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Perspectives of international voluntarism in Samos.
An ethnography on humanitarian borderwork practices

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Introduction

When I remember my time spent in Greece and tell to friends and family I do not recollect a relaxing touristy two weeks sunbathing on the beach. Yes, the weather was hot and summerly, yet I was not there in the shoes of a proper holidaymaker. I was an international volunteer.

As mentioned in the title of this dissertation, I conducted an ethnography on the humanitarian practices of international voluntarism on the island of Samos, Greece, which hosts one of the hotspots of the Mediterranean. I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews in the period September-December 2019 with international volunteers that worked mainly in the NGO Sandstone, or also in other NGOs, using a mix modality of delivery among the written, call, video-call and in presence forms. All the names of people I met and the organization I worked in have been changed or have been reduced to the first letter of the name, capitalized and followed by a dot.

As a volunteer, I worked for two months with a small NGO, Sandstone, that is in charge, among other things, of distributing items to border-crossers that live in the Hotspot and in the surround area, the so-called Jungle.

As a Master student-researcher, I followed placed, experiences and activities working, talking, interviewing, living and sharing moments with the international volunteers that travelled to Samos for ‘helping’ the refugees, that I will call from now on, border-crossers. In the context of a humanitarian ‘crisis’, perceived as an ever-present emergency, the volunteers entered into a world of quandaries and paradoxes in relation to their presence in the field. Moreover, the sense of belonging to the Sandstone’s Family and the perception of the absence of the Greek government, the European Union or the UNHCR motivated their daily work.

The choice of the destination and the NGO for my research derives from a past interest, that was born in the period of my Bachelor studies in May 2016, when I spent a brief period in a small Greek town close to the Macedonian border, where an informal refugee settlement was established. Many volunteers, that I encountered there, defined themselves as independent, that is to say they travelled alone without any support of an organization and join directly on the field a project that would ‘help refugees’. On that

occasion, I talked with some volunteers that were narrating their recent experience on the island of Lesbos, where a great number of border-crossers were reaching the shores. Thanks to the suggestion of Professors Sacchi, Sorgoni and Stopani from the University of Torino I opted to conduct my study in a smaller reality than Lesbos: Samos, another island in the Aegean Sea, which is as much as close to Turkey.

Starting from an illustration of the terminology in the field of humanitarianism, in Chapter 1, I navigate through concepts such as solidarity, biopolitics and border and I progressively introduce the experience of the international volunteer in a humanitarian context. Chapter 2 will be dedicated to exploring from the macro level of the ‘European refugee crisis’, looking into the hotspot approach, to the micro level of the situation on the Aegean island of Samos. In fact, I will discuss the hotspot of Samos and provide a detailed account of Sandstone’s operations.

The thoughts, opinions and themes that emerged in the conversations, from the interviews or from the participant observation with international volunteers will be considered in Chapter 3.

Viandante

E tu che in mare, tu nel deserto,
lì in una spiaggia, sotto il sole,
in una giungla d'anime,
sei stato ispirato al viaggio.

E tu, che in un angolo del quadro,
impietrito in un parcheggio di zattere
hai incominciato la tua strada,
chissà da dove è arrivata la tua chiamata.

Sia stata in una sera, guardando il mare,
o in una notte, sognando le stelle,
potevi solo immaginare lontano
ciò che i tuoi occhi ora insegnano.

Tu che incroci viaggi e culture,
sguardi, sinfonie di sorrisi,
vento, pioggia e nuovi colori
non fermarti, non essere sazio.

Tendi la mano, osserva,
imprimi ciò che scorgi,
non perdere il pensiero,
riporta a casa le tue fatiche.

Il tuo sudore ha plasmato il sacrificio
che dono è stato sicuro aiuto
a chi, viaggiatore di speranza,
ha solcato i mari in cerca di un domani.¹

Gianluigi Viviani, February 2020

¹ Gianluigi Viviani is a 28-year-old Italian poet from Verona. He has been awarded numerous times in national poetry contests. He holds a Master Degree in Psychology from the University of Padova and now he is currently studying Primary Education at the University of Bologna.

1. Perspectives on the humanitarian vocabulary

*“Ricorda: quando vivi in un mondo ingiusto,
mostrare equità è un atto di ribellione”
(Giulia in Se fosse tuo figlio, 2019, N. Govoni)*

1.1 Definitions and categories in sight

In this first chapter, I will start by providing an introductory overview on the lexicon, that the academic literature and the different actors on the ground, involved in humanitarian practices, have been using.

As a premise of this work, it is firstly important to highlight the fact that, especially in migration studies, using specific social categories such as refugee, political refugee, irregular/illegal migrant, clandestine, asylum seeker, newly arrived, undocumented traveller, newcomer, borders’ jumper² and border-crosser³, has to be carefully weighed because each label potentially nuance a denial of the subjectivity, individuality and personal story of the people represented in that category. As a matter of fact, the experts and technicians, who produce this standardizing process of labelling through the categorization, are responsible for managing lives, giving or denying them the legitimacy of being considered as refugee or somewhat different (Biffi, 2017: 154). Bearing in mind the potential danger of ‘playing with names’ and considering that my fieldwork took place in a liminal context of the external borders of Europe, from now

² Translated from Italian “saltatori di frontiere”, Leogrande 2017: 300.

³ The Greek term for refugee is *prosfighas* (pl. *prosfighes*) and historically, it reminds of the Asia Minor refugees of Greek descent that were not welcomed by the local population in the first half of the 20th century. Despite some pejorative connotations that are still attached to the term, it has been recently resignified by the so-called ‘solidarians’, who consciously use the term for all the “kseni, the non-Greek citizens, people who were symbolically placed on the fringes of the Greek nation-state” without considering their actual legal status (Rozakou 2012: 572). Phonetically and graphically, *prosfighas* bears many similarities with the Italian version *profugo*, which very often works as a substitute for ‘refugee’ in lay occasions (for a detailed explanation of the origins of the term see Setti 2017). Recently, it has been evocatively used in the Italian public and political discourse – even if it does not seem to have any legal ground in the Italian law – since the so-called “North African Emergency” (Biffi, 2017: 135). In fact, in 2011, Italy declared the state of humanitarian emergency because an exceptional influx of people crossed the Mediterranean and arrived to the Southern Italian shores after the so-called “Arab Springs” erupted.

on I will resort to loan from Katerina Rozakou⁴ the term border-crosser, which also intend “to avoid the polemic around the categorization of economic migrants vs. political refugees” (Kalir and Rozakou, 2016: 11). Ultimately, in the next chapters, I will use as synonyms both the English terms volunteerism and voluntarism even if semantically they can convey different meanings.⁵

1.1.1 Humanitarianism or humanitarianisms?

In the context of the international relations theory debate, humanitarian intervention, has been intended to pose “the hardest test for an international society built on principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, and the non-use of force” after the Second World War (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005: 556). In fact, the theory of humanitarian intervention draws its principles on the shared notion of humanity: “we all have human rights by virtue of our common humanity, and these rights generate correlative moral duties for individuals and states” (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005: 561). In particular, the solidarist international society theory (Solidarism) argues that “states have both a legal right and a

⁴ Katerina Rozakou is a social anthropologist, focusing in political anthropology, humanitarianism and volunteerism, who conducted extended fieldwork with volunteers, border-crossers and government employees in Greece. She is currently an Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam.

⁵ I comparatively searched for those terms in the major English dictionaries available online (Oxford, Cambridge, Collins and Merriam-Webster) finding the following definitions, which support the coincidence of the terms volunteerism and voluntarism or specifically highlight the philosophical etymology for the term ‘voluntarism’. For what concerns ‘voluntarism’, the following definitions have been found (except for Cambridge Dictionary, available at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/spellcheck/inglese/?q=volontarism>, where no definition was found): in Merriam-Webster (available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/voluntarism>), “the principle or system of doing something by or relying on voluntary action or volunteers” and “a theory that conceives will to be the dominant factor in experience or in the world”; in Oxford Dictionary (available at <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/voluntarism?q=voluntarism>), “the practice of using or relying on volunteers rather than paid workers”. Finally, in Collins Dictionary (available at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/it/dizionario/inglese/voluntarism>), in the American English variant, the first meaning was considered a synonym of ‘volunteerism’: “a voluntary or willing participation in a course of action” or “a doctrine or system based on such participation”, while the second meaning was referring to the philosophical etymology, which was based on “any theory which holds that reality is ultimately of the nature of will or that the will is the primary factor in experience”; in British English, four meanings are stated, that are, “the theory that the will rather than the intellect is the ultimate principle of reality”, “a doctrine or system based on voluntary participation in a course of action”, “the belief that the state, government, and the law should not interfere with the procedures of collective bargaining and of trade union organization” and a synonym for ‘voluntarism’. Regarding the definitions of ‘volunteerism’, most of the online dictionaries refers to it as a ‘practice’, an unremunerated activity (Collins, Oxford and Cambridge) carried out for ‘good causes’ (Cambridge), in reference to ‘community service’ (Merriam-Webster and Oxford) or provided for/by ‘social agencies and charitable organizations’ (Collins).

moral duty to intervene in situations of genocide and mass-killing that offend against minimum standards of humanity” (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005: 559). In order to legitimize these practices, Solidarism intends to develop consensual moral principles, which the society of states should agree upon. In world politics terms, this research will focus on the conceptualization of ‘post-statist non-forcible non-violent consensual humanitarian interventions’ – that I will critically discuss following the anthropological perspective in the next paragraphs – practiced by non-state actors as an alternative to the traditional view of military humanitarian intervention. In particular, this type of humanitarian intervention “emphasizes the pacific activities of states, international organizations in delivering humanitarian aid” (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005: 573). According to this view, in the process of making the states accountable of their failures, the transnational operations of humanitarian agencies, which are considered to be composed of an anti-statist transnational global citizenry, constitute the bright side of globalization, having stimulated a “sense of cosmopolitan moral awareness that is the beginning to make a reality of Kant’s vision of a right’s violation in one place being felt everywhere” (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005: 574).

Amongst the experts and technicians that are part of the humanitarian agencies, there is an array of actors, such as educators, social workers, lawyers, medical staff, psychologists and volunteers, who are the field representatives of a broader “ideologia egemonica che sostiene le relazioni di dominio nord-sud nell’era della globalizzazione, contribuendo anche all’erosione dei diritti dei rifugiati attraverso l’imposizione di un frame politico-comunicativo focalizzato su una dimensione securitaria” (Rainisio and Riva 2017:186). The aforementioned hegemonic ideology constitutes another interpretation of what has been called ‘humanitarianism’, which, according to this perspective, contributes to create a bare, speechless and faceless humanity. Favouring a state-centred perspective, this kind of humanitarianism has been blamed to develop a sort of ‘pornographic violence’, which slowly displays helpless bodies of the ‘people of the dinghies’ (Leogrande 2017: 14). To this extent, an overview of the border-crossers’ representation in the public discourse and in the everyday practice is provided by Rozakou:

Media discourses and analyses commonly referred to them in aquatic terms as ‘waves’ or ‘flows’ [...] people engaged in the management of these populations (primarily police

officers) further dehumanised and produced them as *zōa* (animals) or *aghrímia* (wild animals) unable to conform to the norms of ordered behaviour, queue in a line for registration and obey the rules of bureaucratic procedures. This production of the newcomers as ‘animals’ was deeply hierarchical and classified them in the realm of nature, as opposed to the one of culture where social beings reside (Rozakou (2018: 195).

Moreover, such dehumazing process manifests at a greater extent through the constant infantilization of the border-crossers (Rainisio and Riva 2017: 186), which are seen as innocent victims without agency, developing a sort of “sticky triage”, which is concerned in “sorting bodies according to suffering and need” (Pallister-Wilkins 2019a: 373-375). Considered in its basic definition, the term humanitarianism can be understood as “emergency assistance given to people in crisis situations, a duty of care concerned with alleviating suffering and saving lives” (Sandri 2018: 71). In other words, its main aim is about the physical survival and the provision of “absolute essentials” (Sernetedakis 2017: 86). Considering the heterogeneous strict European system of the ‘visa regime’, the humanitarian government of migrations is based on a daily practice of ‘the politics of lives’, which is not concerned about human rights in general but the right to live in particular; in other words, promoting a ‘humanitarianization of lives’. Indeed, when they are considered a ‘indistinct multiplicity’ at sea, rescuing border-crossers simply implies not leaving them to die in such particular circumstances. Accordingly, humanitarianism is visible in its securitarian and military shades, when people are treated as numbers, flows and arrows⁶, namely a ‘divisible multiplicity’ between the ‘real’ refugees and others categories (Tazzioli, 2017: 48). During a seminar hold in Samos by researchers from Liverpool University, who aimed at providing the volunteers with information about the refugee management in South Eastern Europe, the lecturer expressed her discomfort, when looking at a figure from the UNHCR website about the refugee ‘flows’ in the Mediterranean. Simple one-way arrows were used for displaying such diversified human mobility, which “are everything but a smooth one-way journey towards Europe!”, the lecturer exclaimed.

⁶ On this matter see the description of the victimization process towards border-crossers provided by Leogrande (2017): “Per altri era solo un numero. Un numero tra i salvati, da ricordare accanto al numero dei sommersi. Un segmento delle statistiche sui flussi. Una pratica ‘umanitaria’ da sbrigare” (Leogrande 2017: 23). He also reflects on how the asylum procedure tends to flatten the complexity of lives, therefore favouring a process of self-victimization by the applicant (Leogrande 2017: 278).

Nevertheless, the term humanitarianism can be applied to such a wider range of situations that it is not possible to restrict the term to its basic definition, but it can carry different meanings, implications and manifestations according to the context of use (Sandri 2018: 71). Some of them will now be explored.

1.1.2 A complicated relationship: gift, hospitality and biopolitics

In many interviews and conversations about volunteerism and humanitarian actions that I had with international volunteers in Samos and in the popular imagination as well, those terms were associated with principles of gratuitousness, generosity, altruism and gift. Humanitarians are very often portrayed as selfless and their work is indisputably carried out for a 'good cause' (Sandri 2018: 69). Some scholars⁷ question such romantic vision and argue that "current humanitarianism, or 'post-humanitarianism', can be interpreted as a sense of moral fulfilment that provides comfort and satisfaction to one's own self. In spite of such dichotomy, it should be more useful to look at selfishness and altruism as two sides of the same coin since "altruism is not less 'authentic' if carried out because of selfish motives" (Pallister-Wilkins 2016) and both can help in grasping the humanitarians' experience (in this case the volunteers'one), that is a rather more complex than clear-cut process (Sandri 2018). Moreover, anthropologically speaking, two main reasons prevent humanitarianism from being included in such principles, namely gratuitousness, generosity, altruism and gift:

Firstly, because humanitarian aid creates 'an uneven kula ring', as recipients of humanitarian aid cannot pay back the offer. Secondly, the 'spirit of the gift' is constantly broken since humanitarians, no matter how much they give, are primarily concerned with their own lives and can pull out of the field at any moment (Sandri 2018: 76).

⁷ See Chouliaraki L. (2013), *The Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, in Sandri (2018: 72): "humanitarian aid work, rather than a mutual exchange, can be analysed as a response to private emotions, whereby acting for a specific humanitarian cause is regarded by a gratification to the self. Chouliaraki notes how current humanitarianism, or 'post-humanitarianism', can be interpreted as a sense of moral fulfilment that provides comfort and satisfaction to one's own self, reducing the issue to an 'often narcissistic self-reflection. Post-humanitarianism contemplates the suffering of others as a subjective representation that invites contemplation on one's own terms'".

In contrast, Muehlebach underlines how post-fordist solidarity – based on unwaged labour that “relies on a non-Maussian theory of gifting because spontaneously willed from within the sovereign subject and it disembeds exchange from its social context” (Muehlebach 2011: 67) – if extrapolated from the feeling of compassion, can be pivotal for the stability of the society and it can represent a commendable act of citizenship. The interpretation, that defines the lives of the ‘recipients’ of aid as dispensable, can be seen as very raw and in contradiction with the primary target of humanitarian work, but its logic hides behind the application of protocols in case of emergency, that, especially professional humanitarians have to follow. As a matter of fact, during the fire that occurred in the late evening on the 14th October 2019 at the hotspot in Samos and in the surrounding area, the so-called Jungle⁸, UNHCR⁹ employees, were told not to leave their accommodations for (their own) safety reasons, otherwise they would have been in breach of direct orders¹⁰.

During the 11am break from the daily warehouse work, consisting of packing and sorting clothing to be delivered to the Shop or Distribution Center managed by the NGO Sandstone¹¹, as usual all the volunteers in shift that day were sitting around a very big pool table, that was normally used as a kitchen table in the NGO coordinator’s flat above the Warehouse. Jayarc, a 73-year-old former journalist, Harvard alumni in Environmental Sustainability and Tilly, the local coordinator for Help Refugees¹², were discussing the overuse of plastic bags in the clothing distribution process and the fact that it greatly contributes to swell the production of trash in and around the Camp. Tilly seemed to believe that “we have to put aside the environmental sensibility when you are dealing with an emergency and right now we live in an emergency state”¹³. I personally was pretty much uncomfortable with defining an emergency what in reality was a

⁸ From now on I will refer to these areas as the Camp. For a better understanding of the position and the extension of the hotspot on the island see Chapter 2.

⁹ UNHCR stands for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

¹⁰ From informal conversations with volunteers in contact with UNHCR field employees.

¹¹ All the names of people I met and the organization I worked in have been changed. I worked as a volunteer myself in the NGO Sandstone for two months (mid-September – early November 2019). The Shop or Distribution Center was managed by Sandstone along with other places such as two warehouses, the Volunteers’ House, the Field right before the southern entrance of the Camp.

¹² Help Refugees is a UK-based NGO, that fundraises for a number of organizations concerning refugee management and sponsors their projects. Their aim is “pioneering a new movement in charity that provides emergency aid and long term solutions where they are most needed” (Help Refugees, <https://helprefugees.org/projects/>).

¹³ From author’s fieldnotes.

normalized phenomenon for much of the last five years in the Aegean islands. I could agree on the fact that the arrivals of hundreds of people every week was still not managed in an efficient way, therefore forcing people to sleep and live under appalling circumstances. Nevertheless, the very fact of reiterating the notion of emergency for the migration process in the Mediterranean strategically well-served a short-term poor management of the matter:

When we recognise that the current ‘crisis’ has a long history and that it will inevitably continue, through perhaps along different routes, it no longer seems possible to cover the problem with ‘band-aid’ solutions such as handing out food and setting up tents. [...] Humanitarian interventions and volunteering cannot, therefore, be expected to help solve the issue, unless they are done with critical self-consciousness, constant reflection, and with a view to broader structural change (Knott 2018: 363).

I tried to offer this perspective to Tilly, explaining how this emergency approach did not really help having a long-term strategy, for example, by managing a steady supply of basic items instead of running out of essentials like man underwear, tents, sleeping bags or blankets every time. She looked at me a little irritated and replied: “*This is* an ongoing emergency and you can’t have a long-term strategy because it’s impossible to plan the arrivals”. Following this line of thoughts, human beings are treated as commodities to dress, feed and care for within a humanitarian action based on the notion of biopower, inadvertently looking at people as ‘delocalized bodies’ and indistinct multiplicities (Malighetti 2014: 10); an historical ‘global poor’, that is dependent by the generosity of the elites (Keshavarz 2018: 121). The narrative of emergency action, invoking a universal shared concept of humanity, constantly ignores “the practices and materialities that have made such disasters possible in the first place” and strategically aims to restore the status quo (Keshavarz 2018: 120). Moreover, the very same humanitarian borderwork “work[s] to reproduce the Mediterranean as European space”, within the externalization of border regime. Shifting from the “securitisation of migration to the humanitarianisation of migration”, the exceptional temporal limit of the emergency, that supports the humanitarian interventions, the ‘right now’, becomes permanent, normalizing the suffering, providing the opportunity to create commerciable users and consumers in the neoliberal moral economy (Keshavarz 2018: 121). Long-term management is left aside, the consideration of humanitarianism-

solution to the crisis-problem materialises, imposing, then, specifically designed directions coming from certain politics (Keshavarz 2018).

In the early studies of the notion of gift in Greece, research has suggested¹⁴ that the practice of gift-giving or gift-receiving was met with suspicion by the locals, because it was considered a potential danger for the principles of autonomy and freedom, giving the fact that it would contribute to create relationships based on hierarchy, obligation, reciprocity and dependence. Indeed, acts of generosity, in the form of a gift, towards the stranger presuppose two counterparts, the host and the guest, the latter being included only temporarily in the equation of the *filoxenia* (hospitality) (Cabot 2016: 154), revealing itself as a “deeply hierarchical form of inclusion” (Rozakou 2016a: 188). Similarly Knott (2018), when she specifically talks about hospitality taking the form of humanitarianism towards border-crossers in the Mediterranean, underlines how, not only is the guest supposed to behave respectfully, but also the host is, in relation to being available to offer the very best for his/her guests.

Along with its origins descending directly from the splendors of Ancient Greece, the contemporary Greek state strongly reproduces the notion of hospitality as a national value, recurrently depicting itself as a very generous patron, which offers ‘hospitality’ to “clandestines” or “illegal immigrants” (Rozakou 2012: 565; 2016a: 188; 2018b: 193). The rhetoric, explained above, implies the reiteration of migration as an invasion of a sovereign territory, exemplified in the 2007 inauguration speech in Samos¹⁵ of the then Greek Minister of Interior and Public Order for the opening of the reception center, that in reality turned to be a detention center (Rozakou 2012: 562). Another example of the ‘generosity’ towards the stranger enacted by the state since 2012 is the so-called ‘Operation Xenios Zeus’ mainly targeting “irregular” migrants. The very character it was named after, God Zeus, is once again a reminder of the old roots of the ‘Greek generosity’, embodied in the symbolic meaning of Zeus as “king of gods, patron of the

¹⁴ More specifically, ethnographies, conducted by Campbell and Du Boulay (in Rozakou 2016a) in rural Greece, investigated the importance of kinship, the agonistic social interactions and *filótimo* (love of honour). However, Papataxiarchis (in Rozakou 2016a) offers an alternative version, where he suggests that the practice of gift-giving “with no strings attached” was then very popular. For a short summary of the early ethnographic works see Rozakou 2016: 191-192.

¹⁵ A part of the speech is reported in Rozakou (2012: 572): “[This is] a project that makes us proud of the level of *filoksenia* (hospitality) that our country offers to illegal immigrants who stay here until their return to their country of origin. This high level of hospitality is indicative of the equivalent level of guarantees we ensure for the protection of Human Rights as well as for the total respect for the value and dignity of Anthropos (the human being). After all, our tradition and culture command us to do so”.

stranger and God of hospitality” (Rozakou 2018b: 191). Paradoxically, the operation came off in hostile practices of detention and arrests, which publicly unveiled the monopoly of power and agency by the sovereign Greek host (Rozakou 2012). In so doing, the aim was keeping an ‘ethnocultural similarity’ in the Greek society by recreating a homogenizing process, based on the danger, embodied by the guest (the *xénos*). This one-way offer entails both the control and management of the “outsiders” (Rozakou 2012: 565), then allowing an oxymoronic cohabitation between *filoxenia* and its opposite *xenofobia*. As I mentioned before, revisiting the notions of border-crossers within the spectrum of hospitality as a worthy guests and depoliticized human beings, in the everyday biopolitical practices of institutional aid industry, asylum seekers or refugees are manufactured as recipients and receivers, a product of the paternalizing humanitarian aid generosity. They are considered to be ‘lacking subjectivities’ and temporarily giving up their relative autonomy to the humanitarian actors. In a graduated scale of danger, from being subjects in need of care and at risk, they rapidly are treated as ‘risky subjects’ for their ungovernable hypermobility and they are feared by the very strict administrative system on the regulation for entry or exit permits in a sovereign territory (Tazzioli 2017: 41, 69).

As a matter of fact, it is relevant to notice that the notion of hospitality can profusely be found in the current discourse surrounding migration studies and policies, that lays out first and foremost rules and obligations for the guests upon arrival or before their entrance in the European territory. Moreover, the ‘ethical imperative’ or ‘moral duty’ – problematized by metaphors such as walls, ‘closed doors’, Fortress Europe – to provide hospitality, is not only expected from host countries in the North shore of the Mediterranean such as Greece or Italy, but also from Europe as in the whole political entity, the European Union, too (Rozakou 2012: 566). As a matter of fact, a recurrent question from the volunteers in Samos, beyond wondering where the Greek state was¹⁶ in relation to the (appalling) management of the hotspot and the refugee situation on the island in general, concerned the role of the European Union institution in the matter. It was not clear how the European Union, generally addressed as a personified entity, “could allow” such “events” in a EU Member State, phrasing such concerns like the following: “Why does the EU do nothing to prevent this?”, “Where is the EU?”, “We,

¹⁶ This question will be also explored in Chapter 2.

as Europeans, should be ashamed! [about the poor management by the EU]”¹⁷. In this context, the camp well symbolizes the conjunction of hospitality and biopolitics, which go hand in hand without necessarily exclude one from the other (Rozakou 2012: 573), reproducing a ‘biopolitics of hospitality’. The border-crosser is altogether represented as an ‘uninvited guest’ (Rozakou 2012: 562), in need of protection and as a danger to be confined and restricted; temporarily in the limbo of the camp, physically on the host country territory, but not allowed to be fully included in the society.

Tazzioli (2017) suggests that the idea of “biopolitics” or “biopower”, in the academic and political vocabulary, investigates the regulation of lives in the process of capital enhancement. Considered cardinal in the works about population management by Micheal Foucault and then, revisited by the Governmentality Studies in the ‘90s, “biopolitics” was definitely revived in Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, as Tazzioli reminds us (Tazzioli 2017). Distancing from Foucault’s idea of an ‘historically specific technology of power’, Agamben understands it as the technology of the sovereign power, which produces a ‘state of exception’ of the ‘bare life’ (Rozakou 2012: 364).

What is happening today in a crisis-ridden Greece regarding asylum and immigration is, according to some scholars¹⁸, a “crisis of hospitality”, which comprehends an increasing “impoverishment and decline of the middle classes [...], xenophobia and racism, [the] election in the parliament of the neo Nazi Golden Dawn party, civilian patrols and physical attacks against immigrants” and the criminalization of solidarity initiatives. In contrast, according to Rozakou, the current Greek situation is more understandable within “the expansion of the code of hospitality and the reaffirmation of state sovereignty through the ultimate control and the ontological production of the *ksenos*” (Rozakou 2012: 574). Rozakou (2012) also proposed an alternative to Agamben’s ‘thanatopolitics’ of the ‘bare life’ by focusing on the politics, enacted by ‘solidarians’, which helps live or let live. In fact, through the ‘relational aspect of humanitarian aid’, the concept of generous *filoxenia*¹⁹ might lead to alternative readings through the production of ‘socialities of solidarity’ based on reciprocity between

¹⁷ This role of Europe and its perception is developed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

¹⁸ See Papataxiarchis in Rozakou 2018: 194.

¹⁹ According to Cabot, today the term ‘solidarity’ overlaps with ‘hospitality’ (Cabot 2016: 158); on the contrary, Rozakou tries to discriminate the two words, focusing on the positive meaning of reciprocity that ‘solidarity’ entails, instead of the dangerous one-way generosity embedded in the notion of ‘hospitality’ (Rozakou 2016a: 190).

humanitarian actors and border-crossers (Rozakou 2012: 565) and summed up in the slogan “We distribute nothing, we share everything” (Rozakou 2016a: 190).

With the proliferation of material donations and the professionalization of volunteerism in Greece since 2015, a crucial shift had occurred and the gift taboo seems to have collapsed or at least it has undergone a process of re-signification. In fact, “the burden of *hréos* (debt) affects Greek society to an unprecedented extent”, so much so Greek citizens sometimes face similar challenges to those bore by border-crossers, like poor living conditions or no economic means for food or healthcare (Rozakou 2016a: 192). This idea is, however, problematized by Serntedakis (2017), who finds this type of solidarity towards ‘newcomers’ really different from the one that addressed the locals, since people on the move represents “the ideal subjects for a ‘free solidarity’ that relies on gifts” (Serntedakis 2017: 94).

Similarly, ‘charity’ and ‘philanthropy’ are greatly connected to the humanitarian discourse in the popular representation and sometimes they overlap or intertwine with the term ‘solidarity’ as well²⁰. The former had its origin in the 19th century, when people from upper classes, especially wealthy young women, devoted their attention and reputation of the family name to the cause of the ‘poors’ through large donations. Nowadays, both terms are considered to bear negative connotations – with some exceptions such as the greatly current developed ‘charity sector’ in the UK – and as a consequence, humanitarian actors tend to avoid and differentiate their actions as much as possible from any resemblance that could be drawn to ‘an act of charity’ or ‘an act of benevolence’ because those terms are considered to highly emphasise the difference between the giver (usually wealthy and white) and the receiver (usually indigent and non-white). Nonetheless, some authors highlight that “although the gift is no longer material, this does not mean that it is not a gift. It is still an offer, if not ‘charity under a different name’” (Rozakou 2016: 192; Serntedakis 2017: 91).

²⁰ See Cabot 2016: 160.

1.1.3 Border politics and neutrality in the humanitarian affairs

Historically, principles of neutrality and equality have long been present in the guidelines of any organization that works in the humanitarian field, yet it is not possible to think of humanitarianism outside the field of politics. Thus, it can be argued that: firstly, humanitarian practices are inevitably political and very often include biopolitical practices of governance, for instance, in the cooperation with the management of refugee camps or in matters related to fundings (Rozakou 2012: 568); secondly, “humanitarianism is often presented as a humanist alternative to the international system made up of sovereign and exclusive territorial spaces”, nonetheless “in many instances [humanitarian practice] worked to re-territorialise and reaffirm sovereignty in practice [...] therefore, it is important to see humanitarianism not as a value-neutral field but as a practice based on the relations and hierarchies of power utilised for the governance of populations” (Pallister-Wilkins 2017: 88). The implicit compliance with border policing and military²¹, creating a sort of “functional solidarity” (Serntedakis 2017), constitutes a ‘humanitarian border’, that in relation to the Mediterranean area develops along the Greek and Italian shores, involving the collaboration among actors such as “the Hellenic police and coastguard, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and scores of smaller NGOs, international volunteers, and Greek citizens” (Serntedakis 2017: 87). The border notion is based on the structural violent politics of inclusive and exclusive procedures applied on the border-crossers’ bodies and consequently, softened by humanitarian borderwork

²¹ I experienced this unconventional alliance between police and humanitarian actors during the forced clearing of the temporal camp in the Field managed by Sandstone. After the fire that broke out in October 14, hundreds of border-crossers lost their tents and refuges, therefore Sandstone made their Field available for more or less a week for the placement of about 80 tents. Volunteers from Sandstone and from other NGOs of the island made extra shifts for “patrolling” the entrance to the Field during day and night. One week after, the surprise clearing happened: police, government representatives and volunteers worked from late evening until early morning to quickly take down the tents and move border-crossers to police buses in order to transfer them to continental Greece. The situation was quite tense: volunteers had to go to an assigned tent and communicate the transfer to the family that was registered in that specific tent, but after a while the majority of the border-crossers, that were resident in the temporal camp, left the tents and gathered close to the police buses in the attempt to jump in in a chaotic situation. Police officers were very intimidating with regards to border-crossers and volunteers too, shouting to the former to be quiet and wait for their turn and to the latter to take down the tents as quickly as possible.

practices (Pallister-Wilkins 2017: 87). In this sense, the border – in this case the Mediterranean Sea – works as an indicator of the world in constant transformation:

Le frontiere cambiano, non rimangono mai fisse. Si allarga l'Europa e mutano i punti di ingresso. Scoppiano guerre, cadono dittature, esplodono intere aree del mondo e si aprono nuovi varchi. I varchi a loro volta creano un mondo, una particolare società di confine che definisce le sue regole e i ruoli al suo interno. Sono a tutti gli effetti dei porti franchi. Ma poi anche questi mutano nel tempo, e vengono sostituiti da altri porti franchi. [...] Basta ascoltare le storie di chi viaggia, per accorgersene. Le tappe battute fino a due anni prima, magari anche fino a solo sei mesi prima, diventano vecchie. E se ne cercano subito altre [...] c'è una faglia sotterranea che taglia in due il Mediterraneo da est a ovest. Dal Vicino Oriente fino a Gibilterra. Una linea fatta di infiniti punti, infiniti nodi, infiniti attraversamenti. Ogni punto una storia, ogni nodo un pugno di esistenze. Ogni attraversamento una crepa che si apre. È la Frontiera. Non è un luogo preciso, piuttosto la moltiplicazione di una serie di luoghi in perenne mutamento, che coincidono con la possibilità di finire da una parte o rimanere nell'altra. Dopo la caduta del Muro di Berlino, il confine principale tra il mondo di qua e il mondo di là cade proprio tra le onde di quello che, fin dall'antichità, è stato chiamato Mare di mezzo. [...] Quella parola indica una linea lunga chilometri e spessa anni. Un solco che attraversa la materia e il tempo, le notti e i giorni, le generazioni e le stesse voci che ne parlano, si inseguono, si accavallano, si contraddicono, si comprimono, si dilatano. È la frontiera. Per molti è sinonimo di impazienza, per altri di terrore. Per altri ancora coincide con gli argini di un fortino che si vuole difendere. Tutti la mettono in cima alle altre parole, come se queste esistessero unicamente per sorreggere le frasi che deliniano le sue fattezze. La frontiera corre sempre nel mezzo. Di qua c'è il mondo di prima. Di là c'è quello che deve ancora venire, e che forse non arriverà mai. (Leogrande 2017: 25, 39-40).

The current European mobility regime paradoxically allows the free and unrestricted entrance of international volunteers, that travel, by safe and relatively cheap transports, with the intent 'to help' border-crossers, which on their side are completely devoided of any control over their future in terms of money and of their own life at high risk from the very start of their very expensive journey. Even more paradoxical, when items that were worn or created by border-crossers finally reached places dreamt by the original owners, such as lifejackets²², bracelets or drawings created during kids' activities that volunteers brought to their countries of origin/residence (Knott 2018). Sometimes, the figure of the volunteer "personifies the current 'liberal' management of 'undesirable' populations by the West in their naive extension of care, which is always superseded by the need to control. Despite their efforts to challenge the injustices of the border by extending 'hospitality' (while abroad themselves) in the form of humanitarian

²² See the display of lifejackets in London, available at <https://time.com/4499146/refugee-life-jackets-parliament-summit/>

assistance, volunteers often end up unintentionally reproducing and reinforcing the border regime in their everyday interactions.” (Knott 2018: 362)

In this scenario, the conceptualization of ‘humanitarian borderscapes’ helps to better understand the transformation of border practices:

The varied practices that have arisen to manage these transit populations, from providing short-term shelter, food and clothing, to designated buses, and mobile medical clinics can be understood through the vacillating forms of sovereignty and continual contestation and consolidation of borders suggested in the concept of [humanitarian] borderscapes [which] captures the shifting spaces and terrains of practice, the places that emerge as spaces of intervention and the complexities of response [...] borderscapes that are continually traversed by a number of bodies and the practices and relationships that render visible endless categorisations and shifts in categorisation between self and other, saviour and victim, legal and illegal, worthy and unworthy, refugee and migrant (Pallister-Wilkins 2017: 100).

The politics of rescuing, more generally the welfare and care sectors, has recently undergone a process of privatization since it is mainly operated by an array of non-governmental actors based on unwaged or barely remunerated volunteering work (Muehlebach 2011: 64). This change has happened by effect of the international reorganization of labour, the Structural Adjustment Program in the South and the conservative policies in the North carried out since the ‘80s and ‘90s (Sorgoni 2011: 25). In so doing, they are transforming and mining the role of the state and the notion of the Mediterranean Sea as a contended border among Nation-States, by representing the act of rescuing as a civic duty, that can be carried out only through a down-top process of humanitarianism (Tazzioli, 2017: 50-51). The ‘economy of good feeling’ or ‘good-faith economy’, that concerns unwaged relational or affective labour producing good feeling instead of concrete goods, according to Muehlebach (2011), mainly addresses the undesired noncitizen population, and represents a perfect “wedding of hyperexploitation, intense moralization, non remuneration, public fetishization of sacrifice, desire and seeking pleasure in unwaged work” (Muehlebach 2011: 74). Accordingly, the existence of unremunerated affective labour, mainly stemmed from Catholic traditions, comes to life by means of dualistic elements such as exploitation and salvation, exclusion and utopia, alienation and new forms of sociality (Muehlebach 2011: 76). Humanitarianism is part of the contemporary moral economies, where the outsourcing of public services to the civil society, in this case, to organizations based on volunteerism, is seen as a strategic logic of rationality that follows the rules of

neoliberal cost-effectiveness, “by withdrawing from social responsibilities such as welfare, while minimising economic costs” (Sandri 2018: 70). By comparison, Malighetti (2014) highlights the role of international aid in progressively contributing to weaken the state sovereignty, through its acquisition of a growing representative role in the international community, participating in the decision-making process, acting independently from the states and in the process being recognized by the United Nations. In this sense, it is relevant to explain the concept of governmentality, which can be described as “a particular kind of rationality that strategically reproduces the need and power of the state. By situating economic interests within the networks of associative and voluntarist work, citizens become governable, their membership to civil society being an expression of this process”²³ (Sandri 2018: 70). Similarly, the previously mentioned idea of humanitarianism “founded on the inequality and hierarchical ordering of human lives” is what constitutes the ‘aporia of humanitarian governmentality’ (Rozakou 2012: 364).

Instead of considering the humanitarian neutrality as absence of a political statement (Pallister-Wilkins 2016: 7), Sandri (2018) interprets it as “a negative form of politics” and hopes for a revelation of the humanitarianism, mediated by the ethnographic research, “as a particularly charged terrain between politics and ethics”²⁴. A similar hope is shared by Pallister-Wilkins (2016): in fact, she would appreciate a firm position, summarized in the vivid expression ‘muddy its feet in the waters of politics’, by the humanitarian organizations in Lesvos for condemning the violence of the hotspot approach, which is considered a product of the European border externalization policies. The line between humanitarianism and politics, or better political activism, appears to be sometimes intertwined and blurred when, for instance, the volunteers in Sandri’s ethnography in Calais (2018) consider their work as solely humanitarian – even though they would paradoxically define humanitarianism as a sovereign territory too – and they reported indifference or disinterest in political engagement, but finally, in separate occasions from the voluntarism carried out in the field, they would end up in advocating in favour of border-crossers’s rights, by participating to pro-refugee demonstrations or generally becoming vocal about the matter. However, in other occasions, humanitarian actions have been differentiated from ‘border contestation and solidarity activism’,

²³ Foucault in Sandri 2018.

²⁴ Redfield and Bornstein in Sandri 2018.

which primary intent were political and sought engaging border-crossers “in the [collective] struggle for open borders” (Sandri 2018: 75). To this extent, this type of activism has been blamed of imposing ‘solidarity’, considering the ‘recipients of aid’ as a marginalized and unified whole²⁵ (Rozakou 2018b: 200). Nevertheless, an example of bridging humanitarianism and activism is represented by the ‘volunteer humanitarianism’ (Sandri 2018), which has been proclaimed as the alternative to humanitarian aid, being characterized by improvisation, informality, geographical proximity, activism and sociality. In addition, it is considered as a symbol against the violent border practices across Europe and a challenge to both the humanitarian machine and the neoliberal governmentality (Sandri 2018: 65, 77). In this sense, ‘volunteer humanitarianism’ was not involved in the governmental border practices since it created a strong network of sociality, affectivity, emotions and activism. Surpassing the notion of ‘post-bureaucratic humanitarianism’, it established “a form of civil disobedience that was not informed by unified political views but by the lived experiences of volunteers in the camp” (Sandri, 2018: 66). As a result, neoliberalism can be understood not only in its utilitarian and rational way of making sense of the world, but it is conceivable as a ‘complex of opposites’ and as “a force that can contain its negation – the vision of a de commodified, disinterested life and of a moral community of human relationality and solidarity that stands opposed to alienation”²⁶ (Sandri 2018: 77).

1.1.4 Millions of solidarities

When humanitarianism and solidarity are coupled together, some scholars, such as Serntedakis (2017), try to polarize them in two different worlds, even though he acknowledges the existence of blurred boundaries, for example, in the case of “people that identify as humanitarians (independent volunteers and NGOs) refer to their activities as ‘actions of solidarity’” (Serntedakis, 2017: 86); others, like Rozakou (2017), focused on the concept of ‘solidarity humanitarianism’, where the Greek

²⁵ See Agustín’s research about outreach social workers with immigrant sex workers in Spain in Rozakou 2018: 200.

²⁶ Muehlebach in Sandri 2018.

neologism ‘solidarian’ (*allileggyos*) – that initially was used within the anarchist movement, then it had been acquired by pro-migration groups in the 2000s – becomes the symbol of a new understanding of solidarity that “emphasizes lateral and anti-hierarchical relatedness” (Rozakou 2017a: 99; 2018b: 190), that goes beyond gift-giving and challenges the Greek dominant cultural code of hospitality and the classic top-down approach of formal bureaucratized humanitarianism in relation to ‘beneficiaries’. Turning from adjective to noun, the substantivation process underlined the growing popularity of the term as a counterblast to the neoliberalization lived in ‘austerity-ridden Greece’²⁷ within the circles of middle class Greek citizens as well. In other words, after the Greek crisis had erupted, the ‘social’ sphere undertook great transformations, developing the so-called ‘socialities of solidarity’, that are “social spaces that intend to materialise alternative visions of society”, trying to give birth to significant forms of interactions among refugees, migrants and locals (Rozakou 2016a: 185). Acknowledging the strong relationship between the ‘European refugee crisis’ and the Greek economic crisis, ‘solidarity’ has turned into a ‘bridge concept’, a ‘shifter’, a ‘*pharmako*’, that is “a transformative and healing substance that does you good [and] it even makes you well” (Cabot 2016: 158, 162). Solidarity constitutes “an all-embracing word, since it does not require any kind of legal commitment and entails notions of civic duty towards fellow citizens who suffer” (Serntedakis 2017: 85). It equally includes border-crossers and ‘solidarians’ as well or everyone who is facing challenges in austerity times; it is grounded on horizontal and “on bi-lateral deeply inter-subjective, modes of reciprocal exchange” (Cabot 2016: 162). Disregarding the use of ‘solidarity’ between quotation marks, “thus following its semantic variation as an emic category in multiple contexts of economic and political use”²⁸, Serntedakis (2017) invites the researchers to give more attention to the actions of solidarity rather than its multiple (endless) definitions. Being a term with such positive connotations, it has been strategically used by politicians, from Germany’s conservative Minister of Finance Schauble to the left-wing Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras in its 2015 visit in Lesbos – where he announced that the island should be named the “European capital of solidarity” (Rozakou 2016a: 194) – and several other actors with different purposes and in diversified contexts. Nonetheless, it is worthy to mention that even if solidarity is

²⁷ See Chapter 2 for an overview on the Greek socio-economic situation.

²⁸ Papataxiarchis in Serntedakis 2017: 94.

imagined and described by solidarians/activists in terms of equal recognition of border-crossers, ‘the power symmetries’ and ‘the ghost of wage labour’ can similarly affect the way in which solidarity is used in practice (Cabot 2016: 162).

1.2 A brief introduction on the handbook of the volunteer

Undoubtably, “the role of volunteers, their positionality and the question of doing good or doing harm are important aspects of the politics of international volunteering.” (Bendixsen 2018), nonetheless, it is significant to take into consideration a broader and polychromatic perspective, to put it simply, ‘the complexities of hope’:

[It] is not only about the complexities in which the volunteers are finding themselves, or the constant interchangeable position of doing harm and doing good. It also refers to my own position of writing: while recognizing that “volunteering for refugees” is entangled in ethical and political power dimensions, there must be space to recognize that for many volunteers their experience was shaped by their mode of being in the world before arriving and would shape the ways in which they continued to inhabit the world in the future, as by no means flawless, but as ethically concerned human beings. This recognition, I believe, without dismissing critique or to become lured to romanticism, provides the chance to investigate afresh the possibility of actions as movement of international solidarity, hospitality and potentially ethical citizenship (Bendixsen 2018).

I started my research by framing voluntarism from the lay perception of it, that is, an unpaid or barely remunerated activity, which can include discounts, the provision of accommodation or a pocket money, where social actors, willingly but not professionally, operate within an array of social projects, in this case with border-crossers.

Looking at institutionalized activities of voluntarism such as the former National Civil Service (now Universal Civil Service) in Italy or the former European Voluntary Service – which was proposed by the European Commission with Decision No 1686/98/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 July 1998 (Rozakou 2011; 2016b), now European Solidarity Corps – they are promoted as important formative and empowering opportunities, based on the voluntary decision of the potential volunteer and funded by the government or the European Union. It is to an in-depth discussion of the production of the notion ‘voluntarism’ within the European

Union and in particular in Greece that I now turn. Since the last decade of the 20th century, volunteering and civil society have been increasingly promoted as an essential part of the EU integration policies (Rozakou 2011). The first reference in the EU law about voluntarism can be found in ‘Declaration 38 on voluntary service and activities’ in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), which recites as follows: “The Conference recognises the important contribution made by voluntary service activities to developing social solidarity. The Community will encourage the European dimension of voluntary organisations with particular emphasis on the exchange of information and experiences as well as on the participation of the young and the elderly in voluntary work”²⁹. Generally speaking, the aforementioned production of legislation can be seen as an attempt to support the circulation of ideas in relation to active civic citizenship, social cohesion and democracy (Rozakou 2016b). In this sense, the construction of the volunteer as the personification of an active European citizen and a self-governed subject, who altruistically dedicate personal time for the common good of the expanding “European society” has been particularly targeting the middle class and it can be interpreted within the logic of neoliberalism. The delegation of activities – normally subject to the national law – to non-state actors, who then would made be accountable and bound to the very same state actors, most likely implies mechanisms of power over a depoliticized yet responsible citizen (Rozakou 2016b). As a matter of fact, by degovernmentalizing the state, the society has been governamentalized (Rozakou 2016b). Zooming on Greece, a particular focus on voluntarism as a model of civic participation was emphasized at domestic level due to the thriving economic state of the middle class since the 2000s (Rozakou 2016a). As part of the institutionalization and professionalization of the volunteerism, the “Global Volunteer Day” on the 5th of December and the “International Year of Volunteers” in 2011 were officially proclaimed by the United Nations for celebrating and promoting voluntary activities (Rozakou 2016b). Consequently, they were both incorporated in the Greek society by activating initiatives such as the establishment of the 5th of december as Volunteer Day in Greece according to law 2646/98 and the “Panhellenic Volunteerism Expo”, which was sponsored by governmental organisations and the municipality of Athens. In the last decades, volunteerism has been systematized into

²⁹ Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/treaty/pdf/amst-en.pdf>

layers of specializations, expertise and bureaucratic frameworks contributing to the ‘crafting’ of the volunteer as a Greek and European self-governed active citizen in the Greek society. Nevertheless, as mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, this can greatly affect the problematic youth job insecurity: “Instead of the transformation of voluntary activities to professional categories and specialized professions in social care that takes place in postwar Greece, volunteerism in the last few decades has been marked by the professionalization of unpaid and disinterested work. This is a form of labour that neither follows the principles of a commodity economy, nor can it be measured in terms of economic gain” (Rozakou 2016b: 84). The political resignificance of the volunteer has different shades whether it applied into a small and local humanitarian organization, which according to Rozakou (2016b) subversily challenge the dominant institutionalized notion of the volunteer or in a multinational large one, where staff is remunerated and volunteers are offered internships (Cabot 2016). In contrast with the notion of charity, this ‘new volunteerism’, coming from beliefs of the Left, is strongly opposing the official modes of action conceived in terms of service, and considers volunteerism as an act of resistance and solidarity. The ‘new volunteerism’ still implies a set of rules, organization and experts in the attempt to change the society and at the same time challenge the current migration policies by enacting different strategies and perspectives. Through an experimental lateral sociality based on social inclusion, spontaneity and disinterestness towards marginalised groups, the new volunteerism, embedded in the practices of the group studied in Rozakou’s ethnography (2016b; 2018), shows a pioneering alternative mode of volunteerism from the ground, which even rejects the word ‘volunteer’ and self-identifies as ‘solidarian’ or ‘activist’ (Rozakou 2016b; 2018). Taking into consideration the austerity that afflicted Greece after the 2008 economic crisis³⁰, some studies (Cabot 2016; Rozakou 2016b) mention that, according to the dominant view, the Greek population has no interest in volunteering given the fact that the Greek society is basically considered weak and with a poorly developed third sector. Nevertheless, a great number of ethnographic works discharge this theory at once.³¹ Since 2015, challenging the dominant notion of gift in

³⁰ The consequences of the 2008 economic crisis in Greece will be further explored in Chapter 2.

³¹ Local and expert-in-the-area scholars, such as Rozakou and Cabot, have put great efforts in highlighting the solidarity projects initiated by Greek citizens. In particular, Cabot (2016) related on the presence of an active mobilization connected with larger social movements since 2010. Other studies that support this idea are mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

the Greek society, massive deliveries of material aid and volunteers – whether they were local, travellers from other countries specifically for this purpose or overstaying tourists – from all over the world to contribute to the extreme situation that the media were depicting with images of stranded overloaded dinghies. Volunteers progressively took over the management of the humanitarian assistance by cooking, sorting, distributing and cleaning (Rozakou 2016a; Sandri 2018), cooperating with or working for spontaneous solidarity initiatives, NGOs or IGOs. Generally, volunteerism is thought as a leisure activity during someone’s spare time. Nonetheless, the rhythms, regularity and performativity (Muehlebach 2011: 73) are very often similar to the working hours, mainly from Monday to Friday 9am-6pm. Even if it is not considered as professional work by the volunteers, in my experience, I found that some volunteers felt the ‘need’ to ‘go to work’ even if they were evidently sick. It is noteworthy how voluntarism is reconducible to the fordist theory when, for example, social usefulness and public utility are associated by volunteers to their work, but at the same time it contradicts the very same theory since it is unwaged (Muehlebach 2011: 74). In Muehlebach’s research (2011), most of the volunteers were at the margins of the labour market (i.e. unemployed youngsters or retirees) and in search for public dignity and social belonging. That was also the case for my research, which also, like in Knott (2018), has shown that, amongst students and retirees, there were also many professionally fulfilled volunteers, such as lawyers, journalists, nurses, engineers, that were spending their work holidays there. In less than two months, I met more than 80 volunteers in the NGO I was volunteering with and since the volunteer flux constantly changed, schedules had to be adjusted every week. Generally, the volunteers stayed from few days to several months, but the average choice for people was two weeks, which perfectly matched with the official requirement of minimum period of stay set by the NGO and the holidays of the workers. Although for theoretically purposes, I draw some lines between border-crossers and volunteers, in the islands’ main port towns the seemingly sharp lines between different categories of mobile persons become blurred as it is often unclear who are migrants, tourists, volunteers, or people employed in the ‘illegality industry’. All groups of visitors tend to frequent the same spaces; they use the same transportation and communication systems, dine at restaurants, stay at hotels,

swim at the beach, and purchase essentials at small stores catering to tourists” (Knott 2018: 354).

1.2.1 A careful choice: voluntarism, voluntourism, volutalant

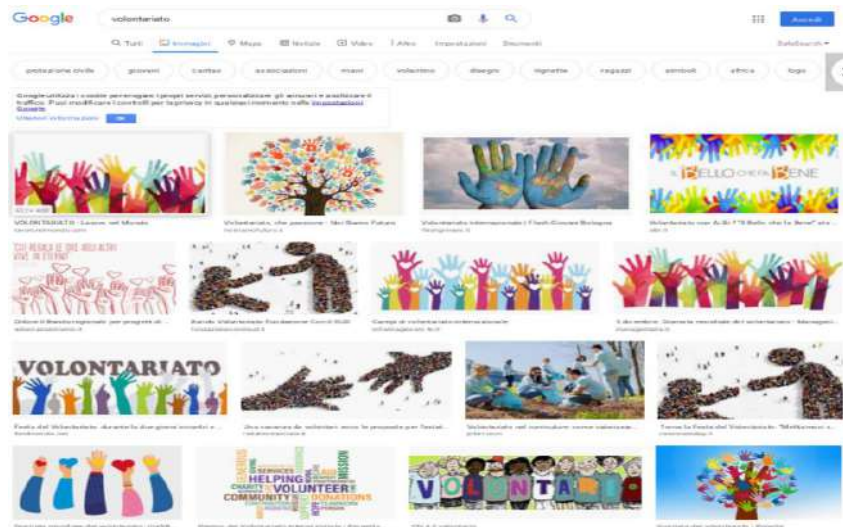


Image 1 – Screenshot of the results for ‘volontariato (source: Google Image Search bar)

Regarding the representation of the volunteer, I asked myself how volunteerism was conceptualised in the online world of images, thus, I typed ‘volunteerism’ and ‘international volunteerism’ in English, in Italian (‘volontariato’ and ‘volontariato internazionale’) and in Spanish (‘voluntariado’ and ‘voluntariado internacional’) in Google Image Search bar and interestingly, I found out the following connections: the very first images that all the three languages have in common are multicolour raised hands and pictures of small groups of white young volunteers, who were smiling and in position for the photograph to be taken and mainly, white young volunteers among non-white children, while doing some kind of entertaining activity. In particular, the last connections reflect the dominant understanding of volunteerism as voluntourism.

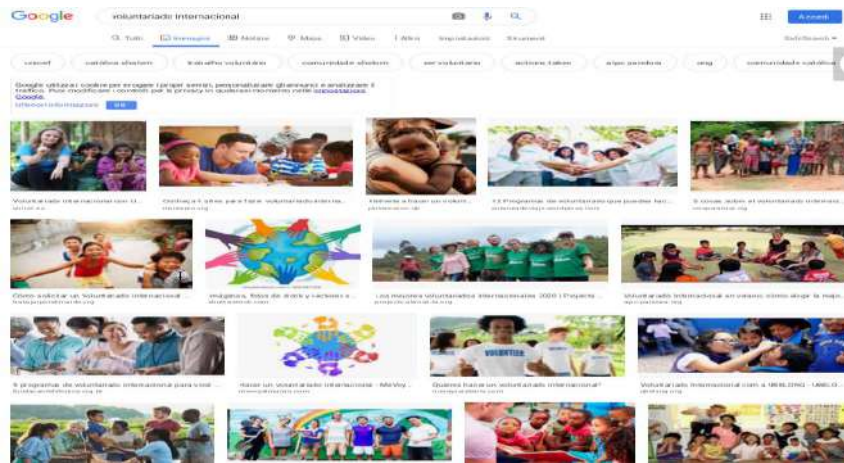


Image 2 – Screenshot of the results for ‘voluntariado internacional’ (source: Google Search bar)

Among the different types of local and international voluntarism, since the 1990s the so-called ‘voluntourism’ or ‘volunteer tourism’ has been steadily increasing (Bendixsen 2018). An overview of this type of volunteerism is offered by Knott (2018) in very targeted and strong opinions:

Scholars have noted the vast expansion of volunteer tourism, as an alternative to conventional mass tourism, allowing volunteers the chance to ‘escape the tourist bubble’ through intimate encounters with local hosts, as well as offering conscious consumers a chance to ‘give back’ [or as] a new, potentially more effective, vehicle for international development [...] Increasingly, the ‘help’ that comes does not take the form of asylum, nor of concerted efforts to strengthen economic, social and political systems in Third World countries but, rather, of a piecemeal attempt to placate the masses through relief efforts led by NGOs and increasingly staffed by volunteers. Thus, volunteer tourism appear to be yet another band-aid development solution, in which NGOs and individual citizens attempt to fill in gaps left by states in ‘the wake of neoliberalism’s onslaught of structural adjustment programs, state pullbacks and privatization’, which have rendered many asylum seekers’ countries of origin unable to provide them with the basic services available elsewhere (Knott 2018: 357).

Govoni³² provides some questions in order to recognize the potential voluntourist: “Il volonturista mira alla soddisfazione del volontario. Aiutare i bisognosi viene dopo [...]

³² Nicolò Govoni is an Italian writer, president of the NGO ‘Still I Rise’ and 2020 Nobel Peace Prize nominee. After the high school, he volunteered and fundraised for an orphanage in Southern India for four years. From this experience, he started to reflect on voluntarism by problematizing the business of voluntourism and the education of vulnerable children. In the meanwhile, he became a sponsor of the institute in India and graduated in Journalism. Then, he moved to Greece, in Samos, to volunteer in the

Per individuarlo basta porsi tre domande: ti chiedono soldi per attività che nel tuo Paese svolgeresti gratis? Fanno selezione e training preventivo? Ti propongono di fare cose che nel tuo Paese non saresti abilitato a fare?” (Govoni 2019: 112).³³ Mainly targeting far and “exotic” places in the Global South, intermediary agencies send volunteers, that are generally white, wealthy and European, without specific educational background “to experience” a summer working period in orphanages, carrying out activities of entertainment and education within projects of international cooperation and development or of emergency relief.

The volunteer tourist is defined by Knott (2018) as an alternative type of tourist compared to the ones that were scared away by the daily unconventional arrivals to the shores and change their holiday destination, “although it is important to note that, from an emic perspective, volunteers would not usually call themselves ‘tourists’, and most would resist the label as this would undermine the perceived gravity of their work there” (Knott 2018: 354).

This other ‘guests’ in the Aegean islands, instead, willingly travelled across the world in search for interactions with the iconic images of ‘the people of the dinghies’. Within the complex host-guest duality that was mentioned before, volunteers felt as if they were representing the ‘good’ and welcoming European/Western – depending on the volunteer’s nationality – host, in contrast with the strict unwelcoming policies on the national and supranational level in the Mediterranean area. They claimed this role even though, for most of the times, they just stayed few weeks, whereas border-crossers had definitely been there for much longer (Knott 2018).

Govoni has been highly criticizing this choice of volunteering, describing it as an “edonistic journey” (Govoni 2018: 67), in search of the authentic poverty, where volunteers post pictures and thoughts on their social media profiles without considering

NGO ‘Samos Volunteers’, but after some disagreements over NGO management-related formalities, he co-founded Mazi, the first school specifically dedicated to refugee minors. About his ‘Mission’ in India he wrote *Uno* (2015), *Bianco come Dio* (2018), *Se fosse tuo figlio* (2019) about his experience in Samos and *Dreaming Wide* (2018), the first schoolbook for refugee children in collaboration with Samos Volunteers. Thanks to his social media active presence and his proactivity in fundraising campaigns, he opened another school for refugee children in Turkey in 2019 and local branches of Still I Rise in London and Kenya in 2020.

³³ While Govoni does not differentiate between voluntarism in projects of development and cooperation in the Global South, Sandri (2018: 72) briefly mentions a distinction, that is worth to be considered, between what she calls ‘volunteer humanitarianism’, taking place in European areas in need of emergency relief and “D.I.Y. aid” or “private aid initiatives”, which exists in development projects in the Global South.

the consequences of their actions or asking the consent of the people photographed, especially if they are children. Volunteers are trained and asked to distance themselves from the people involved in the projects by not hugging or not having sexual or romantic intercourse with border-crossers and local staff; to put it simply, by caring but not too much, drawing once again a line between “us” and “them” in the attempt of keep a professional relationship and avoid favouritisms. Nonetheless, in this way, the unhuman humanitarianism does not recognize humanity in “beneficiaries” or “recipients of aid”. Continuously facing conundrums that Malkki (2015) calls ‘monologues of the heart’, which are “impossible situations where the technicalities and the emotions intersect and where the ambiguities of the humanitarian action emerge”.

For this reason, voluntourism had been associated to a neo-colonial practice, whereby the West imposes its presence in order “to help”, but at the same time reinforces the vulnerability of people, especially children, who are considered the exemplary human, the most needy of the human beings (Malkki 2015) and are made available for a brief not-too-deep emotional attachment to an array of volunteers throughout the year, months by months (Govoni 2018: 68). In Mazi, the school for refugee minors, Govoni promotes the idea of an ‘ethical and honest’ voluntarism, what he calls ‘voluntalent’, which is based on providing tools for students in order to be independent from any type of help by carefully recruiting experienced and resourceful volunteers. The organization requires a two-month minimum period of stay, no fee of participation and provide a two-day training for new volunteers upon arrival. They believe in the methodologies of informal education and on a horizontal structure where everybody, either the new volunteer or the individual student can contribute to improve the system step by step (Govoni 2019)³⁴. As many other volunteers I met, he calls students “his children” (Govoni 2019: 16) and he would like to “use his luck to be white and privileged to take care of them” (Govoni 2019: 189)³⁵. He declined many prestigious jobs or education offers to answer to ‘his call’ and ‘to dedicate his life to the Mission’. The words ‘gift’, ‘heart’ and ‘love’ are the engines for his actions. Balancing between a patronizing approach and a deep feeling of tenderness and attachment, he believes that only by showing that you care, it is possible to really change a life. In

³⁴ In Appendix 1, one of the interviewee, C., provides an account of her volunteering period in Mazi.

³⁵ Translated from Italian by the author.

Govoni's experience (2018), he highlights the emergence of the 'white saviour complex' in his predeparture attitude towards volunteering and at the initial stages of his period abroad: "pensavo che essere un volontario sotto l'ala protettrice di una grande organizzazione internazionale mi rendesse, a priori, una sorta di eroe. Pensavo che mi avrebbero amato semplicemente perchè europeo. Mi sbagliavo." (Govoni 2018: 15). The good intentions and the idea of being useful at any cost are also part of the initial volunteer's background: "In quanto volontario, pensavo di avere il diritto di entrare nelle case, le porte spalancate, e farmi largo nelle vite della gente armato delle mie buone intenzioni e del mio straripante entusiasmo" (Govoni 2018: 15).

1.2.2 Representing the volunteer imagination and experience

When I decided to apply for a volunteering period to some NGOs in the Aegean area, many of them did not have very strict criteria for welcoming new volunteers³⁶. Like in Italy (Muehlebach 2011: 73), where every volunteer has to be covered by insurance, in Greece, NGOs working in the field of migration, international protection and social integration are monitored through their compulsory registration in a national registry held by the Ministry of Migration Policy since 2016 (EU Commission website)³⁷. Every volunteer working in an NGO on the Greek territory has to be registered and notified to the competent office. Earlier attempts to regularized the volunteer activity can be traced back to February 2015, when a municipality in Athens created three administrative records, namely the Office of Volunteerism, the registry of volunteers and the body of volunteers (Rozakou 2016b).

For the purpose of my thesis and in order to better have an overview of the NGOs operating in the field and how volunteers approached them in social media, I followed some Facebook groups that specifically target volunteering with border-crossers in

³⁶ See for further details Chapter 3.

³⁷ Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/governance/greece>

Greece such as “Information Point for Volunteers on Samos”³⁸ and “Information Point for Lesvos Volunteers”³⁹.

Concerning training opportunities for volunteers, it is noteworthy Cédric Fettouche’s idea, originally posted in the abovementioned Facebook groups and developed on its blogpage Opoïesis⁴⁰. This idea was born in his free time after working for two years in several NGOs in Lesvos, operating in the field of border-crossers, with the aim to overcome the predeparture and on-the-job lack of information of volunteers (Fettouche’s blog)⁴¹. It consists of a 5-day newsletter that he created himself specifically for volunteers in Lesvos but, as he mentioned, it could be applicable to all volunteers in Greece given the fact that the training has only a specific part for Lesvos. He offers an overview on the history and principles of humanitarianism, the ‘do no harm approach’, information about volunteer’s well being, and some hints about Greece and in particular, Lesvos. As Fettouche and Knott (2018) agreed, the predeparture and on-the-job training seems to be not sufficient for the volunteer to fully understand the situation where s/he is going to operate in. Before arriving to Samos, the then Sandstone volunteer coordinator emailed me some flyers and documents that would introduce me to the work of the NGO: the Volunteer Code of Conduct, Guidelines on Children interactions, the Volunteer Fundraising Pack and the Volunteer Introduction for Samos. The abovementioned documents will be further analysed in Chapter 3 and can be found in Appendix 4. Nevertheless, many volunteers that I encountered did not receive such documents and they were not really aware of some basic notions on the Mediterranean situation or the asylum procedure.

On the day of my arrival in Samos, it was Sunday morning, the coordinator of Sandstone, picked me up from the airport and drove me straight to a parking lot close to the seacoast, where more or less fifteen to twenty volunteers, including Nicolò Govoni, wearing vests from several NGOs, were getting ready with trashbags and gloves to pick

³⁸ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/766219550168182/>

³⁹ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/informationpointforlesvosvolunteers/>

⁴⁰ Available at <https://www.opoïesis.com/ressources/the-5-days-training-for-lesvos-volunteers/>. In this blog Fettouche, a French student who has been working for a number of NGOs in Lesvos, created also a very detailed “one-sheet-poster” map about NGOs and services in Lesvos.

⁴¹ In her research, where she also volunteered in Lighthouse Relief and Drops in the Ocean – which is present on the island of Samos, too – some NGOs on the islands of Lesvos and Chios, Knott (2018) reports that there was no selective process for the potential volunteers and that the training “consisted of a brief orientation (given by other volunteers in the case of Lighthouse, and by the coordinator after a few days of volunteering, in the case of Drops) and an 8-h internet-based instructional course on humanitarianism for Lighthouse volunteers” (Knott 2018: 357).

up the trash along the coastal area of Vathy bay. She rapidly explained to me that several NGOs were taking part in the initiative of the Municipality as a sign of collaboration and active involvement. There was no training that day, but the volunteers that arrived in the weekend were asked to be at the meeting point early on Monday morning for the training. It lasted between twenty to forty minutes, giving a general overview on the NGO Sandstone, its objectives and some guidelines of conduct for volunteers, such as avoiding going into the Jungle alone, without first discussing it with the field coordinator. “Should something had happened in that context and being the volunteers registered under the name of the NGO, it was important to have a responsible behaviour”, we were told by Sandstone’s field coordinator. When the field coordinator of another NGO in Samos explained to me how her organization was training volunteers – a two-day training without contact with border-crossers and where volunteers were instructed and updated on the situation of the Mediterranean area and specifically, about Samos – I realized that the procedure was really diversified, depending on the NGO taken into consideration. As Knott (2018) proposes, it is imperative improving and dedicating the right amount of time to train, in fact “further research is needed into the types of training that would successfully challenge volunteers to become more critically aware of their biases and privileges” and “to engage more ethically while abroad, but it may also to lead to broader transformations, by galvanizing volunteers to become more politically active and socially inclusive throughout their stay and upon their return home” (Knott 2018: 363).

In Govoni’s thoughts, as many more young European expats including myself, a conflictive relationship with their country of origin arises: “Amo la mia patria. Nonostante abbia seguito il cuore trasferendomi in India, dell’Italia amo l’arte, il cibo, la storia e soprattutto la letteratura. Lavorare come giornalista laggiù sarebbe il coronamento di un sogno [...] O Italia, madre splendida e malata, madre amorevole e alcolista, che mi ami di un amore tossico, abusivo, dolce – Italia, io ti amo, ma non affonderò con te” (Govoni 2018: 136-137). It is the country that shaped their identity, where the taste of food is different from any other food that you can get abroad, where family and old friends and acquaintances still live. However, they feel somehow incomplete or uncomfortable for some reasons, like in Govoni’s case, they do not find

good job opportunities, therefore they temporarily or permanently move abroad with their ‘portable’ and transnational identities. May, a successful corporate financial advisor in London and Syn, account manager in Berlin, did not know each other before, but both experienced a volunteering period in Sandstone for two weeks. They had already volunteered in other organizations and they shared a common ending. The Samos experience made them reevaluate their life choices and their priorities: as a consequence, at the time of the conversation, they were thinking to quit their well remunerated jobs to dedicate themselves to social projects in their own countries of residence, to something that could really satisfy them like the work in Samos. Like Govoni (2018) argues, “si è trattato solo di un capitolo della mia vita o della mia vita riassunta in un capitolo?”. What happens at the end of the volunteering experiences?⁴² Sometimes people feel very different from the person they were before as if what they lived completely changed their lives and way of seeing the world (Govoni 2018: 17).

In my interviews, like others have shown (Muehlebach 2011; Sandri 2018, 2019; Govoni 2019), volunteers particularly highlight the good relationships with other fellow volunteers and the intense bonds created during the time spent together. It was also usual, especially for ‘long-term volunteers’⁴³, experiencing some kind of distress due to the forced cohabitation and sociality with many people in the volunteer’s house (Malkki 2015). Since international voluntarism often takes place during summer, some volunteers enjoyed leisure activities such as dining out, clubbing, drinking, sunbathing and sightseeing as if it were a real holiday and the very fact that, up in the hill or one hundred meters away, families were sleeping on the ground did not bother them too much; others behaved in the same way as a pressure release valve, escaping the pretty harsh reality they were facing daily; others, like Govoni, experienced alternatively rage, shock, anxiety, depression, caused by the feeling of being useless and powerless in front of the injustice and the power games played by international actors on the lives of people. In this sense, a series of feelings emerge, a feeling of being crushed by the faceless management of the ‘refugee crisis’ and the consequent individual responsibility, that the volunteer develops, to make the difference, in the attempt to

⁴² I dedicated a question regarding future plans and projects after the volunteering period in my interviews in Samos and the answers will be examined in Chapter 3.

⁴³ Given the fact that the minimum and average period of stay of the volunteers on the island was two weeks, I define long-term volunteers those that remained for more than three weeks in a row.

change the system. Interestingly, for both the abovementioned situations the metaphor ‘drop by drop’ or ‘a drop in the ocean’ perfectly applies: the volunteer feels useless like a drop in the ocean, but at the same time it is only drop by drop that an ocean is made of, therefore every small action can make the real difference⁴⁴. Volunteers formed strong relationships not only with other fellow volunteers but with border-crossers too (Sandri 2018), especially with the so-called ‘community volunteers’, which were basically border-crossers – considered ‘trustworthy’ (but not too much)⁴⁵ by the organizations – who volunteered full-time in NGOs as translators or facilitators between the organisations and the fellow border-crossers. Sometimes ‘socialities of solidarities’ develop into virtual sociality when they both keep in touch through social media.

In contrast with the neoliberal fragmentation of the society, being part of a group, sharing ideas, commitments and a purpose very often reinforced the bonds among volunteers and border-crossers: “The emotional and personal connection between volunteers and refugees strengthened the volunteers’ sense of purpose, as they felt they had a responsibility towards their friends living in the camp. In some cases, these friendships were so strong that some of the volunteers and refugees considered each other as their ‘extended family’” (Sandri 2018: 76). Many volunteers were eager to have contacts and interactions with border-crossers, enjoying playing with children or wandering around the ‘Jungle’ and talking to people, immersing themselves in the real ‘refugee life’. Since part of the activities carried out by Sandstone were only concerning logistics and distribution management, volunteers were happy to spend some time ‘in the field’, having real face to face contacts. As a matter of fact, some of them felt that the work they were doing was not completely fulfilling their desire to be ‘useful’, what Malkki (2015: 8) calls “the neediness of the helper”, therefore planning to volunteer in a different NGO, in which they “would be more needed” (Knott 2018: 350), the next time⁴⁶ they will be go back to Samos: Mary, a Brazilian missionary-to-be living in Turkey, told me that she would have preferred to volunteer in the kitchens of some

⁴⁴ It is noteworthy how a Norwegian based NGO operating in the islands of Lesvos and Samos, among other locations, is called “A Drop in the Ocean”, metaphorically referring to the chance of a real transformation step by step, through everyday small practices of solidarity.

⁴⁵ Further explanations will be provided in Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Many volunteers did not exclude the opportunity to come back to the island to volunteer again since they felt there was so much to do and that volunteers will always be needed since the situation on the island was not believed to improve any time soon.

NGOs on the island that provided daily meals to border-crossers in their facilities; Tomhood, a Political Science graduate working in Florence in his family-run shop, after feeling disappointed about the (dis)organization of the NGO where he was volunteering in, spent some time in Sandstone and, in the meantime, asked if he could join for a few weeks the volunteers of Mazi school; ultimately his offer was declined because of the minimum period of stay would have required more than one month. One of Sandstone's coordinator many times got angry and yelled at border-crossers, who were waiting to be received for the 'distribution' of clothes, because they asked for different items from the ones they received or for a specific item and not the whole bag assigned to everyone. She expected border-crossers to appreciate in an orderly and grateful manner every time that a distribution of items was taking place. This idea was part of the mantra "something is better than nothing", which was actually many times challenged by the very same border-crossers. As a matter of fact, it should be challenged especially by the humanitarian actors given the fact that this justification is at the heart of many past inefficient development programs and "allows people to believe that doing anything is reasonable" and that "such convictions, when combined with ethnocentrism, Othering and egocentrism, can lead to interactions with asylum seekers that are not only insulting but maybe also be demoralizing and dehumanizing, thus potentially doing significantly more harm than would doing nothing at all" (Knott 2018: 362). A couple of examples will give an idea of other 'unmet' expectations both from humanitarians and border-crossers. For instance, when the NGO discovered that the clothes distributed during opening times were resold inside the Jungle or in the premises of the entrance of the barbed-wired fence of the hotspot. Or again, when a community volunteer that was working with another NGO on the island, obtained the black trash bag distributed during 'men distribution week' and he referred that the clothes he received were randomly put together, old styled and no one would wear such items⁴⁷. To this extent, these 'unmet' expectations can be included in the benevolent state-centred perspective:

⁴⁷ It is noteworthy the episode narrated by a volunteer who was not working in Sandstone with regard to the distribution of items. A community volunteer, who was working in the same organization of the volunteer, told him that he would have preferred to throw away the clothes that Sandstone had provided for him instead of wearing them. He felt embarrassed to wear those clothes. The clothes were chosen in the Shop by the volunteers randomly, just following the indication of the size provided by the border-crosser at the registration desk, so most of the times the bag contained very randomised styles, colors and type of clothing according to the availability of that day.

Con la *logica della gratitudine* s'intende invece la tendenza dei servizi (e dei loro operatori) a considerare l'utente come oggetto di un atto di carità, che, in quanto tale, dev'essere accettato per quello che è e non può essere discusso né affrontato conflittualmente nei suoi elementi etici e normativi: gli operatori - in conformità con la logica tecnocratica istituzionale - finiscono per subordinare priorità e diritti alle necessità organizzative e a un criterio di merito la cui pertinenza appare quanto meno discutibile. Secondo questa impostazione, oscillante fra un pensiero burocratico "in emergenza" e il moralismo disciplinare, le risorse messe a disposizione non costituirebbero un diritto fondamentale delle persone, ma un'elargizione benevola, la cui concessione sarebbe pertanto sottoposta a condizioni (Rainisio, Riva 2017: 188).

At this point, it is interesting to notice the reversal of hierarchies between the volunteer and the border-crosser, when the former is faced with the rejection or the dissatisfaction of the 'gift' provided to the latter.

Rozakou's experience with solidarians (2012; 2016b; 2018), underlined the challenge posed by this new type of volunteerism based on an anti-hierarchical and anti-bureaucratic socialities with border-crossers – which are reconstituted as hosts (though disputable ones) and political subjects – nonetheless, relations of patronage embedded in the model of the hierarchical Greek hospitality ultimately still prevailed even in the new volunteerism.

Drawing these polychromatic portraits on my volunteering experience in Samos, I would like to shed more light on the European and Greek perspectives of the refugee management and on international voluntarism practices in the following chapters. By doing so, it is relevant:

To re-examine our cherished, abstract notions of the 'human community' on which current interventions are based in favour of a 'historicizing and politicizing humanism' in which people are connected through history as opposed to a 'human essence'. This would allow us to challenge current forms of humanitarian intervention [...] taking place along Europe's southern border, as elsewhere, [that] are currently helping to preserve the status quo by relieving the state of its duty to preserve asylum seekers' minimal physical existence, therein deferring the necessary structural transformations that could support their self-determination (Knott 2018: 363).

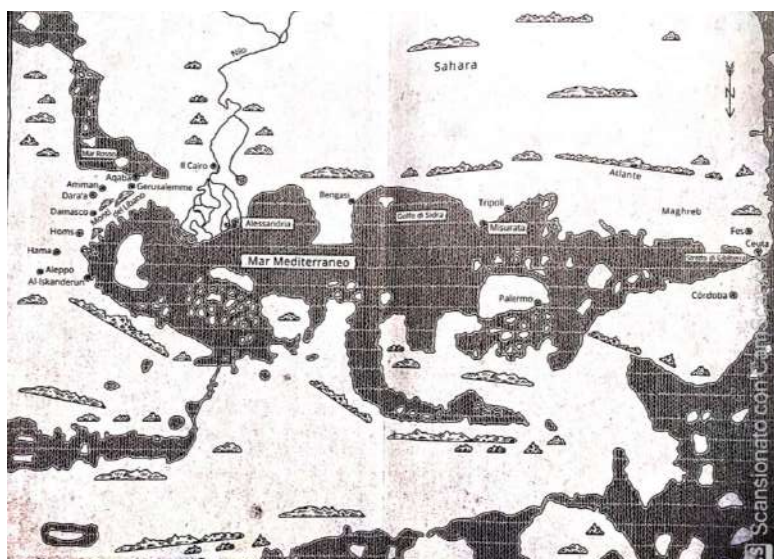
Moreover, I will hopefully pass along the message, which was really well conveyed in Papi's TEDtalk (2013) when she exclaimed: "We need to stop sympathy volunteering and start empathy learning!". As a matter of fact, before undertaking any travel, especially one that involves international voluntarism, it is pivotal learning and understanding the context of operation, otherwise a great piece would be missing from

the bigger picture, in the attempt to avoid unintentional actions and irreversible consequences.

2. The humanitarian governance of (inter)national authorities and NGOs in the Eastern Mediterranean

2.1 A fortress called Europe: the ‘Mediterranean refugee crisis’

There is a sort of poetic way in how Leogrande (2017) calls the Mediterranean in relation to the migrants’ “Big Journey” towards Europe. He compares it to a cemetery, a slab that unites Africa with Europe, a theater of a low-intensity global war. Moreover, the Mediterranean is threatening, enormous, ungovernable, incomprehensible and ultimately deaf to the shouts of migrants navigating through the waves (Leogrande 2017).



Map 1 - Al Idrisi's Mediterranean (Il Paese del Sale e delle Stelle, 2019)

At the beginning of the book *Il Paese del Sale e delle Stelle* (in its original English version, *The Map of Salt and Stars*), “Bahr al-Sham (Syrian Sea)” or “Bahr al-Rum

(Roman Sea)⁴⁸ has been represented in the map shown above, which was created by the Arab geographer Muhammad al Idrisi in 1154 and incorporated in the popular *Tabula Rogeriana*, a wordly famous description and illustration of the world as it was known in those years. The spectator is looking towards the coasts of North Africa with South at the top of the map. Compared to the maps that we are used to, North and South are upside-down. This is to remind that representations of places, people and objects are subject to the personal position of the designer of those representations. To a certain extent, one of the many Mediterranean, that we encounter in the literature of migration, is illustrated as the violent and ambiguous epicentre of the ‘European refugee crisis’:

C’è ancora un altro Mediterraneo, quello all’orizzonte del quale spuntano barche e gommoni carichi di africani diretti verso la sponda nord. Quei barconi e il loro carico suscitano negli abitanti dei paesi europei reazioni contraddittorie, dalla pietà alla paura, dalla solidarietà al calcolo alla repulsione; sono occasioni per mettere in scena convinzioni e posizioni politiche, teorizzazioni razziali, sensibilità umanitarie, competenze giuridiche e socio-antropologiche; alla fine, poichè bene o male gli immigrati o almeno una parte di essi entrano e cominciano a vivere e a lavorare “con noi”, tutto sommato e paradossalmente proprio quei barconi e il loro carico contribuiscono, più del turismo o della circolazione delle informazioni ufficiali a costruire uno spazio di incontri, scambi, circolazione di corpi, parole e cose. Scambi sempre asimmetrici e spesso iniqui, ma concreti, empiricamente esperibili. L’esperienza quotidiana di questi scambi è la sola opportunità (per le persone di buona volontà) di constatare personalmente che lo scontro non è inevitabile; e che quando avviene non è necessariamente “scontro di civiltà”. In questa complessa situazione, comunque, il Mediterraneo sembra essersi appannato come simbolo; sembra che sia meno frequente l’uso del Mediterraneo come immagine di valori, in presenza di una situazione internazionale ambigua, contraddittoria, violenta e generatrice di lutti tremendi non ancora elaborati (Signorelli 2007: 329).

The image of a highly visible and patrolled Mediterranean, portrayed by the military rescue operations and the media, must be deconstructed: a full surveillance and transparency in the Search and Rescue (SAR) missions or about the numbers of crossings on dinghies do not reflect the reality (Marchetti, Pinelli 2017), which is far more complex and flexible than the one spectacularized. In fact, the obsession with statistics and collection of data unveils the spectacularization of the borders, exposing the current migration movements as if they were a novelty, instead of focusing in the creation of a comprehensive understanding of the meaning behind the bare numbers.

The so-called ‘European refugee crisis’ has been managed in a context of an “uncomfortable symbiosis of diverse and antagonistic actors” (Rozakou 2017a: 103),

⁴⁸ Arabic names for the Mediterranean Sea.

involving NGOs, IGOs, EU agencies, local citizens, grassroots initiatives and international volunteers. In the ‘European refugee crisis’ expression, I used single quotation marks to underline both the ambiguity of the a priori assumption of considering it a new phenomenon and the Eurocentric approach behind it. As already consolidated in the academia, the biggest migration ‘flows’ are, in fact, following a South-South direction, instead of a South-North ‘invasion’ depicted by the media. Therefore, the arrivals by sea or on foot in Europe are just a very small portion of greater migration movements⁴⁹.

A wave of crisis has been investing at different rhythms, but with chain repercussions, the global, the supranational and the national level. What if the one that has been investing the European Union is not merely a ‘migration crisis’ or a ‘refugee crisis’, but instead ‘a crisis of migration policies’ currently in place? While in the former expressions there is an emphasis on the ‘original sin’ committed by migrants in trespassing irregularly, the latter could draw attention on the governments’ accountability in the emergence of new areas of crisis or the worsening of already existent areas. Campesi (2017) reflects on this issue and logically elaborates the reasonable conclusion of the strategic deployment, at the EU and national level, of sophisticated armoured shields, based on legal grounds, to deflect the arrivals:

L’instabilità geopolitica ha certamente alimentato l’attuale emergenza umanitaria, ma il sistema europeo d’asilo non è sembrato all’altezza della sfida, facendo emergere tutte le contraddizioni di un modello concepito più per la limitazione dei movimenti di chi fugge da guerre, disordine civile e persecuzioni, che per rispondere alle esigenze di protezione umanitaria e di accoglienza. Negli ultimi decenni, a fronte di una retorica affermazione dell’inviolabilità del diritto d’asilo, si è registrata la tendenza a restringere le possibilità di accedere alla protezione internazionale da parte di profughi e rifugiati. Ciò è stato realizzato tramite politiche che si muovono in due direzioni differenti: da un lato, si limita l’accesso

⁴⁹ Leogrande (2017: 33) reflects on the statistics and numbers of “irregular” arrivals at the Italian shores enlarged by the media: “Se sul lungo periodo si confronta il numero degli sbarchi con il totale degli arrivi in Italia, cioè anche con gli arrivi via terra o via aereo, e con i viaggi di persone in possesso di un permesso di lavoro o di studio, ci si rende conto che sui barconi è giunto meno del 10 per cento dei migranti. Nonostante l’impennarsi dell’attenzione mediatica in occasione di naufragi più gravi, nonostante essi siano ormai associati da tutte le destre xenofobe europee al rischio di un’invasione, gli sbarchi non costituiscono la maggioranza degli approdi. Tuttavia il punto essenziale è un altro. Gli arrivi via mare sono un sismografo che segnala l’esplosione di una vasta area del mondo. I 170.000 migranti giunti in un anno, per due terzi profughi siriani ed eritrei, non vanno paragonati con il numero degli arrivi complessivi, quanto con quello dei siriani e degli eritrei che rimangono imbrigliati nel nulla. Quanti sono tutti quelli che non riescono nemmeno ad arrivare alla riva sud o est del Mediterraneo per poi imbarcarsi? Anche in questo caso, i 170.000 sono meno del 10 per cento. Forse anche meno del 5 per cento. Che dico, non saranno più del 2 per cento di chi resta nei campi profughi in Sudan, Libano o Giordania, di chi si perde nel deserto o muore sotto le bombe”.

all'accoglienza attraverso procedure di selezione, classificazione e discriminazione tra "autentici" e "falsi" rifugiati che fanno in gran parte leva su provvedimenti di limitazione della libertà personale o di circolazione dei richiedenti; dall'altro, si cerca di impedire ai potenziali profughi o rifugiati di raggiungere la giurisdizione degli Stati in cui intendono chiedere protezione attraverso una serie di politiche di non-entrée o di gestione extraterritoriale dei controlli di frontiera. Il sistema europeo di asilo è un esempio tipico di tale modello di politica restrittiva essendo fondamentalmente ispirato dall'obiettivo di confinare quanto più possibile i richiedenti ai margini d'Europa, nei paesi terzi o al limite nei paesi di primo arrivo, limitando la loro possibilità di raggiungere lo spazio europeo o muoversi al suo interno in cerca di protezione (Campesi 2017: 1).

The concept of Fortress Europe, explained by Ricucci (2015: 63-64) as "un'Europa libera all'interno, ma in realtà solo per i suoi cittadini nazionali, sempre più impenetrabile dall'esterno (legalmente) e attraversata al suo interno da umori xenofobi e da atteggiamenti discriminanti e discriminatori", echoes Malik (2018)'s words full of disdain for how the European Union is managing the migration in the Mediterranean:

L'uso di gas lacrimogeni contro i migranti al confine messicano da parte di Donald Trump ha scatenato più proteste delle politiche dell'Unione Europea che hanno causato la morte di migliaia di persone. I tentativi dell'Unione di ostacolare chi salva i migranti in mare vanno avanti da tempo. In passato questa condotta avrebbe provocato lo sdegno generale. Oggi suscita una scrollata di spalle. La fortezza Europa ha costruito una barriera non solo fisica, ma anche emotiva. I migranti non sono più considerati degli esseri umani, ma solo rifiuti galleggianti da tenere lontani dalle spiagge europee. Le autorità sono diventate così cieche nella loro ossessione per l'immigrazione da aver dimenticato i doveri più basilari verso gli altri esseri umani. A quanto pare qualche migliaio di africani e asiatici annegati ogni anno sono un prezzo che vale la pena pagare per placare le polemiche interne sull'immigrazione (Malik 2018: 37).

In this context, an important tool has been put in place as a presupposition for giving birth to the hotspot approach, that is the European Agenda on Migration. Its main objective was providing a response to the 2015 migration crisis. Going into specifics, the Agenda was ideated for smoothing the angles of the reception systems of Italy and Greece, both countries at the forefront of the 'European migration crisis'. This idea brought to light the detaining/restraining facilities that are worldly known as hotspots, actuating a sort of repressive reception system (Campesi 2017) or a partially repressive 'governmentality', where, instead of violent measures, indirect modalities of surveillance of the mobility are applied (Tazzioli 2017). This model was based on the suspicion, on the need to register, collect and dissect data by mug shooting faces and digital prints, ultimately to keep under radar and control the migrant human body.

Indeed, the European policies priority so far seemed to be related to more a matter of internal security within the EU borders than creating the opportunities for granting the right to apply for asylum or at least assuring the fundamental principles, built around the rhetoric of human rights, that is very strongly developed in the EU institutions (Campesi 2017). The entire approach of the migration management so far seemed to aim at plugging holes in an already fractured system, instead of focusing in parallel on uprooting the causes behind what is called “crisis” and “emergency” (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005).

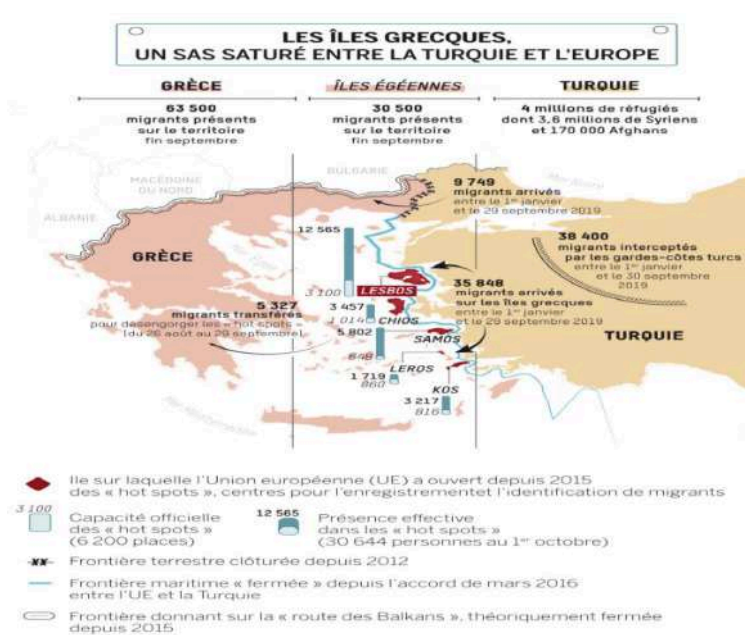
So, if Europe is a Fortress, where is the European solidarity? As a matter of fact, a large quantitative research regarding this topic has been carried out within the EU project TransSOL⁵⁰ (Lahusen, Grasso 2018). Focusing on a transnational concept of solidarity, it analyses with a hybrid perspective the responses of more than 16,000 people in 8 different countries. For what concerns Greece, the research, in contrast with the popular opinion among international volunteers with regard to the non involvement of the Greek population in solidarity initiatives, shows instead that they are particularly active in informal volunteering activities. This can be related to the Greek widespread distrust in institutions. The results also reveal that a European solidarity is still present despite the dangers of the recent strict policies, the rise in populism and the scepticism regarding the advantages of the EU membership:

Overall, the European citizenry cherishes solidarity as a private and public virtue. However, differences between the European people are considerable, particularly when comparing the high levels of voluntary engagement and political participation in northern Europe with the lower rates in the Mediterranean and Eastern European countries [...] European citizens tend to deliver in terms of voluntary engagement in time of crisis and emergency situations [...] Particularly Greek and Polish citizens (and to a lesser extent also Italians) reported high levels of participation in activities of support toward people within and outside their country, and these rates are close to – or even higher than – the levels of solidarity in the other, supposedly more active countries. This could reflect the situation of crisis, uncertainty and transition experienced in these countries (Lahusen, Grasso 2018: 253; 256).

⁵⁰ The EU project TransSOL stands for “European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis: Conditions, forms, role-models and policy responses”, funded in the EU Horizon 2020 program. The study is a “comparative dataset that would allow us to measure levels of solidarity among the member states’ citizenry and to help identify those social and political factors that might promote or inhibit solidarity both within the member states and across their borders” (Lahusen, Grasso 2018: 3).

2.2 Saturated Greece

Analogies have been drawn between Greece and inanimate objects, such as an overflowing container and a saturated⁵¹ double security door between the other EU Member States and Turkey⁵². These comparisons served the purpose to diminish Greece's international reputation and strategically project it as a defective country afflicted by poverty and debts: "In national and European public discourses, Greece is often criticized for its inadequate asylum practices, whether as an insufficient guardian of EU borders or as an inadequate host for newcomers. Hence, immigration and asylum have once again brought to the fore the country's geographical as well as historically symbolic location at the margins of Europe" (Rozakou 2012: 562).



Map 2 - Greece and the Aegean islands as a saturated double security door (source: Le Monde)

⁵¹ It is noteworthy how, in Macmillan Dictionary, the word 'saturated' is used in the following example: "The camps are completely saturated with refugees". <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/saturated>. These lexical choices in an online public dictionary convey specific understandings of the refugee and of the camp, producing and impacting the public with perceptions and imageries.

⁵² See news article Le Monde https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/11/20/la-grece-va-fermer-ses-trois-plus-grands-camps-de-migrants-pres-des-cotes-turques_6019881_3210.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook#Echobox=1574262073

The redistributive strict economic measures, adopted by the European Union regarding Greece, were signed under the international impression of a generous loan agreement⁵³; nonetheless, others saw it differently: “the memoranda of understanding (MoU) that Greece signed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank, and the EU Commission, the so-called Troika, in 2010 and 2011, as well as a new one in 2015 – bind the country to fiscal austerity measures that have contributed to the ongoing recession” (Rakopoulos 2015: 88). The everyday application of those policies abruptly struck the routines of Greek citizens, who felt betrayed, paternalized and subdued to a symbolic domination (Theodossopoulos 2016). In a very short period of time, Greece was facing an impoverished society, which brought the distrust against the political representatives⁵⁴ into the *agoras* (squares), expressed with public demonstrations, and at the same time showed a social cohesion, radiated through the rise of solidarity initiatives in order to fight the times of crisis and dispossession (Serntedakis 2017).

Accompanying the so-called migration crisis that Greece has been living since many years, the asylum crisis greatly contributed to the quasi-collapse of the entire Greek administrative system, which has been under pressure since long before the increasing

⁵³ In relation to the topic of fiscal solidarity among EU Member States, the large dataset gathered by Lahusen-Grasso (2018) found out that to the question “Do you support the EU to provide funds to countries that have been dealing with economic difficulties in paying their debts?”, the following conclusions have been drawn: “While the population in countries that have mastered the financial and economic crisis are more sceptical toward measures of fiscal solidarity, the countries affected more strongly by these crises tend to stress more overly the fact that EU member states should conform to one of their values, namely, interstate help and solidarity. This contrast is even more evident when considering that the share of respondents fully agreeing with measures of fiscal solidarity is very low everywhere, with an exception of Italy and Greece. In regard to EU funds in support of refugees, we find very similar results” (Lahusen, Grasso 2018: 258-259).

⁵⁴ The research, conducted by the non-profit organization More in Common and published in May 2019, shows that the majority of the Greek population revealed signs of deep dissatisfaction, distrust and little confidence in their government or the institutions. An impressive 82% of the respondents felt that “the economy is rigged to benefit the rich and powerful” (Dixon et al., 2019:8) and talked about globalisation, traditional parties, politicians and the Greek society with great pessimism. With regard to the European Union and the migration management, the majority of respondents (77%) felt frustrated and agreed with the thought that Greece has been abused by other EU Member States (Dixon et al., 2019: 10). The study involved a representative pool of 2000 adults aged 18-64 by means of phone interviews. Moreover, three focus groups have been conducted, employing a population clustering segmentational analysis. The abovementioned findings are available at https://www.moreincommon.com/media/tinlenc/0535-more-in-common-greece-report_final-4_web_lr.pdf

of migration 'flows' in the Mediterranean (Rozakou 2016a, 2019). This sub-crisis is part of the entire shacking grounds on which the European asylum system has been built on.

Although recognizing some positive sides, which emergend in the conversation with D. "The EU is an important and powerful structure [...] I still believe in the EU, I have many advantages being a member of the European Union"⁵⁵, among international volunteers, the rhetorical frustrated questions with negative connotations "Where is the Greek state in all of this?", "Where is the European Union?" and "Where is the UNHCR?" resonate everyday like echoes in the streets. There seems to be a triple delegation of responsibilities regarding the refugee response to several (inter)national authorities. The volunteers thought that the state non intervention was strategically planned for preventing more arrivals. In this sense, Sandri (2018) tries to draw attention to the backstage dynamics of it: "this institutional abandonment and intentional indifference" can be understood in terms of "violent inaction, a form of structural violence and a means of control perpetrated through inaction" (Sandri 2018: 70). Pallister-Wilkins (2016) approaches this topic by pointing out that the presence of humanitarian organizations in the hotspots evidently stands for "a refusal and/or abrogation of responsibility by the Greek state and the European Union for those they insist come under their control" (Pallister-Wilkins 2016: 4). In this sense, Malighetti (2014) intervenes in the matter, underlying the increasing important role taken by the NGOs from the public sector:

Negli ultimi venticinque anni, i meccanismi dell'aiuto internazionale hanno contribuito a indebolire la sovranità statali e a delegittimare i poteri pubblici e la nozione stessa di politiche pubbliche. [...] le ONG hanno assunto un ruolo crescente di rappresentanza, partecipando a importanti processi decisionali [...] hanno agito altresì come una rete autonoma dagli Stati, fondate su forme di diplomazie non governative parallele, consolidate attraverso il riconoscimento delle Nazioni Unite (Malighetti 2014: 10-11).

The abovementioned process can be summed up in the concepts of "NGOfication and IGOfication of EU migration management" (Kalir, Rozakou 2016: 2). To this extent, the volunteer Aborisen Canarii suggested the indispensable need for the civil society to be organized through NGOs, such as Sandstone, and hoped for an increasing

⁵⁵ Interview with D. (female, 24, Germany).

development of the third sector and the humanitarian assistance on the island, which he believed to constitute a real solution to the absence of the institutions⁵⁶. In relation to this, Pallister-Wilkins (2016) urges for another reading of the situation: “Humanitarianism can never be seen as a solution to the control enacted by the hotspots. It is not a political solution, only an emergency response to the structural conditions created through the spatio-temporal architecture of the hotspots that works to modulate life in particular ways (Pallister-Wilkins 2016: 7).

Similarly, Rozakou reported a transition in the volunteers’ expectations in Lesbos:

In my encounters, I noticed that the exasperated question had also changed. It was no longer the state that was absent but the UNHCR. ‘Where is the UNHCR?’ people would ask in frustration and in vain. This rhetorical question reflected a shift in authority and also in the conceptualization of the situation. The UNHCR was identified as the main agent that coordinated humanitarian organizations, cooperated with grassroots groups and was in direct collaboration with the local and national Greek authorities (Rozakou 2017a: 103).

Volunteers also expressed anger in relation to both the EU and the UN involvement and management of the situation on the island:

Me he dado cuenta de la mala organización que está haciendo la Unión Europea en cuanto a migración y [...] cómo se vulneran los derechos fundamentales [...] tenía una idea equivocada de cómo la Unión Europea estaba gestionando esta situación, veo que hay una falta de control total eehm aquí las personas no importan lo que importa es el grupo yyy la gestión que se hace aquí de las personas es nefasta. [...]
Estoy enfadado con lo que están haciendo la Naciones Unidas [...] por el tema del los menores tanto acompañados cuanto no acompañados cuya cuestión es nefasta⁵⁷.

Another volunteer, ThommyMayo expresses her anger in relation to how the European Union leaves alone each nation to deal with the migration “issues” in their own countries and focuses more on economic aspects of the situation, on numbers and statistics and less on a more humane management and social engagement:

It’s the job of the EU and not only Greece to assure these people a safe home. [...] The EU has its priorities in the wrong places [...] I think here in the far away and privileged lands of Europe we tend to forget that these people are really just people⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Interview with Aborisen Canarii (male, 36, Spain).

⁵⁷ Interview with Aborisen Canarii (male, 36, Spain).

⁵⁸ Interview with ThommyMayo (female, 18, Switzerland).

I recall that similar questions were posed by independent international volunteers, during the interviews that I conducted in May 2016 in an informal refugee settlement at the Greek-Macedonian border. At that time, the paradoxical asylum system expected border-crossers to apply for asylum through a Skype interview. Undoubtedly, living in a tent in the perimeter of a gas station was not the ideal condition to have access to an Internet connection. If this issue was replicated for thousands of people, the effectiveness of the bureaucratic system in place at that time was undoubtedly unreasonable.

The weak trust in the UNHCR is mirrored in Govoni's words (2019), too. The official UNHCR logo can be seen in many wax-coated tarpaulins and other items, that are distributed by members of the UN organization in refugee settlements in Greece. Being that visible, Govoni thinks of them like a mere marketing strategy of a idle rotten bureaucratic system: "L'Organizzazione significa influenza. L'Organizzazione significa potere. L'Organizzazione sta tradendo la fiducia dei profughi di Samos" (Govoni 2019: 140). To this extent, the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), last updated in 2019, reaffirmed the states's prime responsibility of refugee management and highlighted the UNHCR mandate and role of leadership and coordination. In terms of practical operations, the UNHCR is accountable in eleven main areas: preparedness, advocacy, strengthening national capacity, delivery, coordination, participation, resource mobilization, broadening of the support base, monitoring and reporting, prevention and solutions⁵⁹.

If I had to compare the migration management in the Mediterranean to a battery, I would visualize it as fully overcharged with an excessive manifestation of sovereign power.

Being the Eastern EU frontier, Greece represents one of the entry points planned in the migrants' journey, to reach the North of Europe. Covering more than 131,000 square kilometres, the Hellenic Republic hides a number of potential routes for entering in the EU. Port towns, like Patrasso, or the Evros river, which separate the EU from Turkey have seen many successful and failed attempts to cross the border. Along with the abovementioned entry points, there are the touristic Aegean islands:

⁵⁹ For a detailed explanation on the UNHCR role in refugee response see https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/38270?lang=en_US

Per quanto l'Europa possa erigersi a fortezza, la Grecia orientale è fatta di tanti isolotti. Impossibile controllarli tutti. Anche se meno appariscente del mare a sud di Lampedusa, questa frontiera spugnosa è una delle principali porte di accesso all'Europa. [...] Frontex ammette che, dopo una flessione di un paio d'anni, sono aumentati nettamente gli ingressi non controllati attraverso le isole dell'Egeo. Tuttavia, anche se è relativamente facile entrare in Grecia, come sanno bene tutti i migranti, è molto più difficile uscirne. E questo per almeno due motivi. Il primo è che la principale via di fuga negli ultimi dieci anni è il porto di Patrasso: solo una piccola parte delle decine di migliaia di migranti che ogni anno entrano in Grecia riesce a saltare su un traghetto senza farsi scoprire. Il secondo è rappresentato, ancora una volta, dal Regolamento di Dublino. Tutto ciò ha creato in Grecia un effetto imbuto perverso. Chi entra vorrebbe andar via, ma intanto ingrossa le file che si infoltiscono di giorno in giorno a pochi metri dal porto di Patrasso o in altri luoghi di transito. [...] L'effetto imbuto, unito alla crisi, ha fatto dell'intera Grecia una frontiera ribollente. E di Alba Dorata⁶⁰ una tanica di benzina vicina alle fiamme. Pronta a scoppiare (Leogrande 2017: 236-237).

The abundant arrivals of border-crossers to the shores of the the Aegean islands, that were first managed by ordinary local citizens, were progressively accompanied by other actors: “Along with state actors, the ‘migration crisis’ and its governance brought along an array of state, supra-state and non-state actors. At the same time, the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea and the Greek mainland became sites of humanitarian interventions by international and local humanitarian organizations as well as independent volunteers and solidarians” (Rozakou 2019: 70). The Aegean islands are considered, quoting Cabot (2014), the doorstep of Europe, the entrance of the continental European Union and as such, they are the beginning of the notorious ‘Balkan route’, which has paved the way for the movement of thousands of migrants in the last decade.

“In 2012 the [Greek] government implemented a ‘closed hospitality’ policy, which brought about the establishment of first-reception and detention centres all over the country” (Serntedakis 2017: 87), along with an invisibility policy towards migrants and refugees in general (Rozakou 2012), mirrored in the delays and shortcomings in the asylum system. An example of the layers and differentiated practices at the local level in the migration management in Greece is provided in the following account that specifically concerns the situation in Lesbos:

Apart from the Moria hotspot, there are the following camps and shelters for vulnerable groups in the island of Lesbos: the self-organized PIKPA camp (run since 2012 by local citizens' groups and international volunteers), Kara Tepe “hospitality center” (run by municipality of Lesbos with the assistance of numerous NGOs) and the Mantamdos

⁶⁰ Alba Dorata, in English Golden Dawn, is the neofascist Greek political party that in a number of occasions carried out physical and verbal attacks to migrants. In 2012 national elections, the party reached the quorum for entering in the Parliament (Leogrande 2017).

temporary camp for minors (run by NGOs). Small numbers of vulnerable groups are also hosted in temporary shelters and hotels in the town of Mytilene (Kalir, Rozakou 2016: 11).

2.3 Towers of the Fortress: the hotspot approach in Greece

When volunteers talk about migration management, they made very often accountable the European Union, which was generally called also Europe as a synonym for the whole supranational political and economic organization. A personified Europe, that is supposed to have feelings, to be humane, efficient, democratic and to remember its origin as a peaceful union of countries, say, a body created for preventing wars and destructions among nations. On the contrary, according to the majority of volunteers, as previously mentioned, there seems to be an increasing distrust in the European institutions and their mandate in managing the “humanitarian emergency” in the Mediterranean. The EU is perceived as responsible for a number of reasons and many of its references bring negative connotations: “Che Europa è quella in cui i politici hanno i vitalizi ma i richiedenti asilo muoiono di sete?” (Govoni 2019: 201), “l’Europa volta lo sguardo” (Govoni 2019: 291), “Sono venuti a casa nostra, in Europa, e l’Europa li ha rinchiusi in un lager” (Govoni 2019: 109), “la ‘grande’ Europa sta distruggendo la vita di migliaia di bambini” (Govoni 2019: 162).

It is noteworthy to remind that it is imperative to discern the heterogeneous varieties of the monolithic term ‘humanitarianism’ in the Mediterranean (Tazzioli 2017). One of these implies the two-fold role assumed by the geopolitical humanitarianism: “On the one hand, humanitarianism ends up enhancing and legitimizing policies and practices aimed at preventing migrants from embarking for Europe, thus excluding them from rights they would enjoy there. On the other hand, humanitarianism can enhance search and rescue operations and prompt relocation mechanisms, thus allowing migrants to reach European soil” (Cuttitta 2017:2). In this paragraph, I will focus on the exclusionary role of humanitarianism operated through the so-called hotspot approach.

In response to the ‘Mediterranean refugee crisis’, hotspots were officially established as emergency platforms of the European agencies, namely the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the EU Police Cooperation Agency (EUROPOL), and the EU Judicial Cooperation Agency

(EUROJUST), which represented the Migration Management Support Teams, a sort of temporary receivership of the national authorities. Their genuine aim was to safeguard the entrance to EU by hypernationalizing its realization.

The hotspot approach was indeed implemented – with really different measures in Italy and in Greece – since June 2015. In Italy, the facilities can be found in Taranto, Pozzallo, Lampedusa and Trapani.

According to Rozakou (2019), a EU hotspot is a facility that aims to manage human mobility through the EU external borders. The hotspot was programmatically oriented towards the ‘streamlining, absolute knowledge and control of populations on-the-move’, the relocation of refugees to other EU countries, and later, under the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, the confinement and readmission of asylum seekers to Turkey. Thus, the hotspot was proclaimed as the par excellence ‘sorting centre’ for ‘managing the undesirables’ ” (Rozakou 2019: 72).

With regard to Greece, some Aegean islands became the “guardians” of the Fortress Europe watching over the Southern border: Kos, Leros, Lesvos, Kios and Samos⁶¹. Their edging strategic geographical position, few kilometers from Turkey, represented the perfect location for staging the clear attempt to mark the Greek southern coastlines as EU perimeter, where the “migration flows” had to be detected, stopped and registered (Dijestelbloem, van der Veer, 2019).

The narration of the hotspot was built on the concept of a safe space – in contrast with the dangerous pathways offered by smugglers – where the act of caring turns into actions of control, therefore unveiling its contribution to a geopoliticization of humanitarianism (Mitchell, Sparke 2018). The approach was built also in a mixture of assertive and solidarity language regarding the needs and duties of the countries that are majorly invested by the “issue” (Campesi 2017). Through the hotspot humanitarianism, the European Union agreed on a border externalization of the southern periphery, transforming its initial claim, right some decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, into the unsafest of places, which chooses outsiders and insiders. Those who are allowed to remain become more vulnerable and are exposed to a series of difficult situations, such

⁶¹ For a list of the international and Greek authorities and humanitarian actors operating on the Aegean islands see <https://refugeeobservatory.aegean.gr/en/humanitarian-governance-0/>; for the list of refugee settlements in the Aegean see <https://refugeeobservatory.aegean.gr/en/centers-facilities>

as “dangers of chronic uncertainty, insecurity, and loss of family integrity, depression and widespread signs of hopelessness, poor food, sanitation, lighting and access to hygiene, insect bites, snakes, subject to harsh weather condition during winter or summer” (Mitchell, Sparke 2018: 8), including a certain degree of potential abusive practices and institutional violence by the authorities (Campesi 2017). The triple theoretical safeguarding goal – of the EU, of the EU values and of migrants – of the hotspots failed from the start in its practical implementation. The very same asylum system anchored in the many versions of the Dublin Regulation, was never constructed for the masses, but only as an exception to the regular route (Ticktin 2016). What if there is no safe and regular route planned out not only for asylum seekers and displaced people but also for those seeking a way out of poverty? This is a question that requires a deeper analysis of the whole migration system at the national and supranational level, where the hotspot is only the tip of the iceberg. In the presence of a strict visa regime, “Europe’s borders have become places of suffering and death (Pallister-Wilkins 2018: 86).

The hotspot approach works “as a technology of subcitizenship, enforcing a forceful reterritorialization of bodies and creating a powerful preemptive frontier effect” (Mitchell, Sparke 2018:7). The exposure to risk for migrants exponentially increased with the EU-Turkey Agreement on 18 March 2016. Again, an official promise to rein in the “flows” in the Mediterranean, by authorizing policies of selective forced returns and resettlements. The truth of matters consisted in an “indefinite waiting of refugees in camps in a condition of penal or parole-like (im)mobility surrounded by barbed wire and layers of fencing” (Mitchell, Sparke 2018:7) within the very European territory.

As the other side of the aquatic border management in the Mediterranean, the terrestrial hotspot represents the forced step where every migrant has to pass in order to get on with their migration journey. The parole-like regime, according to Leogrande (2017), is possibly worse than the actual detention for a number of reasons such as the uncertainty in relation to the ambiguous legislative and legal position of the persons in custody.

The institutional rhetoric of the Mediterranean humanitarian border is enhanced by the representation of the dangerous “wild world” originating outside of the civilized Europe “the wild world of the smugglers violating migrants’ human rights and driving

them to death; the wild world of the transit countries lacking capacities for humanitarian border management, and therefore in need of guidance and support, matches the image of non-Western countries and of their inhabitants as backwards and therefore lacking an adequate sense of humanity and human rights culture” (Cuttitta 2017: 6). Consequently, Europe is seen as the ‘good’ and moral compass that can assume a leading role in international migration management, while externalizing moral and legal accountability to outside actors.

A dominant position in the humanitarianization of the sea border has also been posed by the EU border agency Frontex and the Italian operations Mare Nostrum and Triton, contributing to further delocalize the border in international waters, while rescuing lives and preventing the ‘irregular’ entrance of people. The southern shift of the border created an abrupt transformation of a more extreme and mobile frontier, which is progressively moving further south⁶² (Leogrande 2017). Similarly to the hotspot narration, these two operations were conducted in the name of saving lives since the escalation of drownings in the Mediterranean in the attempt to reach the European coasts. Furthermore, they also constituted a tool for a constant border patrolment at sea (Keshavarz 2018): in fact, “humanitarian and securitarian discourses and practices are, indeed, not mutually exclusive but rather support each in enforcing and delocalizing the border” (Cuttitta 2017: 15). Like military missions, which took the role of the humanitarian who rescues lives, so can the humanitarian organizations respond with measures involving the surveillance of lives and forms of control (Marchetti, Pinelli 2017). Following the line of thought of Pallister-Wilkins (2016):

Humanitarian triage usually operates, like that undertaken in hospitals, in situations where the humanitarian and the emergency being responded to sets the limits of triage. Triage in hotspots is conditioned by and contingent on the hotspots themselves, their physical architecture and the systems of control, by the policing and border authorities implemented within them. The hotspots produce the emergency to which humanitarian intervention responds (Pallister-Wilkins 2016: 4).

⁶² See Leogrande (2017: 306) with reference to the Khartoum Process: “Si tratta di un accordo raggiunto dai paesi membri dell’Ue, i paesi del Corno d’Africa (Eritrea, Somalia, Etiopia, Gibuti) e alcuni paesi di transito dei migranti (Sud Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia, Kenya, Egitto). L’obiettivo è arginare l’emigrazione con la cooperazione degli stati da cui l’esodo parte e attraverso i quali si dirama. L’intento è quello di spostare la frontiera più a sud, creando nei paesi africani campi di raccolta ancora più grandi di quelli già esistenti. Il Processo di Khartoum vorrebbe erigere una serie di barriere ulteriori che depotenzino il flusso prima che questo giunga sulle coste libiche. Ma il paradosso è che, per erigere tali barriere, si cerca la collaborazione delle stesse dittature da cui i profughi scappano”.

The limitations of movements, which border-crossers have to respect once landed in the islands oblige them to remain on the island until their application is processed with a possibility of detention upon and after the arrival (Kalir, Rozakou 2016).

Rozakou (2019; 2017b) recollects the structure and the initial role of the hotspot in Lesvos:

Contrary to a common misconception (also among researchers) at the time, the Moria camp is not the hotspot. The hotspot is merely a unit of the Moria camp that also hosts a pre-removal immigration detention centre (operation under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Citizen's Protection) and the Asylum Service (an autonomous body of the Ministry of Migration Policy) supported by EASO (European Asylum Support Office) officers. Inside the hotspot itself an array of agencies operate: state (the First Reception Service under the Ministry of Migration, the Alien's Police Department under the Ministry of Citizen's Protection), supra-state (European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex); European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, Europol; and the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit, Eurojust), intergovernmental (International Organization of Migration, IOM; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR) and non-state ones (humanitarian organizations). Humanitarian organizations, municipal authorities and private corporations are involved in the everyday management of the Moria camp, mainly in administering the distribution of services and aid. Private companies, such as G4 which is contracted by EASO to provide security services, also operate inside the Moria camp (Rozakou 2019: 73).

And conveying the astatic robotic movements of people as if they were movable containers in the Rotterdam port:

Until January 2015, the Moria center served as a registration and classification point for vulnerable groups (mostly unaccompanied minors), deportable and nondeportable subjects. After registration, minors were transferred to reception centers, deportable people to pre-removal centers, and the nondeportable were released with an expulsion order. However, after January 2015, all border crossers were immediately released after registration; only detected minors were sent to open shelters (Rozakou 2017b: 43).

The geopolitics of hotspot humanitarianism was and still is challenged by several geosocial practices of solidarity on the Greek islands (Mitchell, Sparke 2018).

This geosocial practices intend to overcome the 'original sin', of which the border-crossers are accused of since the initial disembarkment on European soil, due to their irregular entrance. The process to extirpate this 'original sin' appears to be long and full of obstacles – like in Dante's journey – and of social inequalities to overcome. The border-crossers are expected to undertake a 'moral career' that will lead them to "deserve" a regular permit of residence (Marchetti, Pinelli 2017). From the very

beginning, not only try the migration policies to make border-crossers “stay still” by impeding or severely reducing the free movement across borders, but also they enact a ‘direct forced mobility’, through the repatriation and reclamation transfers (Marchetti, Pinelli 2017).

The power of the hotspot does not vanish in the disembarkment phase, but it seems to affect border-crossers in the long run, beyond physical frontiers and places, when we look at the process of categorization of the subjects (i.e. deserving or undeserving, fake refugees to expel etc.), that will shape the future of the person (Marchetti, Pinelli 2017).



Image 3 – View of Vathy bay (taken by author)

The islands play a central role in the reception system. Nonetheless, Athens remains the headquarters in the asylum process, where the commission holds the asylum hearings and procedures are handled (Cabot 2014). As mentioned before, for many years, the Greek state has been held responsible for a defected asylum system. For this reason, a body of reforms in the system has been set out since 2010: “In line with the EU Directive (2008/115/EU), the Asylum and Return Law of 2011 (3907/2011) initiated the reformation of the first reception, asylum and returns procedures, and formed the legal basis for migration and asylum policy in the following years. It is the

same law (3907/2011) that defines practices of voluntary repatriation and mandatory deportation” (Rozakou 2018:192).

Apparently, according to a public announcement in November 2019, Stelios Petsas, the Greek government’s spokesperson, hotspots on the Aegean islands are supposed to be gradually closed and substituted by “pre-departure centers”, which will apparently upgrade the current horrible living conditions of border-crossers with modular bungalows⁶³. In the meantime, the appalling conditions, that are shared by the hotspots’ “inhabitants” and described in the following paragraph, have been the object of the operations initiated by NGOs, IGOs and local solidarity initiatives.

2.3.1 The Hotspot of Samos

“L’hotspot è molto più di un luogo orrendo: non è un posto.
Quando vivi in un luogo inesistente smetti di esistere anche tu”
(Govoni 2019: 62).

Similarly to the conditions described by Pallister-Wilkins (2016) in Lesvos⁶⁴, Govoni (2019) denounces the abuse of power over the sovereign space of the Hotspot of Samos⁶⁵: “Il campo è gestito come in una dittatura [...] la Manager è appuntata dal governo greco e ha potere decisionale assoluto. Le atrocità dell’hotspot dipendono da lei” (Govoni 2019: 19).

Spotting the ‘thief of humanity’, according to Govoni (2019), from the skies, is no effort: the hotspot surface from the very green hill with series of grey/white containers built up like terraced vineyards; on the left and on the right hundreds of colourful tents and shelters.

⁶³ See news article in Keep Talking Greece <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2019/11/20/greece-pre-departure-centers-hotspots-moria/>

⁶⁴ See Pallister-Wilkins (2016) for the conditions inside the hotspot of Lesvos: “In Moria the provision of the most basic needs necessary for life have been continually contested and struggled for. From the ability to erect tents and/or containers to be used as medical facilities to the provision of clean drinking water and basic sanitation, to food distribution, all have been conditioned and limited by the Greek and European Union authorities who control the sovereign space of Moria” (Pallister-Wilkins 2016: 4).

⁶⁵ From now on, the capital letter in “Hotspot” will indicate the hotspot of Samos.

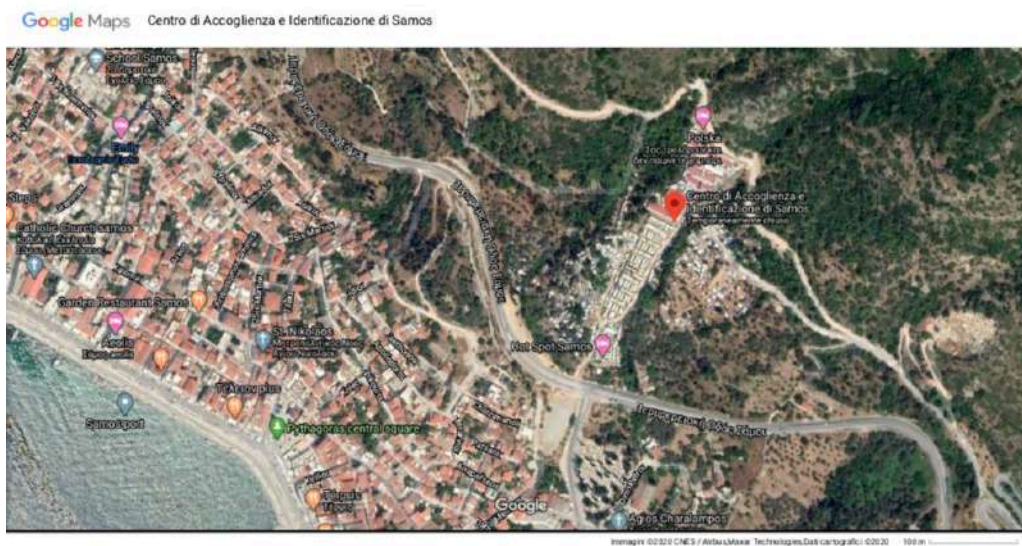


Image 4 - Satellite view of the Hotspot of Samos (source: Google Maps 2020)

Using a sensational and journalistic language that strike at the core of the issue, Govoni finely describes the island of Samos as a paradise with a dark heart (Govoni 2019)⁶⁶. In his opinion, the Greek economic crisis has severely targeted many commercial activities of the island. Its abandoned and empty buildings and “le tante scalinate mal illuminate” (Govoni 2019: 200), that surface in the city center are an example of the consequences of the ongoing crisis. For what concerns the local population, Govoni also reported discrimination against border-crossers with daily episodes of racism and intolerance mirrored by the brutality of police officers towards border-crossers they have under custody.

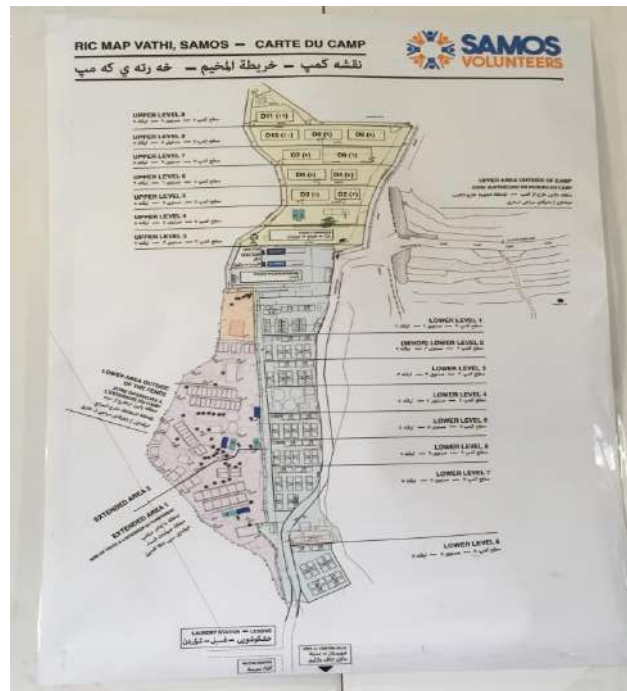
⁶⁶ In describing Samos, he refers to it as “un paradiso” with “un cuore tanto tetro” (Govoni 2019: 20).



Image 5 - On the way to the Shop. Hotspot in the background (taken by author)

In spite of the many deserted islands in Greece, Samos is one of the greenest. It is popular both for beaches of beautiful transparent water and for archeological sites. According to mythology, Samos was the island of the ancient god Hera, the mother of Gods and Zeus' wife. It is the eighth biggest island in Greece and is located in the Aegean Sea sitting just 1.5 km from Turkey.

The hotspot is situated in the northeast side of the island of Samos (Σάμος) in Vathy/Samos Town. Samos Town lies below Vathy Town and it is the capital of the municipality of Samos, the administrative centre of the island. It is included in the municipal unit of Vathy (Βαθύ), which develops along the amphiteatrical bay and it is also one of the oldest villages on the island with traditional houses and narrow cobblestoned streets. Samos Town/Vathy, which distance 14km from the international airport "Aristarchos", have both a port – where rescue boats, in the process of towing dinghies and transporting border crossers on their deck, land – and a ferry port on the opposite side of the bay. The Hotspot was built on the hill above Samos Town, just few minutes away from the city center, and its initial maximum capacity was intended for about 600 people.



Map 2 - An early version of the Hotspot by Samos Volunteers

Given the fact that, during the years, the number of people steeply increased, there was no available space left in the facility originally created. Therefore, as Map 3 by Samos Volunteers shows, the original area of the Hotspot was designed for a limited number of containers. Still, it was not enough for the constant “influx” of people that were landing and that they were not transferred to the mainland. So, since after the landing, many were not provided with refuge, border-crossers started to establish tents and temporary shelters, made out of trash materials, in the forest around the actual Hotspot, beyond the layers of fences and barbed wire, slowly creating the so-called Jungle. Despite the problematic name – which recalls a caotic environment lived by animals – according to Sandstone’s coordinators and from my own account of it⁶⁷, the

⁶⁷ My research did not include a study of the Jungle, so this is an approximate affirmation that will need further studies to be verified. I personally believe that the borders among nationalities were difficult to perceive from a non-inhabitant of the Jungle, but it is noteworthy how some communities were more organized than others in developing a sort of modular “studios” with abandoned materials found in the city center. Here it is possible to see a portion of the Jungle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96k5HKmw8I4>

area of the “Jungle” is grouped in several sub-areas according to different nationalities, i.e. Afghans, Congolese, Pakistani, the “Sub-Saharan African area”, the “Arab area” etc. There are two main entrances to the actual Hotspot, one at the south and one at the north-east, both guarded by police. Border crossers can exit and enter the area, while only few NGOs, including Metadrasi, are allowed by the camp manager to operate inside the Hotspot. Others NGOs or solidarity initiatives, more or less fifteen, that have no permission to enter in the Camp by the camp manager, operate outside the Camp with their own facilities that are mainly located in the city centre as it can be seen in the map of the volunteer organizations in Vathy (see paragraph 2.4).

The southern entrance of the Camp, the most visible one from the road, faces one of the main arterial roads that connect the several urban centres around the island. There are no pedestrian crossings and no traffic signs to indicate to the drivers to slow down and beware of people crossing, putting border-crossers in real danger to be run over, especially for babies and children who cross the road by themselves. Some volunteers told that few border crossers have already died or have been hospitalized because of being driven over in that same point.

When you first look at the southern entrance, you possibly compare it to the image you have of a detention facility with multilayered barbed-wire fences and gated access. A quite steep dirt slope connects the gated entrance, where the main gate remains close and only a small door-like gate allows the passage. At the road level, in both sides of the slope, massive trash containers lay placidly surrounded by trash on the floor. When the bathrooms inside the Hotspot are cleaned, a foul-smelling stream runs down the slope. The Jungle, instead, has no fences or barriers. Facing the southern entrance of the Hotspot, the Jungle extends both on the lower left side and on the upper right side of the Hotspot and literally anyone could enter. It can potentially be a target place for human trafficking or sexual abuse. One day, during the morning’s kids’ activities, some volunteers reported the presence of two young white men who entered in the premises of the kids’ activities in shorts, flip flops, without a shirt on and sat there for a while observing and talking to some children. They looked like holidaymakers coming back

My account of this place derives from conversations with volunteers and from an entire morning spent with other volunteers in the Jungle with the purpose of manually counting the number of tents/shelters in a designated area that was assigned to us. The objective of the counting was collecting an approximate estimate for a potential distribution of solar lights organized by Sandstone.

from the beach. After a while, they left. When the volunteers in shift that morning reported this episode to the coordinator during the “high and low session”⁶⁸ in the evening, the coordinator looked quite upset and reminded the volunteers that no person, other than refugees and children, could stay in the Field during kids’ activities and that volunteers always had to report ‘awkward’ situations and immediately inform one of the coordinators. Volunteers had the right to ask the “unknown” people to leave anytime, she firmly stressed, since the Field was Sandstone’s property and that we were in charge of the children’s safety. I was not present that day, but I was present when similar episodes happened, involving some municipality road workers on a break and the football team of border-crossers that usually played in the Field after the afternoon kids’ activities. I was not comfortable with the idea of asking people to leave the premises since I was “just” a volunteer, who was there for a short period of time. In this sense, I will analyse in detail the quandaries of my role as a volunteer in specific situations in Chapter 3.

The Jungle was framed according to different perspectives: from the very beginning a place that was not meant for volunteers to wander around without the presence or permission of the coordinator; a place where the coordinator – young white female – felt safe in the occasions she went; a place where border-crossers would avoid to go around at night, not even for using the “toilet”, because they didn’t feel safe; a place where babies were conceived and sometimes born; a place where violent fights would erupt in plain day; a place of worship, with specifically designed ‘buildings’, such as mosques or churches, shared by different nationalities. The Jungle could be “conceptualised as an assemblage insofar as it was in constant redefinition and it represented a space where meaning and practice were in the making, depending on the unique interplay between refugees, volunteers, borders and authorities” (Sandri 2018: 70).

⁶⁸ The “high and low session” was the final moment that concluded the day of the volunteers. Coordinators, community representatives and volunteers gathered usually outside the Shop and reflect about their feelings or situations that happened during the day. It was a moment for sharing one positive (the high) and one negative (the low) sides of the day. Some sessions were very emotional, such as the one that turned in a sort of a mourning wake for the death of a young boy in a car incident close to the Sandstone’s facilities in Lesvos; others were goodbyes for the volunteers that ended their time there; others were short and in a hurry because the day was long and tough for everyone. It would have been interesting to film the session and beyond the purpose of my research, possibly uploading the video on Sandstone’s social media page with the intent to make people participant of the volunteer’s day and thoughts, but when I asked to the coordinator, she told me that it would have not been a good idea for volunteers because they could have possibly felt uncomfortable with it.

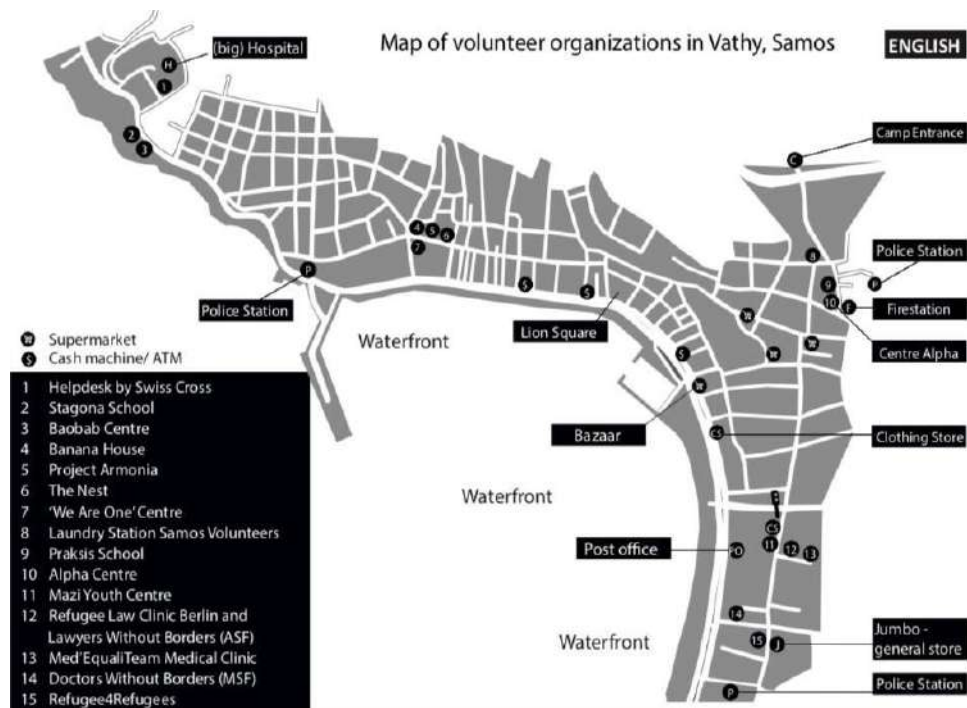
Similarly to the situation in Calais and the poor management and interest by the French authorities, “refugees were stuck in limbo in the squalor of the Jungle” (Sandri 2018: 69) in Samos, too. Even though, the Jungle has broadly been depicted as an unsafe place of oppression and violence, like in Sandri’s (2018) account of the Jungle of Calais, there is an alternative and parallel vision of this place, which takes into account the agency and resilience of border-crossers. A camp, where several subjectivities, values and practices connect:

Beyond the services and infrastructure provided by volunteers, the Jungle was constellated by ramshackle shops, restaurants, hairdressers, bars, places of worship set up and run by refugees. [...] the entrepreneurial spirit of the Jungle contributed to show that refugee settlements can also be spaces of hospitality and identity formation. In certain instances, refugee camps, including the Jungle, have revealed the capacity to build an alternative kind of socio-political space, one based on the coexistence of refugees and other actors in the hybrid space of the camp, and need to be understood beyond the notion of bare life. Thus, although the emphasis of this research is on volunteers, the camp is not discussed here as a place void of refugees’ agency, but rather as a liminal site where different subjectivities meet (Sandri 2018: 70).

During the day, border-crossers were regularly coming down the hill to the city center and going back to the Hotspot or the Jungle, going on foot to the *bazaar* below the Field or other supermarkets in the area to get some groceries, to participate in some activities offered by the NGOs, to have a stroll in the city center or along the promenade, or just to look for materials out of trash to further protect their shelter or tent.

At the opposite side of the southern entrance, there is the Field, rented and used by Sandstone in the morning and in the late afternoon for “kid’s activities”. Across the road, there is also a small police station, where usually some police cars or buses are parked outside.

2.4 Forms of solidarity in town



Map 3 - Volunteer organizations in Samos (Facebook page of Information Point for Volunteers in Samos)

Taking into consideration the definitions of organizations and institutions as “contesti porosi in cui differenti categorie di soggetti recepiscono e filtrano indicazioni, procedure e normative nazionali e trans-nazionali, e dove le relazioni sociali formali e informali ridefiniscono ed reinterpretano dall'interno ruoli, compiti ed obiettivi” (Sorgoni 2011: 26), it has been mentioned that since 2015 a diverse group of actors, including IGOs, NGOs, local solidarians, foreign volunteers had acquired shifting roles in the humanitarian governance of the border-crossers management and, depending on the occasion, at times competed or collaborated (Rozakou 2017b).

Dijstelbloem and van der Veer (2019) underlined how actors operating in the field, such as solidarity initiatives, NGOs or local authorities sometimes suffer from lack of facilities, staff and material – perhaps shared strategies too – therefore they have to improvise. According to some voices in the local authorities, and especially in the case of

Lesvos, it was difficult to keep track of the many NGOs surfacing on the island, and in particular, to manage independent initiatives, that are not accredited or registered by the state. The other side of the coin shows episodes of criminalization of solidarity from local authorities (Dijstelbloem, van der Veer 2019; Rozakou 2017a). Nevertheless, unlike NGOs, which most likely move and “follow the crisis”, the hyperlocality of grassroots initiatives allowed them to be perceived as more sensitive and rooted into the very context they operate in (Dijstelbloem, van der Veer 2019). The danger of an NGOification of solidarity was raised by solidararians in Rozakou (2017a) when, for example, they noticed the professionalism of humanitarian workers in organizing day shifts that were typical of office hours, conveying the idea of a sort of “bureaucratized solidarity” (Rozakou 2017a).

According to Sandstone’s coordinators, the solidarity network in Samos looks different from the situation in Lesvos, where “camps often became ideological battlegrounds, as each NGO comes with its own notion of what is ‘best’ for the population they have come to help” (Knott 2018:356). In Samos, there are very few NGOs that operate outside the camp – in total they are fifteen – and compared to more than one hundred NGOs that are working in Lesvos, Sandstone’s coordinators believed them to be well organised and not to overlap and compete for the production of services. All of them are registered NGOs working for/with border-crossers with several purposes: restaurants, community centers for families or/and women, language classes for adults, computer lab, school for age 11-17, game space for age 2-7, laundry station, general medicine clinic, psychological support and obstetrics, clothing and basic items distribution, legal support, fitness and recreational activities, adult informal education. All the out-NGOs⁶⁹ meet every two weeks for coordinating operations, exchanging ideas and keeping updated regarding the situation on the island and every three months with the UNHCR, which in turn every week meet with the representatives of each community of border-crossers in order to collect their concerns or opinions. Sometime NGOs “lend” volunteers when needed among each other and ask for specific supplies of items, such as baby food or bags of clothing for specific ages and gender, to Sandstone. The majority of NGOs on the island have previous experiences with border-crossers through past operations in other Greek islands or parts of Greece; they have been

⁶⁹ I use the term out-NGOs to distinguish the NGOs that operate outside the Hotspot from those who are allowed to operate inside (in-NGOs).

founded or registered in other UE or non-EU (i.e. Switzerland) countries and receive volunteers from all over the world through unsolicited applications or by partnering with Indigo Volunteers⁷⁰.

An account of the early situation on the island of Lesbos carried out by Rozakou (2017a) can give the idea of the rapidity with which the humanitarian organizations ‘follow the crisis’, but at the same time it shows how the unregulated presence of humanitarians and the decisions of supranational actors affected the local population:

In the summer of 2015 there were only a few international humanitarian organizations such as the MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières), MDM (Médecins du Monde) and IRC (International Rescue Committee), independent volunteers and solidarians offering first aid, medical assistance, information, food and water, cleaning and infrastructure facilities (such as tents, toilets and showers in the camps on the island. [...] In late October 2015, several months after my first visits to Kara Tepe there were already at least one hundred humanitarian organizations operating on Lesbos. The situation on the island was perceived as one of a humanitarian crisis that called for the intervention of experienced humanitarian actors. The UNHCR declared an emergency and the EU decided to allocate resources to humanitarian responses within its territory. At the same time, this was an uncomfortable remark uttered by many locals who objected to the transformation of their island into a ‘Third World’ country and to the neocolonial attitude of international humanitarian actors. All over the island the vests of humanitarian workers and their logos colored public space and demarcated zones of operation, sociality and, ultimately, sovereignty over space. [...] Images such as the photo of the three-year old Aylan Kurdi lying dead in the Turkish shores sparked the humanitarian impetus of laypeople who travelled from all over the world to Lesbos (Rozakou 2017a: 101-102).

Govoni started its organization as ONLUS (Organizzazione Non Lucrativa di Utilità Sociale)⁷¹ and now acquired also the status of NGO according to Still I Rise Facebook page⁷². Govoni founded its organization with the intent to distinguish its operate from the big multinational NGOs, posing it in an us/them relationships: “vediamo lo stesso dilemma, ma lo guardiamo da direzioni opposte. Loro vedono un mondo fatto di milioni di persone, noi vediamo il mondo intero racchiuso in un singolo essere umano” (Govoni 2019: 145). His aim is to destroy the concept of impartiality-based solidarity, which

⁷⁰ The non-profit volunteer matchmaking organization Indigo offers free connections between “charities” and volunteers in Europe, and beyond, with regard to humanitarian projects. Many volunteers I interviewed ended up working for Sandstone thanks to Indigo’s help. The organization aims to differentiate itself from for-profit agencies interested in promoting voluntourism. See the website for further information <https://www.indigovolunteers.org/>

⁷¹ In the Italian legal system, ONLUS (Organizzazioni Non Lucrative di Utilità Sociale) are non-profit organizations for social utility, which work in the local community and have to be registered in the list of the region they operate in. Instead, NGOs are considered to be particular types of ONLUS who focus on development cooperation abroad and are registered under the national list held by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁷² See <https://www.facebook.com/stillriseNGO/>

overlook at what are instead necessary duties, such as constructive criticism, exposing the truth and really challenge the system. Politics, police and big NGOs are all just a trick, that can be defeated by a united force of individuals: “Quando l’ingiustizia diventa legge, la resistenza è un dovere. I politici, la polizia e le grandi ONG – è tutto un trucco, esistono solo finchè permetti loro di esistere. Insieme tutti noi Signori Nessuno possiamo farli crollare” (Govoni 2019: 284). As a matter of fact, in his latest book (2019), he exposed names, surnames and professional liabilities of the UN officer for the protection of children, a Metadras worker, the hotspot manager and the EU Commissioner.

Nevertheless, in order to keep on with the distribution of resources and services for the “masses”, negotiations with the local authorities (i.e. police, camp management, state officials) were continuously carried out by the NGOs on the island, especially those that operated inside the Camp. In two particular occasions, the manifestation of the state approval, already implied in the legal recognition of the NGOs enlisted in the national and municipality registry, took place. Firstly, when municipality officials popped up for two days in a row in all the out-NGOs and solidarity projects in Vathy in order to check that everything was in order for what concerned the safety and the presence of emergency devices in the buildings (i.e. fire extinguishers). During those days, all the organizations closed down in order to avoid the “surprise” inspections, giving them the time to buy all the required equipment that most were probably missing. Secondly, the “surprise” inspections from municipality officials, that investigated and briefly interviewed all the staff working in the NGO: they asked me to provide an ID, if I was working under compensation and for how long I was working there. The official were apparently very tense and adamant “to catch” all the people on the premises and interview them while filling in a list.

2.4.1 Sandstone

The powerful story behind the small NGO revolves around the personal story of his co-founder⁷³. O. is an actual Syrian refugee. In 2010 he left Syria for Lebanon to work as a lifeguard and a swimming instructor. When the turmoils in the MENA countries brought people to fill the squares and the streets, he went back to Syria. During the early protests, he was arrested and kept prisoner for a month and a half. After the release, he started to use his car as an emergency vehicle for transporting the injured to the hospital, but the car was badly damaged during a pro-Assad attack. At that point, he started to use an ambulance, which was hit during a near bombing in 2013. O. was the only survivor, but he brought the consequences of the bombing on his leg, that was quite severely injured. For a few months, he used a wheelchair. The injury was not healing as expected, so in the attempt to seek medical assistance, he travelled to Turkey, where a doctor suggested to go to Europe for a better treatment. At that time, he was 20 years old. After giving careful thought, he opted for departing from Bodrum with few friends. They bought flippers and masks and swam in the open sea for 14 hours. Before reaching the shores of Kalymnos, the Greek police spotted them and transport them to the land. Then, they managed to reach Athens and the Macedonian border, where his friends succeeded in crossing, while O. was turned back for three times. He finally reached Germany and after 8 months his asylum application was approved. In Germany, while volunteering in a local NGO that distributed food for refugees and living in an apartment provided by the government, the police broke into his house in the middle of the night and arrested him under the suspicion of ISIS linkages. Soon after, the accusations were dropped under false pretences. That episode made him realize that he wanted to go back to Syria and after leaving Germany he stopped for a while in Greece for visiting some friends. O. remained indefinitely “to help his people”, volunteering with several organizations, when he finally gave birth to his own NGO, Sandstone.

The organization was first set up in Lesvos and then, from December 2018, in Samos. O. mainly stays in Lesvos and visits the Samos branch more or less twice a

⁷³ The biography of O. has been collaged from several articles published in worldly famous newspapers such as the New Arab, Time, the Independent and the Middle East Eye. In order to protect the name of the NGO, I did not provide links to the actual online articles.

month. In the Sandstone's Code of Conduct⁷⁴, that every volunteer has to sign before starting the period of volunteering, it is made reference to the adherence of the organization to some common humanitarian principles that can be derived by international humanitarian law (UN General Assembly Resolutions 46/182) such as humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, do no harm. Given its very recent beginning, the NGO in Samos carries out different activities and modalities from the sister organization in Lesvos. For example, in the Shop in Lesvos, border-crossers have more agency in choosing their own clothing, instead in Samos volunteers choose the items for the person and deliver them inside a big black trash bag. Another example concerns the Field. As we will discover later, in Samos the Field consists of an unpaved piece of land with similar dimension of a soccer pitch, one storage container, three picnic-style tables and a sort of wooden gazebo above them. Whereas in Lesvos, Sandstone built an entire playground, the Mandala Child Friendly Space, where child-sized wooden houses, volleyball court and other spaces were carved out in the olive groves.

O.'s prime intent was building an organization that would provide basic necessities and encourage border-crossers to develop an active role during their stay in the settlements. As indicated by Sandstone's vision statement in the official website, the NGO "aims to promote the establishment of a participative global aid ecosystem, whereby refugees and asylum seekers can feel empowered through their active involvement in humanitarian and development interventions". Although O. meant to delete the category of victim attached to the border-crosser, I noticed more occasions where "an hand out" was given, instead of the chance to get themselves "an hand up" so to speak. My account of Sandstone in Samos suggests that happened especially in relation to community volunteers. Their role and their involvement were steady, intense and participative, yet very limited to some activities, such as linguistic mediation, desk registration, preparation of bags with items in the Shop – compared to the full integration of community volunteers of other solidarity projects on the island – and reserved only to some "trustworthy" border-crossers. In Sandstone's Code of Conduct, the asylum seeker/migrant/refugee is addressed in terms of beneficiary and passively defined as "a person who is receiving help or support from Sandstone". Moreover, the community volunteers, defined as "a refugee or asylum-seeker assisting with

⁷⁴ See Attachments.

Sandstone's activities (e.g. translation), are not mentioned in the paragraph "key terms" along with beneficiary, volunteer and coordinator, but in the paragraph that details the appropriate volunteer-beneficiary relationship. During my period of stay, there were only two long-term community volunteers, who started to work full-time in the NGO since its initial instalment on the island, and two community volunteers who have just started recently.

All the other tasks, including being in charge of the Shop when the coordinator was not present, were given officially to "long-term" volunteers, that had to rely on and collaborate with community volunteers. It is important to underline how the community volunteers were not left in charge, even if they had been working there for more than 8 months. It is interesting to notice how a border-crosser that is involved in first person in the difficult living conditions in the Camp, that knows the island, the management and the procedures, is considered less trustworthy than international volunteers, who have just landed on the island and will stay for a short period of time.

Among other limitations that in the end were partially lifted, the community volunteers had no permission to go to the Volunteers' House and join collective dinners or gatherings in special occasions such as birthdays. Only towards the end of September, when some of the volunteers asked the permission to the field coordinator, the two "long-term" community volunteers were allowed to join birthday dinners, but in order for this to happen, the field coordinator felt important to clarify some rules: volunteers had not to ask community volunteers for money or food contributions and a zero alcohol policy had to be respected.

In an interview released for the Time, the founder O. stressed the helpful presence of the thousands of international volunteers that fled to Greece since the beginning of the "crisis", but he also noticed how volunteers "fell in love" with border-crosser children and then would go back to their countries, while children may suffer from attachment issues. The article also introduces a distinction between skilled volunteers like legal support providers or nurses, doctors etc. from the "young, untrained, unskilled visitors", who can do more harm than good with inappropriate behaviours or promises that they cannot keep, constituting the so-called volunteer tourists. The article underlines then the important role even of these unskilled volunteers in understaffed organizations to fill the gaps in the holes of the humanitarian management, nonetheless it also stressed

the importance of their training. In this sense, Sandstone's founder reiterated the need for trained volunteers and in particular, for those, who would push their own country's governments to change the situation in Greece. If the training is so important, why did the volunteers receive just a 20-minute brief introduction to the work in the NGO? All the coordinators, volunteers and community volunteers were working very hard all day long, sometimes until late in the evening. This stressful timetables of the persons in charge were not likely compatible for a well prepared training to give on the day of arrival of every new volunteer.

After 10 months of being operationally active in Samos, some changes were adopted: a new Warehouse coordinator arrived, the old Warehouse coordinator became the Shop coordinator so that the field coordinator could have more time to manage other aspects of the NGO management and the figure of the volunteer coordinator was introduced.

When talking about Sandstone, Aborisen Canarii defines the NGO as provider of services⁷⁵, such as kid's activities or distribution of items, that were previously sorted and partially packed in the Warehouse such as clothing, women pads, baby diapers, baby food, hygiene packs, clothes, blankets, tarpaulins, tents, mats, sleeping bags, strollers, baby chairs and shoes.

By looking back at her experience in Sandstone, S. realizes that many of the activities promoted by the NGO were depriving her of the chance to have meaningful interactions with adult border-crossers, so she underlined the importance of moments, in which she visited a family in the Jungle on her spare time⁷⁶. Govoni (2019) also tried to spend as much time as possible outside the working hours with families of the children he was working with when he was volunteering in Samos Volunteers, even if the coordinators did not like the idea of it. Govoni felt that this was very important for getting to know better the children and their situation in the environment outside the school hours.

As I mentioned earlier, the volunteers thought that the locals were pretty much hostile to the presence of border-crossers on the island reproducing a stereotyped perspective. Certainly, the abrupt police behaviour towards border-crossers, public demonstrations in the main streets with banners such as "Frontex do your job!", hotel

⁷⁵ Interview with Aborisen Canarii (male, 36, Spain). Since the conversation was held in Spanish, he uses terms such as "entregar" (deliver), "suministrar" (distribute), "proveer" (provide).

⁷⁶ Interview with S. (female, 24, Australia).

and restaurant owners, that did not accept border-crossers in their facilities, were synonym of racist practices. As it happens also in Italy, some people are bothered by the numerous presence of small groups of border-crossers that fill the squares and the green areas – that were otherwise half empty before – as if border-crossers were not meant to mingle with locals and share the same spaces. Other Samians complain about noise nuisance and rubbish that is left on shore or along the promenade. Looking at the broader situation of economic constraints that many Samian citizens are facing, given to the decline of the tourism economy in the city of Samos, many locals were still donating items to the NGO sometimes walking straight into the Shop and leaving in an hurry after depositing second-hand clothing or baby supplies on the floor or others would leave their donations at the doorstep of the NGO during the night without being seen by anyone. Other times, Sandstone and other NGOs on the island, given the fact that they receive a fair amount of people during the day, have to deal with some complaints the neighbors, that suddenly have to adapt their lifestyle to a constant chatting and rumbling – even during the so-called quiet hours that many apartment buildings have to respect – or to people accidentally transpassing their properties or blocking the entrance to their commercial activities. Neighbors are not explicitly against the operations of NGOs but they are finding difficult to live their life as it was before the massive arrivals. The distrust and scepticism of Greek citizens about NGOs and in general about institutions have been studied and confirmed (Dixon et al. 2019), extending this trait to the majority of the Greek population in recent years and it is connected to the larger perception of disorder and mismanagement of the humanitarian situation in Greece. Research shows (Dixon et al. 2019) that despite the low awareness about the presence of NGOs in Greece, more than half of the participants donated time, money or items, suggesting that empathy and the “Welcome refugees” approach are still prevalent in Greece in comparison to other countries:

This study found that the attitudes of Greeks towards immigration are far more nuanced than is often suggested in public debates. The country is not divided between two clearly defined pro- and anti-immigration viewpoints. Many Greeks, especially those in the middle groups, hold opinions that might at first glance seem contradictory. They have anxieties about immigration that are often connected to Greece’s wider economic problems, but these concerns sit alongside deep humanitarian impulses. The evidence from this study suggests that many of these concerns can be addressed without adopting exclusionary immigration policies (Dixon et al. 2019: 63).

The Shop



Image 6 - Crowded Shop in the morning (source: Sandstone's Instagram page)

Meeting place for all the volunteers, coordinators and community volunteers in the morning, the Shop is strategically located 20 minutes on foot from the Volunteer's House, the Hotspot and the Field and 20 minutes by car from the Old and New Warehouses. Just across the street, there are a toy store and a gas station. The Shop occupies the ground floor of a white apartment building with a separate entrance. As it can be seen from the picture above, the patio always hosts a crowd of about 80-100 "new arrivals" (up until 230 in one morning) from 9am until 2pm. A table for the registration and a number of stools are orderly set in the patio paved with gravel. If there is no place available, people wait seated on the low wall that divide the property from the sidewalk. One big pine tree in the corner offers a nice shade during the summerly hot hours. When you enter for the first time and you see that so many volunteers are coming and going from this very small rectangular room without windows you remain impressed. At the entrance, there is a big high L-shape counter, that separates the room. A small yet long bench has been made out of particle boards

and runs along the left wall of the room. On this long wooden bench, mats, sleeping bags, tents and empty cardboard boxes are piled up against the wall, almost reaching the ceiling. At the opposite side of the entrance, there is a plastic table, that has become the working station of the field coordinator. She usually sits there in the mornings and afternoons behind her laptop, answering to text on her mobile and always looking very occupied in managing the “backstage” of the NGO operations. Beyond the plastic table, there is “Al-Bashar’s Office” as the A4 white sheet indicates⁷⁷. Just two meters before the field coordinator “office”, an opening in the long L-shape counter guarantees on the left the access to a very small blue spiral staircase and to a small storage room, where baby food for the morning kids’ activities is kept in the minifridge. On the right of the opening, a series of storage shelves are carved out of the counter. Usually they contain stationary for the kids’ activities such as colored pencils, A4 white sheets and colored card stocks, “baby bags”⁷⁸ for boy, girl or gender-neutral and raincoats for adults and children. In the corner shelf at the beginning of the staircase, three boxes, full of drawstring bags with few toys inside, were waiting to be distributed to children from age 2-14. Going downstairs, the basement appears. The same particle boards, used for the counters and the bench upstairs, were used to create big deep storage compartments along the walls and in the middle of the room, above which two ceiling clothing racks were hanging. Under the staircase, piles of black rubbish bags and blue small shopping bags were ready to be filled in with the items required. The Shop was supplied every afternoon or evening with the items prepared by the volunteers that were in the shift of the Warehouse.

⁷⁷ If the label-pun was not clear enough, a toilet was behind that white door.

⁷⁸ “Baby bags” are big fabric shopper bags that include nappies and basic items for a newborn.

The Field



Image 7 - Temporary camp in the Field after the fire (source: Sandstone's Instagram page)

What the NGO staff calls ‘the Field’ is an unpaved rectangular piece of land directly below and across the street of the southern entrance of the Hotspot of Samos. Architectural adjuncts of the Field comprise one blue container with the UNHCR logo, three wooden pic-nic tables in the shade of a bower, wire mesh panels that separate the road through a slight slope. The Field, as the Jungle, had no gated access and many people were using it as a short cut to the city center. In the morning from 9.30am to 12am, the week schedule identified at least two volunteers in charge for the “kid’s activities”. These activities were organized by volunteers spontaneously sometimes on the spot, other times with previous little organization of materials and games. In the afternoon, all the volunteers that were not in the shift for the Shop had to go to the Field, dividing the duties in five different and fix categories of activities: jumping rope, LEGO, football, road crossing and ‘arts and craft’.

The NGO supports the cost of the rent of the Field and lend it to other NGOs or border-crossers for carrying out activities outside the hours of the NGO’s activities. For example, after 6 pm the Field was used by a group of border-crossers for playing

football or around 9 pm Samos Volunteers would use it for male gym training sessions. When the weather allowed it, Sandstone would organize the open air cinema night for children. For a period of time, the kids' activities were suspended and substituted by the recreational experiences in the 'Cirque du Samos' provided by the "The Flying Seagull Project".

The route that many times I followed for going to the Camp on foot, and that I recall by heart, is from the Shop to the Camp for the so-called "kid's activities". The customary rule was that all the volunteers that were not involved in duties at the Shop in the afternoon should go to the Field. The number of volunteers was of course always variable depending on the total number of volunteers available that week. We usually met at the Shop at 4.30pm and then in group we went to the meeting place before the kid's activities. Going straight, passing by the EKO petrol station on the left (at that point we had to remember to walk on the sidewalk outside the petrol station and not crossing the station because the owner would complain especially when border crossers cross the station to reach the Shop) we sat on the floor in front of a motorbike shop for assigning the tasks of the afternoon to the volunteers. After the meeting, we resumed the climb to the Field, passing by the café at the corner, Mazi School on the left, the mobile greengrocer with the *Ape* car, the fish vendor stand surrounded by cats waiting for a smelly delicious piece, the supermarket beside the stairs, the *bazaar* below the Field, the super steep tremendous slope towards the crossroads where the Field and the Camp were and the parking lot in the middle, which usually hosted a stand with two Jeovah's Witnesses distributing leaflets.

The New and Old Warehouses



Image 8 - Pallets delivered from donors and shelves of sorted clothes in the New Warehouse (take by author)

The Old Warehouse was situated up in the hills 10 minutes by car from the Camp⁷⁹. In fact, it was so much close to the Hotspot that once it was ‘raided’ by some border-crossers who left the writing “SORRY” on a sort of panel and resold the clothes in the Jungle. Since then, Sandstone moved their clothing stock to the New Warehouse and secured the entrance of the Old Warehouse with new locks. Since it was abandoned for many months, the rats feasted in the remaining clothes, food, materials – that also other NGOs stored there – so in October 2019, it underwent a massive cleaning with the help of Movement on the Ground and Sandstone’s volunteers. The clean up was also necessary because the Municipality, that owned the place, asked it back. When I arrived, community volunteers were not allowed to be at the Warehouses, then after few weeks, along the possibility to join dinners at the Volunteers’ House, community

⁷⁹ I use the terms old and new for the Warehouse because during my stay in Samos they were called as such. Nonetheless, the temporal reference changes over time. In fact, what I now refer to as the Old Warehouse was once in 2016 the New Warehouse: some charities at that time rented it and it was used as extra storage. Regarding this matter see the video partially shot in the now Old Warehouse (minutes 3.10-3.53) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thh5je0KjQw>.

volunteers – only the two that started to volunteer many many months ago – were given the permission to join the volunteer to the Warehouses.

The New Warehouse was located up in the hills, twenty minutes by car from the Shop under the apartment where all the coordinators, except the field coordinator, lived. The neighbours and owners of the entire building were a Greek small businessman and his son. Volunteers, in turn, would drive the cars and the van from and to the Warehouses.

2.4.2 Humanitarian logistics and management: manufacturing the border-crosser through the lens of the volunteers

Sandstone based much of its stockpiling on the informal economy of donations. Many individual people abroad, NGOs, associations or informal groups frequently organize collections of items, such as second hand clothing or factory surplus, to be delivered directly to Sandstone's New Warehouse. This direct donations are part of the so-called solidarity economy, which is based on a principle of horizontal reciprocity by cutting off the middlemen from the distribution line. Rakopoulos (2015) explains solidarity economy as:

A native concept, used by political collectives of a broadly progressive, leftist, or anarchist orientation and by social movements and networks struggling for equality and social justice [...] This usage is strongly differentiated from the depoliticized use of the term 'solidarity' expressed by entities such as the church, for which it is another word for charity; NGOs and civil society volunteering programs, which look to remedy the results of these policies; and finally, the state, for which 'solidarity' is a word masking further taxation (Rakopoulos 2015: 86).

Labels on the hundreds of boxes stored in the New Warehouse can be traced back to the international routes, where those items were originally boxed and sent. Many deliveries came from Hungary, Spain, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, The Netherlands and France. Some of the deliveries were also coming from continental Greece or from places where other solidarity initiatives for refugees were taking place such as Calais (France) and Lesvos. As mentioned earlier, local Samian citizens too were contributing from time to time dropping off at the Shop bags and boxes of clothing

or kids' games/stationary. When I first arrived to the New Warehouse, I was impressed and a little surprised by the massive amount of unpacked pallets that were somehow stored in and out of the building and by the very few people that were working to unpack and organize them. While I was working on my Bachelor thesis, I visited a warehouse run by volunteers in Polykastro, a small town close to the Greek-Macedonian border where the informal settlement of border-crossers 'Eko camp' was based. On that occasion, the entrance to the warehouse was restricted to those volunteers who were working there and it seemed very well organized like I imagine the wordly company Amazon would run a storage area. In Samos, the Warehouse Coordinator was first C., a French 25-year-old student in International Relations and Humanitarian Response who has been working for Sandstone since May 2019, who then became the Shop Coordinator, leaving her place to B., an Italian 30-year-old girl, who already worked in the socalled Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (CAS)⁸⁰. B. had no previous knowledge in humanitarian supply management, but from day one she tried to study new strategies for improving the entire logistic operation. She focused on creating a web of 'sociality' (Rakopoulos 2015), through networking with several actors, both institutional and informal groups. Nevertheless, the sociality and informality that solidarians were describing in Rakopoulos's work (2015) seemed very much different from the one that B. was applying by running her operations in the NGO's Warehouse. In this sense, solidarians were deeply and better settled in the local context, aimed at creating solidarity bonds and ultimately, by rejecting an institutionalized legal form, their work was meant to be an act of resistance against the state disciplined incorporation. Also Theodossopoulos (2016) underlines the immediacy, spontaneity and locality of local solidarity initiatives in contrast with the international humanitarian organizations or NGOs. The action of 'bringing help to their neighbourhood' allows a different approach to the needs of the border-crossers, one that is based not on compassion, but on the creation of meaningful and intimate relationships in the long run. One day, I was working in the New Warehouse, and I recall two Spanish women in their sixties that were introduced to the team in shift that day as new volunteers. They were travelling around Europe and decided to stop by in Samos for a few days. One of them was a journalist and they reported that they were not aware of

⁸⁰ CAS were included in the Italian reception system in 2015 as temporary emergency centers.

the refugee situation on the island. They decided to “visit” the Jungle and wandering around, noticed one woman that was living up in the hill surrounded by only men. They told me that they ‘talked’ for a while with the woman through gestures, because they were not speaking a common language. While sorting clothes in the Warehouse, they looked for a warm bathrobe that they thought could be useful to the woman for both having more privacy during the “shower” or as warm cover during cold weather. I was really impressed by the narration of this episode, because it reminded me of a sort of speedy volunteer tourists, ‘giving out’ some items to the ones that they imagined as ‘needy’ and consequently feeling better to have done some ‘good’ during their very short stay. In contrast to Sandstone’s policy of a minimum requirement of two weeks for volunteering and of its claim of a depoliticized humanitarianism, which responds to the immediate suffering by neutrally providing a large steady supply for the masses, the two Spanish women decided to put in place a one-to-one distribution. Humanitarian practices, in both the NGO’s and the two women’s ways, overlook or at least not address structural and systemic inequalities that allow such circumstances (Theodossopoulos 2016).

The categorization of items was following more or less standardized sizes such as small (S), medium (M), large (L) and extra large (XL). The New Warehouse was divided into more or less defined areas: hygiene items area, toys, baby food, shoes, baby, man, woman, boy and girl. Clothes in labelled card boxes were piled up in high big metal shelves that reached the ceiling after being sorted by the volunteers. Among the human volunteers, Trixie the cat – and for a shorter time Franz the duck – was always present in the New Warehouse, observing and every time looking for new petting hands. Even if I had no experience whatsoever with children clothing size, I “specialized” in kids (boy, girl) sorting. As it can possibly be noticed from the picture below, girls’ clothes are on the left and boys’ clothes are on the right. They can be spotted by the colour gender stereotyping that surround children clothing: pinkish and lighter colours for girls and green/blue darker colours for boys.



Image 9 - Piles of kids' clothes to be sorted (taken by author)

Another interesting remark is the division of appropriate/inappropriate clothing for what concerns women. Since the very first days of sorting in the New Warehouse, some items were not meant to be distributed because, according to volunteers and also coordinators, were defined not appropriate or ‘too sexy’ for a “refugee woman” to wear in a “refugee camp”. During a Power Point presentation held in the Shop by the Warehouse coordinator, that was meant for the new volunteers in order to understand the system of sorting and labelling, the field coordinator stressed the importance to watch out and be careful with the choice of clothing with regard to their appropriateness given the fact that border-crossers could not have the opportunity to select them by themselves. She entrusted volunteers to put aside items that had ambiguous texts or flags, but she made no reference to the (in)appropriateness of some women clothing. As a matter of fact, she reported how a border-crosser wearing a T-shirt with the Turkish flag was object of criticism in the Camp. The suitability of certain types of clothes really caught my attention when I read a caption under a picture in the Sandstone’s volunteers’ WhatsApp group: “If anyone is in dire need of thongs, you can find them in this bag in lady underwear section”. The picture represented a volunteer who was smiling and pointing her finger to the transparent bag with the label ‘too sexy’ shown in the photo below.



Image 10 - "Too sexy" bag next to the hijab box (taken by author)

I asked to some volunteers what they thought about the special section of a 'too sexy' bag. V. agreed with the decision that has been made and pointed out that after the fire, women and children could not go into the Shop for choosing two pairs of underwear, one hijab/scarf/hat, one trouser from few boxes divided by size on the counter. These items were now chosen by volunteers who added them with the other items in the list in the big black trash bag. V. thought that adding a not-that-sexy and more comfortable underwear could be more appropriate. T. agreed with the fact that thongs are too sexy for a woman in a refugee camp. L. laughed at thinking that a thong and an abaya (long traditional Muslim dress for women) could co-exist in the same bag as if they were oxymorons.

Sorting out skirts in the Warehouse, a volunteer man exclaimed "This is not appropriate for a refugee camp!" referring to the miniskirts or cropped T-shirts that

could be worn by women⁸¹.

In Sandstone's Code of Conduct, volunteers are asked to show the 'right' amount of appropriateness either relating to dress code or to cultural/religious practices:

Male volunteers are asked to not wear 'tank tops', i.e. to ensure that their shoulders are covered whilst volunteering in activities that involve contact with beneficiaries. Female volunteers are asked to cover their shoulders and knees, and to avoid revealing clothing whilst volunteering in activities that involve contact with beneficiaries (Sandstone's Code of Conduct).

Take care not to carry out activities or actions that may be misconstrued or offensive. If a volunteer is unsure of the appropriateness of something, they should consult the coordinator (Sandstone's Code of Conduct).

Cultural appropriateness also extends to the respect of the personal space of beneficiaries:

"Whilst we may be accustomed to close and intimate contact between friends and acquaintances in *our* culture, it is not universally appropriate and can cause great distress to the beneficiaries we are working with" [cursive mine] (Sandstone's Code of Conduct).

The double imposition and victimization, as a woman and as a refugee, on the 'refugee woman' by the volunteers traces the model of the Western imaginary and the widespread assumption that Muslim women cover themselves for modesty and this cannot co-exist with sensual *lingerie*. Western categories seem to admit that Muslim women can only wear 'le mutande della nonna'⁸².

When volunteers choose the nonappropriateness of some clothing make assumptions in relation to a part of the women population in the Hotspot, that are Muslim and that wear a traditional dress. What about all the others? There were many nationalities and religions such as Christian Congolese black women. They were wearing cropped T-shirts and tight leggings. Not only things were intended just as a sexy type of garment, but also as a uncomfortable for a refugee camp. So, what about the slippers that most of the border-crossers have because they do not own a pair of sneakers to go up and down the slippery hill? As Abu-Lughod (2013) recalls, a widespread Western concept

⁸¹ From author's fieldnotes.

⁸² Literally translated from Italian means 'granny's underwear'. In fact, older women, in the previously mentioned collective Italian saying, are not meant to wear sexy underwear, but most likely loose big comfortable garments.

regarding Muslim women is that they are oppressed by their culture and their religion, especially if they cover themselves and the consequence is that they need saving: human rights organizations “presume that just because Muslim women dress in a certain way, they are not agentic individuals or cannot speak for themselves” (Abu-Lughod 2013: 9). The concept of suitability/appropriateness overlooks different realities that women experience in the Hotspot, in fact, “people wear the appropriate form of dress for their social communities and their social classes. They are guided by socially shared standards and signals of social status” (Abu-Lughod 2013: 37). A sense of superiority and of patronizing arrogance take place in the mind of the volunteers. This needs to be challenged. Some volunteers, in contrast with the Code of Conduct, were wearing thongs, very short pants and tight tops. Was that appropriate?

The refugee woman that needs to be saved is reproduced in offering special activities for women only by the NGOs on the island, for example, the community center run by the Swiss organization Glocal Roots that intended to create “A safe space for refugee women in Samos. A space that enables women to reclaim their dignity and their confidence”⁸³ (NGO website). Do ‘refugee women’ need to be saved?

After narrating the border-crossers’ reception at the European, Greek and Samos level, I will now turn to the third chapter, where I will focus on the volunteers’ experience from the very first steps, which imply the selection of the organization to some salient topics and episodes, emerged during interviews and during my stay in Samos.

⁸³ See their website <https://glocalroots.ch/about/team/>

3. An ethnography with international volunteers in Samos

3.1 Methodology and positionality

This research is based on participant observation, or rather observant participation since I work as a volunteer in the NGO Sandstone. Moreover, I drew a series of questions and interviewed 10 volunteers either in person, via video-call, phone call or in writing. These volunteers were chosen among those who show interest in being interviewed and who worked in Sandstone or in other organizations of the island. With all the volunteers involved, I had professional and/or personal relationships developed during my stay in Samos, therefore findings are also based on informal conversations, too. The semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted during the period September-December 2019 using English as a common language or Spanish and Italian. Another interesting fact about languages is that, during my stay, a big group of Brazilian volunteers settled in the Volunteers' House. Most of the time, they spoke only their native language so the communication was a little bit hard in the beginning, but after one month and a half, I could pick up some words and phrases in Brazilian-Portuguese or they could comprehend some basic English/Spanish. For privacy reasons, I asked the volunteers to provide a nickname that I reported in this research, and in case they decided to keep their real name I replaced them with the capitalized first letter followed by a dot. Three books were also relevant for the purpose of this study: the biographical novel *Se fosse tuo figlio* by Niccolò Govoni and the volunteer's guides by Lonely Planet (2017) and Bennett et al. (2018).

Unlike Papataxiarchis's (2016) long interest and personal attachment to the matter, Samos is not my village. In line with my previous experience and interest in independent voluntarism in an informal refugee settlement in Greece close to the Macedonian border, which constituted the object of my Bachelor dissertation, I chose this destination for my Master project thanks to the insightful suggestions provided by Professors Paola Sacchi, Barbara Sorgoni and Antonio Stopani from the University of Torino.

As some volunteers have mentioned, “being there on the frontline” – as Papataxiarchis (2016a; 2016b) reminds us – where the journey of border-crossers in the European territory begins, works as a ‘knot’ (Papataxiarchis 2016a) of multitudes of other flows such as humanitarian organizations, scholars, volunteers, journalists, dispensable objects (Papataxiarchis 2016a; Rozakou 2018a; Cabot 2019). I acknowledge, also as a limitation of this study, that I was part of that ‘symbolic geography of humanitarianism’ (Rozakou 2018a) that circled around a gravitational center and it was harshly contested by Papataxiarchis (2016a: 9): “the occasional anthropologist who ‘tries to understand’. Understand what? Such cognitive ambition is misplaced. The deconstruction of the place has dismantled any easily recognizable ‘object of the study’ besides the self-evident manifestations of the crisis. The place has turned into a rich laboratory for studying almost everything and nearly nothing – the human condition!”. Cabot (2019) specifically outlines how both students and long-term members of the academia are part of what she calls ‘the business of anthropology’, because they focused on the ‘European refugee crisis’ having little or no knowledge of the context. This could potentially entails the same risks of the humanitarian work:

Not unlike humanitarianism, anthropological work addressing displacement on Europe’s borders risks enacting its own politics of life: a hierarchization of which people, things, situations, and places are worthy or deserving of study. Anthropological scholarship also expresses modes of caring, of trying to save – whether by documenting and saving experiences (a kind of salvage anthropology of the refugee crisis) or by conducting research that may become relevant or useful to policy makers, activists, advocates, or even border crossers themselves. Finally, anthropological attempts to “do good” may elide the power relations enacted through anthropological practice and writing (Cabot 2019: 2).

The similarities between humanitarians and anthropologist is mentioned by Rozakou (2018a) as well:

Much like humanitarian workers, anthropologists who study humanitarianism travel from the Global North to the Global South out of professional ambition, but also in a process of self-formation as ethical cosmopolitans. They are global citizens enabled by their privileged mobility, their – most often – (white) color, citizenship (passport and visas) and capital materialized in research funding. [...] These parallel routes ought to be at the epicenter of a self-reflexive critique and an analysis of the common roots of both humanitarianism and anthropology. [...] Like the symbolic geography of humanitarianism, the anthropology of humanitarianism is grounded on specific and enduring geographies of imagination: the *there* (field) and the *here* (Western academia), the *them* [(suffering) “other”] and the *us* (scholars in the West).

Taking into consideration these ‘dangers’ implied in this field of study, I tried to followed as much as possible some advices for being a ‘good ethnographer’, even if I am aware that on the fieldwork there is no such thing and that every time the technique has to be adapted to the context of study. Nevertheless, few guidelines help the ethnographer navigating the field, such as the ones summed up by Cabot, that are, a “combination of learning the languages of interlocutors, developing close field relationships, spending adequate time in field locations, acknowledging history and context, and reading and citing previous research on the topic”, always keeping in mind an “engaged self-critique and reflexivity” (Cabot 2019: 9).

Compared to Lesbos, the island of Samos has shown few examples of academic research concerning voluntarism in the humanitarian field. Moreover, fewer NGOs operate on the island. Other limitations of the study, that can be potentially amended and turned into interesting points of view to explore and include in further studies, involve: the very short period of time of two months; the missing perspective of locals and border-crossers towards the NGOs’ and the volunteers’ engagement.

Given the relative brief experience in doing research, some challenges⁸⁴ have been found in building a relationship of trust with volunteers in relation to the separation of roles and the transition from volunteer to researcher as Mosse (2015: 135) indicates: “participant observation is to some degree an act of concealment. Commitment to an intellectual project moored elsewhere involves a being-there-not-being-there that is not apparent to those whose lives ethnographers share: it involves an issue of “doubleness” (if not feelings of duplicity)”. As a white young woman doing research in Greece, in the encounters with border crossers, my multiple identities as a volunteer, an (early) researcher and a student conditioned some of my experiences and raised some ethical and methodological questions that were difficult to deal with, such as participating or not to sightseeing and excursions, dinners at restaurants or the decision, that will be explored later, to opt out from kid’s activities after some weeks of volunteering. As a volunteer, it was important for me to limit the tourist part of the experience as much as possible because I felt that I was not there for that reason and it could not be ‘fair’ to community volunteers or border-crossers on the island. As an early researcher,

⁸⁴ An account, provided by Anya Jhoty, of some challenges that a student-researcher can find in the field is available here <https://migrationresearchgroup.wordpress.com/category/notes-from-the-field/>

however, I acknowledged that I was a white privileged woman coming from the Global North with a European passport and no visa required – therefore with a very flexible mobility compared to other fellow volunteers – and I felt stimulated to go with other volunteers and participate as much as possible to their daily routines and to get to know more about the island and its places, which would have helped me to better contextualise my study. Ultimately, as a student, even with a scholarship provided by the university, I was in a very tight budget and some activities seemed out of my personal allowance.

Regarding the ethical choice of photographs, since the beginning I decided to take as many little photos as possible, limiting the visual part of my research to landscapes and places with no recognizable people. In this sense, Papataxiarchis (2016b) argued that as the essential elements that can make the situation on the islands known to a wider public, the ethical dilemma of “Photos or no photos?” was a source of conflict from the beginning, because “Photos are a major vehicle of politics. They communicate a visual sense of ‘being there’ towards an interested public.” (Papataxiarchis 2016b: 4).

According to this view, I chose to not post anything on social medias. Since the very first days, the NGO made clear, also in writing in the Code of Conduct⁸⁵ that has to be signed by the volunteer before arriving to Samos, that no photo to children, the Camp and the surrounding area had to be taken. Photos of border-crossers adults were allowed only with their explicit consent. The Code of Conduct explicitly states that no interviews to journalists and media were to be delivered by volunteers during their period of stay without the consent of the coordinator. Since the first approach via email to the NGO and during my period of stay, I deliberately stated that I was a Master student doing research for my final dissertation on international voluntarism working in the humanitarian field. In comparison to the research of my Bachelor dissertation, where I acquired only the role of the researcher without the volunteering part, I felt more integrated in the web of relationships among volunteers, NGOs and border-crossers and this helped me to collect a different perspective than the mere “drop-in” and the consequent distrust that you can receive during that experience: in that past occasion in continental Greece, many volunteers saw me as a sort of curious journalist, an outsider, that was not really welcome in the backstage of the humanitarian field or

⁸⁵ See Appendix 4.

someone that is not helping out in practice and was “only” writing about it. Of course, the time that I had at my disposal for the research was very limited and I did not have a scholarship to sustain my period of stay and, in the same vein, being the very first experience, I most likely made mistakes in the research access and in the process of meeting people. I felt a sort of drop-in journalist collecting targeted questions to be answered without the part that volunteering implies, such as building relationships and sharing the firsthand view on the life of the international volunteer.

3.2 A volunteer is landing

The flight Athens-Samos was not as I expected it to be. In September, the Greek summer was still full-on on the islands so I thought that more holiday makers, families and youngsters, especially from the European Union, were travelling to Samos for enjoying a late summer. However, few people and, in particular elderly couples, were my companions of travel for a few hours. When I landed, it was Sunday morning and a strong wind was blowing. I texted Sandstone’s field coordinator about my arrival and waited outside the airport until she picked me up in a minuscule blue car. She asked me if I was tired and how my travel has gone, then, when we reached a sort of small city center, I waited few minutes for her to pick up a coffee to go. After a half hour drive, we went straight to Samos Town, because she explained to me that there was an event promoted by the municipality and all the NGOs offered to participate as a sign of collaboration to pick up trash along the promenade beside the sea. I remember that I was not comfortable to leave my big backpack with all my items and laptop in the parked car, but I had not a real choice anyway. There, sitting on a low wall along the promenade, I met the group of volunteers of that time and the initial embarrassment when you are the new person in a very large group of people immediately kicked in. Afterwards, we dove in the job right away. The same feeling of being suddenly ‘dropped’ without being warmed by a sort of training or brief introductions was perceived by the volunteer C.⁸⁶, who felt a similar way when she was thrown into the ‘chaos’ and she had to figure out a number of things by herself. She admitted that it was

⁸⁶ Interview with C. (female, Italian, 34).

not easy and took more than an effort, however, as time passed, after two weeks, she got used to the situation. In fact, in a busy environment such as the one of the NGOs on the island, sometimes volunteers and their wellbeing are the last thing in the list to take care of.

A volunteer lands with a whole bag of expectations and preconceptions. On some occasions, they are modified or lost in the way. Tomhood⁸⁷, who likes to draw cartoons, remembers his first two comic strips after his arrival:

Mi ricordo le prime due vignette che ho fatto la prima sera su quando sono arrivato...era una boiata è...però...che io pensavo che i greci fossero tutti bassi però sono tutti alti cioè infatti come è possibile...io pensavo di essere un gigante tra...io poi sono alto uno e settanta sono basso però pensavo a Lisbona io non sono così basso cioè sono nella media anzi e invece qua no...e la seconda vignetta era la doccia che qua le docce non hanno l'affarino daaa cioè non sono le docce normali sono tipo delle sorte di vasche fatte a doccia dove ti attacchi...dove non attacchi la sistola e quindi senza tenda fai i veri laghi quindi una vignetta sul mio lago della doccia (Interview with Tomhood).

The volunteer leaves his/her home thinking to go and work 'in the mud'⁸⁸. Having watched many videos and news reports, they expected to have to deal with a more difficult situation than the one they experienced on the island. Yes, everyone was always busy, there was always something to do, but you find yourself in an urban context, a touristy island right in the city center. Not quite the imagined far refugee camp that the imagery of the volunteers had in mind before the departure, especially if it was a first time of volunteering in a humanitarian context.

Among the several organizations operating in the Aegean, that I contacted for spending a volunteering period with them as an internee or a volunteer, stating that I was a Master student interested in international voluntarism in the humanitarian field, many NGOs required sending a CV and filling in an online application form through their website. One of the organizations, that I was looking into was Eurorelief. I only noticed, while looking at the application form, that it was actually a Faith-Based Organization (FBO) of Christian Evangelical roots, because at some point it required a letter of reference from a pastor. Others, like Sandstone, did not have any specific

⁸⁷ Interview with Tomhood (male, Italian, 31).

⁸⁸ Wildcat, my Brazilian roommate, once morning when she saw that I put some jeans on she told me that they were a fancy clothing to wear for a work day. She explained that, before going to Samos, when she was preparing her suitcase for the period abroad, she expected that working in a refugee camp would have meant to work in the mud.

requirements for the application, so an unsolicited application to their email account would suffice.

When I first contacted Sandstone via email in January 2019, the co-founder replied to me and was pleased to accept my application. In September few days before my departure, I contacted again the association to make sure that everything was ok because I had no reply since the end of August, but the volunteer coordinator in Lesvos said that “It seems that a lot of wires have been crossed regarding your application”⁸⁹ and she asked if I could provide some documents such as a copy of my passport, an ID picture if I was staying for more than one month, a copy of my booked flight/ferry tickets and a criminal record compulsory for the activities with children. She sent me the volunteer information pack⁹⁰ consisting of the Volunteer Code of Conduct (whose signed copy had to be emailed back), Guideline on Children Interactions, Volunteer Fundraising Pack and “a brief Introduction to our current activities and other logistic considerations, so you can get a better idea of what we do here in Samos”⁹¹. Despite the information on the documents, some things changed before my arrival, such as the transport costs – that were cut down because they decided to use the car only for work related activities – the requirement of a criminal record to work with children – which was asked to me few days before the departure and therefore I could not provide it – and the 50% discount on the accommodation for the second month of stay. In the end, these requirements were quite flexible. In fact, some volunteers reported to not having received the informative documents before the departure or the request of a criminal record. Regarding this last point, everyone worked with children without taking into consideration the presence or not of the criminal check.

The Code of Conduct, the bilateral agreement between the organization and the volunteer, established basic rules for the volunteer to follow. It is outlined in eight paragraphs as the following: guiding humanitarian principles; key terms; professional relationships with beneficiaries; professional relationships with other actors; responsibility, safety and security; photography; media and journalists; child protection and liability disclaimer. The Volunteer Introduction⁹², instead, draws on the

⁸⁹ From personal exchange of emails.

⁹⁰ See Appendix 4.

⁹¹ From personal exchange of emails.

⁹² See Appendix 4.

practicalities for the period of volunteering, such as advices for travel, accommodation – a shared accommodation provided by Sandstone in the Volunteers' House cost 10 euro per night – and transport. The shared house was twenty-thirty minutes on foot up in the hill in the small ancient Vathy village. It was a three-story⁹³ white and blue house with seven rooms or rooms-like with bunk beds, three bathrooms, three separate entrances and at the ground floor one dining room, a big kitchen and a very picturesque patio with orange/lemon trees, which was used to hang out clothes to dry, that later on became the dogs' yard⁹⁴.



Image 11 - The Volunteers' House (taken by author)

Sometimes it took more than an effort to share the house with so many people – up until twenty-two – especially after few weeks of staying. Being surrounded every day by people and having little to no privacy turns sometimes into a stressful situation. Nevertheless, a part from minor inconveniences related to female volunteers that were

⁹³ Image 9 shows the three separated entrances that granted access to the house from the road level. The other two stories developed downwards instead of upwards following the terraced slots in the hill where the houses have been built.

⁹⁴ Four puppies were anonymously left at the entrance of the New Warehouse. All of them were adopted by volunteers, either from Sandstone or from other NGOs. One travelled all the way to London. The other stayed in Samos and the last two puppies lived at the Volunteers' House until the volunteer that adopted them left Samos to go back to Germany.

not comfortable to share the room with male volunteers, the lakes of the bathrooms and getting use to the 'Greek way' of throwing the toilet paper in the bin, the majority of volunteers enjoyed the camaraderie, the shared meals and the late conversations in the evening.

Every morning, afternoon and evening – except those times where some of the volunteers asked for a lift by car – four times a day the volunteer would walk down the hill (very easily) and walk up (struggling every time for the steep climb!) to come back. Every day that I followed the path that goes downhill, some minor details caught my eyes and accompanied me for the rest of my stay in Samos:

Ogni mattina, dal lunedì al venerdì, in realtà ogni qual volta volevo scendere in città anche solo per fare un po' di spesa, esco dalla porta sinistra – quella di fronte alla camera che condivido con un'altra ragazza brasiliana – della casa dalle finestre e porte blu appollaiata sulla collina. Di fronte alla casa, c'è la solita auto parcheggiata con la scritta Herbalife. Ogni volta penso che se dovessi guidare un'auto e parcheggiarla in quel modo potrei diventare una campionessa di Formula Uno. Infatti, non sono abituata a guidare per stradine strette e a senso unico nonostante per gli isolani siano normali strade a doppio senso. Scendo lungo una viuzza piuttosto ripida e alla mia sinistra c'è il centro culturale della vecchia Vathy che qualche giorno alla settimana apre le porte alla comunità per ritrovarsi a ballare e danzare sulle note delle canzoni tipiche. Alla mia destra, la casa con il muro a secco che il muratore sta ristrutturando fin dalle prime luci della mattina. Il cane legato al guinzaglio alla paratia del piccolo balcone/entrata di una casa, che ogni mattina incontro, mi guarda disinteressato. Alla mia sinistra, una chiesetta apparentemente abbandonata segnala la sua presenza per la croce sul tetto. Guardo all'insù e vedo gli angoli della grondaia, decorata con angeli di terracotta di una piccola casa, carina e ornata da piante e fiori sul pianerottolo. Per strada saluto chiunque incontro con un *kalimera*, sia la vecchietta che fa di ritorno con una borsa della spesa dal negozio di generi alimentari poco più in giù, sia le mamme che hanno appena accompagnato i figli e le figlie alla scuola elementare lì vicino. Alla destra, il ristorante, dove ho mangiato un paio di volte e dove ho trascorso l'ultima sera prima di andarmene come molti dei volontari: i proprietari sono molto cordiali e offrono una vasta scelta di piatti tipici greci che cucinano su un fornello a due piastre; per due mesi ogni mattina ci siamo salutati con un *kalimera* e alla sera con un *kalispera*. Il piccolo negozietto degli alimentari lì vicino, dove molti samiani della collina comprano il profumatissimo *kouluri* e un paio di prodotti che servono per la preparazione dei pasti della giornata. Poi la vietta blu, una delle poche stradine che nella mia vita posso dire mi abbia trasmesso il senso di felicità e gioia nel percorrerla. Un vicolo, tentativo dei proprietari delle case che si affacciano di vivere anche lo spazio al di fuori della loro casa decorando con pannelli dipinti le pareti delle case vicine abbandonate, piante ornamentali che scendevano dai muri, il vialetto di pietra che era stato dipinto di bianco e di blu, i davanzali delle finestre ornati di piccoli oggetti e giocattoli; al pomeriggio si trasformava in un cinguettio continuo per le gabbie dei canarini che venivano appese all'esterno. Poi la farmacia, la grande chiesa, il piccolo parco giochi abbandonato con un murales mezzo sbiadito dove la sagoma di un ombrello è ancora visibile, la scuola elementare dove alla mattina in cortile il maestro di ginnastica fa esercitare i bambini e le bambine. E poi la piccola chiesa bianca e blu che si affaccia sulla baia tranquilla e sul lontano ma allo stesso tempo vicino Hotspot. L'asilo nido, le scuole superiori, i cassonetti dell'immondizia da dove ogni tanto dei gatti saltano fuori all'improvviso facendoti prendere uno spavento e dove i border crossers cercano materiale con cui migliorare i loro precari

ripari. E infine lo Shop, dove di solito persone erano già in attesa alle 8.30 di mattina, sedute sugli sgabelli o sul muretto. In lontananza a circa 100 metri, alla fine della strada, uno scorcio di mare⁹⁵.



Image 12 - Banner on the way to the Shop (taken by author)

The banner above was one of the two that I encountered every day on the road to and from the Shop. This was placed next to the high school and it says as follows: “No to the death agreement No to the foundation of death EEDYE Peace Committee of Samos”. The banner was placed there by the Greek Committee for International Détente and Peace (EEDYE), which was created in the ‘50s, and represents an anti-fascist anti-imperialist and anti-war movement.⁹⁶ At least twice a month there were demonstrations in the streets held by students, by the municipality, by right-wing supporters, who all show and shout their demands more or less always concerning the presence of border-crossers in town.

Before, during and after the departure, volunteers find themselves to break the news of their decision to volunteer to family, friends and acquaintances either in person or in

⁹⁵ From author’s fieldnotes.

⁹⁶ See the official website of the movement (only in Greek) <http://www.eedye.gr/>

their virtual profiles. Some reacted in a very positive way, being really supportive about their 'brave' choice, a decision that can appear very far away from the lives of those who do not make themselves available to volunteering internationally and imagine the destinations as warfares or really dangerous and/or uncomfortable places and poor living conditions. Thanks to the account provided by volunteers, their testimony somehow, these people 'open their eyes' and their mentalities and see 'the reality as it is'. They think it is 'a great adventure' and that the volunteer is 'a very good person', even if the stories they hear could make them a little uncomfortable:

Sì allora tante persone anche i miei amici era una specie diiii non so...molto coraggiosa mi dicevano che avevo tanto coraggio a fare quello che facevo per me era una cosa abbastanza... insomma...avevo questa necessità di scontrarmi un po' con questa realtà però per loro era una cosa che loro sentivano molto lontana dalla loro realtà non capivano... nemmeno io penso più di tanto eee i miei genitori pensavano che io fossi andata a vivere in una specie di catapecchia di situazione borderline o chissacchè invece poi gli ho fatto vedere la scuola gli ho fatto vedere la casa gli ho detto no la situazione in realtà è abbastanza normale anche se appunto sull'isola la situazione è molto più grave...i social sì la gente si è mobilitata quando io...io ho postato solo una volta perché ero abbastanza scossa perché pioveva lì a Samos piove non so che periodo ci sei stata te però d'inverno piove questa pioggia torrenziale che io pensavo...la gente che viveva nelle tende spesso i ragazzi arrivavano da noi e dormivano poi tutto il giorno tecnicamente e io ho scritto che mi dispiaceva che era una cosa ingiusta che non stavano nelle case ecc e la gente si è mobilitata racconta dicci se possiamo fare qualcosa fare cose così...per cui c'è stata molta solidarietà con quello che facevo però ecco senza che si rendessero realmente conto di quale è la situazione perché qualcuno mi ha anche detto qualcuno non sapeva nemmeno che in Grecia ci fossero gli immigrati qualcuno con cui parlavo ha aperto gli occhi anche grazie a quello che ho fatto io dopo che gli ho spiegato ovviamente le isole greche essendo per me era scontato però tanta gente non ci arriva che le isole greche sono appiccate alla Turchia e quindi la gente cerca di arrivare ovviamente in Grecia e in Europa attraverso la Grecia eee quindi ecco tante persone erano anche abbastanza ignoranti rispetto alla situazione eee tanta solidarietà a volte un po di ignoranza e così più o meno...(Interview with C.)

Well people supported me a lot my family supports me my boyfriend my friends they...they like to hear about my experiences and when I talked to them it's so clear about how mind changes are connected with the volunteering international experience and stuff ehm for just one example when I told one friend that I got the chicken pox it was like ooh aren't the children vaccinated there I mean that there are MSF there but I mean they don't have where to sleep they don't have what to eat and like people here such a lack of information about the situation there they think about vaccines like you know in a place where people don't have to eat what to eat where to sleep so...they liked when talked about the situations that I have been through sooo they can have just a little bit information that media doesn't give us and change just a little bit their mentality that they wouldn't changed if they have not talked to me you know it's not really common for Brasilians to volunteer in an international level sooo for them it's like really cool that I'm doing it and they love to hear about the experiences (Interview with Wildcat).

Sometimes they receive bad feedbacks on their social media accounts and from people they know:

On social media I only had one negative response from a woman that I don't even know and I don't know how this actually happened...she told me that was...I was doing...was absolutely wrong but yeah I didn't know her so I didn't really care about that [...] yeah she posted something and I commented on that I guess I didn't agree with what she was posting like refugees nowadays they are not real refugees blah blah blah something like that and then she sent me a personal a private message and yeah we had a short conversation but yeah she didn't really listened to what I was saying and it was quite clear that she already had her opinion like it was already there and she eehm she basically told me that what I did was attract refugees and all they want is money things you hear a lot ehm yeah...(Interview with Fiori).

Che sei un coglione e che sei un grande allo stesso tempo c'è chi dice dai ma che cazzo fai ma c'hai tutto a Firenze ma vai là con questi disgraziati a perdere tempo (Interview with Tomhood).

The same scepticism has been reported by a young Japanese volunteer, K., who spent his work holiday break volunteering in Samos for one week. He told me that his decision was not seen as profitable and useful in any way from his colleagues of work.

Others, such as Y. and T. and ThommyMayo, leave and come back to the same social environment where people would not understand their decision, where they feel that people listen to them but they do not quite understand them. Their "audiences" get interested quite easily, but the excitement fades away as much as quickly after few questions. For this reason, the bonds among volunteers sometimes are kept alive even after the experience on the island, because sadly 'if you haven't been there, you can't understand' as Y. repeats me sitting at a café close to Colombia Road flower market in London.

3.3 A volunteer is in the making

In the Code of Conduct, power asymmetries are mentioned: "Volunteers are in a position of trust and these actions [with reference to sexual relations with border-crossers or community volunteers] put the beneficiary at risk of harm, as it exploits the disproportionate balance of power" and it also states the unsupervised prohibition of

visiting the Jungle: “Volunteers should not enter the camp when they are not scheduled to be there, except in exceptional circumstances. In this case, volunteers must inform one of the coordinators”. Of course, in many occasions these rules were not completely followed by the volunteers. Since in Sandstone, for its structure and activities, volunteers did not have much of a contact with adult border-crossers, sometimes volunteers would visit the ‘Jungle’ to talk and to ‘listen’ to border-crossers. As Theodossopoulos (2016) argues, not many volunteers, when specifically asked, were willing to problematize their humanitarian engagement in the field. The experience was positive, border-crossers were receiving help because “something is better than nothing” and since the governments ‘cannot do their job’ or the EU does not significantly step in, the only practical contribution was volunteering. They acknowledged the fact that their single contribution was temporary, and most likely not a permanent solution for the issue in general, yet border-crossers ‘need’ help, so they choose to make their time available – even if it is just for a week – for them and for the NGOs that are working on the ground: “Is this, after all, the secret fascination of borgeois philanthropy?” (Theodossopoulos 2016: 171). Nonetheless, many volunteers faced ethical dilemmas during their stay. I personally, as I mentioned before, opted out after some time from the kids’ activities. First, it was partially because I tried to be assigned to the ‘crossing road’ for most of the time, but then also there I felt not comfortable and I decided to ask to the coordinators to be either in the Shop or at the Warehouse. It was a limit that I brought with me from my personal background, because I always said that I do not like working with children, but especially in this context I chose not to go further with it after pondering the possible outcomes, for my research too. I participated in many children’s summer camps as an educator in the past. Yet, I felt that the activities that Sandstone were carrying on in the Field, such as LEGO station, jumping the rope, football, ‘arts and craft’ and roadcrossing were meant to fill the time for the children, to have them in a “secure” place instead of wandering around without anything to do. Nonetheless, the Field was not really a quiet and secure place because anyone could just enter and it was not possible to have a sort of controlled environment without much distractions. The activities, especially arts and craft, were not organized in a sort of structured logic. They were left to the organization of the volunteers in charge of that day without being supervised by the coordinator. And it mainly constituted in drawing or some kind of

manual activity that were very well successful when there was a volunteer that was able to engage the children, otherwise, they were not. S. admitted to feel not very competent at the beginning, but in the end she justifies her decision “I became more comfortable and saw the importance of kids’ activities and cinema to the them. Bringing some form of normalcy (even if they could be extremely frustrating) was important to me” (Interview with S.). It is important to be a good listener, too: “A lot of people came and wanted to explain to me the bad situation. [...] Also they have had the hope left that I would be able to help them in their current situation [...] they felt unimportant and forgotten by the EU and the rest of the world. Just listening to their stories, showing interest...made them leave with a better feeling.” (Interview with D.)

Especially with traumatized children, some skills are needed to manage them:

Tu ti comportavi come un insegnante normale ma in quella situazione in realtà ci voleva molto più tatto sensibilità [...] L’esperienza è stata particolare perché quella scuola ti dà l’idea di essere una scuola normale cioè i ragazzi sono felici sono allegri entrano a scuola e li vedi carini pettinati puliti poi ti rendi conto che vivono in una condizione disumana quella del campo dell’hotspot sull’isola e insomma è difficile relazionare il ragazzo a quella situazione lì perché la scuola creava una specie di bolla protetta quello era quello che eravamo tenuti a fare noi creare un ambiente protetto rispetto a quello che vivevano poi fuori quindi era difficile poi considerarli dei rifugiati lì consideravi ragazzini tra virgolette normali e quindi li sgridavi a volte anche troppo magari no come essere umani chiaramente se si picchiavano si lanciavano la frutta addosso tu li fermavi e insomma però chiaramente l’ambiente era un po’ particolare ecco molto diverso dalle altre associazioni come Samos Volunteers per esempio era un ambiente diverso molto più rilassato (Interview with C.).

And even though, there was a brief introduction on how to approach ‘refugee children’, it was not enough or not for everyone to have the necessary skills.

Sometimes, volunteers would call children ‘crazy’ because they were shouting and fighting each other all the time, but in the end they were enjoying those moments because they felt they could bring some temporary good time to those that are not having a great time all day long. So imagine a medium traffic flow high-speed road, a big crossroad, the entrance of a refugee camp and the Field where children play. How are all coexisting? Being the person, usually white, wearing the NGO vest, that stands in the middle of the road slowing down cars because very small children are running down the slope at the entrance of the Hotspot towards the road without looking if cars are coming, smiling at border-crossers who are coming and going from the Camp...The greeting ‘How are you?’ that usually follows ‘Hello’ in English does not really mean

that the person who ask is really interested in an answer, but it is very often used as simply a form of greeting, a small talk. So English (non) native speakers were saying hello in this was many times to border-crossers while doing roadcrossing or when they met them in the street or the city center. Once while I was in 'roadcrossing', after I said that, a young man stopped, looked me in the eyes and asked me: "Why are you asking me this? You know that I'm not. Can you help me if I say that I am not okay?". That question really shake me and it seemed ridiculous to me being there as a white volunteer wearing a vest of an NGO in the middle of the road "helping" to cross the road when border-crossers already knew that crossing the road in that place was dangerous. So, after that, I tried other times but I was not comfortable at all and in kid's activities I was not feeling competent enough to deal with vulnerable children. Many other volunteers focused on those border-crossers who thanked them for looking out for small children and helping them to cross the road or for the services that the NGO was providing to them. This act of thankfulness showed the volunteers that their work was useful somehow, that it was appreciated:

When I stepped onto the ferry in the middle of the night, I met a young man from Nigeria who had stayed on Samos for a couple of months. Many people from the camp tried to flee once again that night and tried to get onto the ferry secretly or through bribes. Every single one was turned away by officers. Except for this young man that I talked to, who had simply gotten incredibly lucky. In the morning officials from the camp decided that he should be moved to Athens which was why he had a valid ticket. When I explained to him why I had come to Samos and that I have worked for *Sandstone* [*modified by author*] his eyes widened and he couldn't stop smiling. He told me how deeply grateful he feels for how much this organization has helped him. He said "you gave me a tent when I had nothing, you gave me clothes, you helped me so so much". He couldn't stop saying thank you. And in that moment I was reminded that the things that appear small really do make a difference in the lives of individuals. In my head I started planning my return to Samos (Interview with Ririka).

Jayarc, instead, was surprised in seeing so much gratitude because he expected more resentment since the West, in particular the UK and the USA, were greatly responsible for the situation that caused this massive emigration. The positive, "enriquecedora", "excelente" contact with border-crossers, for Aborisen Canarii, turns his coming back home with more questions than the day that he arrived: he cannot understand what and why is happening in Samos; he does not problematize the activities with children, but he is worried about the conditions of these minors, their painful teeth decays, the

abrasions on their skin, the ‘suffering body’ of an innocent child. Even if Fiori did not have so many contacts with border-crosser adults, she enjoyed the ‘superfast’ contact during distributions or desk registration because you could see that people were thankful. Sometimes volunteers notice that are looked with different eyes and ponder the friendships that are created with border-crossers:

Gli adulti richiedenti asilo chiaramente ti guardano insomma sanno che sei un volontario ti guardano in maniera diversa con occhio diverso che non sei un loro pari forse hanno anche un po’ paura di te o comunque non quelli con cui ho fatto amicizia io erano quelli con cui lavoravano con Samos Volunteers perché con Samos Volunteers abbiamo fatto amicizia ovviamente quindi passavamo il tempo libero con loro e quindi tanti di loro erano alcuni di loro sono richiedenti asilo e ehm c’è stato anche delle amicizie interessanti anche se hai sempre l’impressione che vogliono qualcosa da te soldi o l’aiuto che te non gli puoi dare ovviamente perché non sei in grado di aiutarli ad avere il permesso di soggiorno ecc poi abbiamo iniziato a frequentare la casa di un ragazzo che aveva aperto lì un negozio *** il negozio per i rifugiati che era accanto al *** lui era lui è *** arrivato dalla Turchia e poi ha aperto questo negozio per i rifugiati e poi abbiamo fatto amicizia e la sera passavamo spesso tempo a casa sua eee tutto molto positivo ovviamente però una volta tornata a casa mi sono veramente resa conto che loro sono in una gabbia e che non...anche il distacco è stato pesante anche da parte sua si era molto affezionato a me eeehm insomma è stato pesante staccarsi tutt’ora ci penso ovviamente vorrei mandargli delle cose dei regali ma c’ho come un blocco emotivo non so comunque abbiamo fatto amicizia con loro eee è successo una volta che ho provato ad entrare sono provata ad entrare nel campo perché c’era proibito però c’era una signora che aveva un sacco di vestiti addosso cioè aveva un sacchetto con vestiti molto pesanti della roba e io l’ho aiutata a portarlo dentro e quindi lì poi si è un po’ arrabbiata eee però non è successo niente mi ha detto non entrare e quindi sei sempre vista come l’occidentale che va un po’ a farsi gli affari suoi no ecco (Interview with C.).

As mentioned earlier, when the itinerant circus, the Flying Seagulls, placed its big red and white tent in the Field, children got really excited. It is a social project based in the UK and founded in 2007 that gather professionals in dealing with vulnerable children through music and laughs. Clowns, musicians, circus performers and magicians travel from place to place. They settled in Samos too for about two months. So this means that children were not really crazy, but non-expert volunteers were not prepared to deal with them.

3.3.1 EU and others

One of the questions that I asked during the interviews was related to the European Union. I thought it could be relevant based on two preliminary remarks: the presence of mainly European international volunteers on the Aegean islands and the EU perceived as one of the main responsible of the mismanagement of the ‘refugee crisis’ in the Mediterranean. Many volunteers believe that there is co-responsibility among the EU, the Greek government and the UN – sometimes confusing their political hierarchy – in not providing the much needed assistance, in ‘doing their job’. All the volunteers believe in a world without borders, without discriminations of places of births and based on that the need to have or not a visa or a permit of residence. Some of them, being European citizens and enjoying a special freedom of movement, recognize the importance of the EU and of being part of it, but they do not agree with a Europe that goes back in time and turns once again into a Fortress:

When I was a child I felt like I was growing up in a borderless world. Living in Germany during a time after the Berlin Wall had come down and after the European Union was formed, I received the message that people have the right to move freely. I was fascinated by stories that my parents told me about their past, about a time when my mom lived in East Germany and my dad in West Germany and by law it was impossible for them to communicate with each other, let alone meet. They lived in a world in which their movement was controlled by the state, with a physical wall in between them that functioned as a visible border and aimed to remind people of their powerlessness. But these were stories of the past, I was taught that after the German reunification, another step towards more freedom and more opportunities was being taken when free movement within member states of the European Union became possible. What no one told me was how deceiving the story of freedom really was. Now I understand that back then the fact that I never took my privilege of being able to move so freely for granted was solely rooted in history and not in my awareness of what borders mean in the world that we live in today. When I left Samos in the night of the fire that broke out in the camp, I experienced how Greek authorities did everything they could to stop anyone who seemed suspicious of “illegal movement”. When I arrived at the harbour to take the ferry to Athens, several police officers checked my passport a couple of times and asked me some questions. But one moment later, I was free to go. I was free to leave behind a place where thousands of people were trapped. Trapped within a system created by governments that desperately want to secure their borders through deterrent and often inhumane approaches, aiming to protect the privileges of millions and aggravating the plight of million others who get left behind feeling powerless. With the passing of more and more policies that I disapproved of, I started to distance myself from EU politics and focused more on my own power within this crisis, looking for efficient ways how I can support individuals who are affected by the mismanagement of the crisis (Interview with Ririka).

Especially for those volunteers who are damaged by Brexit, they recognize the advantage of being in the EU, but they still disagree with the idleness in relation to this situation, that could theoretically be sorted out with no effort and shared responsibility:

The vote for Brexit was disastrous and I think it will be disastrous for the UK not the least because it limits the ehm the ease of travel around European countries and I think this will possibly be difficult for some British volunteers because they'll need the visa question and that sort of nonsense ehm so far the context of the EU how the EU relates to the refugee situation everybody I've spoken to seems to think that this problem this challenge that we have the refugees have whether it's in Samos or Thessaloniki or Croatia or whatever in Europe Italy anywhere is...it is totally unnecessary of course seven thousand refugees in a town with a population of five thousand is disproportionate it's not reasonable to expect to expect such a small population as there is in Samos Town it's not reasonable to expect them to put up with an invasion coz that's what it is an invasion of...of seven thousand...they are outnumbered now by the refugees it's ridiculous and I am amazed how they...how the Samians if that's the right word for people who live on Samos I am amazed how tolerant they are not all of them but most of them I think are sharing a lot of acceptance which is extraordinary and I think it tests if any...what lovely people they are but seven thousand refugees as a percentage of Europe wide population is absolutely nothing and I suspect I don't know the total number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe but if it's let's I have no idea maybe it's a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand I don't know say two hundred thousand as a percentage of the European population it is minute it is not even a drop in the ocean so ehm the EU is not is not facing its responsibilities and it's missing a huge opportunity to absorb a very small number of people who desperately need help and ehm I just don't understand it I think that the EU there are twenty seven soon to be twenty six countries in Europe and I think that each member of the EU took in and welcomed and helped a number...a number of refugees relating to the population of their own country so for example if there are seventy million people living in France and thirty five million people living in I don't know in Sweden...France should take twice as many people and I think you could use and I think the EU could use another metric perhaps being the population ratio to the maybe bring in gross national product you know wealthier countries could perhaps take more or contribute more so I think that the EU really I think when the history is written I think the EU will be judged badly they might have taken a huge number...Germany has but don't taking it quite right or taking it next to no people which the UK has so I think there is a lot I think the EU is gonna wake up to the fact that this is gonna be a continuing problem (Interview with Jayarc).

The mismanagement seems very dangerous; the EU is missing an opportunity to give form to future European citizens right from the beginning: “quanto ci vuole a fare un campo serio i soldi ci sono te fai un campo dove ci metti una scuola un ospedale e tutto così poi questa gente arriva quando esce dal campo è un cittadino europeo così invece è gente frustrata e poi quando crescerà non so cosa potrà portare al nostro paese pericolosa come situazione magari non adesso ma in un futuro...l'integrazione va fatta adesso” (Interview with Tomhood). Refugees are *not* welcome, this is the ultimate goal of the EU:

Quello che sta facendo l'Europa è chiaro l'Europa vuole dare un messaggio all'Oriente e ai poveri dell'Oriente non venite in Europa perché si sta male non venite in Europa perché finite in questi hotspot in cui vivete nella vostra spazzatura loro non vogliono l'Europa non vuole creare dei campi profughi...dei campi profughi decenti perché se lo facesse arriverebbero il triplo o il quadruplo delle persone probabilmente questo è quello che pensa l'ONU con molta probabilità anche se l'ONU si batte forse ho detto una bischerata te lo sai meglio di me di sicuro comunque il messaggio che vogliono dare è questo si sa qualcuno lo ha anche detto noi non possiamo accogliere gli immigrati perché se ne arriverebbero molti di più...loro vogliono che la gente muoia in mare perché così si sparge la voce che la gente muore in mare e sperano in questo modo di arrestare l'onda migratoria questo è il mio pensiero io penso sia così eee chiaramente si sta comportando in maniera l'Europa i paesi europei si sta comportando in maniera poco accettabile però lo sta facendo per questo motivo qui soprattutto perché sta alimentando le guerre in Oriente l'Europa no...sì...ritorno al discorso dell'economia basata purtroppo sulla meccanica...Finmeccanica produce le armi e siamo noi che sovvenzioniamo tante guerre in giro per il mondo e quindi poi gli fa comodo che ci sia la guerra in questi posti ma non vogliamo gli immigrati e quindi c'è bisogno che il messaggio sia chiaro qui si sta male non c'è posto per gli immigrati e non c'è integrazione e quindi non non si preoccupano di creare integrazione (Interview with C.).

3.3.2 Emotions and self-care

Volunteers feel. But feeling too much can be counterproductive in a situation of emergency. It can cause a breakdown if emotions are not taken care of such as the uncontrolled laugh after the intense situation during the clearing of the tents in the Field by the police and the transfer of people to Athens. It is interesting Doidge and Sandri (2019)'s approach of emotions as initial factor for volunteering, which accompanies the experience of the volunteers in Calais. Emotions are central and can intensify in collective environments such as the dense spiritual energy that religious and non-religious volunteers shared in honour of the deceased little boy in Lesvos, run over by a Sandstone volunteer driving a car. Volunteers feel plenty of emotions: frustration, sadness, anger, shock, annoyance, bothersome, joy, happiness, relief, uncertainty and so on. Volunteers feel that they would like to provide a small amount of normalcy for children, as I mentioned before, organising from time to time an open air cinema by night in the Field where everybody is welcome.



Image 13 - Open air cinema by night in the Field

Nevertheless, it looks like the replaceability of volunteers and the attachment issues of children, that could happen in any NGO on the island, cause a burst of feelings too: “Mi sento amareggiato. La scarsa continuità che Samos Volunteers offre a questi bambini mi fa rabbia. Hanno bisogno di struttura e invece vedono nuovi volontari quasi ogni giorno” (Govoni 2019: 38).

Some volunteers live the experience in a very relaxed way; others are more shaken by the thought of repeating this project of international voluntarism:

Dal punto di vista emotivo pesante molto pesante almeno per me molto pesante non so se riuscirei vorrei...uno dovrebbe staccarsi completamente dalla propria vita e dedicarsi a quello allora io là potrei farcela ma se dovessi continuamente tornare...questi due mondi paralleli della vita normale che tu hai che io c'ho il mio lavoro le mie cose e poi tornare a fare la volontaria internazionale è molto faticoso perché poi l'impatto di quando ritorni hai tutte le tue cose lì ecc insomma è difficile però molto positivo sì mmh (Interview with C.).

A sense of overwhelming anxiety occupies the minds of the volunteers even when the experience is finished and they realize that the bubble they were in Samos reversed. The bubble is the privilege life that everyone creates for themselves:

Quando uno si abitua ovviamente hai una serenità e ritornare alla vita normale è un po' difficile io poi faccio la guida turistica quindi spesso lavoro anche con persone ricche benestanti e quindi insomma rendersi proprio conto che quello che stai vivendo non è il vero mondo non so la sensazione di stare vivendo qualcosa che non è reale sì ti sei costruito il tuo mondo ecc. ma una specie di piccolo ambiente bello e positivo ma che poi il mondo reale è un'altra cosaaa e chiaramente da lì nasce un senso di angoscia non sai se tirare fuori e

affrontarlo e fare la volontaria e aiutare gli altri oppure se fare finta di niente e continuare con la tua vita e il tuo mondo e basta un po' questo sentimento qui più o meno non so se mi sono spiegata (Interview with C.).

3.4 Voluntarism means...

A quantitative survey⁹⁷ in Lesvos in 2015, focusing on the motivations that pushed the volunteer tourists to visit the island, highlighted how for the majority of volunteers it was the first experience of volunteering abroad and the main reason of the departure was altruist ('help', 'make a difference', 'contribute', 'do something worthwhile') compared to other studies which show motives regarding the personal growth. Most of the volunteers stayed one or two weeks, were mainly female, had no previous background in the field and hold a high educational level. In 2019 on the island of Samos the picture is similar for certain aspects but very different for others. Similarly, I noticed more females than male volunteers and mostly attending the university or holding already a degree. By contrast, many volunteers had previous engagement in activities with border-crossers either in humanitarian field or at the local level, but some volunteers with no past volunteering experience whatsoever were also present. For what concerns the motivations and the meaning associated with voluntarism, I will explore this matter in the next paragraphs.

The meaning of voluntarism as 'giving back to the community' and as a service is reproduced in the guide book "Learning Service. The essential guide to volunteering abroad" (2018), which philosophy can be traced back at the core of the American experiential service-learning approach that has seen as a pioneer Robert Sigmon. On the same line, the European Solidarity Corps base their operations describing extensively the meaning of voluntarism as a non-profitable experience of learning skills and an occasion for being an active citizen:

In the context of the European Solidarity Corps, Volunteering is a solidarity activity that takes the form of a full-time (at least 30 and not more than 38 hours per week) voluntary unpaid activity for a period of up to 12 months. It provides young people with the opportunity to contribute to the daily work of organisations in solidarity activities to the ultimate benefit of the communities within which the activities are carried out. As the main

⁹⁷ See Trihas and Tsilimpokos (2018).

mechanism for promoting solidarity as a value, volunteering helps to overcome important societal challenges and addresses the needs of local communities. It also enables young people to acquire useful experience, skills and competences for their personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, thereby improving their employability and active citizenship.

Volunteering can take place in a broad range of areas, such as in the fields of environmental protection, climate change mitigation and greater social inclusion. It does not include activities that are part of curricula in formal education, vocational education and training systems and activities for emergency response, and must not interfere with the functioning of the labour market.

Activities supported under volunteering must constitute a rich experience in a non-formal and informal learning context, which enhances young people's skills and competences. They must not substitute traineeships or jobs and should be based on a written volunteering agreement.

Volunteering should cover the participants' expenditure arising from participation in such solidarity activities but should not provide them with salaries or an economic benefit. Participation in volunteering activities must be free of charge for the volunteer, with the exception of possible contributions to travel costs (if the grant does not fully cover these costs) and additional expenses not linked to the implementation of the activity.

Volunteering activities are open to all young people, including people with fewer opportunities. Volunteers are to be selected in a fair, transparent and objective way, regardless of their ethnic group, religion, sexual orientation, political opinion, etc. No previous qualifications, educational level, specific experience or language knowledge must be required. A more specific profile of the volunteer might be drawn up if justified by the nature of the tasks of the activity or by the project context (European Solidarity Corps Call 2019)⁹⁸.

'To make the difference' and 'to experience firsthand' are the initial factors that pushed many people to volunteer in Sandstone. As such, the volunteering period taught to the volunteers to open up their minds about other cultures, other 'worlds' compared to 'theirs', where people are in the move and do not have (yet) commodities but are still 'thankful to God for their lives'⁹⁹. Wildcat underlines how, far away from the things that you are used to, you connect instantly with people from different countries and with different backgrounds, that normally you would not connect with. The direct contact, either with border-crossers or with international volunteers, really changes you and makes you see things from a different perspective:

⁹⁸ See the European Solidarity Corps Call 2019 available at https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/library/documents/european-solidarity-corps-guide-2019_en.pdf

⁹⁹ Interview with Wildcat (female, Brazilian, 24). It is interesting to notice how, even though she was a missionary in training in the undenominational academy Youth With a Mission and she identifies herself as Christian, was very surprised in realizing that a border-crosser still firmly believed, that it was thankful to God for being alive even though he was living in such appalling circumstances in the Hotspot.

Even in really simple things for example if I wanna share a snack in Brasil you usually take a bite and then you offer to other people to take a bite but in other countries that's disgusting if you want to share your snack you tear apart the snack with your hands and then you offer to the other persons so like...meeting new people you can see the difference there something that you learn it was right in your whole life you see that it is actually wrong in other cultures and that really makes you question about other things that you were thought it was right like your whole life and it opens up your minds not to be strict in your opinions about what's right and what's wrong (Interview with Wildcat).

Volunteering means recognizing that you are privileged and it creates the opportunity to help the others without expecting something back, to give back, or while giving something, you earn more in a sort of positive-sum game¹⁰⁰.

I guess it means helping other people in what way in any way possible without expecting well not without expecting anything back but without expecting too much in as yeah without expecting anything back I guess that's it... ehm it is a good feeling obviously yeah that's it it could be in any field I guess it is just trying to make the world a little bit better than it was (Interview with Fiori)¹⁰¹.

I guess it kinda means that I received a lot in my life you know without asking I received a good family I received a house I received education and a lot of people didn't and it also wasn't their choice like it wasn't mine to receive all of that so yes ehm governments doesn't do their job correctly especially in Brasil like to offer people what they need you know like the government should protect their people and they don't sooo I think it's nice when our own people get together other that doesn't have all that we have so I mean I received more than and I give a little bit even if I don't give anything material I can give at least my time to be there to listen to support to play and yeah I guess a little bit of my motivation (Interview with Wildcat).

Doing voluntarism to me means to be aware of your own privilege and to feel the need to give something back to people who's current situation is not as privileged as ourselves. Working voluntarily means to have empathy and care for other people...rather than spending time on yourself. Also it means receiving highly precious experiences that you can share. It is never just one handed work. While you spend time and money to work for others, you always get a lot back (Interview with D.)

Well I think is giving whatever you can but realizing that actually the experience gives a lot more than you think you're gonna get it's not just about getting nice comments on your Facebook you do really gain a lot from doing it at a personal level self-esteem self-worth I think it is incredible useful being useful to other people [...] I suppose furtherly I ehm the the experience of...of doing this small service has ehm made me feel better about myself that's why I'm so grateful because it's...it's improved my self-esteem and I suspect that it this experience would improve the self-esteem who does it so I feel as always that I got more out of the situation than I've given I've given everything that I can I feel that I received a lot more than I had given and that's kinda cool [he laughs] (Interview with Jayarc).

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Jayarc (male, British, 73).

¹⁰¹ Interview with Fiori (female, Dutch, 28).

ThommyMayo supports the “listener” mode of the volunteer, that whenever possible, turns into action with the ultimate goal of the empowerment of border-crossers, whereas Tomhood, a cartoonist, symbolically draws an ear and a hug:

Doing whatever you are able to do to help. I think volunteers should listen to the wants and needs of the asylum seekers and if possible do that. Help them help themselves (Interview with ThommyMayo¹⁰²).

Penso un abbraccio perchè alla fine aiutare gli altri è cercare di essere mentalmente disponibili alle loro esigenze e anche fisicamente dipende poi ognuno la vive in maniera sua cioè io la vivo in maniera rilassata c'è chi la vive in maniera molto stressante vuole fare tantissime cose io cerco di fare quello che so fare e aiutarli appunto parlando essendo tra virgolette una sorta di orecchio direi ascoltare quello che vogliono dire e dargli quello che vogliono nel limite del possibile chiaramente (Interview with Tomhood)¹⁰³.

Being an international volunteer means working for a cause that you are passionate about while travelling, giving a purpose to your travel in a short-term engagement, that you share with other people you are working with:

Volunteering to me means that you are motivated to use your skills to support a cause that is close to your heart. I believe that genuine dedication is incredibly important and that you should be able to work wholeheartedly as a volunteer. When you volunteer you work towards change together with a group of people who share similar values and ideas in regards to the goals of their action. So I think it is key that volunteers genuinely believe in the general importance of their work while also constantly reminding themselves of their own initial motivation. [...] Personally, I have learned that even though I love to travel, I don't necessarily enjoy “just wandering around”. I need tasks in my life. Combining voluntary work with traveling has given me a sense of purpose which I wouldn't have if I would only travel to new countries to go hiking and to relax at nice beaches. Volunteering adds a lot of value to my life because giving back and putting all my energy into work that I believe has meaning, fulfils me.” (Interview with Ririka).¹⁰⁴

Mah impiegare il tempo libero che ho nell'aiutare delle persone in difficoltà o anche gli animali come faccio al canile impiegare il mio tempo libero per fare qualcosa che sia al bisogno di altri bisogno mio di dare un senso al mio tempo e quindi alla mia vita ovviamente eehm per quello che posso eehm una cosa che dà molto più valore all'esistenza di una persona ecco se tu impieghi il tuo tempo non solo per te stesso ma anche per gli altri è lì il senso della vita altrimenti vivi per te e non boh non c'ha senso...[...] io faccio la guida quindi io a febbraio non lavoro eehm volevo provare a fare qualcosa che non fosse solo per me ho sempre fatto dei viaggi ho lavorato nelle fattorie oppure insomma e in linea con questa cosa quest'anno ho fatto la volontaria non mi definirei una volontaria perché non lo faccio con continuità a parte il mio lavoro lì al canile qui in Italia non ho mai provato a

¹⁰² Interview with ThommyMayo (female, Swiss, 18).

¹⁰³ Interview with Tomhood (male, Italian, 31).

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Ririka (female, German, 24). See Appendix 1.

buttarmi in altre situazioni perché perché quando sono qui lavoro e non ho così tanto tempo libero però potrei farlo anche qui qui richiede un impegno diverso perché c'è una preparazione e c'è una cosa con più continuità no devi fare tutto l'anno magari due volte a settimana e fare volontariato e allora sei una vera volontaria io non tanto [ride] non sono tanto una vera volontaria l'ho fatto così sì sì forse anche io ho fatto un po' di turismo volontariato cioè magari al limite delle due cose con coscienza però ovviamente (Interview with C.¹⁰⁵)

Voluntarism is something primordial, a response of the civil society to the absence of the state¹⁰⁶. Whereas, when I asked to S.¹⁰⁷ to define what it means to be a volunteer and to do voluntarism, she differentiated her period of volunteering in Samos from the voluntourism in Calais. The difference was in the negative connotations attached to the latter term due to the harm and 'make things worse' that implies.

3.5 #Sandstone's Family

Despite the first awkwardness in being the new volunteer, making an effort into remembering the names and try to get to know and speak with many people as possible, week by week, the sense of belonging to a group grows. Bonds are tied and relationships, that will last way beyond the experience on the island, are created:

Well I felt like the other volunteers were really great I don't recall any bad experience with any of them like I had fun with them I talked to them and get to know their lives and listen to mine and ehm we could learn about each other motivations to be there it was really cool it is really different when you are in an house like with a lot of nationalities and you see a lot of different point of views you were all so really great in my opinion I was glad that I met all of them sooo...(Interview with Wildcat).

In this sense, the final speech¹⁰⁸ made by Aborisen Canarii at his last high and low session reveals the emotional component in thanking each and every one of the volunteers addressing them personally or as a group (i.e. the Brasilians that came as two groups of 10-15 people that were missionaries or missionaries in training). Living together, working together, waiting together, sharing funny and difficult moments...everything contribute to tighten the strings that connect all the volunteers

¹⁰⁵ Interview with C. (female, Italian, 34).

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Aborisen Canarii (male, Spanish, 36).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with S. (female, Australian 24).

¹⁰⁸ See Attachments.

and that gives birth to the Sandstone's Family:

I thought that it must take some time until I felt really comfortable within the organization and understood the way they worked. But in reality I got picked up from the airport, had a quick 15 minute introduction in the car, then was dropped off at the shop of *Sandstone* [modified by author] and started working without hesitation right away. It was easy to get along with the other volunteers and even though you always worked together with different people, we were one team [...] Volunteering for *Sandstone* [modified by author] was a very intuitive decision, it was the first organization that I came across and I immediately had a good feeling with them. I was also amazed by how easy it was to join them so spontaneously and I felt like my contribution was appreciated, which to me is an important part of a positive volunteering experience. [...] The two weeks that I spent on Samos were very meaningful to me, before I started volunteering I felt quite lost and didn't really know what I was doing with my life. I was in search for some kind of purpose and I definitely found it on Samos. I experienced my days there as very fulfilling. I was exhausted by the end of each day, but it was a kind of exhaustion that inspired me to do it all again the next day. I felt like I always knew why I was getting up so I started my days motivated and ready. I also noticed how much I had grown since my first internships working with refugees. On Samos I felt a lot more stability and strength within me and had less difficulties handling challenging situations. The most difficult parts of my time volunteering for *Sandstone* [modified by author] were moments in which decisions had to be made, when it had to be determined which donations we should give out to who so that it was a "fair" and effective distribution. I often wondered if I did the right thing and whether our organization is making the right choices. But then I also questioned how you can actually determine what *is* right and wrong in a situation that is so fundamentally messed up due to the fact that, in my opinion, it is constantly being mishandled by governments who don't want to take responsibility. Then, on the night of my planned departure, a fire broke out in the camp, which made it incredibly hard to leave. My heart was so broken for all the people who had lost everything once again and who weren't safe in a place that was supposed to give them refuge... I wanted to stay so badly, it felt like it was the worst moment to leave, I felt so obligated to stay and to do more, to do something. But I knew that I had to go, that I couldn't change my plans now (Interview with Ririka).

This Family includes all the volunteers that are still working on the ground and all the past volunteers, that exchange thoughts and news related to the situation on Samos from time to time in the WhatsApp group called "Sandstone Samos: off the island", whose profile description goes as follows: "A platform dedicated to the Sandstone Family to share information and questions on the situation related to the Refugee "Crisis", and for the Sandstone Team to share updates from the ground".

The other side of the coin, however, shows that this closeness, at times inevitable, is too much for some people, who, especially regarding the accommodation, prefer to live on their own in a hotel room so that they can enjoy their own privacy. And considering that the team is always changing, rebalancing the teamworking can be a bit challenging:

L'esperienza è stata positiva difficile relazionarmi magari con gli altri volontari perché si arriva a un punto in cui si vive insieme si passa il tempo libero assieme si lavora assieme eravamo molto insieme [ride] sempre molto uniti però chiaramente si creavano magari poi tutti italiani più o meno eh la metà erano italiani quindi c'era magari c'era magari qualche polemica ecc quindi quello è stato l'aspetto forse più difficile relazionarmi con tante persone che erano lì anche loro a fare i volontari sono stata due mesi eee perché anche stare due settimane [...] no no era tutto legato al discorso lavorativo ovviamente le cose in casa vabbè normali cose normali ma le polemiche nascevano sulla gestione ovviamente del lavoro ognuno aveva la sua visione magari della cosa le regole c'erano però è sempre una situazione difficile che crea genera dei contrasti no perché magari io penso una cosa un altro ne pensa un'altra e quindi poi c'erano un po' delle polemiche magari non so veniva buttato via del cibo piuttosto che situazioni che venivano controllate meno qualche ragazzo più viziato di altri insomma queste cose qui e quindi poi c'era sempre un po' di polemica che rendeva un po' pesante l'ambiente ma non cose cose sostenibile ecco però per dirti chiaramente quando ci sono dieci quindici persone che lavorano in una struttura eee ognuno c'ha la sua anche se ci sono le regole però poi sei a contatto con ottanta ragazzi e quindi ognuno poi aveva il suo modo di portare avanti il lavoro diciamo eee polemiche legate al lavoro sì (Interview with C.).

All the volunteers evaluated the experience as really positive and useful without particular low points, enjoying the camaraderie and the good energy of working with people from different countries.

For many volunteers on the ground it was useful to have a diary as a tool of pressure release valve and to be self-reflexive about what was happening. At times you feel like you are in a temporal bubble, away from your family, your friends and in such busy environment that you do not really have the time to pause and think. The diary helps you do that:

Dopo aver perso questo diario ho smesso di scrivere e è un peccato perché scrivere tiii cioè in un certo senso è come la memoria del computer la RAM e l'hard disk cioè salvò quello che devi salvare nell'hard disk e il resto poi si perde quindi probabilmente ho perso tante cose poiii un giorno qua è come un mese a Firenze ma anche di più un anno a Firenze in questo periodo c'è stato anche l'incendio quindi insomma sono successe tantissime cose (Interview with Tomhood).

3.6 Once a volunteer, always a volunteer

When the experience is over, being that of two weeks or one month, many volunteers think in keep being engaged in some kind of social project. Someone decided to gather funds through organising online crowdfunding, flea markets or collecting material

donations to deliver directly to Sandstone. Others thought in continuing their involvement at home in a local organization in relation to border-crossers. A great number decided that, given the fact that the media coverage is close to none, they would organize an event to raise awareness about the situation on the Greek islands by means of a five minute stand up or a photographic exposition or releasing an interview with journalists. One crowdfunding campaign is particularly noteworthy: “Vamos 4 Samos: Winter is coming” was organized by three volunteers who met during their time in Sandstone and decided to gather funds to donate to the NGO in order to buy new laptops for the desk registration. With this intent in mind, they hiked through Turkey “to raise money and awareness for Sandstone”. Somewhere in the middle of their hike, they met an 18-year-old German boy, who, after listening to their stories about Samos, the refugees and Sandstone, decided to stop his hiking and travel to Samos to be a volunteer for more than one month.

It seems that the experience of volunteering has been for everyone so positive that inspired them to keep on that direction, abandoning their previous professional careers to dedicate themselves to something which they discovered to be more passionate about. Many had to go back to find a job or to go back to their actual job, but they were certain that in the future they will be once again international volunteers either in Samos or in other parts of the world for a longer period of time, because it seems difficult to ‘let go’, ‘disconnect’ and go back to their lives as if everything never happened and not be useful anymore:

For me the key is being useful I don’t really believe that as an older person that I can justify my experience unless I’m being useful I really don’t understand how some older people even don’t get out of bed because you don’t really have much reason to it unless you ehm I mean they are gonna be looking after their grandchildren they gotta be doing something I don’t want ever to get an age where I can’t be useful to other people in one form or another and I’m not sure that my children really want me turning a grandparent into a full time job [he laughs] (Interview with Jayarc).

The volunteering period was useful for both a personal growth in terms of confidence, self-esteem and for the purpose of CV expendable experience.

In a moment of self-reflexivity, C. realizes that maybe she would prefer in the future to dedicate herself to local project in Florence that manages accommodations for asylum seekers and refugees, instead of volunteering internationally again:

Allora sì ci avevo pensato partire ripartirei avevo pensato di andare sulla terraferma avevo pensato diverse cose però c'è una parte di me che è un po' disillusa che pensa che sia un po' inutile che più che altro si faccia per noi stessi che si stai aiutando il prossimo però stai anche creando una situazione di squilibrio perché sei quella occidentale che va ad insegnare delle cose a delle persone che sono dei prigionieri e ehm una parte di me ha dei problemi a conciliare questa cosa (Interview with C.).

Ultimately, some of the volunteers dream about having a professional career in the humanitarian field and coming back to Samos taking a coordinator position.

Conclusions

This dissertation aimed at dropping some hints for an exploration of the journey of the international volunteers, that will need further studies and discussions about the blank points that this topic has left in the academic literature. As a limitations of my research, I underlined the lack of the border-crossers' and locals' perspective on the NGO and the international voluntarism that has increasingly occupied a large portion of space in the Samian community and in general in the Greek society. Moreover, I did not explored the social media activity of the volunteers and of Sandstone and, ultimately, the research lacked a comprehensive trans-scalar analysis of the subjects operating in the humanitarian field in Samos. This can be interesting starting points for further fruitful studies.

Navigating through the experiences, opinions and challenges that humanitarianism and international volunteers have faced, some closing interpretations can be drawn. Nevertheless, I would like to stress that these line of thoughts are not final and are subject to my personal experience and research contextualised in the period that I conducted the research. This topic, as the situation per se on the island and broadly in Greece, quickly changes in a very short amount of time.

Volunteers have been motivated by a sort of mixture of 'need to help', to put themselves out in the world in an altruistic way and as an occasion of personal growth in terms of professional or life experience. The sense of belonging to a group, that shares their daily routines and intimate moments together is remarkable and has been perceived by each and every volunteer. Beyond different nationalities, ages and social backgrounds volunteers form a working team with a shared vision of the world, at least for what concerns the border-crossers' situation.

Can international volunteers in Sandstone be considered voluntourists? From my own account, international volunteers were not comparable to holidaymakers considering the volunteering period as part of their holiday experience in a foreign country. There was a sort of reflection and attention to the delicate situation where they were operating in, yet it was a challenge when it comes to the field practices, such as the

consideration that “something is better than nothing”, the categorization of inappropriate clothes for ‘refugee women’ in a ‘refugee camp’ or the consideration of the innocent ‘refugee kids’ that are at the same time crazy, yet fun to play with and need an entertainment to pass the time. I met international volunteers that were not defining themselves as such, therefore not being fully aware of their impact on the local and the border-crossers community due to their presence. The shortness of the volunteering period, the little or zero knowledge about the situation of border-crossers and the lack of training before, during and after the arrival are points that have to be taken into consideration and that influenced some episodes that volunteers were not ready to deal with. On a positive note, these volunteers seemed to be interested in helping to develop their level of solidarity also beyond their work in Samos. Once returned to their own countries, they kept alive the interest in the situation of the border-crossers in the Mediterranean and activated themselves with collections of funds, donations or awareness raising initiatives or started to dedicate their time to local solidarity initiatives. In Samos they found a purpose, a sense of belonging shared with people with a similar vision that in their own countries sometimes have taken an effort to discover, feeling out of place.

Contrary to the action of the solidarians, international volunteers did not explicitly challenged their presence and the consequences of their actions, but they felt that their active participation was useful and essential, whereas other actors, such as the Greek government, the European Union or the UNHCR, were apparently absent and did not provide a temporal or definitive solution.

With this dissertation, I hoped to shed a small light on the backstage of the border humanitarian practices operated by international volunteers. However, I would like to leave an open interpretation of the matters that I explored, going beyond the debate of ‘doing harm or good’ that surrounds international voluntarism and voluntourism.

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Appendix 1. Three interviews with international volunteers

Jayarc

I: Could you please tell me more about you and your life journey until here to Samos

J: well oh my goodness you know I am 73 years old so I honestly don't know where to begin ehm

I: it's up to you

J: I've had three or four different careers if you like I started off as a journalist but when my wife became pregnant we went I weren't earning enough money as a journalist she was working at the French embassy in London and she didn't wanna work any more so I stopped being a journalist and I went into public relations which was well paid so public relations was my second career so I did that for a few years and then we moved out of London and went to live on the coast of England and I bought a share in a manufacturing business so I became a factory owner only fifty per cent well fifty per cent factory owner which was very useful experience so manufacturing I guess or business if you like was my third career and then after I got divorced and left England to go to live in South East Asia I became a teacher because I trained before I went I trained as a teacher of English as a foreign language so that's four different four different careers if you like ehmmm and then I went back to my real love which is writing so I became a journalist again ehm initially as a radio report for BBC in Cambodia but only for two years because I had a big huge motorcycle accident so I had to go back to England [the chat stopped because a community volunteer asked the interviewer if there were any diapers size one left] and ehm yes I had a motorcycle accident in Cambodia then I came back to the UK for back surgery it took me six months to learn to walk again not fun and then I went back this time I went back to Thailand and I took a desk job as a sub editor on an English language newspaper in Bangkok a daily newspaper and ehm then I had successively different jobs as a journalist ehm in South East Asia and then I retired

I: what brought you here in Samos

J: ah what brought me here to Samos well I after I retired I kept busy writing about about film festivals in different countries Korea Japan Estonia and I went to lots of different countries to write about film festivals so that was a sort of a part time job post retirement ehm and then ehm so that kept me busy but it wasn't enough you know it was a little bit I felt it was a little bit too frivolous I wanted to do something more useful sooo [noise from the street of a motorcycle passing by] but I didn't really feel really well qualified academically so I went back to school I went back to university and I went to live in the States I went to two universities Webster university and then Harvard university ehm and I finished ehm well we had commencements graduation ceremony in Boston in May and since May I was looking for something useful to do so I got together with a group of students in Oxford and I worked with them a little bit but I wanted to do something a bit more substantial so I was looking for I wanted to do some voluntary work so I started to looking in the internet and I saw that ehm there were opportunities in Europe and I didn't particularly go to Calais [he laughs] I wasn't I didn't particularly want to go to Croatia and it looked that the greatest need was in Greece so ehm the ehm Indigo came up Indigo the recruitment volunteer recruitment agency came up and they accepted me and that's why I am here

I: so you decided this on like you researched before looking for a place where it could be more useful your experience and it came up Samos

J: absolutely yeah

I: sooo how was your experience here in Samos [the interviewer was called outside the Shop for few seconds]

J: well there have been no negatives for me at all it all have been positives ehm I ehm I've greatly enjoyed the comradery working with other volunteers from different countries that's been a real real pleasure that was great I lie being with younger people I rediscovered that pleasure when I was in the States you know so I nevertheless I was surprised how much I enjoyed working with other people and secondly of course the refugees ehm it's been it's been it's been it's been difficult it's been it's been difficult knowing seeing first hand the ehm conditions they are living in because I within two days of arriving here somebody took me into the Jungle I know we are not supposed to go in but anyway I went in I was shocked I didn't see any rats ehm ehm I didn't see any snakes but I know they are there and ehm they probably come out at night which would be make it even worse so I was shocked ehm [the interviewer was called for a question regarding an issue with a distribution to some people for a few minutes] I was so meeting the refugees I think we all expect and find a level of ehm gratitude amongst the refugees but I as a British nationals I expected to find also more resentment because British foreign policy has had a huge impact and [the interviewer was called again for a matter of distribution] American foreign policy and British foreign policy trough George Bush and Tony Blair created this situations that's what I believe by going to Kuwait and later going to Iraq so and of course the presence in Afghanistan I was expecting to find not from the women and the children but I was expecting to find more resentment than I had found I have seen some I have sensed some resentment I am not at all surprised about that as I say I was expecting more more of it because I think we deserve more resentment

I: do you mean specifically towards some governments the European Union the United Nations

J: towards the UK and America because anybody who studies current affairs and modern history it's it's very clear that all of this goes back to American and British foreign policy and I suppose furtherly I ehm the the experience of of doing this small service has ehm made me feel better about myself that's why I'm so grateful because it's it's improved my self-esteem and I suspect that it this experience would improve the self-esteem who does it so I feel as always that I got more out of the situation than I've given I've given everything that I can I feel that I received a lot more than I had given and that's kinda cool [he laughs]

I: so how would you define being a volunteer or doing voluntarism

J: how I would define it how I define being a volunteer ehm well I think is giving whatever you can but realizing that actually the experience gives a lot more than you think you're gonna get it's not just about getting nice comments on your Facebook you do really gain a lot from doing it at a personal level self-esteem self-worth I think it is incredible useful being useful to other people

I: and why did you mentioned Facebook

J: [he laughs] well because I think [he laughs] I mean because we all use Facebook and I think that's cool I think that's great ehm ehm I mean I have spent the last twenty twenty six years not living in England and I lived in South East Asia in different countries and also I lived in the States for me it's impossible to keep in touch with all the people that I want to keep in touch with if I don't use Facebook what else do you use? so I think that Facebook is important I think most of us you know volunteers seems to me a little be nomadic people who like to move around and if you like to

move around if are a little bit of a nomad you you I think you need Facebook so that's why I mentioned Facebook I think it's good

I: alright so what about the media social media and the experience of voluntarism you connected this experiences let's say but is it one did you mention it because sometimes when you are doing volunteerism you post information ehm some posts on your social media page

J: well I have not as it happens I have not I I mean for me the main purpose of facebook is to keep up to date on my facebook friend are doing and for me to tell them what I'm doing but ehm so I certainly use my timeline to my page to tell people what I was doing but I haven't posted anything since then I guess I mean being a volunteer I think is quite an emotional experience if you are volunteering in a situation like Samos and being British I don't tend to make a public display of my emotions I'm old school ehm so ehm but I think younger people would share a lot more and eh mi think it's a good thing because the more we share our experiences on Samos or generally volunteering the more people I suspe I don't know anybody here who has not have a positive experience so sharing a positive experience encourages other people to do the same so ehm whether they do that on Twitter or Facebook or whatsapp I had to learn whatsapp because I really didn't use I had one friend in the UK only one friend in the UK who uses whatsapp and we exchange messages like once every three months here it's like messages once every three minutes up to midnight I noticed last night and ehm yeah and I think also Instagram people are using Instagram as well so I've never used instagram but I think I will look at that when I go back home

I: so how did other people that you know or that you don't know react to you being here

J: well I I only I mean I on Twitter Facebook LinkedIn I only my friends are only people that I know if I don't know someone than I don't I don't count them among my friends they don't become one of my friends they don't know what I'm doing so it's only friends yeah very positive response some of them thought wow what a great adventure ehm one person [inaudible] sixty or seventy people who posted a response said one person said you are a good persone which I thought it was interesting ehm and but all of them were encouraging and wish me luck and ehm ehm reacted in a very positive manner yeah yeah

I: so can you please elaborate on your relationship with the European Union

J: my personal relationship?

I: yeah your personal relationship and also like contextualise it in this experience in Samos

J: ok well you have to remember I'm not a typical Brit I spent at least I think it's twenty six years overseas I came back to the UK because of climate change in in South East Asia the temperature is definitely increasing and ehm and the older you get the less able you are to cope with extreme temperature so I came back to the UK to look for somewhere to live in ehm 2016 after the UK vote to leave the EU so I my instinct this was the the vote for Brexit was disastrous and I think it will be disastrous for the UK not the least because it limits the ehm the ease of travel around European countries and I think this will possibly be difficult for some British volunteers because they'll need the visa question and that sort of nonsense ehm so far the context of the EU how the EU relates to the refugee situation everybody I've spoken to seems to think that this problem this challenge that we have the refugees have whether it's in Samos or Thessaloniki or Croatia or whatever in Europe Italy anywhere is it is totally unnecessary of course seven thousand refugees in a town with a population of five thousand is disproportionate it's not reasonable to accept to expect such a small population as there is in Samos Town it's not reasonable to expect them to put up with an invasion

coz that's what it is an invasion of of seven thousand they are outnumbered now by the refugees it's ridiculous and I am amazed how they how the Samians if that's the right word for people who live on Samos I am amazed how tolerant they are not all of them but most of them I think are sharing a lot of acceptance which is extraordinary and I think it tests if any what lovely people they are but seven thousand refugees as a percentage of Europe wide population is absolutely nothing and I suspect I don't know the total number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe but if it's let's I have no idea maybe it's a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand I don't know say two hundred thousand as a percentage of the European population it is minute it is not even a drop in the ocean so ehm the EU is not facing its responsibilities and it's missing a huge opportunity to absorb a very small number of people who desperately need help and ehm I just don't understand it I think that the EU there are twenty seven soon to be twenty six countries in Europe and I think that each member of the EU took in and welcomed and helped a number a number of refugees relating to the population of their own country so for example if there are seventy million people living in France and thirty five million people living in I don't know in Sweden France should take twice as many people and I think you could use and I think the EU could use another metric perhaps being the population ratio to the maybe bring in gross national product you know wealthier countries could perhaps take more or contribute more so I think that the EU really I think when the history is written I think the EU will be judged badly they might have taken a huge number Germany has but don't taking it quite right or taking it next to no people which the UK has so I think there is a lot I think the EU is gonna wake up to the fact that this is gonna be a continuing problem that's what I believe I'm not an expert these are just personal view that I shared from with other volunteers

I: so what's next?

J: well I'm going to after return to the UK for few weeks to catch up with my student friends I will go to South East Asia so I will spend Christmas in Bangkok ehm I will probably spend three months in South East Asia I want to enrol in a sort of intermediate level course in Buddhism ehm I want to go to a couple of retreats silent retreats somewhere I don't hear the sound of my voice or anybody else's for two three weeks and I'm going to look to the question of doing some voluntary work in Laos which I think is still the poorest country in the planet certainly it was if no longer the case Indigo indicate they might be able to put me in touch with some of the organizations working in Laos I catch up with friends and look for further opportunities to be useful

I: in the international volunteering world in the domestic area...?

J: international I'm not sure particularly now that looks that we are going to leave definitely I am not sure how much more time I will spend in England I do prefer to be elsewhere

I: even though you came back for the climate change?

J: well yes I mean that's right the reason I'm I'm not necessarily gonna spend all my time in South East Asia there are lots of other places in the world where I might be useful where temperature don't exceed forty degrees Celsius on a regular basis so for me the key is being useful I don't really believe that as an older person that I can justify my experience unless I'm being useful I really don't understand how some older people even don't get out of bed because you don't really have much reason to it unless you ehm I mean they are gonna be looking after their grandchildren they gotta be doing something I don't want ever to get an age where I can't be useful to other people in one form or another and I'm not sure that my children really want me turning a grandparent into a full time job [he laughs]

I: so just to clarify before coming to Samos did you have any experience of volunteering?

J: yes but not this sort of volunteering I worked as a ehm after my divorce I spoke to somebody a good friend said told me look if you are really feeling very sorry for yourself the best way to deal with that is to be useful to other people in my hometown there were opportunities to work with people with the Samaritans so I worked with the Samaritans for quite a long time and I don't know if I helped anyone else but certainly helped me so that's good and also worked did voluntary work with local radio station this is before I went to the Far East ehm so yeah I worked for a radio station which was sort of a voluntary work ehm and I did a little bit work voluntary work with the British [inaudible] Foundation but nothing Samos has been a very different experience

I: so it was a first one in the humanitarian field let's say

J: I guess so yeah yeah I'm not sure whether to describe this and as an emergency or a crisis I don't know enough about the ways to describe it but it's an ongoing situation and I think that the work that we are doing here is critical I often hear people say look NGOs are doing great job but if they didn't doing a great job or they didn't do any work at all governments would have to step in themselves and do more I don't know if that's true or not I suspect it's probably not true and even if they did even if governments would take more direct responsibility they still need people like us to come and do the work of distributing the cloths of doing the cooking cleaning at the end of the day it's about people being useful and try to help somebody help others

NOTES from the author:

Jayarc is a British 73 year-old man who volunteered for two weeks.

C.

I: Allora la prima domanda sarebbe un po' di raccontare un po' di te di non so partire non so da qualcosa che hai studiato oppure per costà stai lavorando in generale sulla sua persona ecco come ti descriveresti

C: Allora io faccio la guida turistica qua a Firenze sono guida turistica sono laureata in storia dell'arte specializzata sempre qui a Firenze eee so parlare spagnolo inglese e francese e quindi ho fatto applicazione per partire come insegnante lì alla scuola Mazi di Still I Rise a Samos ho 35 anni lavoro da 5 anni come guida ho insegnato tanti anni ai ragazzini anche con problemi facevo ripetizioni eee quando ero all'università e poi ho iniziato a lavorare nel turismo nel turismo a viaggiare e poi il discorso del volontariato insomma vederee fare nuove esperienze viaggiare perché faccio sempre dei viaggi poi coltivo delle cose concrete e insomma quest'anno ho fatto questa cosa come volontaria in Grecia...

I: quindi non è la prima volta che fai volontariato internazionale o a livello locale cioè hai aderito anche ad altri progetti...

C: allora no era la prima volta sono volontaria al canile qui a Firenze e basta era la prima volta più o meno sì pensoo era la prima volta che facevo un'esperienza del genere sì...

I: e comee cioè perché hai scelto quell'organizzazione lì e perché hai scelto di andare a Samos in Grecia con richiedenti asilo...

C: allora perché ho iniziato a seguire la sua pagine su facebook eee già in passato mi ero informata per fare volontariato però ogni volta finivo in delle pagine o situazioni in cui mi chiedevano diversi soldi per applicare no la domanda e quindi poi ho sempre rinunciato perché la cosa non mi quadrava molto poi tra le varie cose mi sono interessata alla situazione un po' più internazionale appunto diciamo che non sono non sono una professionista tra virgolette cioè l'ho fatto proprio per vedere come era e non diciamo che non mi rendevo nemmeno conto che ero una volontaria internazionale cioè ho detto andiamo ho fatto applicazione mi hanno preso eee siccome lui questa persona Niccolò anche lui aveva fatto aveva scritto diverse cose sul volontari sul turismo legato al volontariato eee mi piaceva questo concetto che aveva lui espresso anche nel suo libro che ha scritto del suo viaggio in India e quindi poi mi è piaciuta questa cose e come tutte le cose ho fatto l'applicazione un po' per vedere se mi prendevano poi quando mi hanno preso ho detto ok parto però sai sono quelle cose che non è che fai io non ho né una tesi in questa in questo ambito nèè però insegnare mi piaceva lì c'era questa scuola e ho detto facciamo questa cosa ecco più o meno è andata così mmh

I: eehm quindi come è stata l'esperienza lì perché insomma hai passato due mesi eee diciamo che per la media dei volontari che ci sono nelle isole dell'Egeo di solito è un periodo molto breve di una settimana due tu sei stata due mesi quindi cosa non so cosa ti è rimasto in mente come è stato

C: sono stata due mesi perché è intanto sia lì sia a Samos Volunteers bisognava minimo era un mese e mezzo comunque questo tipo di situazioni no sì sei settimane minimo e poi una volta lì ovviamente insomma fare due settimane in più è stato facilissimo sono volate perché la situazione era densa diiii ehm densa di lavoro ecc l'esperienza è stata positiva difficile relazionarmi magari con

gli altri volontari perché si arriva a un punto in cui si vive insieme si passa il tempo libero assieme si lavora assieme eravamo molto insieme [ride] sempre molto uniti però chiaramente si creavano magari poi tutti italiani più o meno eh la metà erano italiani quindi c'era magari c'era magari qualche polemica ecc quindi quello è stato l'aspetto forse più difficile relazionarmi con tante persone che erano lì anche loro a fare i volontari sono stata due mesi eee perché anche stare due settimane allora quello che facevo io era un progetto ovviamente ancora in atto è una scuola e quindi già stare due settimane non ti era permesso e poi non avrebbe avuto tanto senso perché due settimane non entri nemmeno nel meccanismo eee l'esperienza è stata particolare perché quella scuola ti dà l'idea di essere una scuola normale cioè i ragazzi sono felici sono allegri entrano a scuola e li vedi carini pettinati puliti poi ti rendi conto che vivono in una condizione disumana quella del campo dell'hotspot sull'isola e insomma è difficile relazionare il ragazzo a quella situazione lì perché la scuola creava una specie di bolla protetta quello era quello che eravamo tenuti a fare noi creare un ambiente protetto rispetto a quello che vivevano poi fuori quindi era difficile poi considerarli dei rifugiati li consideravi ragazzini tra virgolette normali e quindi li sgridavi a volte anche troppo magari no come essere umani chiaramente se si picchiavano si lanciavano la frutta addosso tu li fermavi e insomma però chiaramente l'ambiente era un po' particolare ecco molto diverso dalle altre associazioni come Samos Volunteers per esempio era un ambiente diverso molto più rilassato non so dimmi un po' tu cosa vuoi sapere nello specifico...

I: due cose da quello che hai appena detto: una che hai fatto riferimento a delle polemiche delle anche difficoltà con gli altri volontari dell'associazione ma volevo sapere se era per soltanto cioè soltanto tra virgolette per questioni di convivenza cioè quasi forzata o comunque di stare assieme troppo e quindi le dinamiche che si possono creare da questo tipo di relazione oppure anche in riferimento a atteggiamenti e pensieri che questi altri volontari potevano avere nei confronti del lavoro che svolgevano o delle persone con cui interagivano...

C: no no era tutto legato al discorso lavorativo ovviamente le cose in casa vabbè normali cose normali ma le polemiche nascevano sulla gestione ovviamente del lavoro ognuno aveva la sua visione magari della cosa le regole c'erano però è sempre una situazione difficile che crea genera dei contrasti no perché magari io penso una cosa un altro ne pensa un'altra e quindi poi c'erano un po' delle polemiche magari non so veniva buttato via del cibo piuttosto che situazioni che venivano controllate meno qualche ragazzo più viziato di altri insomma queste cose qui e quindi poi c'era sempre un po' di polemica che rendeva un po' pesante l'ambiente ma non cose cose sostenibile ecco però per dirti chiaramente quando ci sono dieci quindici persone che lavorano in una struttura eee ognuno c'ha la sua anche se ci sono le regole però poi sei a contatto con ottanta ragazzi e quindi ognuno poi aveva il suo modo di portare avanti il lavoro diciamo eee polemiche legate al lavoro sì

I: maaa appunto essendo cioè non una normale ONG perché comunque Still I Rise è fondata su principi che vorrebbero essere diversi da quelli delle ONG normali che potrebbero esserci presenti nelle isole o insomma anche le altre che ci sono a livello internazionale pure eee cioè come volontaria come ti sei sentita cioè hai ricevuto un training da parte di Still I Rise prima di arrivare o comunque dopo cioè facevate dei meeting eehm non so se in generale anche tu come ti sei sentita anche a lavorare con minori se ci sono stati degli episodi non so che pensi potrebbero essere raccontati a supporto di quello che pensi ecco cose che sono successe

C: prima di partire mi è stato inviato del materiale ehm per rendermi conto un po' do com'era la situazione però si parlava ovviamente di numeri e di problemi psicologici che questi bambini potevano avere però non mi ha dato però forse perché io non sono cioè ricorda che io non sono di questo ambiente e non mi sono sentita in grado di capire da quello tutto ma quello penso sia normale comunque mi hanno mandato del materiale facevamo un meeting a settimana la prima sensazione il primo impatto è stato un po' brusco perché hai la sensazione di essere gettata un po' in

quella situazione e che te la devi cavare un po' da sola e che quindi non so anche ai meeting c'era un po' questa situazione in cui ti sentivi mmh noh anche l'ultima arrivata all'inizio eee invece abbiamo cercato piano piano di creare un ambiente più accogliente anche per chi arrivava anche se comunque c'è chi diceva tutto anzi Niccolò in primis ha sempre cercato però chiaramente lì tra i ragazzi portare avanti la scuola ecc i volontari non erano il primo pensiero non sono il primo pensiero dell'associazione ovviamente per cui si faceva questi meeting poi sono andati anche a migliorare ecco perché ehm appunto cercavamo di renderli più accoglienti poi ehm cosa mi avevi detto come mi sono sentita no la onlus la onlus era il discorso che lui non voleva prendere soldi dai governi e quindi ha cercato di creare una cosa più indipendente possibile da sovvenzioni statali ehm quello anche era quello che cercavo un'associazione che fosse di questo stampo diciamo poi io appunto non sono del settore data la mia prima esperienze è stata molto positiva eee all'inizio eravamo meno volontari poi sono arrivate più persone e ovviamente quando arrivano più persone eri te quella cioè quasi tutti avevamo lo stesso modo di fare all'inizio no un po' gettati lì nel caos della scuola e dell'associazione ti ritrovavi un po' spaesato le prime due settimane e non è stato facile però dopo insomma abbastanza agevole

I: e quindi avendo letto i libri prima o durante il tuo periodo in cui sei stata lì appunto le tue aspettative che ti eri creata prima e poi invece quello che hai vissuto tu cioè più o meno sono sullo stesso piano dal momento che hai detto che è stata un'esperienza positiva ti sei aspettata quello che in realtà hai vissuto? cioè hai vissuto quello che in realtà ti sei aspettata ecco

C: in generale sì in generaleeee con il complesso sì assolutamente forse anche di più mi aspettavo una situazione anche più difficile eee invece quello che hanno creato con questa scuola è proprio un ambiente sereno e diverso rispetto a quello che poi si vive sull'isola no perché sull'isola si vedono le si vedono le problematiche si vedono no i contrasti tra chi vive lì e i rifugiati che vivono lì ecc ecc ehm quindi anche molto meglio di come mi aspettavo cioè è andata molto meglio di come me lo aspettavo sì sì più positiva di come me lo aspettavo cioè è stato più un lavoro di quello che mi aspettavo sicuramente tanto lavoro eee perché dipende anche in che periodo arrivi io sono arrivata che la scuola era stata aperta da pochi mesi io sono arrivata a gennaio la scuola era aperta da agosto dopo cinque mesi si stava ancora capendo come gestire infatti ci hanno fatto tante domande per capire se loro stavano effettivamente aiutando tutti i volontari a capire bene come comportarsi ecco questo era un po' il problema perché tu ti comportavi come un insegnante normale ma in quella situazione in realtà ci voleva molto più tatto sensibilità cioè ancora di più diciamo quindi è stato ancora di più faticoso di quello che di quello che pensavo molto più positivo di quello che mi aspettavo quando sono arrivata io abbiamo anche dovuto ristrutturare una casa dove ci siamo poi spostati quindi è stato un bel un bel lavoro perché hai abbiamo dovuto pulire mettere a posto questa casa dove poi abbiamo traslocato eee però sì situazione molto positiva sicuramente sì dal punto di vista emotivo pesante molto pesante almeno per me molto pesante non so se riuscirei vorrei uno dovrebbe staccarsi completamente dalla propria vita e dedicarsi a quello allora io là potrei farcela ma se dovessi continuamente tornare questi due mondi paralleli della vita normale che tu hai che io c'ho il mio lavoro le mie cose e poi tornare a fare la volontaria internazionale è molto faticoso perché poi l'impatto di quando ritorni hai tutte le tue cose lì ecc insomma è difficile però molto positivo sì mmh

I: eh infatti questoo carico emotivo tu come l'hai vissuto cioè nel senso cosa hai fatto per cercare di affrontare questa difficoltà

C: io sono una persona che parla tanto a volte anche un po' nervosa all'inizio mi ha portato ad essere molto espansiva all'inizio sai quando sei un po' nervosa non sai bene la situazione io non sono una di quelle persone che sta zitta in un angolo che osserva tutto il contrario mi butto un po' nella mischia quindi quello che ho fatto è stato dare dire tutto quello che pensavo a volte anche

troppo scontrandomi magari con i miei colleghi con qualcuno che non faceva secondo me quello che insomma si doveva fare però poi quando le cose si sono equilibrate abbastanza eee è stato quando uno si abitua ovviamente hai una serenità e ritornare alla vita normale è un po' difficile io poi faccio la guida turistica quindi spesso lavoro anche con persone ricche benestanti e quindi insomma rendersi proprio conto che quello che stai vivendo non è il vero mondo non so la sensazione di stare vivendo qualcosa che non è reale si ti sei costruito il tuo mondo ecc ma una specie di piccolo ambiente bello e positivo ma che poi il mondo reale è un'altra cosaaa e chiaramente da lì nasce un senso di angoscia non sai se tirare fuori e affrontarlo e fare la volontaria e aiutare gli altri oppure se fare finta di niente e continuare con la tua vita e il tuo mondo e basta un po' questo sentimento qui più o meno non so se mi sono spiegata

I: sì sì sì

C: ok

I: quali sono state le tue impressioni sia per il lavoro che facevi ma anche magari per incontri che puoi avere avuto al di fuori della scuola sia con i minori richiedenti asilo con gli adulti se per caso hai parlato con loro pure le famiglie magari dei ragazzi oppure anche i locali oppure anche i samiani diciamo abitanti dell'isola

C: allora eh [ride] è complessa la cosa partendo dai ragazzi non abbiamo mai conosciuto le famiglie se non in qualche occasione sporadica quindi siamo sempre e solo rimasti in contatto con i ragazzi e abbiamo avuto un rapporto molto sereno i ragazzi anche quando li incontravamo fuori dalla scuola eravamo sempre i loro professori a volte gli offrivamo un tè o un caffè qualcosa ma non accettavano quasi mai si chiacchierava era tutto in maniera molto armonioso gli adulti richiedenti asilo chiaramente ti guardano insomma sanno che sei un volontario ti guardano in maniera diversa con occhio diverso che non sei un loro pari forse hanno anche un po' paura di te o comunque non quelli con cui ho fatto amicizia io erano quelli con cui lavoravano con Samos Volunteers perché con Samos Volunteers abbiamo fatto amicizia ovviamente quindi passavamo il tempo libero con loro e quindi tanti di loro erano alcuni di loro sono richiedenti asilo e ehm c'è stato anche delle amicizie interessanti anche se hai sempre l'impressione che vogliono qualcosa da te soldi o l'aiuto che te non gli puoi dare ovviamente perché non sei in grado di aiutarli ad avere il permesso di soggiorno ecc poi abbiamo iniziato a frequentare la casa di un ragazzo che aveva aperto lì un negozio Open Arms il negozio per i rifugiati che era accanto al Centro Alpha lui era lui è tunisino arrivato dalla Turchia e poi ha aperto questo negozio per i rifugiati e poi abbiamo fatto amicizia e la sera passavamo spesso tempo a casa sua eee tutto molto positivo ovviamente però una volta tornata a casa mi sono veramente resa conto che loro sono in una gabbia e che non anche il distacco è stato pesante anche da parte sua si era molto affezionato a me eeehm insomma è stato pesante staccarsi tutt'ora ci penso ovviamente vorrei mandargli delle cose dei regali ma c'ho come un blocco emotivo non so comunque abbiamo fatto amicizia con loro eee è successo una volta che ho provato ad entrare sono provata ad entrare nel campo perché c'era proibito però c'era una signora che aveva un sacco di vestiti addosso cioè aveva un sacchetto con vestiti molto pesanti della roba e io l'ho aiutata a portarlo dentro e quindi lì poi si è un po' arrabbiata eee però non è successo niente mi ha detto non entrare e quindi sei sempre vista come l'occidentale che va un po' a farsi gli affari suoi no ecco

I: cioè di per sé quindi tu sei entrata nell'hotspot di per sé o anche nella Giungla ooo...

C: la Giungla siamo andati perché ci hanno portato a fare il giro perché uno dei nostri colleghi caricando nel farci fare il giro nell'hotspot nella giungla si poteva entrare quindi abbiamo fatto un giro e quindi siamo entrati però senza non abbiamo mai frequentato l'hotspot né io né i miei

colleghi ci siamo mai avvicinati mai più di tanto al campo e un'altra volta questa volta ero da sola infatti ho portato questa roba sono entrata dove c'era il cancello e infatti tutti mi guardavano con due occhi così perché non si può perché c'è il divieto adesso dei volontari quelli appunto internazionali non possono entrare proprio perché non vogliono problemi e quindi niente queste due occasioni in cui ho visitato l'hotspot però ne rimanevamo fuori cioè assolutamente separati da... sì...con i ragazzi un bellissimo rapporto perché poi li portavamo a fare delle gite il sabato poi la domenica mattina li incrociavamo lì sul mare insomma era sempre molto armoniosooo il rapporto apparte quando dovevano partire con le navi andavamo a salutarli abbastanza straziante l'ho fatto due volte e poi ho detto non lo faccio più perché veramente abbastanza pesante dal punto di vista emotivo perché ora ho capito che non vanno a stare meglio cioè un pochino sì non tutti alcuni sono andati a stare peggio o in mano a dei trafficanti ovviamente quindi poi questo senso della realtà che ti angoscia sempre...

I: eee per quanto riguarda le persone che conosci la tua città a Firenze anche nei social media o tuoi parenti in generale che cosa hanno pensato del fatto che tu sei andata due mesi a fare volontariato internazionale...quindi sia nella realtà sia nella realtà virtuale no se per caso ha i postato cose su social media o altro insomma...

C: sì allora tante persone anche i miei amici era una specie diiii non so molto coraggiosa mi dicevano che avevo tanto coraggio a fare quello che facevo per me era una cosa abbastanza insomma avevo questa necessità di scontrarmi un po' con questa realtà però per loro era una cosa che loro sentivano molto lontana dalla loro realtà non capivano nemmeno io penso più di tanto eee i miei genitori pensavano che io fossi andata a vivere in una specie di catapecchia di situazione borderline o chissacchè invece poi gli ho fatto vedere la scuola gli ho fatto vedere la casa gli ho detto no la situazione in realtà è abbastanza normale anche se appunto sull'isola la situazione è molto più grave i social sì la gente si è mobilitata quando io io ho postato sol una volta perché ero abbastanza scossa perché pioveva lì a Samos piove non so che periodo ci sei stata te però d'inverno piove questa pioggia torrenziale che io pensavo la gente che viveva nelle tende spesso i ragazzi arrivavano da noi e dormivano poi tutto il giorno tecnicamente e io ho scritto che mi dispiaceva che era una cosa ingiusta che non stavano nelle case ecc e la gente si è mobilitata racconta dicci se possiamo fare qualcosa fare cose così per cui c'è stata molta solidarietà con quello che facevo però ecco senza che si rendessero realmente conto di quale è la situazione perché qualcuno mi ha anche detto qualcuno non sapeva nemmeno che in Grecia ci fossero gli immigrati qualcuno con cui parlavo ha aperto gli occhi anche grazie a quello che ho fatto io dopo che gli ho spiegato ovviamente le isole greche essendo per me era scontato però tanta gente non ci arriva che le isole greche sono appiccate alla Turchia e quindi la gente cerca di arrivare ovviamente in Grecia e in Europa attraverso la Grecia eee quindi ecco tante persone erano anche abbastanza ignoranti rispetto alla situazione eee tanta solidarietà a volte un po di ignoranza e così più o meno...

I: eeehm se tu dovessi definire cosa vuol dire essere una volontaria o fare volontariato cosa diresti

C: aspetta che mi sono persa la prima parte della frase se mi dovessi definire...

I: cosa vuol dire essere una volontaria o fare volontariato cosa diresti

C: eehmmm

I: cioè cos'è per te fare volontariato o fare la volontaria se dovessi dare una definizione

C: mah impiegare il tempo libero che ho nell'aiutare delle persone in difficoltà o anche gli animali come faccio al canile impiegare il mio tempo libero per fare qualcosa che sia al bisogno di altri bisogno mio di dare un senso al mio tempo e quindi alla mia vita ovviamente eehm per quello che posso ehm una cosa che dà molto più valore all'esistenza di una persona ecco se tu impieghi il tuo tempo non solo per te stesso ma anche per gli altri è lì il senso della vita altrimenti vivi per te e non boh non c'ha senso...ma te dicevi la differenza tra essere volontaria o fare volontariato o c'è una differenza o no

I: se per te c'è una differenza e vuoi provare a spiegarla sì sennò la domanda era in generale cosa significa per te

C: ma quello che ho detto ora appunto il discorso del tempo libero io faccio la guida quindi io ho febbraio non lavoro eehm volevo provare a fare qualcosa che non fosse solo per me ho sempre fatto dei viaggi ho lavorato nelle fattorie oppure insomma e in linea con questa cosa quest'anno ho fatto la volontaria non mi definirei una volontaria perché non lo faccio con continuità a parte il mio lavoro lì al canile qui in Italia non ho mai provato a buttarmi in altre situazioni perché perché quando sono qui lavoro e non ho così tanto tempo libero però potrei farlo anche qui qui richiede un impegno diverso perché c'è una preparazione e c'è una cosa con più continuità no devi fare tutto l'anno magari due volte a settimana e fare volontariato e allora sei una vera volontaria io non tanto [ride] non sono tanto una vera volontaria l'ho fatto così sì sì forse anche io ho fatto un po' di turismo volontariato cioè magari al limite delle due cose con coscienza però ovviamente

I: perché dicevi che appunto in generale tu cerchi di fare turismo responsabile cioè in altri viaggi che fai cerchi in qualche modo di rapportarti con i locali dicevi che vai a lavorare nelle fattorie cose di questo tipo

C: allora ho fatto la ragazza alla pari l'anno scorso due anni fa sono stata in America a stare con una famiglia e cercare di dare un senso diverso al viaggio non soltanto stare due settimane in un posto tempo di fare più cose in modo che siano delle esperienze un pochino più profondo ecco diverse più pensate delle esperienze diverse dal semplice viaggio che chiaramente ti porta qualcosa però ecco stare in famiglia all'estero piuttosto che andare a vivere con persone locali ooo andare a lavorare nelle fattorie è un'altra cosa mmh sì

I: e da un punto di vista politico tu come la pensi nel senso sia per quanto riguarda l'Unione Europea eehm e i richiedenti in Grecia o anche in Italia sì se vuoi dire qualcosa o in generale riguardo il tuo rapporto alla politica

C: allora il mio rapporto con la politica

I: o diciamo da un punto di vista di ideologie di valori diiii ecco

C: partendo dal principio seguo molto quello che è successo mi tengo piuttosto informata mi ritengo una persona informata molto più della media intanto questo e poi tirando le somme di quello che succede chiaramente il mondo io essendo anche una storica una storica dell'arte so benissimo che eee la storia si ripete e che la storia del mondo è che ci sono persone ricche e persone povere sfruttate e che la ricchezza viene dallo sfruttamento di molti la ricchezza di pochi viene da da questo è sempre stato e sempre sarà quindi il mio rapporto con la politica nasce da il mio pensiero poi è la conseguenza di questo quindi sapere che la certezza è che bisognerebbe rovesciare questo sistema in cui se il capitalismo è sfruttamento sennò non c'è ricchezza di pochi quello è come funziona il mondo cioè la ricchezza viene perché si prosciuga la ricchezza di altri no ovviamente per cui questo sempre è stato e quello è il capitalismo io sono fortemente contraria sia al capitalismo che al

consumismo si sta parlando di economia però oggi politica ed economia sono la stessa cosa per cui anche questo è abbastanza logico fondamentale nel mio pensiero no eee che si dovrebbe fare rovesciare un po' questo sistema ma in primis nelle mentalità delle persone che il consumismo è un cancro che porta a la distruzione delle società e di un sacco di altre cose no perché è proprio il consumismo che sta alla base di tanti problemi perché il consumismo ora si potrebbe stare ore a parlare di questa cosa mettiamola così che sono contro il capitalismo contro un certo tipo di società che vede del buono nello sfruttamento del povero in modo che ci sia il ricco mi sto spiegando malissimo vabbè il discorso è che questo tipo di sistema andrà rivisto anche per i problemi che porta l'ambiente ovviamente perché con questa velocità siamo spacciati ecco quindi politica ambiente economia sono per me tutte le stesse cose avrai capito che ho una visione di sinistra di sinistra si può definire quei valori che sono l'ambiente l'equilibrio sociale la parità tra classi sociali ecc eee questo e questo come si riflette nei rifugiati quello che sta facendo l'Europa è chiaro l'Europa vuole dare un messaggio all'Oriente e ai poveri dell'Oriente non venite in Europa perché si sta male non venite in Europa perché finite in questi hotspot in cui vivete nella vostra spazzatura loro non vogliono l'Europa non vuole creare dei campi profughi dei campi profughi decenti perché se lo facesse arriverebbero il triplo o il quadruplo delle persone probabilmente questo è quello che pensa l'ONU con molta probabilità anche se l'ONU si batte forse ho detto una bischerata te lo sai meglio di me di sicuro comunque il messaggio che vogliono dare è questo si sa qualcuno lo ha anche detto noi non possiamo accogliere gli immigrati perché se ne arriverebbero molto di più loro vogliono che la gente muoia in mare perché così si sparge la voce che la gente muore in mare e sperano in questo modo di arrestare l'onda migratoria questo è il mio pensiero io penso sia così eee chiaramente si sta comportando in maniera l'Europa i paesi europei si sta comportando in maniera poco accettabili però lo sta facendo per questo motivo qui soprattutto perché sta alimentando le guerre in Oriente l'Europa no si ritorna al discorso dell'economia basata purtroppo sulla meccanica Finmeccanica produce le armi e siamo noi che sovvenzioniamo tante guerre in giro per il mondo e quindi poi gli fa comodo che ci sia la guerra in questi posti ma non vogliamo gli immigrati e quindi c'è bisogno che il messaggio sia chiaro qui si sta male non c'è posto per gli immigrati e non c'è integrazione e quindi non non si preoccupano di creare integrazione poi questo è un discorso lunghissimo ci potrei stare ore e ore dimmi un po' te cosa ti serve...

I: mi hai risposto abbastanza alla domanda che ti avevo fatto ehm dopo la tua esperienza a Samos che cosa hai fatto e se diciamo vorresti appunto provare a tornare a fare un progetto simile o progetti diversi o non fare più volontariato se farlo farlo internazionale ancora locale...

C: allora sì ci avevo pensato partire ripartirei avevo pensato di andare sulla terraferma avevo pensato diverse cose però c'è una parte di me che è un po' disillusa che pensa che sia un po' inutile che più che altro si faccia per noi stessi che si stai aiutando il prossimo però stai anche creando una situazione di squilibrio perché sei quella occidentale che va ad insegnare delle cose e a delle persone che sono dei prigionieri e ehm una parte di me ha dei problemi a conciliare questa cosa mi sono messa in contatto con delle associazioni qui in Italia a Firenze si chiama Refugees Welcome che si occupa di proporre degli alloggi a delle persone che possiedono un portale e loro possono richiedere una stanza se hanno bisogno di una stanza così e quindi ho parlato con la responsabile per lavorare con loro fare delle attività ancora non ho fatto niente io sono un po' lenta ora probabilmente di inverno vedrò se mi attivo e faccio qualcosa con loro loro si occupano di varie cose tra cui questa cosa molto bella di mettere in contatto famiglie che magari hanno una stanza in più con persone richiedenti asilo che hanno bisogno di un alloggio e poi tramite una amica mi ero informata per fare la tutor dei minori non accompagnati che arrivano qui in Italia però quella è andata un po' a morire come cosa perché gli ho dato i documenti a lei ma poi non mi ha fatto più sapere niente ora mi informerò e vedrò un attimo questa cosa qua e poi basta più che altro sono arrivata all'idea che forse è meglio attivarsi da soli e con l'aiuto di amici per aiutare le persone che sono già qui che

hanno difficoltà a tirare avanti cioè in poche parole io lavoro sempre in centro quindi sono amica di tutte le ragazze di colore che sono lì in centro a vendere e sono diventata amica di un paio di loro le ho aiutate economicamente quando avevano bisogno sempre però con il dubbio di fare bene fare male non lo so però insomma ehm un aiuto più diretto che non passasse da associazioni varie diciamo questo più o meno basta...

NOTES from the author:

C. is a 34 year-old Italian woman that works as tourist guide in Florence. She attended a Master Degree in Art History and she volunteered for two months for the NGO Still I Rise, founded by Niccolò Govoni.

Ririka

1. Could you please tell me more about you, your life journey that has led you here in Samos? (for ex. starting from where you are from, your studies or any experiences that have shaped your decision to come here)

As part of my Bachelor program in Art Therapy at **** in ****, the Netherlands, I completed a minor in the field of humanitarian management in 2017 and moved to Nairobi, Kenya, for three months to support an NGO (“Xavier Project”) which focuses on improving access to education for refugee children. During this time my view on what it means for children to be forced to be on the move in the 21st century started to become more and more realistic and I got determined to find ways in which I could use my therapeutic knowledge to support refugees when I get back to Europe. Only two weeks after I had returned from Kenya I took another flight, this time to Athens, where I completed another internship as part of my studies. With the support of the NGO “Amaka” I started offering psychological support through art therapy workshops to unaccompanied minors in refugee shelters across the city. It didn’t take long for me to be confronted with the contradiction of the whole situation. I realized that the work I was doing was not only incredibly important but also equally as frustrating. I knew that the art activities I offered gave young refugees who lived under circumstances that took away their sense of being in control, the opportunity to express themselves from a more empowered position. At the same time, I knew that every day these young people would leave the safe space that I had created for them over the last 90 minutes to go back to the exact same discouraging conditions that they have become accustomed to. It was overwhelming to realize how much needed to be done to truly improve the quality of life of just one of these young people, let alone the lives of all 60,000+ refugees that were desperately waiting for any kind of shift during that time in Greece. Often it felt like whatever positive I achieved through my work, it was never enough and in the long run it was impossible for change to persist. Even though the hopelessness and the frustration weighed me down many many times, I couldn’t imagine giving up continuing to try and to fight to make just the smallest of improvements in the lives of individuals. I worked with more and more dedication because I realized that many times, that alone, the fact that there was someone who truly cared and showed genuine compassion through their work, had a powerful impact. It made people feel seen.

After six very intense, challenging and inspiring months it was time for me to return to the Netherlands to finish my studies. However, one of the things I had learned during my time in Athens was that even more than wanting to be an art therapist, I wanted to continue working in the humanitarian field.

After I had gotten my degree this September, I decided that instead of looking for a job right away, I wanted to travel for a while, to try out different things and to focus on my own personal growth. My first stop was Greece, because I had made many friends there while living in Athens who I wanted to see again. I travelled to the town of Corinth, where a friend of mine is part of an anti-racism group which aims, among other things, to fight for the rights of refugees in Greece. Through the work of this group I was able to spend time at the new refugee camp that just opened in Corinth and talked to the people who were staying there. Many of them had been moved there from Samos only a couple of days earlier. I started bonding with them and listened to unbelievable descriptions of the current horrific conditions at the hotspot of Samos. Then one night I lay awake in bed and couldn’t sleep, so I opened up my laptop and typed “Samos” into Youtube. The first video I clicked on was one by the organization *Sandstone* [modified by author], showing how volunteers were cleaning up the

“jungle”. And in that moment I didn’t have any doubts, I just knew: I need to go! Unfortunately I also knew that my time would be limited because I had another flight booked just three weeks later, from Istanbul to India. So I also knew: I need to go now! I filled out the volunteer form immediately, sent it in the middle of the night, got a response from *Sandstone* [modified by author] the next day in the afternoon, booked my flight in the evening and before I knew it I was on the way to the airport.

2. Could you describe me your experience here in Samos?

(IF THE PERSON INTERVIEWED HAS STILL NOT MENTIONED IT)

- **Have you already done an experience of this kind in other or similar contexts?**
- **Why did you decide to come to Samos?**
- **How many days or months have you been volunteering here?**
- **How did people such as your relatives or people you know react about you coming/being here?**
- **Why did you choose to volunteer in this NGO?**
- **How was your relationship with the other volunteers?**
- **What are your personal opinions in terms of politics, at national, regional or global level?**
- **Can you elaborate on the encounters you had with the asylum seekers, either with minors and/or adults?**

Coming to Samos wasn’t a decision I thought twice about. It was one of those moments in my life when I just knew with absolute certainty that this is what I needed and wanted to do. I had time, I had some money saved, I had a healthy body and I knew enough about the situation to be incredibly motivated to do something. There was no reason not to go. However, I was unsure whether my contribution would really be of any actual value since I would only be able to stay for such a short amount of time (2 weeks). I thought that it must take some time until I felt really comfortable within the organization and understood the way they worked. But in reality I got picked up from the airport, had a quick 15 minute introduction in the car, then was dropped off at the shop of *Sandstone* [modified by author] and started working without hesitation right away. It was easy to get along with the other volunteers and even though you always worked together with different people, we were one team.

Volunteering for *Sandstone* [modified by author] was a very intuitive decision, it was the first organization that I came across and I immediately had a good feeling with them. I was also amazed by how easy it was to join them so spontaneously and I felt like my contribution was appreciated, which to me is an important part of a positive volunteering experience.

The two weeks that I spent on Samos were very meaningful to me, before I started volunteering I felt quite lost and didn’t really know what I was doing with my life. I was in search for some kind of purpose and I definitely found it on Samos. I experienced my days there as very fulfilling. I was exhausted by the end of each day, but it was a kind of exhaustion that inspired me to do it all again the next day. I felt like I always knew why I was getting up so I started my days motivated and ready. I also noticed how much I had grown since my first internships working with refugees. On Samos I felt a lot more stability and strength within me and had less difficulties handling challenging situations. The most difficult parts of my time volunteering for *Sandstone* [modified by author] were moments in which decisions had to be made, when it had to be determined which donations we should give out to who so that it was a “fair” and effective distribution. I often wondered if I did the right thing and whether our organization is making the right choices. But then I also questioned how you can actually

determine what *is* right and wrong in a situation that is so fundamentally messed up due to the fact that, in my opinion, it is constantly being mishandled by governments who don't want to take responsibility. Then, on the night of my planned departure, a fire broke out in the camp, which made it incredibly hard to leave. My heart was so broken for all the people who had lost everything once again and who weren't safe in a place that was supposed to give them refuge... I wanted to stay so badly, it felt like it was the worst moment to leave, I felt so obligated to stay and to do more, to do something. But I knew that I had to go, that I couldn't change my plans now. When I stepped onto the ferry in the middle of the night, I met a young man from Nigeria who had stayed on Samos for a couple of months. Many people from the camp tried to flee once again that night and tried to get onto the ferry secretly or through bribes. Every single one was turned away by officers. Except for this young man that I talked to, who had simply gotten incredibly lucky. In the morning officials from the camp decided that he should be moved to Athens which was why he had a valid ticket. When I explained to him why I had come to Samos and that I have worked for *Sandstone* [*modified by author*] his eyes widened and he couldn't stop smiling. He told me how deeply grateful he feels for how much this organization has helped him. He said "you gave me a tent when I had nothing, you gave me clothes, you helped me so so much". He couldn't stop saying thank you. And in that moment I was reminded that the things that appear small really do make a difference in the lives of individuals. In my head I started planning my return to Samos.

3. In your opinion, what does it mean being a volunteer or doing voluntarism?

Volunteering to me means that you are motivated to use your skills to support a cause that is close to your heart. I believe that genuine dedication is incredibly important and that you should be able to work wholeheartedly as a volunteer. When you volunteer you work towards change together with a group of people who share similar values and ideas in regards to the goals of their action. So I think it is key that volunteers genuinely believe in the general importance of their work while also constantly reminding themselves of their own initial motivation.

Personally, I have learned that even though I love to travel, I don't necessarily enjoy "just wandering around". I need tasks in my life. Combining voluntary work with traveling has given me a sense of purpose which I wouldn't have if I would only travel to new countries to go hiking and to relax at nice beaches. Volunteering adds a lot of value to my life because giving back and putting all my energy into work that I believe has meaning, fulfils me.

4. Can you elaborate on your relationship with the European Union taking into consideration your personal opinions/background and/or referring to the current situation of the refugees in Samos?

When I was a child I felt like I was growing up in a borderless world. Living in Germany during a time after the Berlin Wall had come down and after the European Union was formed, I received the message that people have the right to move freely. I was fascinated by stories that my parents told me about their past, about a time when my mom lived in East Germany and my dad in West Germany and by law it was impossible for them to communicate with each other, let alone meet. They lived in a world in which their movement was controlled by the state, with a physical wall in between them that functioned as a visible border and aimed to remind people of their powerlessness. But these were

stories of the past, I was taught that after the German reunification, another step towards more freedom and more opportunities was being taken when free movement within member states of the European Union became possible. What no one told me was how deceiving the story of freedom really was. Now I understand that back then the fact that I never took my privilege of being able to move so freely for granted was solely rooted in history and not in my awareness of what borders mean in the world that we live in today. When I left Samos in the night of the fire that broke out in the camp, I experienced how Greek authorities did everything they could to stop anyone who seemed suspicious of “illegal movement”. When I arrived at the harbour to take the ferry to Athens, several police officers checked my passport a couple of times and asked me some questions. But one moment later, I was free to go. I was free to leave behind a place where thousands of people were trapped. Trapped within a system created by governments that desperately want to secure their borders through deterrent and often inhumane approaches, aiming to protect the privileges of millions and aggravating the plight of million others who get left behind feeling powerless. With the passing of more and more policies that I disapproved of, I started to distance myself from EU politics and focused more on my own power within this crisis, looking for efficient ways how I can support individuals who are affected by the mismanagement of the crisis.

5. What is next after Samos? Can you please relate on any of your plans/projects after this experience?

I left Samos because I had a flight booked to India, otherwise I definitely would have stayed longer. I took a ferry back to Athens where I stayed a few days, then travelled up to Thessaloniki and went to Istanbul from there and then took my flight to Delhi. I didn't make any specific plans for my time in India, but I definitely want to find a project where I can contribute to for a little while, I have realized how much more meaning traveling has to me when I combine it with volunteer work! I also can't stop thinking about going back to Samos, I can definitely see myself staying for a longer period of time, maybe for a couple of months and taking a coordinator position.

6. Additional information or remarks that you would like to add.
NONE *[added by author]*

NOTES from the author:

Ririka is a 24 year-old woman from Germany. Her Bachelor is in Art Therapy. She volunteered in Sandstone for two weeks. I sent via email the questions to Ririka after she finished her period of volunteering in Samos and she replied in the written form reported above.

Appendix 2. Aborisen Canarii's final
speech during the high and low session

WELL GUYS !!

THE FIRST THING I WANT TO DO IS THANK YOU ALL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME TO MEET YOU AND KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

DEFINITELY THE BEST THING ABOUT THIS TRIP HAS BEEN TO WORK WITH YOU AND DISCOVER HOW DESPITE THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL BARRIERS WHEN PEOPLE SHARE A COMMON GOAL EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

~~I COME FROM A SMALL ISLAND~~ ^{IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN} BEFORE COMING I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING IN HERE ^{NOW} I FEEL VERY ASHAMED OF WHAT I HAVE SEEN, IT'S THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE THAT I SEE PEOPLE TREATED NOT AS HUMAN BEINGS BUT AS MERCHANDISE. HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE ???

BUT, DESPITE ALL THE SUFFERING, PAIN, ANGER THAT I HAVE SEEN IN THESE PEOPLE, I HAVE ALSO FOUND A LOT OF HOPE AND LOVE. I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF MEETING MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE FIGHTING AGAINST THIS HORRIBLE CAPITALIST SYSTEM.

SALLY, DEBBI, TOM I HOPE THAT IN THIS NEW TRIP THAT YOU START NEXT WEEK YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TELL EVERYONE WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE, THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SPREAD THE SAME CONCERNS THAT BROUGHT YOU HERE. AND MAY YOUR PROJECT WITH REFUGEES BE A SUCCESS.

DAVID, PAUL, WHAT CAN I SAY?

YOU ARE THE PERFECT COUPLE AND MY IDEAL IDEA ABOUT LOVE YOU HAVE REALLY INSPIRED ME. AT THE SAME TIME YOU ARE THE PRESENT, THE PAST & THE FUTURE.

BEATRICE, CLARISSA. IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURE TALKING TO YOU, IT HAS BEEN LOVELY TO SEE HOW YOU ARE ALL THE OPPOSITE THAT ONE CAN BE TO SARVINI'S POLICES.
FORZA ITALIA.

ANNE & CHLOE. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU. YOU ARE THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS WHAT YOU ARE DOING HERE GOES BEYOND THE HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

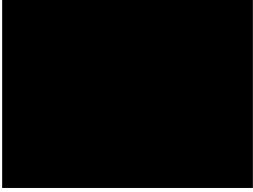
I REALLY BELIEVE THAT IT'S THE WOMEN WHO ARE
GOING TO CHANGE THIS INSANE WORLD.
AND BY THAT, I MEAN ALL THE WOMEN PRESENT.

PARA MEUS AMIGOS BRASILEIROS, AQUELES QUE
ESTÃO AQUI E OS QUE FORAM EMBORA, FOI UM
PRAZER COMPARTILHAR ESSAS SEMANAS COM VOCÊS,
NÃO CONSIGO ENCONTRAR AS PALAVRAS PARA
AGRADECER. COMO EUROPEO É UM ORGULHO QUE ELES
TENHAM VINDO AQUI PARA AJUDAR NESTA CRISE.
EU SEI QUE MUITOS FIZERAM UM GRANDE ESFORÇO,
TRABALHANDO MUITO E ECONOMIZANDO EU SEMPRE
CARREGAREI VOCÊ EM MEU CORAÇÃO. DEUS TE ABENÇOE

AND FINALLY, WASSEM Y ABED.
YOU ARE A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE STORY
THE ~~STRONG~~ ^{CORD} THAT UNITES TWO WORLDS THAT MANY
TRY TO CUT BUT WITH YOUR ^{HANDS} WORK IS STRONGER
THAN EVER.

THANK YOU, OBRIGADO, GRACE, DANKE, MERCI,
CHATROM, BEDANKT

Appendix 3. Exit interview conducted by Sandstone's Volunteer coordinator at the end of the volunteering period



Exit Interview

Name:

Date:

How did you find your time with [redacted]?

How did you find your introduction?

What was your best experience during your stay?

Was there anything you did not enjoy?




Which was your favourite project and why?

Is there anything you think we can improve on as an organisation?

Are there any suggestions you have to improve any of our projects?

Any other comments?

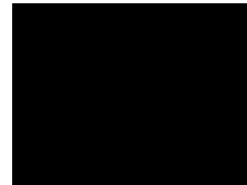
Final notes from :

- If you would like to make a donation of items, please contact us before sending anything as our needs quickly change
- When you leave the island I will remove you from all the WhatsApp groups, however, please do join the Facebook group which contains all past volunteers and will also provide regular updates on our projects.
- If you ever have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch

Appendix 4. Code of Conduct, Volunteer Introduction, Fundraising Pack, Guideline on Interaction with Children



Volunteer Code of Conduct



Before volunteers are accepted to [REDACTED], it is essential that they read and agree with our Code of Conduct.

It must be understood that it is at the coordinators' discretion to ask a volunteer to leave at any time if the volunteer breaches any of the following provisions. Furthermore, if a volunteer notices that the behavior of another volunteer breaches any of the following provisions, it is their responsibility to inform the coordinator in confidence.

GUIDING HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

The following principles are derived from international humanitarian law (United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 46/182) and should be recognized and adhered to by all [REDACTED] volunteers, following our adoption and respect for these principles.

Humanity – the principal driver for any response to a crisis, whether caused by conflict, violence or natural or man-made disaster.

Impartiality – humanitarian action is based solely on need, giving priority to the most urgent cases irrespective of race, nationality, gender, religious belief, political opinion or class.

Neutrality – humanitarian actors refrain from taking sides in hostilities or engaging in political, racial, religious or ideological controversies.

Independence – requires autonomy on the part of humanitarian actors, who are not to be subject to control or subordination by political, economic, military or other non-humanitarian objectives.

Do no harm – prevent or mitigate any negative impact of actions by humanitarian actors on the refugee population. Volunteers must adopt the 'do no harm' principle in both professional and social environments, along with consistently assessing the implications and consequences of their actions.

KEY TERMS

Beneficiary – a person who is receiving help or support from [REDACTED] e.g. a refugee, migrant, asylum-seeker.

Volunteer – a person who is volunteering directly with [REDACTED] or assisting a specific project on a temporary basis.

Coordinator – a person who is designated as responsible for the project, or an area of the project, and is experienced in working in the environment.

PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH BENEFICIARIES

- All beneficiaries should be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
 - At no point should volunteer conduct be degrading, discriminatory, or harmful.
 - In carrying out activities, volunteers should treat all beneficiaries equally and without favoritism.
 - Volunteers will avoid spending excessive amounts of time with one particular beneficiary or benefitting family.
 - Volunteers will offer the same opportunities to every beneficiary. This can include ensuring that there are enough resources for each activity.
- Volunteers must maintain a high level of professionalism in all relationships with beneficiaries.
 - Sometimes situations can be emotional, and whilst we are here to provide support, beneficiaries often experience additional trauma when volunteers leave and an emotional dependency on the volunteer has been established.
 - Boundaries must be respected for safety and security purposes.
 - Volunteers should not exercise favoritism to any beneficiaries or benefitting families.
- Volunteers will never engage in sexual relations with beneficiaries, including community volunteers, on the basis that volunteers recognize this is exploitative behavior. Note: a community volunteer is a refugee or asylum-seeker assisting with [REDACTED] activities (e.g. translation).

- This applies even if the beneficiary is a consenting party.
 - Volunteers are in a position of trust and these actions put the beneficiary at risk of harm, as it exploits the disproportionate balance of power.
 - Any sexual relations occurring between volunteers and beneficiaries who are under the age of 18 shall be reported as a criminal offence to local authorities.
 - Volunteers should also be aware that entering into close personal relationships with beneficiaries or community volunteers can lead to negative effects on the beneficiary when that volunteer leaves. Particularly if the beneficiary becomes emotionally dependent on the volunteer.
- Volunteers will never engage in illegal activities on behalf of, or in accordance with, a beneficiary.
 - This includes the discussion or disclosure of information that could support illegal activities. For example, how to find a smuggler.
 - Volunteers must acknowledge that the majority of beneficiaries have had traumatic experiences and are dealing with the repercussions. Volunteers should avoid asking probing questions relating to the beneficiary's personal history or current status.
 - Not following this provision may result in lasting damage to the individual.
 - Volunteers will be observant of the cultural and religious practices of their beneficiaries.
 - Take care not to carry out activities or actions that may be misconstrued or offensive. If a volunteer is unsure of the appropriateness of something, they should consult the coordinator.
 - Male volunteers are asked to not wear 'tank tops', i.e. to ensure that their shoulders are covered whilst volunteering in activities that involve contact with beneficiaries.
 - Female volunteers are asked to cover their shoulders and knees, and to avoid otherwise revealing clothing whilst volunteering in activities that involve contact with beneficiaries.
 - Cultural appropriateness also extends to the respect of the personal space of beneficiaries. Whilst we may be accustomed to close and intimate contact between friends and acquaintances in our culture, it is not universally appropriate and can cause great distress to the beneficiaries we are working with.

Volunteer Introduction

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Introduction

Dear [REDACTED] volunteer,

We're looking forward to hosting you! We can imagine you have a lot of questions before you come here. In this introduction document we will try to tell you the most important things.

In case you haven't read it in our other messages: we rather accept volunteers who have a driving license and are able to drive a manual. Because almost each activity takes place on a different location and public transport between the locations is not available, it's important that almost everyone can drive the van. And in case of a landing you'll have to drive our 4x4 Jeep. Both vehicles are manual.

Please make sure you are comfortable with driving on the island (also off road) and that you feel comfortable with driving with others in the car as well. Please inform us as soon as possible if you can't drive or haven't driven a manual car (for a long time).

Another important note is that our working schedule changes from time to time because of emergencies or because of situation changes on the island. Working days can be up to 12 hours from time to time.

Everyone needs to be back at the house by midnight. Drinking alcohol is not allowed, only when you have a full day off the next day, but please remember you're here to help the refugees, not to party.

Please read everything carefully and make sure you send back the signed Code of Conduct/Waiver or sign upon arrival.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. We're looking forward to meeting you!

Kind regards,

Team [REDACTED]



Travelling to Samos

You can fly directly to Samos Airport from Athens or Thessaloniki. Sky Express, Aegean Airlines and Olympic fly daily (45-50 minute flight). You can also take the ferry from Athens to Vathy, which might be a cheaper option during high season, although travel time is much longer (The Blue Star Ferries service runs up once a week with a sailing duration of around 7 hrs 20 min while the Hellenic Seaways service runs 4 times per week with a duration of 9 hrs 10 min).



Volunteering activities

The situation in Samos is always changing, therefore we cannot guarantee that there will be no changes in the activities that you will perform as a volunteer with [REDACTED]. Currently, our volunteers work on the following activities (note that once you arrive you will be briefed in detail by one of our Volunteer Coordinators on each of the activities, and in certain cases, further training will be provided):

- Warehouse clothes sorting and distribution: [REDACTED]'s warehouse will be open from January onwards and will continue to be open for at least 6 months, until the end of June. If the project is as successful as last year, [REDACTED] will aim to keep the warehouse open for longer. During the morning, the doors will open at 9AM for volunteers to start the distribution of clothes and hygienic items until early in the afternoon, after which we will sort the remaining stock to have an updated inventory.
- Olive Grove Cleaning: cleaning at the Olive Grove (surroundings of the camp) in order to ensure sufficient hygienic conditions for the refugees living there.



Accommodation

[REDACTED] rents a house in the outskirts of Vathi, around 15 minutes away from the city centre. We ask that all volunteers stay in the [REDACTED] volunteer house. The reason our volunteers stay in this house is for logistic reasons.

A bed in the volunteer house (3-4 beds per room) is €10 per night. We will provide bedding material (bedding sheets, etc.). You pay for your whole stay upon arrival. With this money, we directly pay for the rent, electricity, water and WiFi. Please make sure you book your bed as soon as possible since we only have 12 beds available in the house (first-come, first-serve basis). Note that you will be living with other volunteers as well as our Volunteer Coordinators, so please be considerate of others.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you want to use our accommodation so we can plan accordingly.



Transportation

We have a 4x4 car that we use in case of landings and other impromptu transportation needs. Furthermore, every month we rent a van that we use to transport equipment and to transport all the volunteers to the working locations, which can entail trips of up to 30-40 minutes.

If you don't rent your own car, you will have to use our transportation service. For this, we ask every volunteer to pay €25 per week for transportation costs (€100 per month), which should be paid upon arrival. With this, we only cover a part of the money spent on fuel every month.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you want to use our transportation service, and if so, if you have the required driving license and you are able to drive a manual car.



T-shirts

During the shifts at all locations, we wear our T-shirts. Upon arrival, you can buy one or more T-shirts for €20 each. This way we make sure we always look professional and people can recognize us easily.



Passport and flight details

Make sure you send us a copy of your passport as soon as possible (but at least one week before your arrival) and, as soon as you have booked your flights, please send us a copy of your itinerary. This way we can arrange a pick up for you at the airport (or at the port if you come by ferry). Furthermore, make sure you bring your passport. Photocopies of passports are not accepted and, for non-EU citizens, travel stamps on passports should be visible. Furthermore, note that national ID cards are often not sufficient, Greek police or other authorities might ask you for your passport during any of our shifts and you have to make sure you have it on you at all times.

PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ACTORS

- [REDACTED] works closely alongside other organizations and the Greek authorities. The camp in Samos is officially run by the government.
 - Volunteers must maintain good working relationships with all aforementioned parties and must respect and abide by decisions made by them.
 - Volunteers should refrain from publicly making negative comments about other organizations and/or the authorities.
 - If a volunteer disagrees with a decision made by an organization or the authorities, they are never to confront them about it. Instead, they must voice their concerns with the coordinator, who will deal with the matter as they see fit.

RESPONSIBILITIES, SAFETY AND SECURITY

- Volunteers must respect the rules and practices already adopted by [REDACTED]
 - Efforts to purposefully undermine or negatively affect the work of [REDACTED] will not be tolerated.
- Volunteers will observe Greek law.
 - This includes both during working hours and a volunteers' free time.
 - Volunteers who rent a vehicle will abide by traffic laws and are advised against driving beneficiaries. But it is specifically prohibited to drive beneficiaries who are within their 25-day period of detention following their arrival on Samos.
- In the unlikely event that a conflict arises, volunteers are prohibited, under any circumstances, from entering into verbal or physical confrontations.
- Volunteers shall not push their own agenda: whether it be religious, political, or otherwise. Our primary responsibility is to support those in need, and anything otherwise would be contrary to the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.
- Volunteers must not undertake tasks that are outside of their role within the volunteer group.

- A situation can occasionally arise where a beneficiary asks a volunteer for legal advice or information. The volunteer must direct the refugee to a lawyer (for example, Advocates Abroad, METAdrasi, or Greek Council for Refugees). Volunteers should never attempt to provide legal advice themselves: every case is different, and there is a risk you will be providing information that is incorrect, misconstrued, or outdated, and therefore in conflict with the 'do no harm' principle.
 - Volunteers will never share private or confidential information (e.g. personal data). This also includes information passed on verbally.
 - However, if a volunteer believes that this information may have a negative or harmful impact on the welfare, safety, or health of another (whether beneficiary or volunteer), the information should be disclosed privately with a coordinator.
 - All information privately shared with a coordinator will remain confidential throughout and after the volunteer placement, unless it is otherwise necessary for action to be taken.
 - If a volunteer is unsure whether the information is of a sensitive nature, they must check with the coordinator.
- Volunteers shall never consume alcohol whilst working. Further, the buying, selling, provision or taking of illegal substances, whether during working hours or free time, is absolutely prohibited.
 - Volunteers should not enter the camp when they are not scheduled to be there, except in exceptional circumstances. In this case, volunteers must inform one of the coordinators.

PHOTOGRAPHY

- For safeguarding reasons, it is prohibited to take photographs of children under the age of 18, where the image of their face is recognizable.
 - Volunteers must understand that even if they believe they have obtained the parent's permission, the parents [due to language barriers] may not have fully understood what they are consenting to.
 - Beneficiaries may not fully comprehend, realize, or misinterpret the 'destination' of the photographs or their reach. This may cause unnecessary stress and/or anxiety, or be harmful to the beneficiary personally.

- Photographs of adult beneficiaries may be taken, but only with their informed consent. Photographs of any beneficiary should never be shared on social media without their informed consent. Note: informed consent includes making it very clear (preferably with the help of a translator) where and how the photograph will be used.
 - All volunteers must acknowledge that beneficiaries must be treated with dignity and their privacy must be respected.
 - All volunteers must understand that we are offering services to our beneficiaries for free, and a beneficiary may feel awkward and agree to having their photo taken even if it makes them uncomfortable, because they have no other way to thank us. Beneficiaries must not feel pressured into having their photograph taken.
 - All volunteers must consider that beneficiaries may have fled a situation or regime where their life was at risk and sharing their photograph on social media may reveal their location and jeopardize their safety.
 - If you re-post any pictures of our projects on your personal social media account, it is mandatory to tag [REDACTED].

- It is forbidden to take photographs inside the camp, or in the immediate surrounding area.

MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

- If a journalist approaches you or you see media enter the premises of the warehouse, please refer them to the coordinators.
- Volunteers should not give interviews unless asked to do so by the coordinators.
 - Interviews with beneficiaries must be accompanied by someone from the media team or a coordinator and the [REDACTED] policy on privacy and security (changing individual's name and make unrecognizable on photos if no clear consent is given) has to be clearly accepted.
- Volunteers are encouraged to intervene if journalists speak to beneficiaries who might not have given clear consent to speak to media and are not accompanied by another volunteer.

CHILD PROTECTION

For this section, a child is to be understood as any individual under the age of 18.

- Volunteers must never:
 - Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse children;
 - Develop relationships with children, which are of physical or sexual nature, or otherwise;
 - Use language, make suggestions, or offer advice in front of children that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive;
 - Take a child away from their parents, for any reason, without the parents' informed consent;
 - Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse;
 - Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favor particular children to the exclusion of others.

This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list. The principle is that volunteers avoid actions or behavior that may constitute poor practice or potentially abusive behavior.

In general, it is inappropriate for volunteers to spend excessive time alone with one child, or to spend excessive time with children away from other volunteers.

LIABILITY DISCLAIMER

- Volunteers accept that participating in and organizing activities with [REDACTED] is at their own risk.

- Volunteers accept all personal responsibilities during the period that they are volunteering, including;
 - Their health and safety, and taking due care for all activities;
 - The purchasing of travel and health insurance;
 - The sourcing of their own accommodation and daily transport to and from volunteer locations;
 - Their compliance with the laws of Greece;
 - Acting in an ethical, responsible and culturally appropriate manner throughout the course of their stay.

- Volunteers accept that no liability or responsibility for injury, illness, damage, loss, accident, expense or other claim lies with [REDACTED]

- By signing this document, I agree to comply with all of the above provisions and understand that breaching any provision in the code of conduct could result in a termination of my volunteering with [REDACTED]

Volunteer name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: / / .



Fundraising Pack

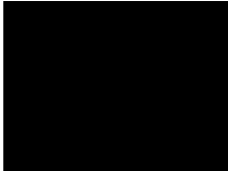


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Introduction

Dear volunteer,

Thank you again for showing interest in our project!

Since April 2017, [REDACTED] has worked to offer sustainable support, humanitarian assistance and emergency response to refugees who arrive at the shores of Lesbos, Greece. We are at the forefront of this humanitarian crisis, and it is only through the efforts of those who are willing to give up their time and energy to invest in helping others that we are able to continue our mission.

At [REDACTED] we are all volunteers. We are managed and run by volunteers and, crucially, we are partially funded by volunteers. We rely on our enthusiastic volunteers at all levels of the organization to help us raise money for our vital work.

It is not mandatory for all volunteers to contribute, but any effort you can make before your arrival is greatly appreciated. Ideally, we would like to encourage all volunteers that arrive to attempt to raise at least 250€ to donate to our cause, and, as you will soon see, this will make a genuine difference. Hosting personal fundraisers reaches new communities who may not be aware of our work otherwise, and donors are much happier to donate if they know the funds are raised by someone they know and trust and who will be able to vouch for the way these funds are used in the field.

Thanks to this approach, we can guarantee that every cent that is brought in goes directly to help the beneficiaries. You will be able to see how any money you raise, goes straight into buying equipment for our day to day operations to better serve the refugee community in Lesbos, or paying for necessities like transport or rent expenses.

With that said, we would like to encourage you to undertake some fundraising activities prior to your departure. This could be as simple as setting up your own online fundraising page and asking your friends and family to donate. Alternatively, we can help you with plenty of fundraising ideas, like cake sales, sponsored runs or hosting a film night.




Aside from anything else, these kinds of activities can be really fun, and a wonderful way for your friends and family to see you off before you head out to your Lesbos adventure.

If you're willing to have a go at fundraising before you come over, have a look through this Fundraising Pack for inspiration.






Fundraising and Donation Ideas

Fundraising Hints and Tips






Before deciding how you're going to fundraise for [REDACTED] you may want to think about:

-  Who you know and how they might be able to help you
-  How much time you have
-  How you're going to raise funds

Don't forget the W's:

-  **WHAT?** - What will you do? From running a 5km to organizing a picnic, hosting a film screening to a quiz night at work. Each fundraiser will have completely different elements.
-  **WHO?** - Who will you invite to your event or help you fundraise? Who will help you organize everything? Who might be able to donate their skills?
-  **WHERE?** - Consider where you will hold your event. If it's at university or at work, you need to get permission from the people in charge. But some events may need you to book a venue or get permission from the local council.
-  **WHEN?** - Give yourself plenty of time to organize your fundraiser and make sure it's on a day when people will be able to show their support.
-  **HOW?** - Make a plan. You'll need to think about how you'll tell people about what you're doing, how things will run on the day, how you'll collect the cash...

MAKE SOME NOISE!! You'll want to tell people about your fundraising and you can do this in lots of different ways:

-  **Social media** – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat – let people know what you are doing and how they can get involved. See if your local community websites can give you a shout-out too. Don't forget to keep people updated as things progress – for example: let them know how much you've raised to date, how your training's going or how many tickets have sold.
-  **Hot off the press** – Contact your local media and radio stations to see if they might be willing to cover your story. Pictures tell a thousand words so make sure you include a few. Check to see if they have on their websites a listings section where you can add your event.
-  **In print** – Put up posters or get out into the community and hand out flyers. Make sure you get any permission needed first!
-  **Local contacts** – Get out and about. Ask if you can set up a table or information board about your fundraising in your local university/supermarket/town hall/swimming pool, etc. Check out the local groups/meetings in your area; you could offer to go and speak to them about your fundraising and the charity.
-  **Who's in your address book?** – Tell your friends/family/colleagues what you're up to. Ask them to spread the word.



Activities



At home

Give it up - Are you a chocoholic? A wine lover? Always on your game console? Ask your friends and family to sponsor you to give up something that you can't live without. You could give it up for a day, a week, a month...

Sponsored chores - Get the family involved with chores around the house. Kids get sponsored to take on the duster buster challenge, wash the family car...

Have a good clear-out - Clear out those cupboards and ask your friends to do the same. Then hold a nearly-new sale. Raise even more by selling refreshments at the same time.

Shave your hair - Weirdly beardy? Long hair don't care? Take the ultimate fundraising challenge – set a target and if you reach it the fuzz must go!

Great night in - Invite your friends round for a night in and ask them to donate what they would usually spend on a night out. How about karaoke? Board games night? Have a clothes swap? Or just enjoy some great food together.

Stage a screening - See if you can borrow a projector from your university or workplace, hang a sheet, choose your film, make some posters and away you go – provide popcorn and ice-cream and ask people to pay a small amount to view a blockbuster.

Talent show - Celebrate everyone's uniqueness and talent, let them shine by putting on a show and asking for a donation for family and friends to come and watch. You'll find out your friends and family's hidden talents, have a laugh, and raise money at the same time!

Open garden day - Garden in full bloom? Then how about an open garden day? Charge an entry fee and sell some drinks to refresh people on a hot day. Lemonade anyone?

Celebrate and give - Big birthday? Wedding anniversary? Wedding? Why not use your special occasion as a way to raise funds. Rather than a gift ask people to donate to Refugee4Refugees instead.

Bingo – A fun and easy event to plan and suitable for the whole family.

At work

Hold a coffee morning - Invite people for coffee and cake. You could get the kids involved too by baking at home. Maybe team up with others and hold a bake sale too.

Raffle - Ask local businesses to donate prizes. Then ask your coworkers for a donation to enter the contest to win them. If you can find 10 prizes and charge €2 per ticket or €5 for 3 you could easily make €150.

Skills auction - Tired of photocopying? Parched and in need of a cup of coffee? Encourage colleagues to auction off their skills and put your feet up for the day.

Auction of promises – Ask your colleagues to contribute a promise for the auction and then ask people to bid at the auction to win the promise. The promises could be for example; taking over photocopying for a day or going to fetch your morning coffee.

Sweepstake – Football world cup? Wimbledon? Olympics? Grand National? Organize a sweepstake and raise money by charging your colleagues an entrance fee. Place your bets!

Always commuting by car - Ask people to sponsor you to cycle / walk to work for a week instead; it's great for burning those extra calories!

Give a talk - Ask your colleagues if they will make a donation to your fundraising target, in exchange for you giving them a talk about the work that we do and the current situation in Lesvos

Quiz Night - Fingers on buzzers, it's time for a quiz! Whether it's work related or general trivia, you will get the competitive juices flowing and raise a chunk of money in the process by hosting a charity quiz.

Get active

Run, bike, swim - There are 100's of events taking place all over the world, from 5km runs to ultramarathons, indoor swims to triathlons, extreme mountain biking to family bike rides. Pick your event and motivate yourself to train by asking friends and family to sponsor you.

Sponsored walk - Grab your friends, get them to grab their friends, pick a route, pack a picnic and away you go. Great one for dog lovers to join in too.

Group exercise - Are you an experienced teacher in yoga, Zumba, etc.? Then why not use these skills to run a class?

Hold a tournament – Football, hockey, basketball, there are so many options. Ask your friends and family to bring out their competitive side and organize teams. Then charge a donation for teams to enter the tournament. You could raise extra money by selling food and drink. All that running, they are bound to get thirsty!

Get creative

Knitting - Whether you're a knitting master or a knitting novice, pick up the needles and get knitting. Then sell the items for a donation. You could ask your friends / family for orders. Christmas jumper anyone?

Make your own - Why not try something new? Candle-making, painting, ceramics...so many possibilities. Then use your new skills to raise funds.

Team up - Get together and form a quilting club. Beautiful hand-made quilts are a great way to raise funds, either by selling them directly or donating them to a raffle.

Hold a class – Are you an experienced crafter? Raise funds by using your crafting skills to hold a class to teach others how it's done.

Fundraising campaigns in online platforms

Another option is to create an online fundraising campaign explaining what you will be doing and share it with all your friends and family in order to raise the money online. You can use the information in the "Activities" section of the "Volunteer Introduction" document, that you have received together with this Fundraising Pack, in order to explain what you will be doing in the island, and to give readers an idea of what the money would be used for. Furthermore, please feel free to add pictures to your campaign, which you can find in our Facebook page

() or Instagram

()

In just a few steps you can set up your page and be able to start receiving donations for your fundraiser. Bear in mind that most online platforms charge for transaction fees (typically between 3% and 9%), which means that you would not receive 100% of the funds raised once you decide to withdraw. These are just some of the online platforms that you can use:

-  Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/>
-  Givengain - <https://www.givengain.com/>
-  GoFundMe – <https://www.gofundme.com/>
-  GlobalGiving - <https://www.globalgiving.org/>
-  Fundly - <https://fundly.com/>
-  Indiegogo - <https://www.indiegogo.com/>



Other methods of contributing to our cause

NeedsList - With NeedsList, groups working directly with displaced people can list their most urgent needs. Donors respond by meeting needs in real-time. Buy one or more items from our NeedsList through the following link

[Redacted link]

Shipping donations - Do you have a lot of goods you want to ship to Lesvos? The items that are most needed right now include, but are not limited to:

<p align="center">Clothing (children and adults, especially men's wear in sizes S and M, no XL or XXL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long sleeve shirts • Trousers • Underwear (new) • Hijabs (head scarves) • Winter jackets • Sweaters • Baby onesies • Thick socks • Hats • Gloves 	<p align="center">Hygiene products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menstrual pads • Soap • Shampoo • Toothpaste • Toothbrushes • Baby wipes • Washing powder • Diapers
<p align="center">Footwear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainers/Winter shoes (no wellies) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Babies (0-24 months old) ○ Children (2-15 years old) ○ Adults (sizes 35-45) 	<p align="center">Other items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blankets • Sleeping bags • Towels



The items collected should be sent to the [Redacted] warehouse (all shipment and customs clearance costs should be accounted for by the donor). Please contact us at [Redacted] in order to get further information on any further logistic information.

Where does the money go?

The money raised for [REDACTED] will be used for the following applications:





- **School material:** notebooks, pencils, clipboards, whiteboards, educational games, etc.
- **Recreational toys:** hoola hoops, jumping ropes, puzzles, etc.
- **Cleaning material:** gloves, garbage bags, hand sanitizer, etc.
- **Clothes:** winter jackets, trousers, socks, underwear, etc.
- **Hygiene products:** shampoo, shower gel, menstrual pads, toothbrushes, toothpaste, etc.
- **Upcycling material:** needles, super glue, thread, hole puncher, etc.
- **Rent:** monthly rent of our warehouse, piece of land next to the Olive Grove in Moria Camp, and other potential facilities we decide to expand to in the future to better serve the local and refugee population.
- **Administrative material:** paper, printer ink, pens, etc.
- **Transport:** fuel, vehicle insurance, vehicle taxes, etc.
- **Other:** warm blankets for winter distribution to refugees living in Moria Camp and Kara Tepe Camp, wood to build shelves in the warehouse, basic medicines for first aid kits, NGO taxes, etc.





How to send the money to [REDACTED]

There are several ways to send us the donations you raised prior to your arrival:

-  **Cash:** if you collected the money in cash and would rather avoid the hassle of a transfer, you can always bring the cash and we can make the deposit ourselves. This method would mean that we would receive 100% of the funds raised.
-  **Direct deposit:** you can choose to transfer the money directly to the NGO bank account, available in our website [REDACTED]. This method would mean that we would receive 100% of the funds raised (excluding any online fundraising platform fees and bank transaction fees).
-  **PayPal:** you can choose to transfer the money through our PayPal account, available in our website [REDACTED]. This method would mean that we would receive 95% of the funds raised (excluding any online fundraising platform fees), as PayPal also charges transaction fees.
-  **Omprakash:** We are also able to provide tax receipts for US-based company donors under our partnership with Omprakash, a 501(c)3 organization. Link available in our website [REDACTED].




Thank you!






Thank you very much for taking the time to read through this Fundraising Pack. If you do finally choose to help us raise funds for our operations, this money will have a direct and tangible impact on the local refugee population of Lesvos. We truly appreciate any and all contribution that our volunteers can offer. It is due to people like you, who offer their relentless help and enthusiasm, that this NGO is now what it is. **Thank you!**




GUIDELINE ON INTERACTION WITH CHILDREN



 aims to protect the children our team comes in contact with and has developed the following guidelines in order to ensure all team members understand how to appropriately interact with the residents under the age of 18.

I agree to read this guideline and sign based on my understanding and acceptance of these terms. In order to maintain a safe and supportive environment, all volunteers must adhere to the following guidelines:

- 1) Keep sharp materials, plastic bags, cigarettes, matches, medications, cleaning supplies out of the reach of children and in locked storage when actively not in use.
 - 2) Avoid toys that explode or that shoot things (toy guns, darts, fireworks) in order to avoid triggering fears and traumas. Volunteers are not permitted to encourage rock throwing.
 - 3) There should always be a minimum of two  volunteers in the space. Try not to be alone with a child or group of children if not visible to other volunteers.
 - 4) If a child becomes ill whilst at Mandala, notify the parents as soon as possible and monitor child until parents arrive. Please inform  leadership who will walk the child back to the camp.
 - 5) Never ask for or accept personal favours in exchange for services or materials supplied by the project. These favours refer to sexual contact, labour, goods and/or other services.
 - 6) Never ask for or accept personal favours in exchange for allowing someone to participate in programme activities and/or access services.
 - 7) Never have sexual contact with anyone that  serves.
 - 8) Never beat, hit or slap or use any other form of physical punishment with participants. In case you witness this kind of behaviour in someone else, we kindly ask you to stop it in a calm way, and inform  leadership.
 - 9) Never verbally or physically harass participants.
 - 10) Never make vulgar, discriminating or humiliating jokes or comments at participants, other volunteers or staff.
 - 11) Never limit someone's access to program supplies or activities because of personal feelings or dislikes. There should be no discrimination. Everyone should have access to program activities regardless of your own personal opinions.
 - 12) Never use program supplies or materials for personal benefit outside of regularly planned activities.
 - 13) Never use race, ethnicity, religion or family relations as criteria for inclusion or exclusion in activities.
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- 14) Never leave children unsupervised in Mandala.
 - 15) Never leave or disappear from the space assigned to you at Mandala without telling the coordinator in charge. Always follow the coordinator's instructions at Mandala. If you think there is a better alternative, please refrain from implementing it without first discussing it with the coordinator, as there is most likely a reason for the system in place. Feel free to communicate your suggestions, but please do so through the designated feedback channels (e.g. direct conversation with the coordinator, weekly individual check-ins, weekly volunteer meeting, volunteer feedback form, etc.).
 - 16) Never swear at Mandala.
 - 17) Always ask for the permission of a parent and coordinator before taking a photo of a child.
 - 18) Demonstrate fairness and consistency.

In terms of the young children we interact with, we ask that you follow the following guidelines:

- 1) Before starting any activity, ensure that the physical space is safe. E.g there are no sharp object lying about.
 - 2) Keep an omniscient eye, keep language simple, go down to their level. Do everything in a calm manner.
 - 3) Children who suffer from traumas or who come from different backgrounds may not know how to play with the toys that are in the space, so we ask that volunteers show how the activity works and actively play with children, leading by example.
 - 4) Conversations: some children have never been spoken to by adults, or asked how they are; they might have had no conversations with adults about how they are feeling or how their day is going. Therefore, we encourage positive conversations between beneficiaries and volunteers. Please note that asking questions regarding the children's past and their journey to Europe is considered dialogue of a sensitive nature. Therefore, unless appropriately trained and previously communicated to  leadership, please avoid engaging in such conversations.
 - 5) Bear in mind that they are learning English, and even though we might think they don't understand, they take in our conversations. Therefore conversations between volunteers within the space must be child-friendly, remain positive, and never include the children's names, present or not.
 - 6) With young children, use diversion first before using "no". E.g a child wants another child's toy, instead of saying no, propose another one or direct the child towards another station/activity.
 - 7) Keep emphasising positive attitudes, positive reinforcement and language. E.g when a child takes an object that is meant to remain in place, keep using positive language such as "Please, give it back" instead of "Not Good!".
 - 8) Volunteers should never make a child feel ashamed for his or her actions, display of affection, or physical contact. That being said, volunteers can receive physical contact,
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but should not reciprocate in an active manner. It is important to maintain the professional boundaries in order to demonstrate that we are the authority figure present in order to facilitate their safety. We want to be warm and supportive while reducing the potential for attachment and feeling of abandonment, especially considering the inherent volunteer rotation (volunteers will leave, children will stay).

- a. Example of passive reciprocation: a child may hold your hand. You can gently hold their hand, but do not squeeze or offer positive reinforcements for their physical contact.
- b. It is okay to receive and reciprocate hugs. However, make sure this reciprocation is passive and that, when a child comes to you for a friendly hug, it only last for a few seconds before organically creating a physical distance and redirecting their attention. Only initiate hugs when a child is distressed and needs comforting, otherwise refrain from actively cradling or hugging the children you come in contact with. Use common sense in supporting children feeling sad or emotional.
- c. Volunteers are not permitted to tickle or engage in rough play.

If I violate this guideline, I am aware of the potential termination of my work with [redacted] I understand and agree, that information that I gain from my work with [redacted] is confidential. Any information shared outside the organization could lead to legal consequences.

I understand and accept the information in this contract and vow to work accordingly:

Date:

Signature of volunteer:

