

Mutual aid amongst refugees: Organized abandonment and anarchic places

Abstract:

The state's central role in creating the precarious conditions of incarceration, uncertainty, marginalization, and informality is best described as 'organized abandonment' (Gilmore 2007). Based on fieldwork in Turkey and Peru, this article shows how some refugees have responded to difficult material and existential conditions by creating anarchic geographic places of meaning that are beyond the state. Where subjectivities and practices converge upon egalitarianism, autonomy, and cooperation, the ethnographic cases of refugee placemaking presented are explored through the concept of mutual aid. The observations are evocative, asking us to reflect on how reformulations of space and place as a result of organized abandonment intersect with refugee collectivities and futurities that are beyond the state.

Keywords:

mutual aid; refugees; organized abandonment; anarchism; comparative research; geography

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“Open any book on sociology or jurisprudence, and you will find there the government, its organization, its acts, filling so large a place that we come to believe that there is nothing outside the government and the world of statesmen ... And when you read the newspapers, you hardly think of the incalculable number of beings – all humanity, so to say – who grow up and die, who know sorrow, who work and consume, think and create outside the few encumbering personages who have been so magnified that humanity is hidden by their shadows, enlarged by our ignorance.”

Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* ([1892] 2015: 36)

The state, in its general and amorphous form, has been persuasive in convincing that its existence is necessary to human organization. Much like Mbembe’s (2019) thorough discussion of modern state democracy, masking its colonial and slave system origins with its ‘official story’ that “democracies are pacified societies” (16), the state *in and of itself* exists only within the grammar of violence. This is a foundational axis on which anarchists base their analytic and praxis towards state abolition. And while their claims are empirically sound and historically accurate, anarchism as both a philosophy and a body of cues for egalitarian ways of social organization faces the brunt of human pessimism. Conversely, state democracy is awarded endless optimism, no matter how distant the *demos* (people) is from the *kratia* (power), or the human cost to achieve it. The cost of this optimism, of systematic reproduction and survival, is deeply spatial: “the mythological logics required for modern democracies to function and survive is the exteriorization of their originary violence to third places, to nonplaces, of which the plantation, the colony, or, today, the camp and the prison, are emblematic figures” (Mbembe 2019: 27). These are the exilic spaces of the world, ‘vast zones of asylum’ (Malkki 2002) of refugee ‘warehousing’ (Smith 2004), where mass incarceration and mass displacement intersect in ‘states of exception’ (Agamben 1998). Beyond the overtly carceral, the emblems of modern-day segregation and humanitarian failure, exilic spaces – in all forms, physical, imaginary, and existential – increasingly exist in everyday topographies.

And yet, despite the continued violence and disappointments many refugees endure, realizing that they have simply left one violent state for another, a great number continue to feel love, to forge relationships of support, and to project themselves forward through a sense of futurity (Allan 2014; Boletsi et al. 2020; Poole and Rigan 2020). More than this, within these conditions of ‘organized abandonment’ (Gilmore 2007), refugees coalesce around their own forms of organization and sociality; forms that are inherently beyond the state. It is not because many of us cannot envision a reality “outside the government and the world of statesmen”, as suggested above by Kropotkin, that this life does not exist, or even thrive. We are perhaps not looking to these exilic spaces with lucidity, preferring the trope of liminality, or otherwise, fetishizing moral precarity to stake a claim for social justice (AUTHOR 2020). With little or no support, refugees are working for the betterment of their own lives. They are doing this without the concepts and tools – policy papers, reports, press releases, and articles – we have manufactured; those artifacts that operate directly *within rather than against* the logic of the state.

The aim of this paper is to present evidence of sociability and cooperation amongst refugees; free associations and practices that live inside exilic spaces and outside (or perhaps more suitably, 'beyond') the state. As this paper will demonstrate through the use of two geographically distinct cases, the principle of mutual aid provides the substratum for these relationships, organically producing anarchic places where a future-focused and egalitarian prefigurative politics is enacted in everyday life. The next section will preface the case studies included in this paper, presenting relevant literature on organized abandonment and its implications for state self-destruction in refugee spaces. Then, the methodology used to collect the data presented will be outlined. The first case will then bring us to Basmane, Izmir (Turkey), where a group of Syrian women will show how mutual support systems, elective kinship, and alternative education are instrumental to their moving on from loss, solitude, and abandonment. We will then move to Chorrillos, Lima (Peru), where a group of otherwise disconnected Venezuelan musicians have formed a collective around egalitarian substantive economics. Following the presentation of cases, I will draw on mutual aid and anarchist literatures to conceptually situate these practices. A brief conclusion will then be provided.

Organized abandonment and state self-destruction

'Organized abandonment', advanced by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2002; 2007; 2008) with reference to David Harvey (1989), is the process whereby a 'state-in-crisis' systematically responds to its surplus of labor by directing vulnerable, poor, and racialized persons towards carceral institutions. Let us remember that 'carceral', as Foucault intended in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), reaches beyond the penitentiary, manifesting itself through the disciplinary tactics of surveillance, segregation, containment, and boundary-making (Moran 2015; Moran et al. 2018). While detention centres stand as explicit examples of the carceral migrant geographies of biopolitical regulation (Moran et al. 2013), many other spaces have been recognized as such: refugee camps (Agamben 1998), human trafficking corridors (Aradau 2011), airports (Sharma 2009), plantations (Mbembe 2019), and ethnic enclaves (McDowell and Wonders 2009), to name a few. Externalization, refolement, and deportation also stand as emblems of the pervasiveness of what has been called the 'carceral turn' (Lissovoy 2012; Moran et al. 2018), where migrants' own national territories have become 'zones of confinement' (Coutin 2010). The common thread between all these spaces is organized abandonment.

Interestingly, organized abandonment produces divergent outcomes. On the one hand, the state becomes emboldened, stronger, and seemingly omnipresent; the features that have been, many times over, examined through the analytic of biopolitics (Agamben 1995, 1998; Foucault 1975; Minca 2006). These are the situations where refugees are detained indefinitely, contained on Nauru or in sections of the Canary Islands, or waiting in caged areas for 'processing' in the United States or at the outer edges of the European Union. On the other hand, organized abandonment is manifested as a literal abandonment, a retreat of the state. Perhaps more discreet, these are the many situations in which refugees are *de facto* stateless, have no recourse to the resources of any state or its laws, no rights to call upon, and are, essentially and brutally, abandoned. In far less extreme cases, but with as much geographical reach, others experience this abandonment through the erosion of both the welfare state and social democracy. This landscape of bifurcated impacts

of organized abandonment – the simultaneous emboldening and weakening of the state – is part and parcel of the sociopolitical disorganization that we see in many places today. As others have observed (Lukacs 2005; Strange 1996), this sociopolitical disorganization is both an emblem of state retreat and causal to its loss of authority.

As such, the state – and particularly in its capitalist articulation – is self-destructing. At an increasing rate, ‘exilic spaces and practices’ are producing alternate spatialities of sociality, understood by O’Hearn and Grubačić (2016) as “areas of social and economic life in which people and groups attempt to escape from state authority and capitalist economic processes, whether by territorial escape or by attempting to build structures that are autonomous of capitalist processes of accumulation and social control” (162-163). Beyond isolationist geographies (Scott 2009), mutual aid and anarchic associations are responding to the call of human survival.

Methodology and data

Data presented in this paper was collected rather spontaneously. In both cases, these were people I met while conducting fieldwork related to other research projects (AUTHOR 2017, 2018). In Izmir, Turkey, it was mixed-methods research related to my Master’s degree, undertaken over an 18 month period between 2015-2016. In Lima, Peru, it was qualitative research conducted over a 15 month period, first as an independent scholar, and then as BLINDED. Throughout the course of these research periods, I came to know the individuals who appear in this study. It was only in the later part of these research periods, however, that I began directly documenting, exploring, and conversing with these individuals about the themes herein. Sampling was therefore relational, a typical approach in the anthropological tradition, and meaning that participants were ‘recruited’ based on the relationships, channels, and networks I was introduced to throughout the research process. In positivist terms, this can best be described as nonprobability snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Chromy 2008), and specifically its uses in studying ‘rare’ (or in this research context, ‘marginal’) populations (Kalton and Anderson 1986).

Two primary research methods were used: participant observation and unstructured interviews. Participant observation is understood here as “a long-term intimate engagement with a group of people that were once strangers to us in order to know and experience the world through their perspectives and actions in as holistic a way as possible” (Shah 2017: 51). While on the field, I took on the ‘participant-as-observer’ position (Takyi 2015), gaining intimate familiarity with the participants through more extensive contact with a smaller group of individuals. This is an approach that is considered productive to help shore up long-standing concerns of misrepresentation (Lather 2001). The choice to take on this approach was informed by an emerging appreciation for a research ethics of care when working with refugees (Clark-Kazak 2017; McGrath and Young 2019). Given the importance awarded to building rapport with participants, unstructured interviewing was utilized in both research contexts¹ (Fontana and Prokos 2007). Based on guidance from Pelto (2013), I adopted the ‘ethnographic interview’ method, with questions interspersed within general conversation; these are known as ‘grand tour questions’

¹ In Turkey, five Syrian women were interviewed. In Peru, six Venezuelans (two women; four men) were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in English. Names have been altered in this paper to preserve participants’ anonymity.

(Spradley 1979). Non-intrusive probing was used to gain more insight on specific aspects of participants' descriptions and stories. Given the themes of this investigation, I greatly considered the advice provided by Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway (2007) who ask that forced migration researchers see beyond the lens of vulnerability in order to explore how their work risks entrenching existing hierarchies that threaten participants' autonomy. Part of this consideration informed my interest in exploring how refugees in both contexts engage in forward-looking practices (Munn 1992) that go beyond vulnerability, avoiding unnecessary probing on issues of memory and trauma.

Observations, contextual information, and direct quotations were inscribed in a notebook, following comprehensive guidance provided in Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2011). Some interviews were first recorded, then transcribed. As more time passed, less information was transcribed, leading to a natural point of 'data saturation', described as "the point in data collection when no new additional data are found that develop aspects of a conceptual category" (Francis et al. 2010). Once this point was reached, I used open coding and repetitive reading of the ethnographic record to discover common themes and narratives (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Saldaña 2015; Wolcott 1990).

Case study 1: Syrian mothers in Basmane, Turkey

For nearly two years, I spent a great deal of time volunteering at Kapılar, a grassroots organization and community centre founded on egalitarian values and located in a squatted building. The organization takes its name from the neighborhood it operates within, a smaller section of a wider sub-district known as Basmane. Although its exact origins are not fully known and mythologized, the neighborhood of Kapılar, meaning 'doors', is thought to have taken its name from its historical significance as the location of the gate to the citadel of Smyrna built during the 4th to 3rd Centuries BCE. As the drop off point for many long-distance buses, Kapılar still remains a spatially symbolic place of entry. I felt this greatly when I was hanging around this area between 2015 and 2016, a timeframe where a great number of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa travelled through Turkey to then cross the Aegean Sea to reach Europe. For many transiting refugees, Kapılar is the gate to the coast. For others, those that stay, it is the gate to Basmane and the proximate settlements of Mount Pagos (known locally as 'Kadifekale').

In a nearby street, just an earshot away from the community centre, I would often see Zayna sitting on a chair outside her home whilst on my way to a Syrian falafel eatery. I would sit for a while and chat mostly about daily things. Zayna was an elderly woman, always smiling and making jokes about the odds of her life in Turkey: "How did I end up here? How did they ever allow a wrinkly woman like me here? An old widow, imagine!" Under the humour you could feel lingering pain, but she took it in stride. She would sometimes mention her involvement with a small group of widowed women. "We rely on each other a lot, I'm so happy that we've found each other," Zayna would say, also expressing her deep gratitude for this support group. One day, at great surprise, she invited me to attend one of their sessions. Without waiting for my response, she raised her hand towards me and pronounced "lift!" with great imperative. As instructed, I lifted her from her chair and we began to walk.

As I entered their place of meeting, the women welcomed me. They already knew who I was. Leyla was also in attendance, a woman in her late 20s that I spoke with regularly while at Kapılar. Another woman, whom I later learnt was named Nahir, asked me to sit. She then went on to introduce this group to me:

“We’re a small group of three women, all widows, and we use this group to share our pain and find ways to help each other. We all have children and its hard to raise a family alone. Most jobs available here are for men, so we need to find other ways to support our family ... The group started because one of us thought a lot about suicide and we aren’t able to have access to health services that can help with that ... When I go home after spending time with this group, I feel like I just spoke with a therapist.”

Leyla also shared some thoughts on the group:

“Right now, this group is part of our survival strategy. I might be dead without it and my children would be in a difficult position. Outside the group we help each other out, share bread and take care of each others’ children. I don’t see the government helping us in this way any time soon, probably ever. I think this group is the way forward even though we don’t all agree on what we can actually do.”

I knew Leyla, and this type of ‘activist’ talk was one of her most noticeable conversational traits. It was also a trait that she would say “pushes people away.” The group did not dismiss her, however. They nodded in affirmation, suggesting nonverbally that its activities could – or perhaps *should* – be expanded. Zayna, in her usual demeanour, explained her own limitations: “I’m old, look at me! I think that’s a great idea Zayna, something for you young people.” “Sure, but we need your wisdom and positivity!”, Nahir intervened, chuckling along with the others.

After a bit more chatter, I left and returned home, thinking that it was best to let the group continue with its ongoings. A few months passed, still crossing paths with Zayna and Leyla regularly. My visit to the group’s meeting made my relationship with these two women more intimate and authentic. They spoke to me more about the things that pained them, their solitude, but also about their vision of the future, what they would like to accomplish, and how they are moving on from the tragedy of the Syrian Civil War. One day, Leyla rushed to see me as I was preparing some food in the community kitchen. “You really need to see what the group has become!”, she said, excitedly inviting me to that evening’s meeting.

The group had transformed into something quite different – more vibrant and energetic, it seemed. They were meeting in a larger space, an area that was parcelled into what looked like different ‘stations’ of activity. Children were playing quietly, or reading and drawing. Communal food was spread out across a table – homemade pastries, olives, tomatoes, cucumbers, and *sarma* (filled grape leaves). Two of the newest members approached me, indicating that they had heard from Zayna that I was a good person who’s interested in the group. Mina began sharing the significance of this group to her:

“We have formed a community of support. We need each other because we experience different forms of suffering. Some of us have lost their husband, or a child or parent. The chance of returning to our former homes is increasingly low; that compounds our suffering because our futures look troubled ... The situation here in Turkey isn’t ideal. We are supposed to have the rights but the government, hospitals, schools – they don’t deliver on this. It’s the difference between what should happen and what actually happens ... Syrian women support each other in general, it’s part of our cultural heritage, but the social conditions here where there’s a total absence of state support are pushing us to be more organized and strategic in how we support each other”

She went on to explain an emergent form of milk kinship amongst these women. And while milk kinship is nothing new, and particularly so in the Arab world (Conte 1994; Parkes 2005; Rahbari 2020), she described the nuance at play:

“Usually, a milk mother would be someone you are either directly related to, or a close friend of the family. The main reason is that, in our culture, if you share a milk mother, you cannot get married or

have children. Often, milk mothers are there because the biological mother cannot produce milk ... It's a bit different here, because we're doing it for different reasons and in different circumstances. Multiple mothers are milk mothers to multiple children, and we don't really know each other. But we do it because, in a way, it means that we can share responsibilities across more people. If another mother is giving milk to my baby, I can spend that time doing something else, like make bread to sell, or even rest ... We can be more autonomous because of this."

When asked about the implications for marriage and child-rearing, Mina laughed, shrugging her shoulders slightly, "We're in a difficult situation here in Turkey and so we might have to change how we think about it ... this is also helping us build a community." And so it seemed, this group had brought together women who cooperated through 'elective' kinship and affinities (Carsten 2000). Dunia also talked about adaptations in her own practice as a former teacher in Syria:

"No one is doing anything for us here. They just let us in the country, and yes, I appreciate that, but you can't do that and then not take care of us ... We are taking care of each other, in our own way. That can be better because it gives us freedom to teach our kids the way we want to – we don't have to teach about Ataturk [founder of the Turkish Republic] and we can teach our own stories and language ... It's a lot of work and it takes a lot of time but it's also rewarding and it gives us a break from the pain."

She described a new form of alternative schooling she had developed. Using her knowledge of Syrian curriculum, removing now-obsolete ideas related to the Syrian homeland, and combining it with "practical skills they'll need here in Turkey," she developed an informal school program for local children. Like others have noticed (Halid and Hos 2021; Uyan-Semerci and Erdoğan 2018), Dunia was responding to educational access barriers, where local schools were not admitting Syrian children despite a series of government decrees indicating they should. Through this group, she was training other women on teaching strategies, and together, they were planning on expanding the reach of their efforts to include more children. "We need to provide our children with an alternative. Right now, many of them are just playing around the streets all of the time, losing the value of learning new things," explained Dunia.

Case study 2: Venezuelan musicians in Chorrillos, Lima

The municipality of Barranco is Lima's hub for arts and culture. Like many urban spaces in Latin America, its central Plaza de Armas is a vibrant public space and popular meeting place. In Barranco, the plaza is bursting at the seams with food vendors, music, and dancing. The mass exodus resulting from a deterioration of the sociopolitical and humanitarian situation has brought many Venezuelans to Lima (AUTHOR 2018), and its artist contingent have gravitated toward Barranco and its neighboring areas of Chorrillos and Surco. I first met Santiago, Miguel, and Adriana near the *Puente de los Suspiros* (Bridge of Sighs), a popular place for couples to take photos. At the south-east extremity of the bridge, Santiago was sitting on the stairs leading to Barranco's main plaza, rolling a cigarette. He and I made eye contact, followed by a mutual smile, and – somehow – I had the boldness to ask him if he could roll me one too. He asked me to sit and listen to the music playing just a few meters away. "Do you like it, what you're hearing?", he asked in a rhetorical fashion, quickly explaining that those are his friends. He continued: "We're from Venezuela. We play music around the city to make some money to live ... It's mostly a passion, but now it's also a job." We kept chatting for a long while, and occasionally he would speedily join his bandmates to play the *cajón* (box-shaped percussion instrument). After a few hours, the band packed up their stuff and walked over to me, still sitting on the steps. Santiago introduced his friends: "This is Adriana, the voice. And this is Miguel, the violin." He apologized to his friends for his absence during the performance, telling them about some of the interesting conversations

he and I were having. Adriana wasn't pleased, "Yea, we still sounded good, but you should be there to help us." She looked at me with a timid smile, "It's not your fault. He does this sometimes. Have you tried *arepas* (traditional Venezuelan sandwich with cornmeal bun)?" We walked for half an hour to the neighboring municipality of Chorrillos. "Don't be scared *gringo*, the food will make it worth it!", said Miguel with a maniacal laugh. I had visited Chorrillos many times but played along with the trope.

We sat down next to a small pushcart that sold a variety of Venezuelan dishes. Some of their friends joined us for a time, then leaving with the instruments in hand. "How come they took your instruments?", I asked. Miguel explained that they share their instruments and perform in shifts; that when one group is resting, the other is playing, and vice versa. Adriana jumped in, "That's what we need to do, but we're really happy about it. We have a good rhythm with this system ... Yeah, we do have work permits but I can't do anything related to what I studied so this is much better than working in a restaurant." Adriana had a Master's degree in chemical engineering, but abandoned the idea of working in this field after spending months looking for a job and being disappointed with employers' hesitation to hire an immigrant. "I have a degree in physical therapy," Miguel explained, "but same thing, no one wants to hire Venezuelans even if a lot of us are educated. The Peruvian government isn't seeing this as an opportunity or doing anything about dealing with the bad feelings locals have toward us." Feeling tired from the day, Santiago proposed that we all go back to the house.

It was a small but tidy place. The dining room had been converted into a bedroom, one of two rooms for rest and sleep. The kitchen gave to a back door, leading to a terrace with a few wishbone chairs and a small table. "You wouldn't think so, but twelve people live here," Adriana emphasized, continuing with her explanation of how this was possible in such a small space:

As you saw, we share our instruments. This way, those that play are awake while the others are sleeping. In total, we have four groups, so two groups play and two groups sleep. Obviously we don't play all night, except maybe on Friday or Saturday's, so often the groups that are rested will go out to scavenge for things to sell, or for food if we haven't been making enough money. The punk's call it 'dumpster diving' [laughs] ... aside from that, we also divide cooking and cleaning duties. We also cook in big batches so everyone has food when they wake up and can leave the house quickly.

It was obvious that a sophisticated form of household organization had been put in place. When I asked when and how this all happened, Santiago remarked:

One of the family members, Virginia, got really sick one day. We all knew each others' faces from playing out in public, but when we heard that she was ill, we sort of all jumped in to help her. She wasn't receiving the care she needed so it took a few months for her to get better. In the meantime, all of us musicians got to know each other and started planning this idea of house-sharing.

"It all came together very quickly, and we had a few growing pains, but we've been doing it for a little over a year and it's working out really well," added Miguel.

Over the next few months, I visited the house a few more times, meeting new 'family members'. Pedro, who was the main figure dealing with finances, also affectionately called 'the hustler' by Santiago, once described the microeconomics of their dwelling and comradery:

"All the money we make goes in one place. It is all shared because we need to be fair. Some days, from like Thursday to Sunday, you can make good money. But Mondays are horrible ... We don't want to alternate too much in terms of who plays on what days so that everyone has the opportunity to make money ... We just pool the money not to disturb our house schedule ... Every week we all meet up, usually very late at night once the performances have ended, and we discuss money stuff ... Every

month, whatever is left over is divided equally to everyone. Some save it or get themselves something. Others send it home to Venezuela.”

Gabriel – another dweller – added to Pedro’s remarks on remittances: “I send most of my money back home. I used to send different amounts every month but now it’s more consistent and that’s much better for my family because they can rely on it.” Gabriel’s wife and three children were still in Venezuela, and he was hoping to bring them to Lima at some point with the little savings he had put aside. One evening, I sat with Virginia, chatting over an ice cold *chilcano* (Peruvian pisco-based cocktail). I wanted to ask her about her role in the ‘origin story’ of this meaningful, vibrant, and egalitarian place:

“It’s like they say, ‘there’s always a silver lining’. It’s always surprising what can happen from tragedy, in the migration sense, and from bad personal circumstances. They all came together through my illness, and in way I’m almost happy I got sick ... I’ve made lifelong friends here, we’re bonded forever ... But the world out there is still hard. I still don’t do the work I really want to. It’s still impossible to get the right paperwork, or get treated at a hospital ... We do our best to challenge the circumstances. It’s like this drink [points to her *chilcano*]. We’re drinking this because we’re here in Peru, just like we often sing Peruvian songs when we play ... People love it, and yes, I think we make more money when we do it, but for me it’s more about getting closer to Peruvians ... Some many don’t like us, and I think this is our way to show them that we aren’t that bad.”

Mutual aid in anarchic places

In his 1891 booklet, *Anarchy*, Italian anarchist philosopher Errico Malatesta wrote something quite relevant to the cases presented above:

“A government cannot wish the destruction of the community, for then it and the dominant class could not claim their exploitation-gained wealth; nor could the government leave the community to manage its own affairs; for then the people would soon discover that it (the government) was necessary for no other end than to defend the proprietary class who impoverish them, and would hasten to rid themselves of both government and proprietary class” (Malatesta [1891] 2014: 13)

Perhaps more than many believe, the state is indeed fragile, continuously needing to reform, reinvent, and remake its constitution to shape public opinion and defend itself from the sociopolitical consciousness that questions the legitimacy of its authority. It is widely accepted amongst scholars of forced migration that the international refugee protection regime has steadily eroded since the end of the Cold War (Mertus 1998; Loescher and Milner 2004; Hyndman and Giles 2017). And from the standpoint of dialectical materialism, while some idealistic reforms have been attempted since then (for example, the Global Compacts), the material outcomes of these efforts – through increased access to health, education, protection, etc. – have been weak and expectations kept pitiful. As scholars have pointed out, it is the divisive politics surrounding issues of nomenclature (refugees versus migrants), sovereignty, and ‘burden sharing’ that have perpetuated this foot-dragging (Hyndman and Reynolds 2020; Ineli-Ciger 2019; Jubilut and Casagrande 2019). Whether through nefarious means such as externalization and detention, or more subtle ‘blame games’ (Hood 2011) and surrendering to ‘collective action problems’ (Suhrke 1998; Weiss and Hoffman 2007), I have situated this global reality within the practices and logics of organized abandonment. And so, as Malatesta has forewarned (above), refugees across the world have moved beyond the state, realizing painfully and systematically throughout the last thirty years (at least) that life with dignity cannot depend on the state’s empty promises, and conversely, will more likely be achieved through alternative collectivities. Many have characterised this through the neoliberal language of ‘adaptation’ and ‘resilience’, whereas the

‘alter-politics’ (Hage 2015) that form these practices call us to qualify them more so as ‘resistance’ and ‘revolutionary’.

The cases above showcase the actions people take, and conversely the collectivities they make, to secure better material conditions for themselves within a generalized landscape of organized abandonment. My combined seven years in both these places – three of which were spent undertaking research – have shown me the deep extent in which the vast majority of refugees are left to their own devices, continually disappointed by the uncertainty, marginalization, and informality that the state has left them in. In their loss of faith towards the state apparatus, they organically associate with one another and build towards a common future. I trust that the cases presented in this paper have demonstrated this. In searching the literature, I believe their practices to be best situated under the umbrella of mutual aid. Mutual aid, briefly, is the horizontal and free assembly of individuals working towards common physical, emotional, artistic and/or intellectual goal(s), free from – and sometimes in direct response to – coercion and violence. As a foundational organizing principle of anarchism, it is rooted within the long-standing anarchist presupposition that humans thrive and develop as a result of cooperation and sociability (Kropotkin [1902] 1989; Reclus 1891; Metchnikoff 1886). As described by June and Lance (2020: 365): “It [mutual aid] is to embrace the idea that we can cooperatively reason with one another, and thereby instantiate our common inclination to build a society that benefits all without instituting any sort of hierarchy that functions to enforce such arrangements”. Within these arrangements of egalitarian social organization, mutual aid is enacted through reciprocity, redistribution, householding, gifting, and other associated acts of substantive economics (O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016).

When speaking of anarchist communism, “the synthesis of the two ideals pursued by humanity throughout the ages – economic and political liberty” (34), Kropotkin ([1892] 2015) writes:

“the bonds which bind the individual are no longer laws, but social habits – the result of the need felt by each one of us to seek the support, the co-operation, the sympathy of his neighbours ... mutual agreement replaces law in order to regulate individual interests in view of a common object” (35).

The cases presented above are vibrant examples of this. In the case of Syrian mothers, their free association opens up new forms of elective kinship, both as a reworking of social connectivity and through the renegotiation of social taboos. New forms of education are built, similar to those described as ‘deschooling’ or ‘radical pedagogy’ (Freire [1968] 2000; Illich 2008; Suissa 2006). In the Venezuelan musician case, these new social habits include householding, the equal distribution of resources, and the marrying of labor and creativity to subvert xenophobia. And while these social habits all work toward building away from old ways of doing, I prefer to conceptualize these places as *anarchic*, rather than explicitly anarchist or anarcho-communist. These places are sites of ‘implicit anarchism’ (Williams 2018), where a differentiation can be made between “ideologically motivated, card-carrying anarchists and anarchical forms of praxis” (Gibson 2013: 336). Despite this, the collection of habits and acts described here certainly constitute ‘pre-revolutionary practices’ of “libertarian and communitarian social life in areas like production, consumption, and cooperative living that would prepare the way for a more thorough transformation of society” (Clark and Martin 2013: 67).

Conclusion

In both Turkey and Peru, refugees have great difficulty accessing basic services such as health care and education, little autonomy or choice in respect to labor, do not have properly recognized rights and no way to make grievances, and are instrumentalized as placeholders responsible for the ills of society. The conditions endured by refugees in both contexts are best described as organized abandonment. And while both countries have received praise from the international community for their ‘efforts’, we ought to see this rather as symbolic of the scale and tolerance of globalized organized abandonment. For the refugees that appear in the cases presented above, however, organized abandonment is not tolerable. In fact, it places them in a predicament of survival where they must find new and creative ways to live beyond the forces that orchestrate it; namely, they must live beyond the state.

In Springer’s (2016) discussion of emancipatory space, he calls upon a ‘relational approach’. Using the examples of the 2000 water privatization struggles in Bolivia and 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, Springer asks us to consider them not as isolated events, “but as moments tied to the broader assemblage of global contestations over ‘the right to the city’ and alternative urban futures” (99). In a similar manner of relational geography, I ask that we consider both cases presented as part of wider forms of resistance to organized abandonment. Beyond the tired tropes of vulnerability and liminality, the observations provided point to another important and too often occluded dimension; that of refugee futurity. It is not to say that we should not tend to the vulnerable, or that liminality is a fictitious formulation, but rather, that I believe we must also commit to seeing the geographies that are working past abandonment and violence.

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