a very dynamic solidarity¹ movement (Refugee Solidarity Movement, or RSM) has developed, with 58 per cent of Greeks

The author would like to thank Donatella della Porta for her comments and edits on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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responding to a February 2016 public opinion poll that they had actively expressed their solidarity with the refugees in one way or another (Public Issue 2016).

In parallel, due to its intensity and scale, the influx of migrants became a key issue both for the European Union and for Greece, led at the time by a self-proclaimed left-wing government and also facing the largest financial and social crisis in its modern history. In this chapter, I argue that the reactions of both the European Union and the Greek government hugely affected how the populations moved around the country, and eventually how the solidarity initiatives developed. Due to the emergent nature of the issue at stake, those initiatives were heavily dependent on the Greek government's actions, which shaped the necessities to which they had to respond. The government, on the other hand, was heavily dependent on its immediate political environment and especially on the EU policies and priorities regarding the issue. As a result, the RSM did not have time to articulate a comprehensive strategy of its own.

During the first phase of the long summer of migration (spring–summer 2015 through 19 March 2016), the state (and the EU) was completely unprepared, thus leaving the space open for the RSM to 'take charge'. During that period, the solidarity initiatives attempted to facilitate the journey of the populations moving through the Balkan corridor. Once that corridor started closing (gradually from September 2015 and definitively on 8 March 2016) and especially after the EU–Turkey agreement was reached (19 March 2016), the people who until then had been *in transit* were immediately transformed into people who were there *to stay*. The state then also changed its stance, deciding to intervene and 'control' the field, reoccupying the 'lost space', and subcontracting NGOs to perform the actions previously covered by the solidarity initiatives.

During what I call the *second phase* of the long summer of migration (from 19 May 2015 onwards), the solidarity movements, in turn, adapted their interventions to the changing political environment. In the first phase, the geographical focus was the islands, the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki, and the Idomeni crossing; once the hot-spots were established and the majority of the refugees and migrants trapped in Greece were on the mainland, that focus shifted accordingly. Since the RSM was now excluded from 'reception' duties (Frontex took over) and the

provision of first aid on the islands (now covered by NGOs), its repertoires of action also shifted towards the promotion of a rights-based approach for people who were now *here to stay*. The RSM thus started to occupy abandoned buildings to provide housing and to highlight the need for an integrating policy, in contrast to the exclusionary approach represented by the hot-spots. It also focused on the issue of education for the refugees' and migrants' children.

I argue, therefore, that the Refugee Solidarity Movement (RSM) that evolved in Greece as a response to the long summer of migration was—like the people fleeing the war and the poverty it focused on—‘in transition’ and heavily dependent on the political opportunities available (or not). In the first phase, the Greek state (and the EU) left the space open for the refugees and migrants to move through the country; the RSM organisations tried to facilitate their journey, ‘accompanying’ the moving populations from the islands to the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki, until they could see them off at the crossing of Idomeni. With the closure of the Balkan corridor and the signing of the EU–Turkey agreement, however, political space was restricted for the Greek government, the moving populations, and the RSM. These migrant populations were now ‘trapped’ in Greece, while the RSM organisations were unable to access them due to the takeover by official organisations (state, EU, or NGOs). Therefore, the RSM shifted its actions towards a more rights-based, integrating approach focusing mostly on the issues of housing and education.

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork on four islands of the North Aegean (Chios, Lesbos, Kos, and Samos), Crete, and three main cities of Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki, and Patra). Apart from numerous informal conversations with RSM activists, state officials, NGO workers, inhabitants of the North Aegean islands, and refugees and migrants, the research included 26 semi-structured interviews of between one and three hours each. The full list of interviewees is available at the end of this chapter (pseudonyms have been used). The chapter starts with an overview of the issue at stake and a presentation of the micro-dynamics that evolved at the entry points to Greece and the EU: the islands of the North Aegean Sea. It then introduces the issue of *memory* and how it was activated by the RSM, especially in regard to the 1922–1923 exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. Further on, I present the organisations that

constitute the RSM, their decision-making mechanisms, their organisational structures, their repertoires of action, and how they evolved over time. Lastly, I present the main argument of this chapter: the fact that the solidarity that the Greek people and the RSM showed with the moving populations was subject to a triple transition and that it depended heavily on the changing political context.

Solidarity in Transition: An Overview

It is widely acknowledged amongst the activists I interviewed that the Greek society reacted largely in solidarity towards the moving populations, at least during the first phase of the long summer of migration. I argue that this solidarity has been—just like the populations it concerned—a solidarity in transition. Affected by several factors, structural and otherwise, it changed forms and geographies over the course of 2015–2016, depending on the changing political circumstances.

We can distinguish two phases in the evolution of the solidarity initiatives with their own temporal, geographical, and thematic characteristics. The first phase is from—roughly—May 2015 until the EU–Turkey agreement of 19 March 2016; the second phase is the one from the agreement onwards. The agreement itself played a central role in the evolution of the refugee issue, the movement of the populations, and the repertoires of action of the solidarity initiatives because it created two types of refugees/migrants with different kinds of rights: those who entered Greece *before* the agreement and those who entered *after* it.

The former would either manage to cross the borders before their eventual closure, or apply for asylum in Greece. Most had gradually succeeded in leaving the islands, and those who had not yet managed to leave the country found themselves in the major cities of mainland Greece waiting for their cases to be processed. The latter were mostly placed in camps, registered there, and trapped on the islands. Their cases are more complicated since, according to the agreement, they were supposed to be gradually deported to Turkey (European Commission 2016a). In addition, after the agreement, the estimated number of arrivals actually making it to Greece dropped massively, as we can clearly see in the graph below (Fig. 3.1).



Fig. 3.1 Daily arrivals to Greece. Source: UNHCR

At the same time, since February 2016, a number of *hot-spots* were established on the islands under EU pressure in order to process the registration and fingerprinting of the incoming refugees and immigrants. Established on the islands of Leros, Kos, Lesvos, Chios, and Samos, they have a capacity of 5450 people (European Commission 2016b). In December 2016, there were more than 12,000 people on the islands—more than double the hot-spot capacity. Most of the migrants, having no way to leave Greece, applied for asylum there. It is indicative to see the rise of asylum applications just after the agreement with Turkey (March 2016) (Fig. 3.2):

What is more, the EU–Turkey agreement also changed the government’s position. Before then, and until the borders of the Balkan route started closing down, the Greek government had a rather open stance towards the solidarity initiatives, allowing them to substitute for it without obstacles. Several of the activists I interviewed also highlighted the fact that some of the new government officers had been their comrades in the struggles for migrant and refugee rights. They had even protested together outside the camps, asking for their immediate closure. Even before SYRIZA entered the government, during the first phase of the ‘refugee crisis’, the government entered a truce, a ‘honeymoon period’ with the RSM and other movements in Greece. The government did not obstruct the work of the RSM in this phase, and the movement did the work that the government was not able—or willing—to do: it facilitated the reception of the immigrants and refugees in the country, and their journey outside of it. As noted by Poseidon, from Steki Metanaston of Chania:

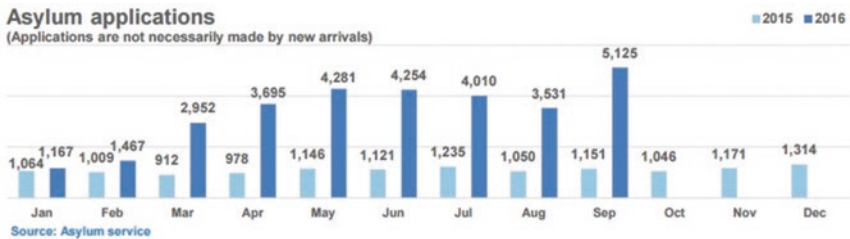


Fig. 3.2 Number of asylum applications to Greece. Source: UNHCR

You can say a lot about the government. On the other hand though, the political discourse changed ... there was a completely new discourse and it was diffused to the society. It was incredible, I mean, two boats arrived here in February, and the treatment of the Coastal Guard towards us was completely different. In the past they would not even let us approach, they were saying *You are from Steki? You have nothing to do here. Go to the lawyers' Union*. Now they welcomed us with 'open arms', together with a friend of mine we were taken by surprise. It shows that from one day to another things can change, if something changes centrally. (Interview GR15)

Of course the government also took advantage of the *refugee issue*² in its mediatic game. Aphrodite, who works in the government relocation office, cited the example of the first relocation from Greece, to Luxemburg. It was the first and last time that Luxemburg had opened up spots, but the Greek government rushed to exploit the fact mediatically:

[Luxemburg offered] thirty spots! In short: *zero [compared to the number of people on the lists]*. However, it was all done in a very festive manner, with Tsipras going to the airport etc. Those refugees who went there contacted us later to complain that [in Luxemburg] they are keeping them under horrible conditions, with chemical toilets, under bridges etc. (Interview GR5)

However, Themis—a lawyer—activist who now works for the government—emphasises that this was also part of the government's political game:

What was going on in Samos is very characteristic. They were opening the door [of the hotspot]; the refugees would go out to eat pizza in the city and then after they would return to the camp to sleep. That is *illegal* and *informal* [interviewee's emphasis]. Or they were allowing the *solidarians*³ to enter in order to distribute food. When the money started flowing in, what did they do? They locked up the doors and kicked out the *solidarians*. They decide how flexible to be. If we consider that we belong to the general solidarity movement, we have not managed to do any major crack, to enter somewhere and take it. We have substituted for the state, for as long as the state allowed us to, and for as long as it served its interests. (Interview GR2)

After the EU–Turkey agreement, however, the state took matters into its own hands and excluded the RSM from any access to the moving populations. The reception on the coasts was now being covered by Frontex and the Greek police, while only NGOs and official organisations could provide services in the camps. Most of the solidarity initiatives—being informal organisations and collectives—faced the dilemma of becoming official in order to have access to the hot-spots. Many decided to not enter officialdom, perceiving that they would thus legitimise the government’s policies of closed detention centres. Themis noted:

What Mouzalas (the then Minister of Immigration Policy) is doing now is very obvious. They follow deterring policies in order to move the people where the Ministry wants, cutting the access to information to everybody. [It is so] because it is not working for them otherwise, they need to implement right-wing policy, and in order to do that you need to do it silently, since you have criticised it so much in the past. (Interview GR2)

Small Islands, Huge Issues⁴

No matter how we decide to view the issue, we cannot fail to notice the central role of the places where people on the move would arrive first: the North Aegean islands. Due to their proximity to the Turkish coast, in some cases only a few naval miles away, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos, Kastelorizo, and Kalymnos played a huge part during the long summer of migration. These islands became *borderlands*: liminal zones between countries and continents with their own peculiar dynamics (Agier 2016). However, the role they and their inhabitants played and keep playing has been very disproportionate to their size and capabilities: they are very small places, with their own particular, equally small local communities, in which the long summer of migration ‘changed everything’ (Papataxiarchis 2016a, b). To put things in perspective: according to the official data of the UNHCR, the biggest of those islands, Lesbos, with a population of roughly 86,000 people, saw 504,000 people arriving at its coast in 2015 and 95,000 more in 2016. The smallest,

Kastelorizo, with a population of roughly 500 people, had 3000 arrivals in 2016 alone.

As expressed by Ekavi, a local at Skala Sykamias in Lesvos:

I dread the possibility that the same thing could happen again. How did we manage? Of course, later on the solidarity structures joined, but it was extremely difficult. ... At first we started at the village level when the arrivals were few in May. To begin with, we all emptied our cupboards, our drawers, there were no clothes left. (Interview GR1)

In fact, until June 2015, when the solidarity initiatives and the national and international NGOs started arriving on the islands, the few inhabitants with their extremely limited resources and spontaneous improvisations became the (otherwise non-existent) 'welcome policy' for Greece and the European Union. Themis, a lawyer involved with the RSM for many years, told me:

For me that was the most surprising thing. There was no structure, no network on behalf of the Government, even though it is supposed that there is some kind of continuity—ok in the structures at least—because policies change. Well, there was nothing! All this was set up on the islands in record-time. It is incredible to think that they [the RSM] substituted the Coastal guard, the hospitals, the food provision, it is unbelievable! And for me, it is also unbelievable to see how manipulatively the state acts towards the *solidarians*. We have seen that before on the islands: it uses you to cover its own voids and then there comes a moment when it turns against you. (Interview GR2)

Hector, an activist from Steki Metanaston (Migrants' Club) of Chania, Crete, also criticised the government's actions, characterising them as inadequate for the seriousness of the situation:

Personally ... I find the government's stance unacceptable, for a self-proclaimed government of the Left. Organizationally speaking it was incapable of meeting the basic needs of the people. For example, there were babies being born in the mud ... you cannot escape your own responsibilities saying *we are in crisis—there's nothing we can do!* [...] I also notice an effort

by the government to use the issue of the refugees' arrival (*prosfygiko*) in its wider political game ... so, the government does not drown them which is important—we should recognize that—but it is far from what you would expect from a government with a minimum sense of seriousness. (Interview GR3)

Apollo, a photographer studying in Lesvos at the time, believes that the government did not react at all, in an attempt to signal to the European Union that Greece could not handle the situation alone:

Well ... at first the state was not doing anything. The police were there when the boats were arriving and were doing nothing. They were saying: *We have orders not to do anything*. I think Tsipras was playing a game ... to have a better bargaining card, to ask for money. Just like Erdogan did. (Interview GR4)

Other activists, while remaining extremely critical of the government, recognised that it was a new government without any experience in dealing with this issue, in the midst of a catastrophic financial crisis. Aphrodite, who works for the Relocation Programme, an EU initiative that started in September 2013 with the intention of distributing the refugees requesting asylum equally all over Europe, mentioned the inability of the few workers to examine all the applications, as well as the ineffectiveness of the programme which—being dependent on the (non-existent) goodwill of the member states—has failed to meet the demand for asylum:

I joined in November 2015. We started with 13 people ... I mean, we couldn't meet the needs. [The maximum we could do was] 30 cases a day! Then after they hired more people and now we are around 100 people and more are expected to join. But I still feel lost, even though more people came, because the workflow is increasing. (Interview GR5)

In any case, and for whatever reason, the state was considered absent from the handling of the 'refugee crisis', at least during its first phase. Stahler-Sholk (2001) notes that the retreat of the state—especially under neoliberal regimes—sometimes opens up 'new spaces' that can be

contested from below. This is exactly what happened with the refugee issue: having retreated, the state left a new space for action for the solidarity initiatives and the *solidarians* (*allileggyoi*), as they are called in Greece. Orion, an activist from Diktyo (Network for the Protection of Political and Social Rights), noted that the refugee issue became the field for activists who were disappointed with SYRIZA—which they considered as having betrayed the results of the bailout referendum of July 2015⁵—to reactivate themselves:

Half of the ex-SYRIZA-youth branch who left the party after the referendum and were for some time demobilized, eventually joined City Plaza—an occupied hotel that emerged in Athens in order to host refugee and migrant families—and assist here now. (Interview GR6)

Talos, from AK Athens (Antiracist–Antiauthoritarian Movement), agrees that the grassroots movements in Greece were also reactivated thanks to the occupation of a number of buildings that were squatted in order to host refugees and migrants:

I want to mention something here. The movement was at a moment of *low-tide*, and the squats brought a *high-tide*. The movement was weakened, and the squats put the people back into a political process (Interview GR10)

The solidarity initiatives (and some NGOs) took on the responsibility to save the refugees and migrants from drowning, bringing them safely on land, receiving them on the coasts, providing them with clothes and sanitation services, sheltering them for as long as necessary, and providing them with information. In addition, the RSM activists accompanied them to the registration offices and provided translation services, ran a huge solidarity campaign all over the country in order to attract human and other resources, and activated their already existing national and international networks, or initiated new ones for the needs of the campaign. They also organised events (festivals, public talks) in order to acquire resources and propagate their positions.

The Ghosts of Smyrna

I'll tell you a story, an incident during which I said: *Panayia mou* (Mother of Jesus) *this is what Smyrna (must have) looked like!* [...] I went to the tavern and on the tables I saw children ranging from months to 5–6 year-olds. Cries, shouts ... I went mad, I said: *What's going on? A boat full of children only?* [...] Nobody had an answer. After a while, I saw ... mothers, only mothers. Shouting, crying ... and rushing to the kids! I went to a corner and I burst into tears. I said *Oh my God! Smyrna! Smyrna! The refugees of Smyrna!* (Interview GR1)

The above story was narrated to me by Ekavi,⁶ a local woman from Skala Sykamias—‘the informal gate into Europe’ as Papataxiarchis calls it (2016a, 5)—during my fieldwork in Lesvos in the summer of 2016. She was referring to the influx of Greek refugees from Turkey to Greece that took place in 1922 and 1923, and was marked—at least in the Greek historiography—by the pushback of the Greek army by Kemal Atatürk's troops and the burning and looting of the city of Izmir on 13 September 1922. A great number of Orthodox Christians who had lived in what was until then the Ottoman Empire urgently fled to Greece, mainly through the islands of the North Aegean. The event is known in the Greek collective memory and historiography as the ‘Asia Minor Catastrophe’, or *Mikrasiatiki Katastrofi*, with the Catastrophe of Smyrna being an emblematic incident. In total, in the subsequent exchange of populations, more than two million people shifted from Greece to Turkey and vice versa, based on their religious identities: the Orthodox Christians of Turkey were deported to Greece and the Muslims of Greece to Turkey (Clark 2006).

According to the activists' perceptions, today's solidarity is partially rooted in the collective memory of refugee experiences of the Greek people, mostly with regard to the above events. The routes used by the refugees at that time were the same as the routes their modern counterparts now use, central amongst them the passage to the islands of the North Aegean. As a result, many of the modern-day inhabitants of the islands (and of course of mainland Greece as well) are first- or second-generation descendants of those refugees. Their own family history became a big emotional incentive that impelled them to express their solidarity with

today's refugees. For example, Ekavi's Skala Sykamias (in contrast to Sykamia itself, higher up on the mountain) is a refugee settlement. She emphasised that the people of Skala all helped the refugees in one way or another: 'In the shops that didn't help, nobody is from Skala. They are from above (Sykamia). From Skala the majority helped' (Interview GR1).

Plato, an activist from *Allileggyi Samos*, also emphasised the refugee origins of the locals and its role in the modern 'refugee crisis':

These people are being hunted, just like our forefathers, and you know the forefathers of a number of today's inhabitants of Samos (Samiotes) came from Asia Minor. There is a sensibility in the Greek people for historical reasons, which is expressed when it comes to today's refugee issue. We can easily relate ourselves to it, because we know that our grandfathers were in the same position. (Interview GR13)

An activist–lawyer involved with the refugee issue in Patra also related that he went to help in Idomeni on the Greek–Macedonian border; when they made a call for food, a truck full of provisions arrived within a few hours. When he asked, astonished, how that had happened, he was told that the nearby villages were *prosfygika* (refugee villages) whose residents know what *prosfygia* (the state of being a refugee) means.

The same is true for Crete which, given its geographical position, did not receive refugees; activists there mostly focused on the collection of goods and money to be sent to the islands, Piraeus, and Idomeni, where they were needed most. These activists also activated *memory* in their campaigns. In 1897, as a result of the Greco–Ottoman War, Crete ceased being an Ottoman province and became an autonomous one. As a result, many Cretan Muslims had to abandon the island, seeking refuge in Al-Hamidiye in Syria, where the Cretan dialect still survives. In an ironic twist of fate, descendants of those Cretans were now leaving Syria. Activists from the Steki Metanaston in Chania emphasised that fact in their campaign:

We were using a lot a small video that we made. People from Crete had gone to Syria as refugees. ... We are talking about two generations ago. I mean, there are vivid memories inside the families. (Interview GR7)

The activation of memory was therefore crucial in producing empathy amongst the Greek people towards the refugees and immigrants; for as long as they were just crossing through Greece, at least, solidarity was hegemonic in the public discourse.

Solidarity

Like everywhere else in Greece, *solidarity* was the hegemonic frame on the islands of North Aegean. It is indicative that on at least three of the islands where I conducted fieldwork (Kos, Samos, and Chios), there was at least one solidarity initiative called *Allileggyi* (solidarity). Orpheus, an activist from Chania, Crete—a city very far from the refugee route—remembers:

In Chania we were surprised; we saw the same processes like in the rest of Greece. We did not see any racism, any enmity—neither from the side of the state right?—at the local level, which was very beautiful. We were astonished. It was solidarity, it wasn't '*get out of here you stinky bastards*', it was not fear. Of course, considering that the refugees did not want to stay, just to pass through Greece. ... In the political dialogue in the city, the battle had been won. The fascists had disappeared—even though Golden Dawn is present in the city. (Interview GR7)

This spirit of solidarity was dominant on all islands with the exception of Kos, where the mayor was very negative towards the refugees from the beginning, sabotaging the efforts of the local RSM organisations.

Economic Exploitation

Nevertheless, during my fieldwork I also heard stories of economic exploitation of the people on the move by the local businesspeople and other intermediaries. Musaferat, an anarchist collective from Mytilene, Lesbos, published a booklet describing how the shops on the portside of the city started selling camping equipment, kiosks began selling halal food, and at least 5–6 new travel agencies suddenly appeared with signs

in Arabic, selling complete travel packages all the way to the crossing of Idomeni (Musaferat and Πρωτοβουλία για την ολική άρνηση στράτευσης 2016). Dionysos, a coffee shop owner in Mytilene, told me:

Here new bars have opened up, great financial investments were made. But now that the refugees are gone, these places cannot be sustained. Now they use racist terms openly in Molyvos,⁷ and say that the immigrants stare at the female tourists and scare them. But on the other hand the same people say that Lesbos needs to be promoted as the island of solidarity. [That is] hypocrisy! (Interview GR8)

I also heard stories of locals charging ridiculous prices for bottles of water, or in exchange for transportation from the coasts to the main cities. In Samos, Hera, a member of Allileggyi Samos, remembers:

Then, people were going out a lot and were consuming a lot. All the *menus* were in Arabic and there were always new arrivals. The hotels were full ... and that had brought new life to the local market. Vathy⁸ was very lively! (laughter) They were making money, there was exploitation. (Interview GR9)

In general, according to the activists' accounts, the refugees 'extended the tourist season', which normally lasts from April to August and, especially in the beginning of the first phase of the refugee issue, brought a heavily needed financial injection to the crisis-ridden islands. The locals were showing their solidarity in any possible way; however, there were cases of exploitation of migrant needs in order to make profits. Apollo narrates:

There was lots of exploitation. For example, I remember a family arrived to our house and offered us 300 euros just in order to sleep over for one night. Of course I didn't accept the money, because I have some kind of [ethical] consciousness but if they offered that money to me, they certainly did so to others too. And I am not sure those others wouldn't take it. Not to mention the locals with their motorbikes, they would charge 50 euros for a ride to the city. Or the motors of the boats they took, or the petrol, loads of petrol. ... Here there is a Chinese shop. They brought camping tents. Well ... the gypsies would buy one tent for ten euros and sell it for thirty, or fifty. (Interview GR4)

Time and Containment: When the Island Becomes the Camp

With time however, everything changed. The wealthiest refugees and immigrants, and the lucky ones who had arrived in Greece before the EU–Turkey agreement, managed in one way or another to leave the islands and the country, continuing their journey to Northern Europe. The unlucky ones, those arriving after the agreement, were trapped in Greece. As if this was not enough, specific government policies⁹ delayed their transfer to Athens and other cities on the mainland and obliged them to stay on the islands for an indefinite period. First, they were kept in *hot-spots*, prohibited from leaving, for up to 25 days. Afterwards they were allowed to leave the hot-spot, but not the island, until they could get an appointment in Athens to be interviewed and their asylum/relocation application examined. During the period of my fieldwork, the shortest waiting time for an appointment in Athens was four months. Thus, even after being released from the hot-spots, the refugees/immigrants continued to be contained on the island: *the island itself became a big camp*.

Even if those people had some savings, they slowly spent them, while the insecurity of their condition had negative counter-effects both for them and for the local communities. As I was told by Dionysos, an activist of Musaferat in Mytilene, Lesvos:

Now the people are tired. They've been here for more than two months, since March. The money is running up, whatever was left of it. Because you see, before, the Syrians those who came first had money. (Interview GR8)

Hera remembers that in Samos as well, refugees were very welcome in the beginning because they were also perceived as *consumers*:

When they put the containers that they brought in order to shelter the people in the port, the Commercial Union protested because they would be away from the commercial center [and they could not consume]. And now they think that it is unacceptable if the refugees walk where the tourists do or if they swim in the same sea. (Interview GR9)

Pericles, an activist of Lathra in Chios, draws a similar picture, arguing that now that the refugees' savings have been exhausted, things have become much more complicated on the islands:

Things were going smoothly up until the (EU-Turkey) agreement. By 19–20 April the island was empty, there were only 30–50 people left, just because they had financial issues and could not leave. ... Today there are more than 2500 people trapped here. There is financial and psychological exhaustion and that has implications for the local community: ... lately criminality has increased, they are exhausted financially and they are forced to steal. I am talking about the Souda area (an open camp in Chios) where they open up cars, they look for money ... these phenomena are to be expected when people are packed up for a long period of time without knowing what to do. (Interview GR11)

Movement–Countermovement Antagonism

With time, and as it became obvious that there was no specific policy plan for the refugees and migrants on the islands, insecurity led to refugee protests. Often they would riot inside the camps, occasionally burning documents and desks, just to make some noise and attract attention to their condition. Giovanni, an Italian NGO worker in the camp of Moria in Lesbos, told me regarding the camp:

It is horrible in Moria. You hear many stories, even of sexual harassment. There's the army, the police. ... They [the refugees] will rebel and they will burn it and they will be right! Also, the cops are *administrative cops [meaning bureaucrats]*, and they are scared. When something happens they are the first to disappear together with the NGOs. (Interview GR12)

Sometimes they also organised protest marches in the main cities, and in some cases they also occupied the main ports for days, in an effort to attract attention to their condition and demand a solution—in Chios, even forcing the ferry to change port for the duration of the occupation.

For an island, the port is what connects it with the outside world and allows the flow of people and goods. Its occupation is therefore a major

disturbance for the locals. The same is true for the presence of thousands of people on the island without any prospect of a solution. Therefore, the locals also complain and protest. The usual repertoires of protest include gatherings around the municipal buildings and petitions demanding that the newcomers go away. There have also been attacks in the open camps, with Souda in Chios being burnt at least twice. In addition, there is an effort by right-wing and *neo-nazi* organisations to take advantage of the situation. Golden Dawn has started building nuclei both in Lesbos and in Chios, and it is not unusual for Golden Dawn deputies to visit the islands. In Leros in July 2016, patrol groups formed on behalf of the locals who were patrolling the island attacked and threatened to enter the local hot-spot. Some attacks and beatings of refugees were also reported, while verbal fights between pro-refugee activists and anti-refugee locals have also now become regular phenomena.

The ‘Solidarians’

Katerina Rozakou (2016, p. 187) writes that in Greece in recent years, we have witnessed an interesting grammatical–ontological shift: the word *alliléggios* (solidarian) has changed ‘from an adjective to a noun’, meaning a *person* (not just the *action*) who is in solidarity with somebody else. For Rozakou, this grammatical shift signifies the radicalisation of solidarity in the social spaces where it is being practised. The movements that were activated during the 2015–2016 long summer of migration in Greece predominantly used the concept of *solidarity* in describing their actions, and their activists are called *solidarians* (*allileggyoi*)—in contrast to the *Mikiades*,¹⁰ the professional NGO workers who also became key actors in the field. The activists of the RSM can be divided into two categories: the *older actors*, who have been part of the Greek antiracist movement for years, and the *new actors*, groups that were formed in response to the 2015–2016 ‘refugee crisis’. They all are rainbow coalitions of several groups of the institutional and extra-parliamentarian Left and the anarchist spaces of Greece, who agree on the *minimum* of acting in favour of refugee/migrant rights and against racism.

The largest of those coalitions, Diktyo (Network for Social and Political Rights), has a countrywide presence and included a strong contingent of SYRIZA activists in its ranks until SYRIZA came into government and gave in to the Troika's demands. Others, like Steki Metanaston Chanion (Immigrant's Club of Chania), Antiratsistiki Kinisi Thessalonikis (Antiracist Movement of Thessaloniki), or Lathra (Chios), have a more local character and focus on actions in their immediate environments/cities. Over the course of the long summer of migration, new organisations were formed, mostly on the spot by the local communities themselves; there was also the case of Platanos, again a coalition organisation that was formed in the summer of 2015 at Pedio tou Areos Park in Athens in order to be sent to Lesbos and assist the locals in their reception efforts. It is interesting to note here that most of the new groups that were formed on the islands were called Allileggyi (solidarity) which is indicative of the dominant, hegemonic position of solidarity within the Greek society with regard to the issue: just a few examples are Alileggyioi (Solidarians) Chios, Allileggyi Samos, and Allileggyi Kos, while Lathra's sub-name is Coalition of Solidarity of Chios.

In a way, the presence of the refugees in their local communities and spaces is what gave birth to the majority of these organisations—not so much on ideological terms, but rather as a matter of addressing pressing needs. However, along the way, their participation in the groups' actions did politicise and radicalise the activists as well. As clarified by Patroclos, an activist of Prosfygi, a group that used to be active in Lesbos but no longer exists:

Look, I could tell you two versions [of why I got involved] and then you choose which one to keep. The first has to do with the injustice of all this. Why do they keep these people in camps? Detained? I never understood this! It is extremely unfair! But that's *not* how I got involved. On the other hand, when I came here to study, I found the people I could be on the same line with. And, in my friends' circles, the refugee issue [*prosfygiko*] was central. It was all around me. In a way it found me, and it was impossible not to get involved. [...] Through the *refugee issue*, I was formed as a person, I formed my discourse, I could now stand in wider audiences and defend my positions. (Interview GR19)

Activists from pre-existing organisations pointed in a similar direction: what motivated them to join the RSM was necessity. In a way, the ‘issue of the refugees and migrants’ found them, not vice versa: they felt that they had to do something about it. Both Lathra and Allilegyi Samos were formed when the locals noticed the presence of immigrants and refugees, locked up in buildings on their islands, and felt the need to address it. Pericles emphasises that when Lathra was formed in 2001, the refugees it was dealing with were mostly from Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, and events always escalated when there was a war in the region (Interview GR11). Diktyo also got involved with the issue of protecting the rights of the—mostly Albanian—migrants who started entering Greece in the early 1990s and faced social exclusion, racism, and exploitation. Other organisations, like Steki Metanaston Chania, were formed as a by-product of the Greek Social Forum by activists who saw the need to do something about the immigrants and refugees in Greece at the time.

The new organisations have a more diverse activist background, with people from different political spaces who felt the need to act. Especially on the islands on which refugee arrivals were a new occurrence, there had been no previous need for such organisations; they were established in response to the 2015–2016 refugee crisis. In Kos, for example, as noted by Socrates, a local teacher and member of Allilegyi Kos:

We did not have any previous experience. It is difficult to have such experience living in Kos so we tried very hard to organize everything. The people stayed long here, because the identification was a long process, we would get to know these people, we would be with them for 15–20 days or more. Minimum there were 200 people, we also got to feed 500–600 even 1000. Slowly the populations started increasing in the city, officially they were talking of 7000. (Interview GR20)

Decision-Making and Organisational Structure

In terms of structure, all of the organisations I studied are horizontally organised: they are coalitions of various actors, and the ultimate decision-making body is the assembly. The assembly is typically made

up of activists, although in organisations like City Plaza Hotel and Notara 26, the refugees and immigrants also participate and are politicised in the process. In the case of Platanos in Lesvos, some locals also participated in the assemblies, an experience that they found life-changing. Ekavi, a member of SYRIZA Lesvos who was used to more top-down decision-making structures, was impressed by her participation in Platanos' self-organised initiative:

Open assemblies! Clear and transparent things, the finances, everything! At some point I told them: *So aren't we going to vote?* And they said: *We don't vote here.*

—So, how are you taking decisions? Directly democratically? But too much democracy harms, I was saying. We would gather making a circle, of course it is a slow process, many people, there were times that we were 50–60 people. *A 60 people assembly!* [interviewee's emphasis]. (Interview GR1)

Clearly affected by her first self-organised experience, she told me later, during the last days of Platanos in Skala Sykamias:

Platanos came in October. I went for a walk to see. *That's where I got to know solidarity. What solidarity (really) means* [her emphasis] Platanos for me was what I was looking for. The volunteerism I wanted ... what solidarity *really* means. To help each other. (Interview GR1)

In the squats that were hosting refugees, the same decision-making model was used: all issues were discussed in a horizontal and directly democratic assembly, and all the decisions were taken there. An activist from Notara 26 squat told me that at first, it was difficult for the refugees and immigrants to get used to this new decision-making process: 'they were used to more authoritarian regimes, especially for the women it was difficult to break the logic of patriarchy'. However, with time they adapted and participated in the common assemblies, also forming their own.

During the second phase of the long summer of migration, the government demanded that the solidarity groups register themselves officially, requiring them to be institutionalised and formalised in order to act in the camps, for example. Until then, most of them had been informal

organisations. There was internal disagreement within many of the organisations regarding whether or not they would do so. Most of them did not, unwilling to 'legitimise' the government's closed camp policy. Others did, thinking that they would thereby be able to continue helping, despite their disagreement with the government's policies. However, despite their officially hierarchical structure, even those who became formal organisations maintained the horizontal, assembly logic in their decision-making processes.

Actions

With regard to repertoires of action, again we must make two distinctions: one between the pre-existing organisations and those that were set up in 2015–2016 and the other between the first and the second phases of the current 2015–2016 'refugee crisis'. The pre-existing organisations were mostly focused on organising events and performing actions of a political nature that would highlight the political dimensions of the refugees and migrants. They challenged the concept of the border, advocated for human rights, and highlighted the reasons behind the refugee influx. They would organise antiracist festivals in their cities, produce leaflets and press releases, and mobilise to assist refugees and migrants whenever they had issues with the authorities. Some would also maintain their own spaces, *Stekia* as they are called, which are multifunctioning self-administered places where they could organise activities from social events to English and Greek classes. Protests and marches were also organised, especially in response to racist incidents against immigrants and refugees. In short, their actions were mostly focused on intervening in the public discourse.

With the intensification of the arrivals, both pre-existing and new organisations had to focus mainly on meeting the needs of the refugees and immigrants. With the domination of solidarity in the public discourse, the solidarity initiatives could leave aside the sensitisation of the public and focus on the most pressing necessities of the incoming flows of people. After the EU–Turkey agreement, when both the local communities and the refugees and migrants started being exhausted with the

situation, solidarity started to fade away as a dominant frame, and the movements realised that they had to get back to advocacy work. At the same time, the more humanitarian aspects were now taken over by the NGOs, or the ‘professionals of the story’, as one of my interviewees described them.

The Privatisation and Institutionalisation of Solidarity

At some point there were so many volunteers that if you would go to *Bobiras* (a local café) and say *I need volunteers*, for sure 3–4 would raise their hands. It was like Erasmus!

This is how Giovanni, an Italian NGO worker, remembered the influx of volunteers in Lesbos during 2015. ‘They all came with crowdfunding’, he said:

When I first came here there was one from Canada I think who would leave in two days. So he took out 300 euros just like that and gave them to me, and he said go offer them wherever they are needed. He had crowd-funded them. Or some American—if I am not mistaken—ladies, who were distributing toys at the port to everyone! It was crazy! (Interview GR12)

Since the intensity of the arrivals took everyone by surprise, the locals were the first to organise themselves to deal with them. They came together around the pre-existing organisations that had some kind of expertise on the issue, and where those did not exist they formed new ones. They slowly entered the relevant networks and asked for help from the mainland and abroad. The first volunteers did not take long to arrive. Socrates, from Allilegyi Kos, remembers:

During that time the NGOs and others arrived. ... At some point however, they were distributing so much food to each refugee that you needed two days to eat it. 4–5 fruits, three sandwiches etc., and there were so many volunteers from the NGOs that in the end every refugee would have a butler! [...] Here, there were 22 organizations. (Interview GR20)

In Lesvos, there were more than 80 NGOs. Themis, who has long been involved with the issue, emphasises that while some of the organisations were known to the Refugee Solidarity Movement, many of them came for the money, since Lesvos and the other islands of North Aegean were now on the ‘humanitarian crises map’:

If you exclude a couple of NGOs that we knew from before, who had a stable presence ... did not just smell the money and come ... some appeared out of nowhere! Even though I have worked for NGOs for years, I am very cautious regarding the role they play. (Interview GR2)

In general, while the activists I spoke to recognised that one should not generalise about the NGOs, many of them emphasised the distinction between the *solidarians* and the *professionals*: those who do not get paid for their assistance and those who do. Arundhati Roy makes a similar argument when she talks about the *NGOisation of resistance* (Roy 2014):

NGOs have funds that can employ local people who might otherwise be activists in resistance movements, but now can feel they are doing some immediate, creative good (and earning a living while they're at it). Real political resistance offers no such short cuts. The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary.

Many of the locals on the islands found jobs with NGOs. Employment is scarce on these islands especially during winter, and even more so during the financial crisis. Numerous activists of the solidarity movements also accepted NGO jobs, a fact that was criticised by some other activists and some of the locals as well.

In February 2015, the Greek government started asking the solidarity organisations to register themselves officially in order to legalise their work. Some of them were even taken to court on charges of human trafficking, for helping refugees to cross the many kilometres from the coasts to the main cities.¹¹ Especially after the camps were established, the solidarity movements were slowly excluded from the expression of solidarity,

replaced by the NGOs that were subcontracted by the government or the UNHCR, in what I call *the privatisation of solidarity*. We should also note, however, that many of the activists who were employed by NGOs also provided sensitive information to the movement organisations regarding what was going on in the camps.

Solidarity in Triple Transition

Space: Geographies of Solidarity

The solidarity initiatives of 2015–2016 have necessarily followed the movement of refugees and migrants from one place to another. As mentioned, at first, they were active on the islands, taking responsibility for the reception, feeding, provision of information, and sheltering of refugees. Most of the solidarity organisations were active on the islands of the North Aegean; those who were not—like Steki Metanaston in Chania—gathered provisions and money to be sent to the islands where there was need. In addition, as the next stopover once the refugees left the islands, the port of Piraeus became the focus of action. Some central parks in Athens—for example, Pedio tou Areos and Viktoria—became temporary camps as well, while Idomeni was the next stopping place, where the refugees would wait until they could cross into Macedonia and continue their journey. There, the job of the solidarity initiatives would end.

With the signing of the agreement, the spatial character of the solidarity initiatives changed, along with the movement of the refugees and migrants themselves. The populations that until then had just been crossing through the country were now here to stay for an indefinite period. As they ceased being populations on the move, the solidarity initiatives adapted to the new reality and needs. Now the RSM had no access on the coasts, while in the camps the services were provided by NGOs, leading to ‘privatisation of solidarity’: the government was now subcontracting NGOs to offer that service. Since access to the camps was now seriously limited, the solidarity initiatives shifted their attention to the populations that had made it to the cities of the mainland, were not in the camps, and

were now here to stay for an indefinite period. The solidarity initiatives focused on a number of squats that emerged. At that point, the truce between the movements and the government broke as well. Themis remembered:

The movement started putting public pressure on the government for the violations it was responsible for. For me the truce of the movement with the authorities was broken because the RSM said *ok, you have no funds but ...* and it started criticizing the irregularities. And that annoyed the government. Because if you are on the field you have a clear picture of what's going on, whether pushbacks are taking place, whether boats arrive. ... The government thinks it is being washed clean because it was imposed to it by the EU and Turkey (but) they informally brought back the detentions, and they deny access to the *solidarians*. (Interview GR2)

Burnout

Another very important factor in the evolution of the 'refugee crisis' in Greece that affected all the relevant actors is *time*. The influx of populations has been ongoing for almost two years now, and it has undergone different phases; however, the actors involved in the issue remain the same and—with the exception of the refugees and migrants themselves—are becoming fewer and fewer. At first there was excitement, and the locals rushed to assist the newcomers in any possible way. The newcomers themselves were staying on the islands, the port of Piraeus, and the border of Idomeni for a limited period, and then they would continue their journey. Once the EU–Turkey agreement was in place, though, the refugees started overstaying on the islands and the open camps, and the local *solidarians*—those who kept mobilising for the cause, as many abandoned it—started getting tired and becoming frustrated. The perception I got from all the activists I interviewed is that the longer the situation endured without a sustainable solution on the horizon, the more tired they became. 'Look, we are tired, personally I am really tired', related Hephæstus from the Chios Solidarity Kitchen, adding that the solidarity actions they had undertaken with pleasure in the beginning were now an additional burden on their shoulders, adding more hours of work for

them. However, with no solution in sight, they cannot stop providing assistance to the moving populations in need:

We finish our jobs and on top of everything else you have to ... dedicate three more hours to this (cooking and distributing), and three more to do something else, and you end up working for 15 hours. ... Now it is a routine. It is not as spontaneous as it was in the beginning. You also freak out with the situation but what can you do? Not distribute food? There would be riots. And until when? (Interview GR16)

Activists from Allilegyi Samos drew a similar picture. They spoke of passing into a period of limited activity, especially because many activists are gone, particularly during the summer. Themis, who has been involved in migrant rights struggles for years, notes that the same phenomenon had existed in the past:

The movement 'got tired', it is humanly impossible to function for a whole year at such rhythms. You can't be somewhere, on a beach, and offer the same service every day. We saw that in Athens as well (in 2011) for example the hunger strike of the 300 refugees lasted for two months. When it was over, we [the solidarians] threw a party, because we could not take it anymore. We had abandoned jobs ... it is an issue of quantity, finances, and physical endurance. (Interview GR2)

There was also the effect of the involvement of NGOs, which left some solidarity initiatives, especially those that had focused only on the provision of food and clothing, without a field. At the same time, especially after the introduction of the hot-spots, the activists and local communities lost direct contact with the refugees and migrants. That produced alienation, according to Circe, an activist involved with both Lathra and the Social Kitchen in Chios:

In general, the humanitarian part is now covered by the professionals of this story that's why all the (solidarity) groups have a downward trend. I don't know whether the climate has changed in the local community or whether there's a general impasse, I mean, what do we do now? There's also the psychological factor. At first you are enthusiastic but as time goes by

and it becomes a routine this thing tires you. ... Right now you have a different reality, with people being trapped on the island who do nothing, other than wander around waiting for our charity, because the food you give them is just that—nothing else. They have been ghettoized, some groups took the responsibility to feed and clothe them, and you see them from afar [the direct contact has been lost]. (Interview GR17)

If the activists are tired, the same is true for the migrants and the local communities. The refugees have been stuck on the islands and camps on the mainland for more than ten months without knowing what will happen to them, whether their sacrifices will have a positive outcome or whether they will simply be returned to Turkey—as the RSM activists I spoke to believe it is the intention of the government.

Solidarity Actions: From Safe Passage to Integration

Prior to the EU–Turkey agreement, the solidarity movement was dealing with people who were not planning to stay in Greece; they were just using it as a stopover in their journey. Therefore, the movement focused on facilitating that journey: it received them on the coasts; provided them with food, clothing, healthcare, temporary shelter, and information; ‘accompanied them’ in their journey to the border; and saw them off at Idomeni. The agreement changed both the realities and the needs of the refugees and immigrants, as well as the focus of the RSM’s actions. The government gradually pushed the RSM out of the field, allowed only authorised NGOs and organisations to provide services and have access to the refugees, and in general showed that it had no intention of integrating the migrants. The perception of the activists, judging from the government’s policies, is that it is preparing the ground for deportations. Hephaestus, from Solidarity Kitchen of Chios, summarised:

They could very easily integrate those people. There are abandoned villages, I am not saying to keep all the 3000 that are here, but for example you could keep 500–600. To give them a parcel of land to cultivate, or a house at a symbolic price, so that they can feel that they are something. They

didn't commit any crime, they escaped war—and if it wasn't war it was on the search for a better life. You don't take a boat, risk your life otherwise (Interview GR16)

Themis agreed, expressing the belief that the government fears the political cost of admitting that these 70,000 refugees currently in Greece are here to stay:

Let's say the refugees say *ok, I'll stay. Stay where and do what?* There are no opportunities, nothing, for example for their kids to learn the language etc. That has an unbearable cost. It is a political decision, I mean SYRIZA should come out and say that these people are here to stay. We are gonna keep these people. (Interview GR2)

The activists I spoke to also believed that the choice of the SYRIZA government not to integrate was a deterrence measure: to send the message that Greece is not welcoming, so that no newcomers would try to make the crossing. In addition, they believe that the government is preparing the ground for deportations and therefore has chosen the road of 'exclusion' instead of integration: it keeps the refugees and immigrants in camps, where it can control them, away from the local community. This approach produces an alienation effect: Even when camps are near local communities, the vast numbers of people inside them tend to frighten and upset the locals.

Therefore, the RSM shifted towards integrating actions. It started putting pressure on the government for the children of the refugees and immigrants to be incorporated into the educational system. There has also appeared a network of squats, mostly abandoned hotels and public buildings, where refugee and immigrant families are hosted. In Athens alone, more than ten such projects exist, with City Plaza Hotel and Notara 26 being the most prominent examples. These occupied projects perform a dual function:

- (a) They constitute the movement's tangible 'proposals' for an integrating policy, in sharp contrast with the government's 'closed camp' exclusionary one; and

- (b) They provide shelter, food, and medical assistance to families that are trapped in Athens.

In Thessaloniki there were three similar occupations, which at the time of my fieldwork were evacuated—and one of them demolished—by the government.

At the same time, the movement activists seem to have realised the impasse they reached with the service provision they were absorbed into, as well as the fact that the climate of solidarity within the local communities is now slowly losing ground. As a result, the movement is now recognising the need to get involved in the ‘battle’ for ideological hegemony once again. Activists from Allilegyi Samos (Solidarity Samos) summarise the situation:

We need to reach out to the local community once again. To start talking about racism again but we don’t have big strength. We are not so many. We are now considering doing things for the people that are here, because they are permanently here. It’s been five months now. To involve in our actions both the kids and the adults.

Antigone, from the Antiracist Movement of Thessaloniki, agreed:

There has been a shift, after Idomeni was over we were discussing that we need to stop it [the humanitarian work]. We have to put emphasis on the protests and the political dimension of the *refugee issue*, the demands of the refugees themselves. To support them, to help them be heard. (Interview GR18)

Activists who have been involved with the RSM long enough—since before the refugee crisis of 2015–2016—and who consider themselves part of the wider antiracist movement (and some of the anti-capitalist movement as well) are also worried that they have fallen into the trap of just responding to the government’s actions, a fact that has deprived them of forming concrete proposals. From the perspective of Antigone:

That’s what we are doing I think. Ever since 2012, when the Squares were over, we are permanently in defense. We don’t have time to discuss, to pro-

duce our own rhetoric, and not to say *The state is doing this and that and we have to respond*. We don't have that time. And that is obvious, the lack of an alternative rhetoric on our part. You don't have the time to discuss, because there's always something happening so we lack that. On the other hand though you cannot avoid reacting to the developments either. (Interview GR18)

Conclusion (If Any Can Be Made)

This chapter focuses on the Refugee Solidarity Initiatives that evolved in Greece throughout 2015–2016, which form what I call the Refugee Solidarity Movement. It consists of both new and pre-existing organisations, most of them of local character, that form a loose nationwide network. The 'refugee crisis' that evolved in this period can also be separated into two phases, divided by the EU–Turkey agreement, which changed the political context tremendously. Each of them had its own characteristics: the government, the movements, and the refugees and migrants had to change their strategies as a result of the changing political context. Before the agreement, the EU and the government had left the space open for the moving populations to transit the country and leave, causing the RSM organisations to focus on people who were just crossing through Greece. After the agreement, the moving populations would now stay in Greece for an indefinite period, since the EU and the Greek government had now restricted the political space, closing down the borders and taking control of the situation. Therefore, the movements also changed their repertoires and strategies towards both the refugees/migrants and the state.

In addition, until the closure of the Balkan corridor, solidarity with refugees and migrants was widespread, and the RSM could focus on the humanitarian work around the issue. With time, and when it became obvious that those refugees and migrants were now here to stay, solidarity started fading away and the RSM had to address the task of sensitising the public and countering xenophobic reactions. During the first phase of the refugee issue, we also note a 'truce', a honeymoon period, in which the state left the space open for the movements to flourish. After February

2016, however, the state moved to reoccupy the lost space, excluding the movements from expressing their solidarity, and ‘privatising’ it in a way, allowing NGOs to provide the relevant services. The movements, in turn, now once again saw the state as an enemy and shifted their focus to integrating actions, like the occupation of buildings and the political pressure regarding the education of migrant children.

List of Interviews (Pseudonyms Have Been Used)

GR1: Ekavi, local of Skala Sykamias Lesvos, activist with Platanos, Lesvos.

GR2: Themis, lawyer, active in the RSM, Athens.

GR3: Hector, doctor, member of Steki Metanaston Chania, Crete.

GR4: Apollo, student and photographer, Lesvos.

GR5: Aphrodite, worker in the Refugee Relocation Programme, Athens.

GR6: Orion, activist with Diktyo, member of City Plaza assembly, Athens.

GR7: Orpheus, activist member of Steki Metanaston Chania, Crete.

GR8: Dionysos, activist, member of Musaferrat assembly, Lesvos.

GR9: Hera, activist member of Solidarity Samos, Samos.

GR10: Talos, activist member of AK Athens and Notara 26 squat.

GR11: Pericles, member of Lathra, Chios.

GR12: Giovanni, NGO worker, Lesvos.

GR13: Plato, activist with Solidarity Samos, Samos.

GR14: Phaethon, lawyer active in the RSM, Patra.

GR15: Poseidon, activist with Steki Metanaston, Chania.

GR16: Hephaestus, activist with Chios Solidarity Kitchen, Chios.

GR17: Circe, activist with Lathra, Chios.

GR18: Antigone, activist with Thessaloniki Antiracist Initiative, Thessaloniki.

GR19: Patroclos, activist with ex-Prosfygi, Lesvos.

GR20: Socrates, activist with Solidarity Chios, Chios.

GR21: Hippocrates, doctor, activist with City Plaza, Athens and Chios.

GR22: Aiolos, activist with Solidarity Chios and Rescue Team Chios, Chios.

GR23: Chiron, activist with Solidarity Kos, Kos.

GR24: Xerxes, activist with Platanos, Athens and Lesvos.

GR25: Arktos, activist in the antiracist movement, Lesvos.

GR26: Andromeda, activist with PikPa, Lesvos.

Notes

1. Solidarity for this chapter is understood in the Freirian sense of ‘entering in the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity ... fighting at their side to transform the objective reality’ (Freire 1970, p. 49). For more details on the use of the term, see Karkus Kip’s relevant chapter in Fritsch et al. (2016).
2. In the Greek public discourse the issue is known as *prosfygiko*, meaning ‘the refugee issue’. In this chapter I also use the term in that sense.
3. In Greece, the term *solidarians* is used to describe the activists of the RSM, in contrast to the term *mikiades* which is used for the NGO (MKO in Greek) workers.
4. A reference to Hylland Eriksen’s (2001) work, *Small Places, Large Issues*.
5. In July 2015, the SYRIZA–ANEL government organised a referendum regarding the conditions the Troika (European Commission, the ECB, and the IMF) were requiring from Greece in order for a bailout package to be approved. The conditions were rejected by a 61 per cent majority; however the government later on practically ignored the referendum and accepted the bailout conditions.
6. All of the names of my interviewees have been changed.
7. A touristic city in Lesvos.
8. The main city of Samos.
9. According to a law that SYRIZA government (Ministry of the Interior) passed in February, the immigrants and refugees entering Greece can be detained in the hot-spots from three to 25 days, until their registration process is complete.
10. In the Greek alphabet, the acronym NGO is MKO (*MiKiO*).
11. Later on, under pressure from the RSM, the government passed an exception to the law. People who were helping the refugees/migrants for ‘humanitarian purposes’ were now immune from human trafficking accusations.

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