

WE LIVE TOGETHER, WE FIGHT TOGETHER

Solidarity with migrants among the Southern-European radical left

Francesca Maviglia, Yale-NUS College

The Greek “Refugee Crisis” saw the emergence of a large international flow of volunteers and civil society organizations who mobilized to alleviate the dire situation of migrants and refugees. While most of these actors operate within the framework of humanitarian work, some groups ideologically affiliated with the radical left conceive of their activities as actively political, rejecting humanitarianism and adopting the concept of “solidarity” instead. This paper will examine their motivations, ideology, and rhetoric; building on Miriam Ticktin’s distinction between “care” and “cure,” I argue that activist groups see their work with migrants as part of a long-term “political cure” to larger social problems. Finally, the paper will consider the historical experience of fascism and the tradition of internationalism as features of the cultural identity of the Southern European left that have shaped this particular view of migration activism.

Introduction

The Southern European region recently came under the spotlight due to the 2015-2016 “Refugee Crisis,” which saw an unprecedented number of migrants, in particular Syrians seeking refuge from the ongoing civil war, arrive at the shores of Greece and Italy. It rapidly became painfully obvious that national or European Union (EU) institutions were completely unprepared to handle the situation, due to bureaucratic slowness as well as lack of political consensus. The crisis attracted a large flow of people from all parts of Europe who flew to Greece, and especially to the hotspot of Lesbos, to fill the gaps left by the dysfunction of official apparatuses.¹ Volunteers quickly started making headlines for their work,² and have often been described as “humanitarian”³ and animated by a “desire to make a difference when human suffering is tangible.”⁴

¹ Matina Stevis, “Volunteers Flock to Greek Island to Fill Void in Migrant Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 11, 2015, sec. Page One, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/volunteers-flock-to-greek-island-to-fill-void-in-migrant-crisis-1449802501>.

² United Nations News Centre, “Greek Volunteers Awarded Top UN Humanitarian Honour for Efforts with Migrants and Refugees,” June 9, 2016, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?newsid=54855#.wcvfbj95aq>.

³ John Psaropoulos, “The Impact of Humanitarian Volunteers in Greece,” *Al Bawaba*, March 22, 2016, <https://www.albawaba.com/news/impact-humanitarian-volunteers-greece-820222>.

⁴ Karen McVeigh, “What’s in It for Them? The Volunteers Saving Europe’s Refugees,” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2016, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/09/wh>

However true for many volunteers, this narrative conflates traditional large NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders with small, newly-founded non-profit groups, independent volunteers, local habitants, and political groups, grouping all efforts under the umbrella of “humanitarian work” regardless of the specific motivations driving different actors. Although some articles occasionally draw attention to the diversity of realities and organizational structures,⁵ and brief mentions of “anarchist-run squats” are common in coverage of the Greek situation,⁶ the idea of a politically-motivated mobilization for migrants has not been a dominant one in the mainstream collective imagination.

A closer look at radical leftist groups involved in pro-migrant activities, however, quickly reveals that the way in which they think of their work is far from, and most often directly in conflict with, the principles of humanitarianism. In this paper, I focus on this politically-charged form of pro-migrant action, often termed “solidarity,” and explore its characteristics and the motivations driving it. In the first part of the paper, I concentrate on the squats for refugees and migrants started by anarchist

ats-in-it-for-them-the-volunteers-saving-europes-refugees.

⁵ “Secret Aid Worker: Greece Has Exposed the Aid Community’s Failures,” *The Guardian*, September 13, 2016, sec. Global Development Professionals Network, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/sep/13/secret-aid-worker-greece-has-exposed-the-aid-communitys-failures>.

⁶ Helena Smith, “The Idealists of Lesbos: Volunteers at the Heart of the Refugee Crisis,” *The Guardian*, April 15, 2016, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/15/idealists-of-lesbos-volunteers-refugee-crisis-pope-francis>.

groups in Athens, examining their position on humanitarianism and the alternative they propose. The main evidence I use are social media posts published by one of the squats, the City Plaza Hotel, as well as accounts of the volunteers who worked there. These forms of expression are significant because they build the narrative through which activists choose to frame their work and put forth their political stances. I choose to focus on the Greek context because the urgency of the Refugee Crisis caused solidarity to develop from a purely ideological philosophy to an observable set of practices. In the second part, I suggest some factors characterizing the culture and sense of identity of the Southern European radical left which contributed to the rise of the concept of solidarity. I broaden the focus from Athens and the Refugee Crisis to the characteristics and historical experience of the radical left in Southern Europe, which I define as including Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal.⁷ My thesis is twofold: firstly, that solidarity is prompted by a perception of migration as part of a continuum of other political causes, rather than as a separate discrete issue; and secondly, that such perception arises from elements of the identity of the radical left, such as the historic experience of fascism and a tradition of internationalism.

A note on terminology

Among stakeholders in the international community working on migration issues, the

⁷ The region of Southern Europe has no clear limits universally agreed upon, and is sometimes expanded to include the south of France and countries in the Balkans. I choose a restrictive definition based on the political, cultural and historical similarities of these four countries, which make observations on the Left generalizable.

common understanding is that there exists a difference between migrants and refugees. Amnesty International defines a refugee as “a person who has fled their own country because they have suffered human rights abuses or because of who they are or what they believe in,” and a migrant as someone who “moves around within their own country, or from one country to another, usually to find work,” noting that “some move voluntarily, while others are forced to leave because of economic hardship or other problems.”⁸ This differentiation is based on the framework established by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which defines a refugee as someone who left their country “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted.”⁹ As many authors have pointed out, the distinction between the two is problematic, as it relies on supposedly objective criteria which in reality are context- and time-specific to qualify the “refugee,” and it creates categories of “deserving” and “undeserving” people by drawing a separation between voluntary and forced migration.¹⁰ Radical leftist groups, although familiar with these definitions, do not practically or morally draw a distinction, and use both terms

⁸ Amnesty International, “Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Migrants,” accessed November 17, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>.

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>.

¹⁰ Christopher Kyriakides, “Words Don’t Come Easy: Al Jazeera’s Migrant-refugee Distinction and the European Culture of (Mis)Trust,” *Current Sociology*, August 4, 2016, 001139211665808, doi:10.1177/0011392116658089.

interchangeably.¹¹ To reflect this practice, I only use the term “migrant” to refer to refugees and economic migrants alike.

Against humanitarianism

Sitting on the floor and doodling on the surface of a “table” made of a wood plank, I listened to the rest of the people in the room, all students of various European nationalities attending the same university in the UK, complain about the practices of the activist group they had come to Athens to help. Our daily breakfast meetings had mostly been dominated by grievances about the methods of the host group, perceived to be too charity-oriented and not political enough. The long, mostly circular discussion made me and my best friend roll our eyes, as we longed for the meeting to finish to go back to our projects.

In July 2016, I spent three weeks in Athens participating in the creation of a community center for migrants living in the city. The project was initiated by a group of volunteers from various parts of Europe who had already been running a social kitchen in Greece for several months, first in Lesbos and then in Athens. At the time I was there, the group was still in the initial stages of transforming the run-down six-story ex-factory that they had rented into a welcoming community center - which eventually opened in October 2016. Our work routine mostly consisted of painting walls, building furniture out of pallets, and clearing out old machinery. The nature of the daily activities had created tensions between the Athens-based group

and the UK-based group, who had travelled there to help for a few weeks. The criticism from the latter was based on the perceived insufficient involvement of migrants in the shaping of the project, the lack of links with the local anarchist community, and the provision of food, clothes, and medical services, which are seen as a typically humanitarian activity. Although I was familiar with the typical criticisms of charity and outside aid, the discussion seemed largely preposterous to me, as the two groups had virtually identical political ideologies - a mix of anarchism, socialism and communism - relations with state and EU institutions as well as large NGOs characterized by distrust and rejection, and a vision of a utopian solution to the Refugee Crisis: the opening of borders and an unconditional acceptance of all migrants, without distinction between refugees and economic migrants. Interestingly, the Athens-based group had similar accusations towards the UK-based group as well as other groups of volunteers, whom were negatively characterized by a member as “wanting to save the world by playing with children and teaching English” - the kind of activities commonly associated with voluntourism. I do not wish to dwell here on whether the criticisms were founded or not; rather, I want to draw attention to the fact that the mere possibility of closeness to humanitarianism was sufficient to cause conflict between groups with largely similar cultural backgrounds and political goals. The anxiety to avoid any association with charity had led to a high degree of scrutiny of each other’s practices. The hyper-awareness of one’s own positionality and the desire to escape the dynamics of hierarchy, Othering, and passivization of migrants, perceived to be prevalent in NGO and state practices, have been frequently noticed among

¹¹ Katerina Rozakou, “The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece: Humanitarianism and the Management of Refugees.” *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 3 (2012): 562-

politicized pro-migrant groups.^{12 13 14} This preoccupation, and the will to build a different model of relations with migrants, is well summarized by the words of a volunteer who worked at the City Plaza Hotel squat:

I could never have guessed that, despite all the information I had on the refugee crisis and all the awareness I had worked on raising, I still fell into some clichés and small racist acts during my coexistence with these people. In fact, I think some of my slip-ups were caused, partially, by the way the western world articulates the topic of helping refugees. We mustn't forget that two of the main pillars on which our countries were historically built are religion and imperialism, key

factors that lead to charity – a very, very different concept from solidarity.¹⁵

“We live together, we fight together”

Instead of humanitarianism, the radical left has been proposing an outlook on pro-migrant work based on the idea of “solidarity.” This concept preceded the start of Refugee Crisis and is not limited to mobilization for migrants: its use has been noted, for instance, in the context of “social clinics” providing free medicine and medical assistance to those affected by the economic crisis in Athens.¹⁶ Heath Cabot situates these social clinics within a “larger movement of solidarity networks, which include soup kitchens, time banks, anti-middlemen markets, and venues for the distribution of clothing and foodstuffs.”¹⁷ Evthymios Papataxiarchis defines solidarity as “a project, an ‘alternative horizon’ aimed at combating alienation and atomization,” and traces its emergence as a response-from-below to post-2008 austerity policies.¹⁸ According to Papataxiarchis, solidarity is both a pragmatic mode of political practices and a utopian project of reimagining

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Katerina Rozakou, “Socialities of Solidarity: Revisiting the Gift Taboo in Times of Crises: Socialities of Solidarity.” *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2016): 185–99.

¹⁴ Sotirios Chouris, “Pity, Solidarity & Justice in the Light of the Current Refugee Crisis: From Aristotle to Rawls, Hanna Arendt and Back. The Case of Volunteers in the Informal Camps of Eidomeni, Piraeus Port, and Victoria Square-Athens: Forming Interaction – Forming Identity,” *Borderland Security and Migration: Social and Cultural Challenges to Homeland Security*, accessed November 17, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305807895_Pity_Solidarity_Justice_in_the_light_of_the_current_refugee_crisis_From_Aristotle_to_Rawls_Hanna_Arendt_and_back_The_case_of_Volunteers_in_the_Informal_Camps_of_Eidomeni_Piraeus_Port_and_Victoria_Squa.

¹⁵ Elisa Coll Blanco, “Ah, Poor Things’: The Mistake You Must Never Make with Refugees - No-Yolo,” *No-Yolo*, October 18, 2016. www.no-yolo.com/ah-poor-refugees (emphasis in the original)

¹⁶ Heath Cabot, “The Chronicities of Crisis in Athens’s Social Solidarity Clinics,” *Cultural Anthropology*, April 21, 2016, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/860-the-chronicities-of-crisis-in-athens-s-social-solidarity-clinics>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Evthymios Papataxiarchis, “Unwrapping Solidarity? Society Reborn in Austerity,” *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2016): 205–10.

society and social relations. It is thus not surprising that this concept has become the main keyword used by radical groups engaged in pro-migrant activities to describe their work, which is as much an affirmation of the ideology as it is a practical program. The importance of the idea of solidarity is manifest in the way it shapes language use, as shown by this call for a group meeting by the City Plaza Hotel squat:

Refugees and solidarians [...] will discuss the situation in the camps, in order to identify ways to organize refugee and solidarian struggles.¹⁹

Here the people whom the international press would commonly describe as “volunteers” are instead called “solidarians,” emphasizing their distance from the framework of humanitarianism that volunteerism is associated with. This practice is not unique to City Plaza, and has become common-place in Greece.²⁰ The term “solidarian” allows for one’s actions to be charged with political meaning, in contrast to the idea of the “neutral” humanitarian.²¹ Far from choosing a position of

¹⁹ “Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, “Detention Centers: State of Exception and Continual Apartheid on the Islands of the Aegean,” *Facebook*, December 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/sol2refugeesen/photos/a.1569641766661494.1073741828.1568287556796915/1640131902945813/?type=3&theater>.

²⁰ Katerina Rozakou, “Socialities of Solidarity: Revisiting the Gift Taboo in Times of Crises: Socialities of Solidarity.” *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2016): 185–99.

²¹ Miriam Iris Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

neutrality, the City Plaza collective explicitly states that their pro-migrant work is embedded in the political. A statement published on their Facebook page in October 2016 to celebrate the first six months since the opening of the squat reads:

We want to set an example for dignified refugee housing, but we also want to be a tool in the struggle for equal rights for economic and political refugees, in order to abolish the EU-Turkey deal and for the borders to be opened, in order for detention in camps and deportations to stop, [...] in order to bring down the fence on Evros, in order to grant political asylum to refugees fleeing war.²²

In her critique of humanitarianism, Miriam Ticktin makes a distinction between “caring” and “curing,” remarking that humanitarianism functions as an anti-politics machine because it conceives of caring as an end in itself, consequently preventing the imagination of a political cure: “rather than change the conditions in which people live and thereby improve human life on a broader scale, the focus is on alleviating pain in the present moment.”²³ The humanitarian conceives him- or herself as a neutral actor that does not choose a political side, but rather dispenses care unconditionally to all those in need. For solidarians, on the contrary, the emphasis is on a long-term vision, and the immediate work of care

²² Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, “185 Days and Nights of Solidarity and Dignity,” *Facebook*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/sol2refugeesen/posts/1632991936993143:0>.

²³ Miriam Iris Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 62.

- providing housing, providing food, etc. - is not carried out for its own sake, but as a building block of the political cure. The rest of the statement reveals information about the “project of society remaking”²⁴ that solidarity envisions:

We all managed to create a complete counterexample for dignified housing, multiethnic cohabitation and social self organization, [...] a counterexample for the social integration of migrants and refugees, a springboard for demanding from the state itself to provide permanent and dignified housing conditions, a practical proposal for the movement and for society, not only for claiming the rights of refugees and migrants, but of all of us, from racism to unemployment and from closed borders to the memoranda.²⁵

This paragraph shows how the utopian social vision of the radical left and the pro-migrant mobilization merge through the project of solidarity: the cause of migrants is not perceived as a separate, external one, but rather as part of the broader struggle for a reimagined social organization. Cabot argues that the solidarity clinics she observed operate in a “chronicity of illness,” where disease was understood not as a simple pathology but a widespread, long-lasting condition arising from the marginalization and austerity of post-2008 Greece;

²⁴ Evthymios Papataxiarchis, “Unwrapping Solidarity? Society Reborn in Austerity,” *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2016): 205–10.

²⁵ Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, “185 Days and Nights of Solidarity and Dignity,” *Facebook*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/solzrefugeesen/posts/1632991936993143:0>.

solidarity is thus a way to “care” for the pathology while providing a “cure” to heal the chronicity of the crisis. Similarly, for the radical left, the Refugee Crisis is not a one-off failure of official institutions, but is rather situated in the chronic malaise of neoliberalism. Therefore, the cause of migrants is a continuation of normal political activities, rather than an “external” battle affecting a distinct Other that is adopted out of compassion for suffering. This driving philosophy is perhaps best encapsulated by the central slogan of City Plaza and other Athenian squats: “We live together, we fight together” (see Appendix 1).

Identity factors

The hostility to charity and humanitarianism of local Greek groups and the significance of the concept of solidarity, although rarely highlighted by mainstream media coverage, have often been documented in anthropological literature.^{26,27,28,29,30}

²⁶ Katerina Rozakou, “The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece: Humanitarianism and the Management of Refugees.” *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 3 (2012): 562–77.

²⁷ Katerina Rozakou, “Socialities of Solidarity: Revisiting the Gift Taboo in Times of Crises: Socialities of Solidarity.” *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2016): 185–99.

²⁸ Heath Cabot, “The Chronicities of Crisis in Athens’s Social Solidarity Clinics,” *Cultural Anthropology*, April 21, 2016, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/860-the-chronicities-of-crisis-in-athens-s-social-solidarity-clinics>.

²⁹ Sotirios Chroudis, “Pity, Solidarity & Justice in the Light of the Current Refugee Crisis: From Aristotle to Rawls, Hanna Arendt and Back. The Case of Volunteers in the Informal Camps of Eidomeni, Piraeus Port, and Victoria Square-Athens: Forming Interaction –

These works, however, have mostly focused on the practices of local Greek groups, the impact of these practices on the relations between volunteers and migrants, and how volunteers understand and attempt to shape their own positionality through their work ethics. I want to focus instead on the question of why the principle of solidarity was so successful in becoming a paradigm for pro-migrant work among the radical left. As shown, despite the apparent lack of any similarity in demographic, history, or background between European solidarians and African, Middle Eastern, or South Asian migrants, the solidarians conceptualize the cause of migrants' rights not as a separate self-standing issue but as part of their own struggles. This sense of identification and perception of sameness should not be taken as automatic, as other frameworks dealing with migration, like humanitarianism, rely instead on a construction of the migrant as the Other.³¹ What elements of their identity cause leftist political groups to carry such a strong sense of identification with the experience and destiny of migrants? Here I want to suggest that

Forming Identity," *Borderland Security and Migration: Social and Cultural Challenges to Homeland Security*, accessed November 17, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305807895_Pity_Solidarity_Justice_in_the_light_of_the_current_refugee_crisis_From_Aristotle_to_Rawls_Hanna_Arendt_and_back_The_case_of_Volunteers_in_the_Informal_Camps_of_Eidomeni_Piraeus_Port_and_Victoria_Squa.

³⁰ Evthymios Papataxiarchis, "Unwrapping Solidarity? Society Reborn in Austerity," *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2016): 205–10.

³¹ Miriam Iris Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

two issues that have historically defined leftist culture in Southern Europe - the relation with fascism and the ideal of internationalism - have provided ground for the incorporation of the migrants' cause within broader political struggles. I do not mean to imply a simplistic cause-effect relation, but rather show that these two elements have shaped the identity of the radical left in a way that facilitated the creation of a discourse of continuity around migration. I broaden my focus from Greece to the rest of Southern Europe as the historical similarities between the countries of the region cause these themes to be experienced similarly.

The fight against fascism

Historical memory, especially with regards to World War II,³² has been utilized as a tool - Western Europe "actively [fosters] social memories of the past in order to define national belonging in the present."³³ Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal all went through military and fascist dictatorial regimes during the 20th century; this experience left a deep, durable mark on the collective consciousness of these countries. Anti-fascism as a value and a practice is deeply embedded in the ideology and rhetoric of the radical left, which builds its identity on a sense of inheritance and continuity from the movements that resisted fascist dictatorships. The bridge between past and present represented by

³² Csilla Kiss, "Historical Memory in Post-Cold War Europe," *The European Legacy* 19, no. 4 (2014): 419–32.

³³ "Interview: Jonah S. Rubin and 'Re-Membering the Spanish Civil War,'" *The Wenner-Gren Blog*, December 6, 2012, <http://blog.wennergren.org/2012/06/interview-jonah-s-rubin-and-re-membering-the-spanish-civil-war/>.

anti-fascism does not exist only at a national level but across countries as well: the Italian guerrilla song “Bella Ciao” is still sung nowadays in Spain and Greece,³⁴ and the motto of the Republican fighters during the Spanish Civil War, “No pasaran” (They shall not pass), is included in a song of the Italian civil resistance movement against the construction of a high-speed railway.³⁵ The reutilization of this shared cultural heritage for contemporary battles also indicates that the resistance against fascism is not perceived as a historical fact but as an ongoing, lived experience, and the international links unifying the leftist movement across the region are constantly renewed: for instance, the leftist Greek rapper Pavlos Fyssas, who was killed by a group affiliated with the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in 2013, is remembered and celebrated in Italy (see Appendix 2). Leftist groups, therefore, are characterized by a perception of fascism as a living, active threat. It is not surprising, therefore, that the wave of xenophobia and the rise of right-wing extremism across Europe triggered by the Refugee Crisis would have a strong resonance with the values and political struggles of the radical left.

In August 2016, the squat “Notara 26”, which forms part of the network of migrant squats in the anarchist neighborhood of Athens, was attacked with petrol bombs during the night. Although there

³⁴ Andrea Punzo, “Elezioni Grecia, La Piazza Di Alexis Tsipras Canta ‘Bella Ciao’ (VIDEO),” *Huffington Post*, accessed November 17, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2015/01/22/tsipras-bella-ciao_n_6526384.html.

³⁵ “No TAV No Pasaran,” *Canzoni Contro La Guerra*, accessed November 17, 2016, <https://www.antiwarsons.org/canzone.php?id=42357&lang=it>.

were no victims, the interior of the building was damaged by the fire, forcing the occupants to move out. The City Plaza Hotel squat issued the following statement:

It is clear that the goal of the criminals was to spread terror among refugees and solidarians. In the sick climate created, on the one hand, by the evacuation of squats in Thessaloniki and, on the other hand, by the ceaseless smear campaign against the solidarity movement, fascists feel they are free to roam.

Yet they are mistaken! The refugee solidarity movement will not be held back by firebombs, as it was not by riot police either. The murderous attack on Notara 26 does not scare us, it enrages us. We remain on the side of refugees, we insist on a culture of solidarity against the barbarism of racism.

We live together, we struggle together,
we will win together.³⁶

The accreditation of the incident to fascists is due to previous incidents of clashes between pro-migrant activists and Golden Dawn. It is important to notice that the statement links the rise of fascist and racist violence to the behavior of the State, creating a parallel between “firebombs” and “riot police.” The racist violence suffered by migrants at the hands of right-wing groups is perceived to be on a continuum with the violence of the State: both ultimately affect migrants and solidarians alike, and occur within a

³⁶ Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, “The Murderous Attack on Notara 26 Does Not Hold Us Back,” *Facebook*, August 24, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/sol2refugeesen/posts/1608297819462555>.

longer history of conflict between the radical left and both fascism as well as official institutions.³⁷

No borders, no nations

For the celebrations of its six-month anniversary, City Plaza organized a series of workshops, one of which was titled “Internal and external European borders: internationalist solidarity and struggles for the freedom of movement”:

With the participation of comrades from European countries, we exchange experiences on the situation as it is currently unfolding [-] the multiplication of fences, the rise of repression and of the far right, the militarization of the borders, and the peak of the suspension of rights - with a view to identifying strategies and ways to overcome Fortress Europe and to escalate the struggle for internationalist solidarity.³⁸

³⁷ This hypothesis is beyond the scope of the paper, but it is possible that the weight of the threat of fascism might lead to a particularly strong degree of empathy with citizens of countries in the MENA region, often escaping from or having lived under authoritarian regimes with similar patriarchal structure as Southern European fascist regimes. Investigating whether the level of identification with migrants changes depending on their geographical provenience could constitute an interesting question for further research.

³⁸ Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, “Internal and External European Borders: Internationalist Solidarity and Struggles for the Freedom of Movement,” Facebook, December 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/sol2refugeesen/photos/a.1>

Internationalism is a core concept of communist, socialist and anarchist philosophies, characterized by the rejection of a sense of identity based on nationality - and often of the Nation-State altogether - and the forging of relations of brotherhood across national borders instead. In this workshop description, it is possible once again to notice the merging of traditional elements of leftist practices - such as the building of networks across countries and an internationalist outlook to political struggles - with issues unique to the migrant crisis, such as the tightening of border controls and the closure of Europe to outsiders. The fight against borders as an integral part of the leftist struggle is not obvious, given that solidararians are in most part European citizens who already enjoy freedom of movement, and are therefore not personally affected by the increase in border controls. Of course, non-politicized stakeholders involved in migration-related human rights work are also critical of the way European nations have been managing their borders during the Refugee Crisis: Amnesty International, for instance, calls for Europe to “create safe and legal routes so that people do not feel forced to make perilous sea crossings.”³⁹ For these groups, however, the problem is the way immigration law is created and enforced, not the *existence* of borders in itself; leftist groups, on the other hand, understand the failure of the European community to provide a humane solution to the Refugee Crisis as a damaging consequence of the existence of geographically-defined Nation-States.

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³⁹ Amnesty International, “Hotspot Italy: Abuses of Refugees and Migrants,” accessed November 17, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/11/hotspot-italy/>.

“No borders, no nations,” already a core motto of anarchism, has become a central slogan of pro-migrant movements (see Appendix 3). The pre-existing hostility toward state institutions and the ideological rejection of national borders have created fertile ground for the radical left to understand the migrants’ cause as an integral part of their own political struggles.

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt articulated the tragedy of statelessness as the loss of human rights due to the loss of a political community.⁴⁰ Humanitarianism might be read as a response to this loss: as a political cure to the situation of refugees and migrants, which would entail the reacquisition of their human rights, is made impossible by the absence of a state to appeal to, the focus shifts to immediate care instead. The services provided by humanitarian action are not envisioned to be a solution: Ticktin highlights how humanitarian professionals were largely aware that the “immediate, urgent, and temporary” care they were providing did not constitute a long-term political program,⁴¹ but chose to act in the present rather than toward an uncertain future solution. Humanitarianism does not propose itself as a tool for addressing systemic problems, but rather focuses on acting in the now while leaving the task of working toward a cure to other actors. Humanitarianism accepts working in a space where

human rights are suspended, thus implying a degree of confidence in the State and other political institutions, as it hands over to them the responsibility of breaking such suspension. Solidarity, on the other hand, can be read as a response to the situation of statelessness that places no trust in official authorities, and thus is driven by the imperative of working toward a cure in the now. I have shown how the various services offered to migrants are conceived as an integral part of the program of constructing a social utopia, and are therefore embedded in political meaning. The traditional rejection of official authorities and national borders, the violence suffered at the end of fascism, and the experience of post-2008 austerity which aggravated the dissolution of a social pact with the State all contributed to shaping the Southern European leftist identity in a way that proved optimal for the development of the solidarity model.

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Appendix



Appendix 1

Photo of a poster in a street of Athens, publicizing a pro-migrant demonstration organized by several squats. The poster reads: “We live together - We fight together. Against concentration camps, against deportations, political asylum to all refugees/migrants, resilience in the urban fabric, freedom of movement for all”. Photo taken by me.



Appendix 2

Photo of a graffiti homaging rapper Pavlos Fyssas (aka Killah P) in the city of Bologna, Italy. Photo taken by my friend Christopher Saltmarsh and used with permission.



Appendix 3

Photo of an anti-borders, anti-police graffiti in a street of Athens. Photo taken by me.