

The Greek Review of Social Research

Vol 149 (2017)

149 Special Issue: Urban lives and protests in neoliberal times: Art, aesthetics and solidarity as possibilities. Editors: Eleftheria Deltsoy and Fotini Tsibiridou



Solidarity bridges: alternative food economies in urban Greece

Theodoros Rakopoulos

doi: [10.12681/grsr.15818](https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.15818)

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To cite this article:

Rakopoulos, T. (2018). Solidarity bridges: alternative food economies in urban Greece. *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 149, 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.15818>

*Theodoros Rakopoulos**

SOLIDARITY BRIDGES:
ALTERNATIVE FOOD ECONOMIES IN URBAN GREECE

ABSTRACT

Set in the urban-rural continuum of Thessaloniki, this paper explores the grounded social activities of certain groups, committed to building a social economy of distributing food without intermediaries. In the light of new ethnographic data from grassroots responses to livelihoods' hardship, I propose to expand reciprocity's conceptual boundaries, extended to include a local concept rampant in crisis-ridden Greece: solidarity. The solidarity economy can be seen as a conceptual and political bridge that symbolically as well as materially brings together communities of food production and consumption. The cosmology of the horio (village) is an unexpected urban activist metonym in the food distribution systems that have emerged amidst austerity measures in Greece.

Key words: *food, solidarity, Greece, activism, crisis, urban space*

* Associate professor, Social Anthropology Department, University of Oslo, e-mail: theodoros.rakopoulos@sai.uio.no

Θεόδωρος Ρακόπουλος

ΓΕΦΥΡΕΣ ΑΛΛΗΛΕΓΓΥΗΣ:
ΕΝΑΛΛΑΚΤΙΚΕΣ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΕΣ ΔΙΑΤΡΟΦΗΣ
ΣΤΗΝ ΑΣΤΙΚΗ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Εστιάζοντας στο αστικό-περιφερειακό συνεχές στο χώρο της Θεσσαλονίκης, αυτή η μελέτη διερευνά τις απτές κοινωνικές δραστηριότητες ορισμένων ομάδων που έχουν αφοσιωθεί στο χτίσιμο μιας «κοινωνικής οικονομίας» διανομής τροφής χωρίς μεσάζοντες. Τα εθνογραφικά δεδομένα (που συνέλεξα μεταξύ 2013-2015), αφορούν τις από-τα-κάτω απαντήσεις προς τις δυσκολίες που ζουν οι άνθρωποι σε ζητήματα των τα προς το ζην τους ζητημάτων. Στο φως αυτών των δεδομένων, προτείνω να ανοίξουμε τα εννοιολογικά όρια της αμοιβαιότητας, έτσι ώστε να συμπεριλάβουμε την αλληλεγγύη, ως ημική έννοια με πολιτισμικές συμπαραδηλώσεις συγκυριακές της κρίσης. Η «οικονομία αλληλεγγύης» μπορεί να ιδωθεί ως μια εννοιακή και πολιτική γέφυρα που συμβολικά, αλλά και υλικά, φέρνει κοντά κοινότητες παραγωγής και κατανάλωσης τροφής. Η έννοια του «χωριού» είναι μια πρωτότυπη μετωνυμία που χρησιμοποιούν οι αστοί ακτιβιστές στα συστήματα διανομής τους, για να δηλώσουν μια συγκεκριμένη κοσμολογία σχέσης με το φαγητό και τα υλικά διατροφής. Η έννοια επικαιροποιείται με σημαίνοντες τρόπους, στην παρούσα συγκυρία λιτότητας στη χώρα.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: διατροφή, φαγητό, ακτιβισμός, αλληλεγγύη, αστικός χώρος

1. INTRODUCTION

During times of crisis, economic practices organized on principles of reciprocity often arise. Greece's social and 'solidarity' economy is a case in point. This article attempts to unpack the general idea that crises make contradictions in societies more visible (Kosseleck, 2006). These contradictions, including sharp divides (like formal-informal, as per Rakopoulos, 2015), often become fields of contestation. However, only certain contradictions, such as an alleged rural-urban divide, are challenged by the ways food activism develops in crisis contexts. The anti-middleman movement of Greece that I focus on in this essay elucidates how the urban-rural dichotomy is more of an assumed divide than a social reality. The fact that the movement, bringing farmers to cities, bypassed middlemen challenges the assumed need for market middlemen to bridge an alleged urban-rural gap. Social movements operating within austerity, bear stakes for bridging such tensions in the relation of city and hinterland. I suggest that, in Greece, a novel solidarity movement concerned with food activism has been working towards continuing a long process of bridging the consumptive city and the producing village.

In this short piece, I examine the movement against market middlemen (*χωρίς μεσάζοντες*, *horis mesazontes*) that developed in response to austerity and recession measures in Greece. This activity, as well as others, is typically understood as being part of an *oikonomia allilengiis*, i.e. a "solidarity economy" (Laville, 2010; Miller, 2010). This economic setting comprises actions that offer mutual aid to, but is a critique of, conventional economic imperatives. Through an ethnographic exploration of the "anti-middleman" movement in Athens mainly in Thessaloniki between the years 2013-2015¹, I observed how some people have responded to the crisis by organizing networks of food distribution that sideline market brokers.² This paper aims to elucidate the multiple ways by which actors on

1. I have been spending time with a group of research interlocutors, ethnographically studying the organization GEFIRA (bridge) through intermittent fieldwork, for the latter part of 2012 and throughout 2013. More fieldwork has taken place since April 2015, funded by a grant by the Wenner- Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (8856).

2. This is especially important since solidarity discourse is becoming counter-hegemonic to that of debt among anti-middleman movement participants, partly because it addresses the difficulties in access to basic resources such as food. This might be especially urgent, given the possible positive understandings of moral debt, as a vector of reciprocal and solidary relations, which could potentially renew David Graeber's influential approach on the meanings of debt (2011).

the ground enact routes of economic organization that serve as alternatives to mainstream ones, breaking what I would call “the middleman path” between city and village.

I focus on one aspect of the grassroots anti-middleman movement, exploring the modalities of its situatedness in the politics of everyday life in Thessaloniki. My approach positions this “solidarity” activity in the broader picture of the crisis, explaining how participants involved in this group extend the scope of their activities to imagine alternative modes of economic conduct. In this context I trace the use of the term “solidarity” in the interplay between its local and analytical uses.

2. A CONTEXT OF CRISIS, A BRIDGE BETWEEN CITY AND VILLAGE

Greece has received phenomenal attention recently. While the power of the IMF and especially that of Eurocracy, brought the country to its knees leaving much to be desired by way of democracy in the EU (see also Shore, 2011), a *solidarity* economy movement was taking place in the districts of the country’s cities. Collectivities, organized on a grassroots level around neighbourhood assemblies, have arisen (see for instance Cabot, 2016; Rakopoulos, 2016; Douzina-Bakalaki, 2016). The outcome has been a number of initiatives providing social or peer-to-peer services, substituting a piecemeal welfare state. These include reciprocity schemes like time banks, social clinics and pharmacies, as well as what interests us here -- anti-middleman markets.

They interlock but are also distinguished from the initial conception of open markets (“*laikes agores*”, literally “popular markets”) as non-middleman markets. Regardless of how they developed, producers are always found in *laikes*, specifying in tableaus that this is what they are. However, they are the minority in these contexts, where middleman grocers are dominant – hence partly the (often seen as commensurately expensive) relatively high, for working class families, prices of *laikes*. The anti-middleman markets were, apart from a reaction to austerity, also a way to steer clear of the conventional practices of open markets where predominantly city-based middleman sell rural producers’ crops. The latter were partly the offspring of a specific configuration of the Greek recession.

The crisis made the urban-rural divide starker and more obvious in a number of ways, including the accessibility to food, which was largely taken for granted for many working class households in periods of relatively

better income earning. The loss of that accessibility in urban contexts, and the overbearing dependence on retail relied heavily on household budgets and an increasing need for accessibility to foodstuff on terms of a time of hardship – in times of “trouble” (Papataxiarchis, 2017). This implies fresher, quicker, more available and -most importantly- cheaper food in ample quantities, a condition that eventually was established to serve precisely this aim.

We need to recall, in the context of the Greek crisis, a phenomenology of the classical sociological concern with “fragmentation” and “exclusion.” The various fragmentations that the crisis has brought into everyday life in Greece massively involve a series of problems as to accessing cheap and fresh food. Access here implies for the urban consumer, having the financial means to acquire a product available at a reasonable price that takes into account the unemployment, underemployment, and increasing marginalization of working class households in Greece. The stagflation in the market has had contradictory results: while wages have been slashed and inequalities rose, the prices for basic agricultural products remained the same. Many informants reported that their income had been reduced by one third, or even one half. However, retail food prices remained stubbornly high as in pre-crisis standards. In some cases, according to Eurostat, food prices even increased (Chrysopoulos, 2015).

Access to basic foodstuff has become limited for many, and has proved detrimental to social cohesiveness. Most working and lower middle class urbanites have faced a staggering decrease in quality and indeed quantity in their food intakes. The more privileged had not been harmed in that regard, even when facing relative losses in incomes.

2.1. Ethnographic examples

As part of an ongoing project that aims to elucidate wider developments in the solidarity economy of Greece, I have been conducting ethnographic research a number of groups in Athens and Thessaloniki. It is important to note, however, that the movement started in rural areas, and was spearheaded by farmers - particularly potato-growers in Katerini, a small city in the north. After the harvest in autumn/winter 2011, the farmers organized and entered Thessaloniki with their tractors and LDVs and sold their produce to the public with no mediation from market institutions or brokers while squatting a central city square. Such impromptu mobilization was unprecedented, but the urban populace embraced it, not least because peo-

ple had the chance to access potatoes at less than half their mainstream retail price.

This move attracted the attention of many leftist groups that assembled at district and neighbourhood level to debate local issues, most often pertaining to the consequences of austerity in community life. From that collision with the potato producers, this movement of rural producers was originally embraced by urban-based, left wing groups and other informal movements. Some of the participants' leftism was well ingrained in personal activism, trade union involvement and party membership in parties of the Left, including SYRIZA,³ as well as smaller parties like AN-TARSYA⁴. Those who participated in these initiatives that started in early 2012 labeled them "solidarity economy." At the same time, in the Pieria region, where the "potato movement" that organised the first anti-middleman foodstuff distributions was sparked, many of households' basic needs started being served via informal agrarian distribution, directly from farmers.

The grounded social activities of certain anti-middleman groups in Athens and Thessaloniki expressed commitment to building a social economy of distributing food without intermediaries. A substantial portion of the cities' population benefited from the anti-middlemen movement. These groups are operated by unpaid participants⁵ who aim to coordinate initiatives through grassroots co-ops in a movement that spread across Greece. While a developed social and solidarity economy was absent in Greece until recently, today, for instance in Thessaloniki, a number of social clinics, pharmacies, and a cooperative outlet for foodstuff are in full operation. Examples include the KIA social clinic at the western working-class, districts

3. SYRIZA stands for the Coalition of the Radical Left, a party that would routinely gather 4% in national elections but capitalised on the indignation (Herzfeld, 2011; Theodossopoulos, 2014) of the austerity era in Greece and reached a staggering 27% in the 2012 and eventually a 36% in the 2015 elections to form the basis for the first left government in Greek history. At the time of writing the party governs the country in a coalition government with the populist right (ANEL). They have brought a third Memorandum of understanding, aka a loan agreement with dire austerity measures, U-turning on everything they had promised the electorate.

4. To the Left of SYRIZA, this extra-parliamentary party is a coalition of Trotskyite and other radical left groupings.

5. Identifying the range of social activities branded as 'social economy' in food distribution, elsewhere (Rakopoulos, 2017), I suggest they should be approached through the prism of labour, and most specifically the labour invested in this bridging process. The urban participants in this movement envision that the unpaid social economy can be transformed into an agrarian cooperativist system able to reproduce itself via the valuation of their labour. Food distribution activists are projecting their current reciprocity activity into a solidarity-centred future. The recognition of the labour they invest in their reciprocity activities is central in this projection.

of the city, which serves tens of citizens, immigrants and refugees every day, or the Bios coop, the largest consumer cooperative enterprise in the country. Both were born amidst the crisis.

What the anti-middleman movement does is simple. Groups of urban-based activists organise farmers' markets in neighbourhoods of Athens, Thessaloniki and other towns and cities across the country. They come in contact with farmers in rural areas and following the localist principles of food sovereignty they adhere and refer to farmers in the provinces or regions surrounding these cities, liaising with them for long-term collaborations. The activists set up the markets periodically in city squares, and farmers come to sell their produce for up to 50% below the retail price. The markets are set up in an impromptu, improvised way. The broker's share out of the picture, the distribution is now costless, and this affects the final price. In Thessaloniki, at the heyday of the movement, during my fieldwork (latter part of 2013), there were around ten such markets throughout the city. They operated every Sunday, from 8 in the morning until around 4 PM, with thousands attending. Participants included the urban-based organisers, with activists of all ages forming the movement's backbone, urban-based consumers, and rural-based agrarian producers who could now sell their produce directly to the public.

Thus, the movement managed to both tap into and intensify the rejuvenated generational linkages to the rural hinterlands (Panourgia, 1995; Just, 2000), or ever far-off ruralities that the great majority of urban Greeks have via the means of food. This is part of a broader scheme that should not be underestimated in which part of the movement's dynamics are embedded. New food supplies arrive in the cities through kinship networks. Most often these are between older village dwellers and younger city residents who arrive by public transport and bring prepared meals, or fresh produce.

Participant observation, for an earlier project, at the temporary storage spaces of KTEL, the coach station of Thessaloniki at the westernmost part of the city, revealed interesting findings. The oft practice of sending Tupperware boxes filled with cooked food to young urbanites has been multiplied in the crisis, and immensely augmented with the deepening of unemployment especially during the dramatic years 2011-2012. This KTEL bridge serves as inter-generational kinship assistance from the village-based or rural small town parents to their children who study, work or (most often) look for work in the city.

While this is important to have in mind as a backdrop of existing, implicit bridges of consumptive city and productive hinterland, it would need

more evidence in terms of how new connections come to the fore in crisis contexts. What follows in the next section is an insight into a few details of the social life of two such anti-middleman groups, one in Athens' working class suburb and the other in a Thessaloniki lower middle-class district east of the city centre.

3. "THE BRIDGE" AND RAME: FROM THE POTATO FIELD TO THE CITY SQUARE

For the purposes of this research,⁶ I concentrate on findings from the Thessaloniki-based *Gefira* (literally: *bridge*) and the Athens RAME group, although features of the group can be seen in other informal groups and in the broader anti-middleman movement as well (Rakopoulos, 2014a and b).⁷ The details on *Gefira* and RAME⁸ do provide a glimpse but not a full overview of the diverse nature of the movement. This diversity arises from the different social consistencies and sizes of the two cities. The Thessaloniki movement, originating from the organized dissent of the "*den plirono*" ("I don't pay") movement and other groups confronting broader problems of economic livelihood, developed specific actions that addressed the anti-middlemen issue. In contrast, in Athens, the anti-middleman groups that

6. All the toponyms and names of people and associations have been anonymized in order to protect the informants and respect the confidentiality feature of the sensitive data they have shared with me.

7. Although not the immediate concern of the present research, one comparative point on the differences among anti-middleman groups sociologically should be underlined. By and large, the difference between such groups in Thessaloniki and Athens is that, in the last four years, the former have grown out of broader mobilizations, while the latter have grown independently and eventually merged with broader organizations (Rakopoulos, 2014a). What is more, we should bear in mind that these groups coalesce or understand their actions in terms of the broader contexts of the solidarity economy of Greece (Cabot, 2016).

8. In Thessaloniki, the research was more extensive, but less intensive than in Athens. Towards the end of fieldwork, I ended up with not much participant observation, as there was limited anti-middleman mobilisation. This is due to a period of political hibernation that extends well into 2015 and started at around mid-2014, in which these informal networks have been encompassed in. The electoral victory of the Left and the period building up to it, was indeed—in a paradoxical way—detrimental to the development of the movement, in that regard. There was also a plan to pursue research in Pieria, and particularly the town of Katerini. Applying a snowballing technique, wherein one follows the research participants' advice towards other informants, I eventually was not able to extend my fieldwork there for reasons internal to the conflictual relations among the groups of that anti-middleman movement and groups elsewhere in Greece that I developed close relations with.

started by addressing immediate issues of material livelihood eventually came to address the wider solidarity economy. While the food distribution movement itself is arranged across two main sociological categories (market-based and barter-based), both these groups share many common characteristics and would belong to the same taxonomy, if a categorization is needed, which evoke two different groups of practices as well as ideological formations.⁹

RAME, for instance, is an anti-middlemen organization with wide appeal within Athens, and it is part of the coalition of anti-middlemen groups in Greece. In fact, its participants aim to make it a cooperative in the near future. The association operates on the premise of an informal solidarity network, organizing the collection and distribution of agrarian produce directly from producers to consumers, at sub-retail prices. The work of RAME and similar informal associations that are engaged in the distribution of foodstuff, however, also helped to illustrate another level of engagement, as their goals extend beyond food concerns to a broader agenda of seeking political change.

Every second Sunday, the public park of Lithoupoli becomes the site for food distribution organized by the group. There is movement of people from all sides of the park and many residents of the district, as well as documented and undocumented resident immigrants rush uphill to the abandoned, but quite spacious park to buy produce. They pay the farmers directly at their makeshift tills, while RAME members help with the delivery of the produce and the accounting process. The farmers are strongly encouraged and indeed even coerced to issue receipts in order to establish full legality for the operation. Many locals stop to have a chat with the organization's volunteers, during and after the purchase of foodstuffs. Conversations address a wide range of topics, revolving around but not limited to food distribution and consumption. Many complain about their wages and pensions being slashed and consequent limits on their households' food budget. They clearly recognize the need for anti-middleman action.

In Thessaloniki, I came in long-term contact with "The Gefira Commission" (hereafter: Gefira), an informal network group that comprises people

9. These are a left-wing and an anarchist one, with different attitudes towards the conditions and the means of exchange in the construction of these markets. The practical uses and overall attitude towards money can be dictated by political affiliation and agendas. There is also a different attitude to the relation to rural areas: more idealized in the anarchist branch, with *neo-ruraux* tendencies more obvious.

living in the vicinity of district immediately to the east of the city centre. The area is a dense district, mainly populated by lower-middle-class people, heavily hit by the crisis. This market is just one of a number of similar popular responses to hardship that have developed in crisis-ridden Thessaloniki (about 10 at the time of fieldwork, when the movement was peaking, about 3 at the moment, in February 2015). These responses include addressing basic livelihood and negotiating access to material resources, including food. Most are overtly politicised.

Gefira is one of the most successful anti-middleman organisations, as it serves a large number of consumers of fresh foodstuff in Thessaloniki and it has proved relatively resilient, running since 2013 with very little interruption. They organise their meetings in the Community Centre for the Blind every Wednesday, just at the eastern part of the city centre. The place is small and modest, resonating a sense of conspiracy – but nevertheless open to the local community and driven by debate and a “need to organise ourselves”. This enables the organisation to work with and amongst a larger group of people from across the political spectrum in the Anatoli area, not far from the city centre. In organising the distribution of basic foodstuffs, its members strive for “immediate” trade that is distinct from “fair trade” in that it is used as a method of political education rather than an end in itself.

Many Gefira members express allegiance with parties of the Left, while those more senior in age derived their “activist experience”, as they put it, in their “years of struggles in unions”. Gefira’s members reject neither the state nor the market. Rather, they strive to link with similar activist initiatives around Greece, to “get rid of middlemen in the wide sense of the word”. In the idea of the middleman Gefira’s activists often find an allegory for their broader political claims. They have been arguing that the “troika” of financial institutions was the main player of Greek politics and the local government are the mere middleman of the troika’s directives¹⁰.

In several Gefira meetings, members were excited by the prospect that their informal solidarity network might transform into a cooperative association of anti-middleman groups that spanned the country. Members argued that their mobilisation ‘should’ acquire some tangible economic effects to reflect their efforts. A common desire was for some of the activ-

10. In the current circumstance (Summer, 2016), where a Left wing government harnesses the deepest and most violent austerity measures Greece has ever seen, the movement is puzzled. More research is needed to document activists’ reactions and the next steps at this shifting point.

ists (those unemployed) to make a living through their labour. This view of anti-middleman cooperativism *as labour* and as a potential source of income breaks with the idea of similar movements being voluntary coalitions (Rozakou, 2008). However, the idea of anti-middleman groups turning into cooperatives was linked to sustaining the livelihoods of the people organising food distribution. It was also associated with a broader critique of the current configuration of Greece's recession and potentially the politics of austerity at large - which has led to soaring unemployment.

Activists' attitudes towards cooperatives, as a way to transform their informal groups into more sustained efforts to 'bring the village producers in town', were ambiguous; these ambiguities were informed by the experience of the coop movement in Greece. During the 1980s, a proliferation of cooperativised farmers, urged and indeed coopted by the then socialist PASOK government, ended up soon in relative isolation of the coop ideals, with poor production outputs and an alleged flair of patronage set around and towards party politics.

In their assemblies, the Gefira activists project their future configurations, and direct their everyday activities, towards the prospect of organising their work further. Their plan is to establish a constellation of cooperativist initiatives in order to find a way to sustain their project and even value the labour they invest into it. 'We don't believe in volunteering; it's an idea that does not apply to our principles', said a female activist or, in the words of Mr Takis, "we might need to create a system to support our activity through time, and a shift in government might provide the right framework for this". The negative attitudes of left-wing volunteers towards the "ideology of volunteering" reveal more than a linguistic oxymoron: they speak volumes on why volunteerism is seen as an aspect of neoliberal cosmology, an idea explored at length in the related anthropological debate (see for instance Ticktin, 2011 for a critique of the humanitarian phenomenon, as well as Fassin, 2014 for a broader reckoning on the "ethical turn" in the discipline).

4. CITY TENSIONS AND URBAN CONTRADICTIONS IN THE CRISIS

To reconcile this tension is pragmatically difficult. The condensed historical circumstances of the crisis (Rakopoulos, 2014a, p. 66) render problematic any attempt to consolidate the term 'solidarity' as an analytical category. For this reason, while bearing in mind the theoretical discussion on adjacent and complementary terms (mutuality, reciprocity, mutual life,

cooperation), I have concentrated on solidarity's local uses and meanings, by exploring processes on -urban- ground that can help us grasp its relevance to people's lives during the crisis.

The idea of the right to the city could help here. A concept with its own genealogy in social geography, it has stemmed from Levebvre's writings on city space (1995) and has been elaborated most famously by David Harvey. Although concerned with re-making urban space public and opening up the spatial negotiations towards a recapturing of space by people, Harvey is –interestingly- suspicious if not outright inimical to the idea of the market in his right to the city notion (2013).

Of course, the Marxist geographer has a particular understanding of the market phenomenon and treats it as an abstract mechanism that commodifies urban space. However, the ethnography above indicates a possibly different reading of micro-markets: an understanding of the market institution in a pre-Polanyian fashion. At this point, we might need to read Polanyi against his political substantivism and thus opening his take on the market phenomenon beyond its historical solidifications –into nothing short of a monstrous uber-institution. Although not prevalent as a take, this is not news in anthropology (see Hann and Hart, 2011, pp. 12-14, for instance). What I am pointing towards here is that ethnography's attention to detail might help us resuscitate the micro-processes on the urban space that could help us rethink of "markets" – and start de-demonising them. The impromptu, small-time markets of the anti-middleman movement are reclaiming urban space in a decisive fashion.

In the renegotiating process of the do-it-yourself markets of the anti-middleman movement, there is an aspect that begs for a more integrated understanding of micro-markets. They operate in ways that link the village production to urban consumption, as they are formulated bottom up by activists like those of Gefira and RAME. The context of crisis is crucial to situate this problematic.

The research was pursued within the broader framework of conceptualizing solidarity. This relates to the need to identify positive ways to address the material and ideological fragmentation and exclusion of the social economy from the rural hinterlands of urban conglomerations in Greece.

Indeed, while economic crises can displace individuals on the economic and social spheres, they also hold a potential for change and renewal. During this crisis, there is increasing evidence of a number of grass-roots social solidarity initiatives taking place, aiming to address both material

and ideational exclusion (within societies and across countries). Accordingly, this will focus on the identification and analysis of civil society initiatives towards combating either type of fragmentation and exclusion, as well as on the development of mechanisms for the promotion of such initiatives in Greece.

It is reasonable, if not urgent, for an anthropological approach to correlate the crisis and the flourishing of the solidarity economy. But attention should be paid. The genealogy of the term solidarity, of course, stems from Durkheim's (1984) pursuit of what we have termed the non-contractual element in the contract. This takes us beyond an economic analysis, wherein a crisis is met by returns to livelihoods as double-movements to the market's excesses. It thus potentially paves roads to appreciate what such movements do to, say, the urban positionality of their participants and beneficiaries.

The concerns of people involved in this movement are rooted in a strong political framework but also a framework of urban isolation from access to food. Their political appeal is expressed in an interest in creating alternative market institutions where the urban meets the agrarian. The makeshift markets Gefira produces certainly serve this kind of aim, ostensibly extending the rural into the city landscape – but in fact, bridging rural and urban in an already existing structural condition of continuity between them. A holistic sense of the crisis configurations and how the household's food needs open up city squares onto encapsulating flows of farmers within the city walls is central here. It is a pursuit of the whole¹¹ that reminds

11. The holistic, catastrophic crisis time in Greece makes contradictions loom larger than before – and makes the bridging of such contradictions (such as city-village) necessary and urgent. In a recent special issue dedicated to ethnology put together by the *Journal of Classical Sociology* for instance, Hart notes that: “why then take seriously the relationship between Mauss's sociology and his politics? Mauss, while tending to his uncle's legacy, was making a profound break with the latter's sociological reductionism in these years, opening himself to psychology and the humanities, while espousing a method of “total social facts” which underpins *The Gift*” (Hart, 2014: 36). The way *The Gift* brings forward the *prestation totale*, a new sense of total social fact than that of Durkheim, is explained by Jane Guyer in the same series of essays—the gift is “total” in the sense of assembling a multiplicity of evocations and powers, differently configured, bounded and realized in different contexts over time and space (Guyer, 2014: 11). This “pursuit of the whole,” present in theorists that understand the potential for historical research that *The Gift* brings about (Sigaud, 2002), is an asset in our research of the ensemble of social relations present in the accelerated historical temporality of the Greek crisis. It presents itself firmly over the time-space compression (Harvey, 1990), currently at play in urban Greece.

us that urban activists' aims can transcend the obvious, often utilitarian, frameworks operating on the first scale of analysis.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: SOLIDARITY LINKS BETWEEN URBANITIES AND RURALITIES

Exploring the geographies of activist connections can demonstrate how political engagement is an act of world-making (Amin and Thrift, 2013). In this case, within the pressured frameworks of time and space in crisis, activism exposes what is assumed to be an urban and village divide for what it is: a continuum. The importance of the solidarity economy for urbanities cannot go unnoticed, in that regard. Elsewhere, I have had the opportunity to investigate aspects of the movement's informality and sociality (Rakopoulos, 2015), as well as its political radicalism and linkage to anti-austerity sentiment (Rakopoulos, 2014b). But what is central here is to appreciate another feature of it: the understudied link it has implicitly brought about in relations between urbanities and ruralities. The cosmological ramifications of food in this hub of social action take us beyond moral economies. We could expand to consider the implicit nostalgias that drove activists include, according to my observations, the concern for the village as a place of active kinship, of rejuvenation of often underestimated (in a time of faux plenty) relations with older relatives, and even an ecological drive for a loss of natural habitats. The place of the market and the practice of DIY, impromptu markets within it help us to think beyond economic understandings. Such non-economic thinking brings us to its symbolic and practical bridging of city and village that it brings about and it is this aspect I have considered here. This concern as to how politicized agents bring closer city and village might help us appreciate further the implicit, yet significant, aspects of social movements' activity in contexts of crisis.

The sociocultural history of food solidarity practices shows they are not necessarily specific to crisis and austerity. After all, such practices emerged in rural contexts and are extrapolated to Greece's urban centres. I have argued elsewhere (Rakopoulos, 2016) that a certain process of re-contextualisation of village-hood is crucial to solidarity. This is a process that feeds in the very structural formation of Greek urbanisation should also be taken into account, in an intertwined urban-rural continuum (Just, 2000, p. 28). A long tradition of cityfolk partaking in the social memory of the village and vice versa is resuscitated in the solidarity field: I have many times heard the phrase "we have created a *horio* (village) amidst the city". In bringing

together urban and rural domains through mutual aid, solidarity networks thus give rise to new visions of belonging that can momentarily transcend divisions of city and village life.

Importantly, these mediators were market brokers capitalising on perceived understandings of an urban-rural divide, fabricated thoroughly and constructed as an unbridgeable gap. The anti-middleman groups that operate within the distribution sector and set the middlemen aside, have wider-reaching scopes for their activities, extending way beyond addressing immediate hardship for the people involved. They aim to expose the gap between city and village as a false event, and argue that the alleged ‘need’ for middlemen is an intrinsic problem of the Greek market and indeed society. That is, as an informant told me, in a country where an urban-rural continuum has been a historical reality for generations, bringing the rural backbone into the city should not come as a surprise or an unthought-of possibility. While production units are focused on making commodities, the informal and indeed solidary distribution sector aims at much more. In that respect, apart from circulating them and indeed ensuring that social services are safeguarded, the informal solidarity economy aims and indeed achieves a goal pertaining to the structural and historical conditions of Greek urbanities. The movement underscores how in a country where massive urbanization is only two generations old and where cities have lush hinterlands, the urban-rural divide (and the brokers managing it and capitalizing on it) is only an ideological stake, and indeed one open to huge contradiction.

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