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Article

## Acts for Refugees' Right to the City and Commoning Practices of Care-tizenship in Athens, Mytilene and Thessaloniki

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### Abstract

During the recent refugee crisis, numerous solidarity initiatives emerged in Greece and especially in Mytilene, Athens and Thessaloniki. Mytilene is the capital of Lesbos Island and the main entry point in the East Aegean Sea, Athens is the main refugee transit city and Thessaloniki is the biggest city close to the northern borders. After the EU–Turkey Common Statement, the Balkan countries sealed their borders and thousands of refugees found themselves stranded in Greece. The State accommodation policy provides the majority of the refugee population with residency in inappropriate camps which are mainly located in isolated old military bases and abandoned factories. The article contrasts the State-run services to the solidarity acts of “care-tizenship” and commoning practices such as self-organised refugee housing projects, which claim the right to the city and to spatial justice. Specifically, the article is inspired by the Lefebvrian “right to the city,” which embraces the right to housing, education, work, health and challenges the concept of citizen. Echoing Lefebvrian analysis, citizenship is not demarcated by membership in a nation-state, rather, it concerns all the residents of the city. The article discusses the academic literature on critical citizenship studies and especially the so-called “care-tizenship,” meaning the grassroots commoning practices that are based on caring relationships and mutual help for social rights. Following participatory ethnographic research, the main findings highlight that the acts of care-tizenship have opened up new possibilities to challenge State migration policies while reinventing a culture of togetherness and negotiating locals’ and refugees’ multiple class, gender, and religious identities.

### Keywords

care-tizenship; commoning; refugees; right to the city; solidarity

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Over the past four years, Greece has been at the epicentre of the so-called “refugee crisis.” More than one million refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019a) have crossed the country in their effort to reach Northern Europe. However, after the EU–Turkey Common Statement on 18 March 2016 (European Council, 2016), the goal of which is ‘to end the

irregular migration from Turkey to the EU’ and the sealing of the borders of the so-called Balkan route, some 76,000 refugees have found themselves stranded in Greek territory (UNHCR, 2019b). Most of them are housed in inappropriate State-run camps on the outskirts of Athens, Thessaloniki, Aegean islands bordering Turkey and other cities in the mainland. Only one-third of refugees are accommodated in NGO-rented apartments in city centres (funded through UNHCR); however, refugees that

received their status two years ago and until recently have been losing the right to accommodation and financial support (Greek Ministry of Migration Policy, 2019). During this period and in contrast to the State immigration policies of exclusion and marginalisation, a multitude of refugee solidarity initiatives emerged. Many of these initiatives occupied abandoned buildings in city centres, developed forms of mutual help and care and claimed the refugees' right to the city. Thus, a crucial question is raised: Do refugees have a right to the city and to access the particular rights that compose the status of citizenship?

At this point, it must be stressed that last years' migrant solidarity movements highlight various repertoires of protest, networking and political opportunities in the times of late neoliberalism which 'brought about a decline in citizenship rights' (della Porta, 2018, p. 3) and contributed to the emergence of several 'actors, actions and possibilities' (Darling & Bauder, 2019, p. 2) that explore and challenge 'migration, rights and citizenship...beyond the limits and demands of the nation-state system' (Darling & Bauder, 2019, p. 2). Specifically, in the case of Greece, over the past 15 years, there has been remarkable political awareness on migrants' and refugees' issues and several political mobilisations have taken place. Worth mentioning are the No Border Camps, co-organised by local and international solidarity groups, which took place in Xanthi–Komotini in 2005, in Patra in 2008 and in Mytilene–Lesvos in 2009. Moreover, in 2011 a successfully organised solidarity campaign for 300 migrant workers took place, initiating a hunger strike that claimed migrants' legalisation and equal political and social rights to Greek workers (Pistikos, 2016). Finally, during the long refugee summer of 2015, a wide social solidarity movement with multiple acts of hospitality surfaced (Lafazani, 2018a) resulting in several building squats that operated as refugee housing projects in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Raimondi, 2019; Squire, 2018). Finally, in the summer of 2016, after the evacuation of the makeshift refugee settlement in Idomeni, on the border with North Macedonia, locals, refugees and international activists organised a transnational No Border Camp in Thessaloniki (Tsavdaroglou, 2019).

For the purpose of the article, we focus on critical citizenship approaches and especially on the notion of "care-tizenship," which according to Casas-Cortés (2019, p. 21) 'ties in the critique of a precarity/migration nexus.' Following the call of Nyers and Rygiel (2012, p. 1), we research on 'how the practice and experience of mobility—even when restricted—is itself productive of new forms of citizenship and of being political.' Fortunately, there is a significant amount of literature engaging with the binaries of non-citizen/citizen (McNevin, 2011), legal/illegal population (Nyers, 2003), regular/irregular (Squire, 2011) and 'less than full' citizenship (Golding, Berinstein, & Bernhard, 2009). Citizenship rights are usually recognised through 'membership within a particular

political community, defined predominantly through the bounded territorial space of the nation-state' (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012, p. 4). Adding to that, Isin's (2009, p. 376) comment that 'the substance of citizenship is "rights" is of high importance. But rights are not substances. Rights are...relations....Rights of citizenship are relationships that reflect dominant sites and actors of citizenship.' Thus, it becomes obvious that citizenship is not only a legal status, but also an ongoing and contested battlefield that is 'increasingly defined as practices of becoming claim-making subjects in and through various sites and scales' (Isin, 2008, p. 16). In this perspective, it is worth mentioning that over the last decades numerous 'new forms and practices of citizenship have proliferated' (Purcell, 2003, p. 564) such as "cosmopolitan citizenship," "multicultural citizenship," "flexible citizenship," "multi-layered citizenship," "transgendered citizenship," and "ecological citizenship" (Ong, 1999; Stierl, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1999).

This article seeks to problematise and research the formal concept of citizenship by focusing on a) refugees' lack of access to the city and b) the potentialities of self-organised practices and acts of caring, commoning and struggle. For this reason, we analyse both the top-down immigration policies and the non-institutionalised forms of citizenship. Our standpoint is far from the (NGOs)-built "abject victimage" of the refugee figure which 'silenced their voice and emptied their subjectivity of agency' (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012, p. 8). We are particularly interested in refugees' agency and political acts of solidarity, care and struggle that claim the right to the city, spatial justice and visibility. Our findings are based on the ways that such social, political and care practices offer the potential of transforming and modifying the cityscape by producing transnational and solidary common spaces.

The article employs a spatial analysis, ethnographic research and participant observation in State accommodation camps and in self-managed refugee housing projects. The fieldwork research took place between August 2018 and June 2019 in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene. In particular, our participation in collective actions, assemblies and meetings in the state-run camps and in self-organised refugee housing projects fostered observation and ground research. We also collected published material texts, both printed and from internet websites concerning the refugee housing squats and reports from a local and international humanitarian organisation regarding the refugees' living conditions in the state-run camps. Furthermore, forty semi-structured in-depth interviews with adult refugees—both male and female—from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, and Syria were conducted. All participants were fully informed about the research, and their involvement discussed in detail before research commenced. The interviews took place in English, Greek, Urdu, Farsi and Arabic (mediated by relevant interpreters) and lasted one to three hours. Regarding the protection of the research participants' personal data, we

have changed their names and other recognisable characteristics when needed.

The article contains four sections. The purpose of the next section is to review the literature on the Lefebvrian right to the city, the approaches on commoning practices and the critical citizenship studies. The following two sections present the Greek State refugee housing policies and compare them with the solidarity and care practices in self-organised housing projects in Athens, Thessaloniki and Mytilene. The article closes with some concluding remarks on the importance of care-tizenship common spaces for the refugees' right to the city.

## **2. Theoretical Approach: Refugees' Right to the City, Commoning Practices and Acts of Care-Tizenship**

In order to examine the refugees' right to the city we draw from the Lefebvrian analysis, the approaches on commons and the literature on acts of citizenship.

Our starting point is the famous work *The Right to the City*, written by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in the turbulent year of 1968. That was the period when numerous social and political groups claimed their rights to labour, housing, free time, freedom of speech, culture, green spaces, sexuality and education. At the same time, urban protests across the globe made it clear that the struggle for rights has a significant spatial and urban character. Lefebvre, in his socio-spatial analysis, highlights that the city is composed of a plethora of social groups which could potentially constitute "urban society." In his words, 'we have here...projected separately on the ground, groups, ethnic groups, ages and sexes, activities, tasks and functions, knowledge. Here is all that is necessary to create a world, an urban society' (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 143). However, he acknowledges that most of these groups are 'the non-participants, the non-integrated...who survive among the fragments of a possible society...excluded from the city' (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 144). Thus, for Lefebvre, the right to the city includes, combines and transcends 'the rights of ages and sexes (the woman, the child and the elderly), the rights of conditions (the proletarian, the peasant), the rights to training and education, to work, to culture, to rest, to health, to housing' (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 157). Furthermore, in a later work, he emphasised that the right to the city should be 'complemented by the right to difference and the right to information' (Lefebvre, 1991). This is extremely crucial in the case of refugees, in order to have both their distinct social, cultural, psychological and vulnerable characteristics recognised by the local citizens, as well as their right to accessing information in the places of arrival/residence. According to Lefebvre, these three dimensions, the right to the city, the right to difference and the right to information constitute 'the rights of the citizen' (Lefebvre, 1991).

Following Lefebvre, several scholars emphasise and expand the critical features of the right to the city. Purcell (2013, p. 142) suggests that the right to the

city 'is the everyday experience of inhabiting the city that entitles one to a right to the city, rather than one's nation-state citizenship.' Plyushteva (2009, p. 81) agrees with Purcell and claims that urban citizenship could be seen as 'a possible contemporary alternative to long-established notions of citizenship, those built on the pillars of rights, duties, and belonging to a political entity, typically a nation-state.' Furthermore, according to Chiodelli's (2013, pp. 490–491) interpretation of Lefebvre, urban citizenship 'has a specifically spatial component: it can be attained only through action over the space....The right to urban citizenship can be gained only through collective and self-organised action; it is inherently active.' Finally, for Petropoulou (2014, p. 570), the right to the city 'is not the right to the impersonal urban space but the right to the polis. In these new movements, the right to the *polis* is exercised in everyday life by many different actors and through different ways of action.'

In order to focus more on active urban citizenship, we particularly draw attention to critical citizenship studies, which highlight the 'practices of making citizenship social, political, cultural and symbolic' (Isin, 2008, p. 17) rather than the juridical dimension of citizenship. The discussion on acts of citizenship is highly examined by Isin (2008, pp. 18–19), who asks 'How do subjects become claimants of rights, entitlements and responsibilities?' and 'How do subjects such as citizens and others such as strangers...break away from these positions?' Following these questions, he reflects and sets three principles of theorising the acts of citizenship. Firstly, 'acts produce actors that become answerable to justice against injustice' (Isin, 2008, p. 39); secondly, 'acts of citizenship do not need to be founded in law or enacted in the name of the law' (Isin, 2008, p. 39); and thirdly, 'subjects becoming activist citizens through scenes created' (Isin, 2008, p. 39). The last principle is quite provocative as Isin (2009) tries to go beyond the term "active citizen," which is associated with more traditional citizenship duties such as voting and paying taxes, and he proposes the notion of "activist citizenship." In his words, 'while activist citizens engage in writing scripts and creating the scene, active citizens follow scripts and participate in scenes that have already been created. While activist citizens are creative, active citizens are not' (Isin, 2008, p. 39). Additionally, other scholars, such as Nyers (2015) and Holston (2009), expand the discussion on citizenship further. Nyers focuses on the struggles for freedom of movement, actions against detention, deportation, and other border controls, and he suggests the "migrant citizenships from below," which 'make claims on the state for rights and recognition while at the same time they are capable of evading legal capture and, indeed, transform the legal regimes and institutions of state citizenship' (Nyers, 2015, p. 25). Holston examines the struggles of poor people over housing, property rights, urban infrastructure, justice, even motherhood in the Global South and he refers to spaces of "insurgent citizenship" that 'begins with the struggle for the right to have a

daily life in the city worthy of a citizen's dignity' (Holston, 2009, p. 246).

At this point, it is important to mention Casas-Cortes (2019), who proposes the term "care-tizenship" in order to explain the demands and care practices of precarity and migrants' social movements as 'a creative "erasure" and "democratic re-iteration" of the conventional notion of citizenship' (Casas-Cortes, 2019, p. 21). The term "care-tizenship" has its origins in the Spanish anti-austerity movements when grassroots feminist precarity groups proposed the neologism "care-tizenship" ("cuida/danía" in Spanish). According to the collective Precarias a la Deriva (2010):

The word "ciudadania" means citizenship, as well as having resonances with the word for city, "ciudad." The word for care, "cuidado," is spelt very similarly. The authors of the text use these similarities to craft the neologism "ciudadania," referring to proposed rights to care, analogous to the citizenship rights demanded by some sectors of the European precarity and immigrant/asylum seeker movements.

Casas-Cortes (2019, p. 21) comments that 'such linguistic innovations and conceptual productions are worth considering further...the different interpretations of precarity by grassroots efforts...have been able to re-signify and re-politicise conventional understandings and practices of citizenship in creative ways.' Moreover, the collective Precarias a la Deriva (2010) emphasised that 'the cuidadania appears to us as suddenly as a concrete and situated bond created between singularities through common care (and care for the common). Thus, "care-tizenship" provides a useful concept to enrich the discussion on refugees' acts of citizenship and for the right to the city, and to connect it with the discussion on commons.

Usually, the discussion on commons refers to the so-called "tragedy of commons" (Hardin, 1968) and the state (Ehrenfeld, 1972; Ophuls, 1973) or private (Smith, 1981; Welch, 1983) management of common-pool resources. Ostrom (1990) examined the possibility of sharing a common-pool resource and the self-managed practices of the producers-commoners. Beyond the economic debate of private or state management, a new generation of autonomous Marxists scholars emphasised the verbal form of commons, the so-called commoning. Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge (2013, p. 610) argue that the notion of common 'refers to the social process of being-in-common, a social relationship of the commoners who build, defend, and reproduce the commons.' Moreover, de Angelis (2010, p. 955) insightfully comments that 'there are no commons without incessant activities of commoning,' it is across the social relations of (re)production in common that 'communities...decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things.' Finally, Linebaugh (2008, p. 45) clarifies and claims that commoning is 'independent of the

state, is independent also of the temporality of the law and state.' However, there is little research on mutual care as a form of commoning and especially the refugees' self-care practices which offer the potentiality to reinvent both the right to the city and new forms of citizenship acts. Consequently, we propose the connection of these three notions, namely the right to the city, care-tizenship and common spaces. Under this prism, the social and spatial contrast between the ghetto-like State-run camps and the self-organised refugee housing projects in Greece becomes an interesting case study, in order to highlight the importance of acts of commoning and care-tizenship in the perspective of a renewed meaning of the refugees' right to the city.

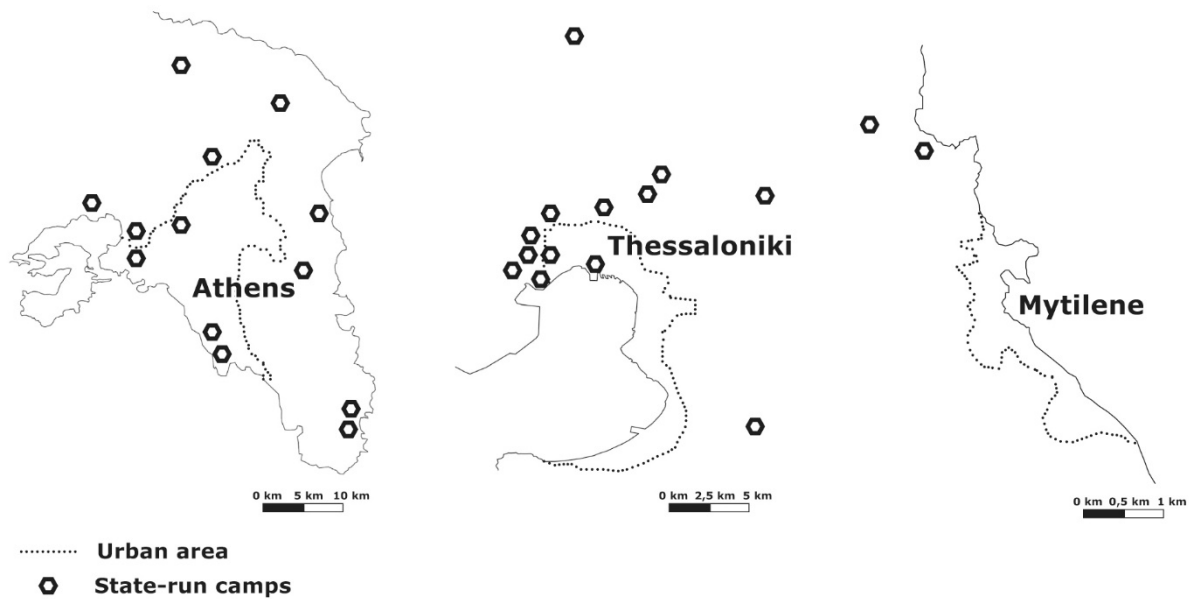
### 3. State Refugee Policies in Athens, Thessaloniki and Mytilene

The refugees' right to the city and to adequate housing has been recognised by several international agreements, treaties and organisations as an essential feature for the integration of newcomers. For example, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1991, p. 2) emphasises that the refugees' right to the city and to housing 'should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense,' but it has to be connected with 'the right to adequate food, shelter, health and education, as well as livelihood opportunities.' (UNHCR, 2009, p. 4) Furthermore, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2007) highlights that the refugees' accommodation centres 'should be integrated into already existing residential areas, mainstreaming the availability and the delivery of social services...to asylum seekers, refugees, migrants.' Thus, following the aforementioned statements, the refugees' right to adequate housing should have the following crucial features: security of tenure; availability of services; affordability; habitability; accessibility; and cultural adequacy (UNHCR, 2014). Finally, in this respect, it is underlined that 'housing is not adequate if it is cut off from employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities, or if located in polluted or dangerous areas' (UNHCR, 2014, p. 4).

However, against the abovementioned accommodation principals, over the last three years, most of the refugees in Greece have been forced to live in inappropriate State-run camps on the perimeter of Athens, Thessaloniki and Mytilene (see Figure 1). Most of the camps are former industrial buildings and military bases that have been transformed into accommodation centres for thousands of refugees. The camps are located in environmentally degraded areas, inside industrial and hazardous zones, with poor transport connection with the city centres and far away from residential areas, hospitals, schools, and urban social life.

According to Salma, an Afghan single woman who lived with her two children in the State-run camp of Elliniko, an abandoned airport in the perimeter of Athens:





**Figure 1.** State-run refugee camps in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene, 2016–2017. Source: Authors.

In that camp, there were about 2,500 refugees. It was horrible. There was no sense of safety. I stayed there with my children for about three months. We stayed inside the building and although it may seem better than staying out in a tent, there were no walls inside the building; thus, there was no privacy. Actually, I did not sleep for those three months because I was afraid that someone might come and steal my things or even steal my children. Health conditions were also horrible, everywhere was dirty. There was also no hot food. Not to mention that there were no translators or cultural mediators. Also, most of the children were sick because they did not eat good quality food, so they were all weak, not even the water was clean. So the children had diarrhoea and fever. (Personal interview, September 20, 2018).

The State-run accommodation structures irrefutably do not follow the international standards and a number of reports (Amnesty International, 2016; UNHCR, 2018) criticise the housing conditions. For example, the last report of Refugee Support Aegean (2019) highlights that the refugee camps in Athens and Thessaloniki are ‘overcrowded while substandard reception conditions have a detrimental impact upon the physical and mental health of their residents’ and:

Camps that have ceased to operate in 2017...reopened their gates in spring 2018. Tents are being set up in the camps and then dismantled depending on the needs...without seemingly any plan for what comes next...until today only three out of the 28 camps operating in the mainland have the required legal basis. (Refugee Support Aegean, 2019)

Especially in Moria camp in Mytilene, several NGOs (ActionAid et al., 2017) have sent a common complaint letter to the Greek Government’s Prime Minister in which they express their opposition to the policy of trapping asylum seekers on the islands in the aftermath of the EU–Turkey Common Statement. In this letter, it is described that:

More than 5,400 people live in overcrowded tents and containers, with little access to proper shelter, food, water, sanitation, health care, or protection....Summer camping tents, designed to accommodate not more than two people are now holding families of up to seven....Single women in the hotspots report harassment by some of the men....These conditions have a devastating impact on the long-term well-being of people trapped there. (ActionAid et al., 2017)

According to Petropoulou (2019), the Moria hotspot has been transformed into a post-modern complex panoptic space where irregularity is legalised within a complex system of controls and personal relationships.

Moving on to the European Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation program, it should be noted that it provides accommodation for 22,650 refugees (about 29% of the total population) in rented apartments within the urban fabric (UNHCR, 2019b). However, according to a decision of the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy (2019), as of 1 April, 2019, refugees who have entered the country two years ago, i.e., 2017 and have been granted refugee status, gradually lose their right to accommodation either in the camps or in apartments. This decision directly concerned 1,700 people at the time of its implementation, which will increase to 4,500 by the end of 2019 and, thus, the

number of homeless refugees will continue to increase (Campfire Innovation, 2019). The aforementioned developments have been criticised by a large number of NGOs and social movements (FEANTSA, 2019; Greek Union of NGO Workers, 2019; Refugee Movement for Rights and Justice, 2019).

At the same time, the Greek police evicted more than ten refugee housing squats in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene. As a result, hundreds of refugees became homeless. Fatima, a Syrian refugee mother of three minors and resident of Clandestina squat in Athens remembered the moment of the eviction and she said:

I was sleeping with my children when I suddenly woke up with guns being held in front of my eyes. There was police everywhere. I tried to collect our most important belongings. The police were shouting: “Fast, fast!” Two of my kids have heart problems. One of them has asthma....It is six months I am trying to call the asylum service from Skype without success. (Infomobile, 2019).

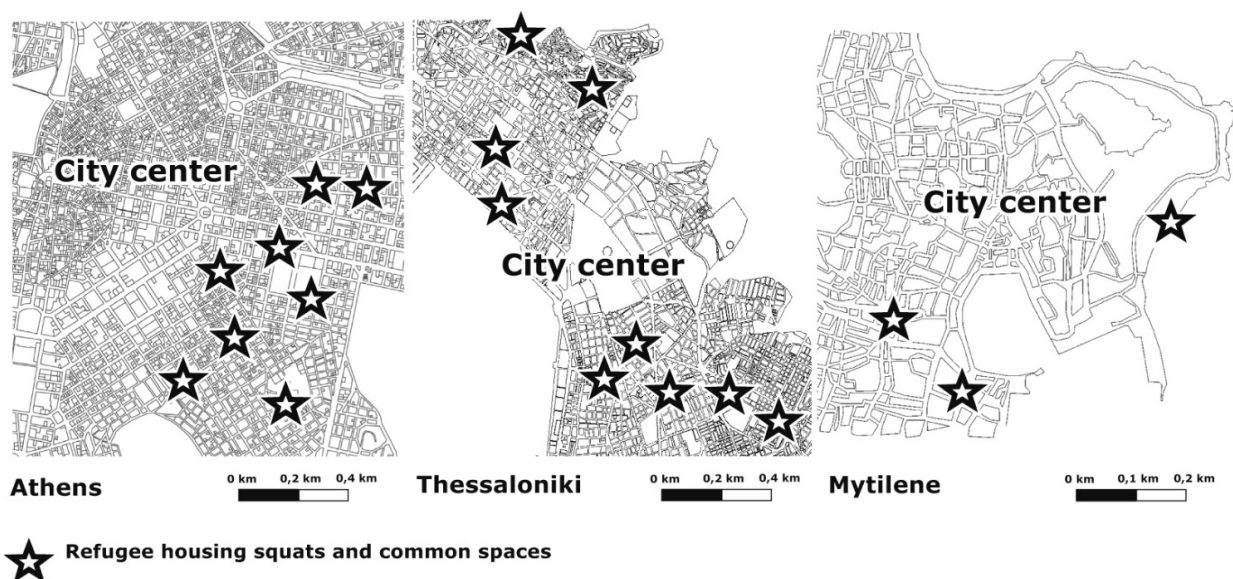
To us, it is clear that the Greek State immigration policies result in the exclusion and marginalisation of refugees from social and urban life, the criminalisation of self-managed housing projects and set up crucial spatial and social obstacles for the refugees’ right to the city, to housing and to citizenship.

**4. We Learn to Walk Together: Acts of Refugees’ Commoning Care-Tizenship in Athens, Mytilene, and Thessaloniki**

The aforementioned State immigration policies do not stand unchallenged and uncontested. During the past three years, numerous refugee solidarity initiatives have emerged, especially in Mytilene, Athens, and

Thessaloniki. In many cases, refugees and local solidarity groups have occupied several abandoned buildings in the city centre, transformed them to common spaces, experimented with acts of care-tizenship and subsequently claimed the right to the city and more specifically the right to the centre of the city. In contrast to the isolated State-run camps that are located at a significant distance from the centre of Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene, most of the solidarity and occupied refugees’ housing projects are in the very centre of the cities (see Figure 2). The centrality of the refugee squats is particularly important for the sociability and the participation of the refugees in the urban social life. The proximity of the squats to public schools, local markets, health services, and employment opportunities is crucial for the refugees’ livelihoods. Moreover, the squats’ central location enforces refugees’ visibility and facilitates the organisation of gatherings, protests and demonstrations for their political and social rights.

Here, it should be stressed that the self-organised refugee squats were created with the support of local and international leftist and anarchist groups. For example, in Thessaloniki, the housing squat for immigrants Orfanotrofio (2016) explains in a statement that the squat ‘was embraced by people of the broader radical movement (communists, anarchists, autonomists) and operated in a self-organised and anti-hierarchical way.’ Moreover, in Mytilene, the occupied Tsamakia beach camp was run by the refugees with the support of the international No Border Kitchen collective which defined itself as ‘a non-hierarchical/horizontal self-organised group of cooking activists from all over the world that share the aim of supporting people on their journey to Europe’ (No Border Kitchen Lesvos, 2016). Furthermore, in Athens, the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza was initiated by the Economic and Political Refugee Solidarity Initiative, to-



**Figure 2.** Refugee housing squats and common spaces in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene, 2016–2017. Source: Authors.

gether with 250 refugees, and, as they highlighted, 'thanks to the generosity of thousands of people from Greece and abroad, we proved that self-organised co-operation can not only be productive, but it can also be more effective than hierarchical commercialised procedures' (Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, 2017) Also, Spirou Trikoupi 17 (2019) emphasised that 'the residents and solidarians working in ST17 organise themselves through assemblies based on the principles of equality, solidarity and horizontality.' Thus, the features of direct-democracy and self-organisation combined with the non-hierarchical and non-commercial way of function constitute the basic principles of the squatted refugees' housing projects.

Noteworthy are the words of Mohamed, a Syrian refugee member of the housing squat for immigrants Orfanotrofio in Thessaloniki:

I like very much the self-organised and direct-democratic way of operating the squat. I can say in a phrase that at the Orfanotrofio "we learn to walk together." This learning is based on mutual care that begins with the simple daily functions of the building, such as the involvement of everyone in cooking and cleaning, and extends to the political processes and self-organised decision-making for political actions such as marches, direct actions and public events. No one is trying to push the other to do something, all decisions and activities are based on dialogue, respect for the other, and consensus. So we all learn together to be active and to care about each other and act as a team. This team is both a care group and a political struggle, we claim on the one hand the equality between us and on the other, we raise our voices in the centre of the city through demonstrations and actions. (Personal interview, October 29, 2018)

In the aforementioned narrative, the three basic features of the Lefebvrian "rights of the citizen" become clear: the right to the city, the right to difference, and the right to information. The collective participation in the daily processes, the consensus-based decision-making process and co-habitation, constitute a learning and caring exercise of the right to the city, which is interlinked with the active political demands in public spaces for the right to difference and the right to information.

Focusing more on the self-organised practices of commoning, togetherness, and caring, beyond the NGOs humanitarianism and the state authorities' control, worth mentioning are the words of Afaf, a woman from Afghanistan who lives in the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza in Athens, and she describes her experience on selforganised care practices as follows:

I had never had a similar experience as the City Plaza. In fact, I have never felt this sense of solidarity and care that I am feeling here. In my family and in my

country there is no solidarity and care. Here there is solidarity and care for everything, for study, for food, and above all I can say "thought." Solidarity and caring are mainly a way of thinking. Here we are discussing everything all together, what needs we have, what problems we face. I can say in a sentence, we think together and we fight together against every oppression. (Personal interview, November 10, 2018)

According to Ali, an Afghan refugee who lived in the Tsamakia beach, a self-organised, occupied camp near the centre of Mytilene:

Here I am involved with No Border group and I stay in the self-organised camp in Tsamakia beach because I believe that refugees should be self-organised without the NGOs involvement. We have an assembly twice a week which is mostly to find out how we will organise the necessary works. Our aim is not only to cover the daily needs but also to deepen political discussions, which require time and clear mind (cited in Tsavdaroglou, Giannopoulou, Lafazani, Pistikos, & Petropoulou, 2018, p. 15).

Furthermore, according to a statement from the housing squat for refugees and immigrants (Tsirmpas, 2016, p. 2), in Athens 'this project doesn't stand for philanthropy, state or private, but rather for a self-organised solidarity project, wherein locals and refugees-immigrants decide together. The decisive body is the squat's open assembly where everyone is welcome to participate with no exclusions.'

In the aforementioned narratives, and according to several scholars (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Alexiou, Tsavdaroglou, & Petropoulou, 2016; Lafazani, 2018b; Tsavdaroglou, 2018), the self-organised refugee housing projects can be recognised as transnational commons. They are commons where locals and newcomers recognise and respect each other's culture, customs and ethics, develop forms of togetherness and co-existence and make decisions in direct-democratic assemblies. Moreover, the most important feature is perhaps that the self-organised housing projects are based on mutual and common care gestures and practices which produce spatialities of egalitarian and solidary communities.

In Mytilene, Ahmet from Afghanistan describes the difference between care-quotidian practices in solidarity camps and cultural centres and the official camp of Moria: 'In Moria refugee camp I am a number, in Mosaik, Mytilene I am a member of a family, I am in the home. Outside this door I do not exist' (Personal interview, October 10, 2018).

In Mytilene, Maria from Syria says:

In Moria camp, we were as if we were sheep for slaughter. They put us in a row to have a meal that in the end was spoiled by the heat. Our children were in constant danger. Here [in PIKPA Lesvos solidarity



camp] we are humans, we can cook at home and decide for our lives, and most importantly, to feel safe. (Personal interview, September 5, 2018)

Also, in the words of Soraya, a Pakistani transgender refugee who participates in the Kontrosol self-organised LGBTQI space in Thessaloniki:

I want to stress that in contrast to life in the camps, it is the first time that I feel safe in this space, because the people who set it know our needs, the people in the group are like me, transgender, and we have become friends, we talk to each other, we share thoughts. The refugees in the group are coming from different countries, like Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Maghreb. This is the first experience in my life that I have as many friends like me, homosexuals and transsexuals. The most important thing is that they care about me and I care about them. It is like a dream if one can feel what I am feeling now. Although I am so far from my home in Pakistan, I feel that this is much more of my home here (cited in Tsavdaroglou et al., 2018, p. 15).

In fact, the commoning and caring practices constitute the collective base for the sustainability of the housing projects as well as for the social and political struggle for the refugees' right to the city. Thus, the "activist acts of citizenship" (Isin, 2008) is a collective action based on commoning and caring relationships, a crucial difference from the individualistic practice of the typical citizenship rights or obligations to the State and law. Additionally, Nyers and Rygiel (2012, p. 9) mention that 'acts of citizenship are acts where notions of belonging and entitlement to rights' are 'founded on criteria of residence, participation in community, and social relations developed in space and in relation to "the commons," contrasting thus the current liberal measure for citizenship and entitlement grounded in "legal status.'" Indeed, in the discussed cases of refugees' housing commons, the clandestine commoners exercise their right to the city through practices of collective care, active participation and cohabitation.

Moreover, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007, p. 166) argue that in many cases migrants develop strategies of "de-identification" such as 'burning their documents' in order 'to avoid being returned to their country of origin' and that this 'strategy of de-identification is a voluntary "dehumanisation," in the sense that it breaks the relationship between one's name and one's body.' In the case of self-organised housing projects, it could be supported that refugees regain their dignity, their voices, their visibility, and through the practices of caring and commoning, a process of "re-humanisation"—contrary to the official State and NGO policy—takes place. It is very common that refugees residing in squats regret the formal accommodation services, and they refuse to be part of the normalisation and marginalisation of State-run camps or the NGO apartments and prefer to produce their own common spaces.

As Shamina, a woman from Iran who lives in the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza in Athens says:

If I had the opportunity to stay in the NGO or UNHCR flats, my answer would have been "no." I want to continue living in the City Plaza. The social, personal and psychological safety and care that I feel here is much more important than isolation in a formal apartment. Also, my children are happy here, they have company, there are many kids here who play and have activities. Also, women here are active, we have organised our women's magazines and of course I have made too many friends here. (Personal interview, August 22, 2018)

## 5. Conclusion: Care-Tizenship Commons Spaces for the Right to the City

In this article, we aimed to analyse and reconceptualise the refugees' right to the city through the lenses of commoning practices and acts of care-tizenship. We have reflected on the refugees' condition in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Mytilene and we suggest four main points that open up new perspectives on acts of citizenship and refugees' right to the city.

Firstly, the refugee care-tizenship commons spaces have the ability and potential to destabilise, transform and modify the city in a creative, collective and egalitarian way. Following the slogan of *Precarias a la Deriva* (2010), 'common care and care for the commons' is essential in the refugee housing projects. Co-belonging, co-existence and togetherness have emerged as practices of commoning, mutual respect and care relations that territorialise new transnational common spaces.

Secondly, practices of commoning and care-tizenship between refugees and locals could upset the dichotomies of citizen/non-citizen, legal/illegal and regular/irregular and help new collective bodies to emerge that are not based on legal identities but on the multiplicity of subjects' differences. Moreover, acts of care-tizenship open up a perspective to go beyond legal taxonomies, produce spatial justice and visibility, and materialise the refugees' right to the city.

Thirdly, the article offers a forceful critique of State migration policies. Our argument is that restriction, exclusion and marginalisation of refugees are constitutional components of the Greek State policies. In contrast, the self-managed refugee housing projects go beyond State exclusion and criminalisation by combining the three Lefebvrian dimensions of "the right of the citizen." The right to the city, the right to difference, and the right to information constitute basic principles of the self-organised refugee housing structures.

Fourthly, we propose a new vision for citizenship that goes beyond the legal and State norms and it is based on activist, political and social relations that highlight the collective agency. Following Isin's (2008) principles

on acts of citizenship, the cases of housing squats prove that it is possible for refugee actors to write the “scripts” and set the “scene” for a transnational right to the city through commoning and care-tizenship practices.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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