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# Between Compassion and Privilege

*Identity, Responsibility and Power*

*Among Volunteers Engaged in Refugee Reception*

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## Abstract

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Based on a research project on the refugee reception in Malmö, Sweden in the fall of 2015, this thesis explores how volunteers engaged in refugee related aid work acquire two conflicting identity positions. Through compassionate acts they orient between two poles: the refugees and the Swedish society. Analysis of interviews with volunteers engaged in the refugee reception, as well as observations and Internet ethnography, show that the volunteers self-identify as “citizens of the world” and the refugees’ fellow human beings. Through a theoretical framework of emotions, globalization, orientalism and queer phenomenology, the thesis investigates how the volunteer identity includes feelings of responsibility and guilt as well as a class perspective where the volunteers distance themselves from what they consider a privileged non-volunteer community. Further, this identity is problematized by an exploration of the volunteers’ position as Swedish citizens and their own privileged everyday lives. The possibility of choosing not to volunteer gives the volunteers a powerful position where they are able to affect how and if the refugees are helped. The refugees are dependent on the volunteers’ aid work and described as being in a situation they cannot influence. Volunteers engaged in the refugee reception in Malmö can therefore be seen as “compassionate authorities”, and as an example of the unequal social relationship between sufferers and non-sufferers inherent in compassionate acts. As a concluding remark, suggestions are presented on how these findings are applicable and beneficial for the documentation of the refugee reception, as well as for increased privilege awareness among volunteers and an improved communication between volunteer organizations and their members.

*Keywords:* volunteers; refugee reception; emotions; identity; globalization; orientalism; responsibility; power; privilege; class

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In September of 2015 the civil war in Syria had been going on for five years, and an estimated 12, 2 million Syrians were fleeing through Europe (Ahola, 2015, September 16). The effects now started to show in Sweden in a much more visible way than before. Hundreds of refugees arrived at Malmö Central Station every day, creating a big need for aid work in the form of information to the refugees, transportation, accommodation, food stations, clothes and so on. This need was met by an increasing amount of people from Malmö's population who engaged in the refugees' situation by helping out on location or by donating necessities and/or money.

In this thesis, I explore how the volunteers' compassion towards the refugees position them both as allies to the refugees and as privileged Swedish citizens. The study is based on a fieldwork project performed by three colleagues and myself that took place during the period of September 11 to mid-November of 2015, when the situation at and around Malmö Central Station was at its most urgent stage. As interns at the Regional Museum in Kristianstad, we were part of a larger project that aimed to document the activities surrounding the refugee reception. In our research we wanted to understand how activism was produced around the refugee reception, as well as to learn what motivations, emotions and experiences those who take action and volunteer have. Our empirical material consisted of interviews with volunteers who engaged in the aid work, data that the analysis will be largely based on. My study also include my own observations from the field as well as data collected online, mainly from the voluntary organization Refugees Welcome's Facebook group page.

During the fieldwork, I was intrigued by how several of the volunteers we interviewed expressed their compassion towards the refugees by describing a personal connection to them. This was for example done by identifying with a sense of being "citizens of the world", by having a responsibility to help as well as by imagining oneself in the refugees' situation, painting up an image of how one would experience fleeing from Sweden because of war. For the volunteers, the feeling of compassion towards the refugees seemed to be accompanied by a self-identification as allies to the refugees. This was done not only because of helping and welcoming them but also by describing oneself as the refugees' "fellow human being". As the research progressed, I was intrigued by the contradiction between volunteers' emotional

reactions and the fact that they were actually *not* in the same situation as the refugees. I became increasingly interested in the way the volunteers' construct their identity through compassion. In this thesis, I argue that compassion is an emotion that makes it possible for the volunteers to position themselves as a resistance towards current anti-refugee attitudes in the Western world. However, through their compassionate acts, the volunteers also show that they are a part of the same Western world and benefit from a privileged position in relation to the refugees.

I have chosen not to describe the field as a "refugee crisis", the term commonly used by media and politicians. One of the interviewees, Peter, described how the use of the term implies that Sweden and its inhabitants have a crisis caused by the refugees, which he did not feel was correct. As he said: "[The refugees] have a crisis, we don't" (Peter, October 9, 2015). Media's references to a "refugee crisis" has also been criticized for not being about the situation taking place in Syria and its neighbouring areas but instead focusing on Sweden and the conditions for Swedish citizens, those who in fact were the least vulnerable (Bengtsson, Kara & Kjellgren, 2016, March 11). Instead, I will refer to the field of my study as "the refugee reception" as I think it describes the situation and the volunteers' acts more accurately. At the same time, it serves as a more neutral starting point for the following exploration of the volunteers' position in the situation.

## 1.2 Aim and research questions

My analysis takes its starting point in an emotion strongly expressed by the interviewees: *compassion*. What identity position does the volunteers' compassion require? In this thesis, I aim to show that volunteers' compassion puts them in a position where they orient between two poles; the refugees and the Swedish society, including the government and Malmö City Council as well as individual non-volunteers and refugee opponents.

To reach this conclusion I will explore different aspects of the volunteers' compassion, for example *responsibility* and *class*. How does the volunteers relate to the idea of responsibility? In what way are notions of class represented in the volunteer identity? Further, I analyze compassion as an emotion that includes power, where inequalities between the Western world and the so-called "Orient" as well as notions of "the Other" become

visible. What is the relation between power and compassion in the context of the refugee reception? In what way does this affect the relationship between volunteers and refugees?

### **1.3 Structure of thesis**

The sections that follow introduces previous research in the field of my study, the theoretical framework I will apply to the empirical material as well as the two spaces where the fieldwork was conducted, Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt. Continuing, I will present and discuss the methods used to gather the data, consisting of qualitative interviews, autoethnography, observations and netnography.

My analysis starts off with a description of my personal experiences when entering the field and a reflection on how I positioned myself in relation to the volunteers' activities. Further, I will show how the situation surrounding the refugees created volunteers who organized and performed compassionate acts. The analysis then develops on the parts of the volunteers' identity that have proved to be important for the way they position themselves: having a sense of responsibility, being a citizen of the world, being motivated by political views as well as distancing oneself from what one consider a privileged middle class. The last two sections of the analysis problematize the volunteers' identity by exploring how they relate to their everyday lives and how the fact that they are Swedish citizens gives them a privileged and powerful position in relation to the refugees.

The thesis ends with a summarizing conclusion and a section on applicability, where I present ways in which my findings are beneficial for the documentation of the refugee reception as well as for volunteers and volunteer organizations.

## **2 Previous research**

This section presents previous research on volunteers, refugee aid workers and so called allies that have been inspirational for the writing of my thesis. To conclude, I position myself in the field and show how my study relate to and differentiate from these researchers' works.



**2.1** Elizabeth Holzer's (2015) research on humanitarianism in a Ghanaian refugee camp, *The Concerned Women of Buduburam: Refugee Activists and Humanitarian Dilemmas*, establishes the term *compassionate authoritarianism*. This authority is compassionate as it "frame[s] authorities as striving to relieve the suffering of refugees", but authoritarian as the refugees have little or no possibilities to make complaints, and because authoritarians are mostly not accountable for political failings (Holzer, 2015, p. 20). Holzer also acknowledges the fact that "[i]t is sometimes hard for well-intentioned aid workers to recognize that they are accumulating 'power over the vulnerable'" (2015, p. 5). My study develops on the presence of power relations between aid workers and refugees and I will refer to Holzer's concept of compassionate authoritarianism in the analysis.

**2.2** In her article "Doing Good, Being Good, and the Social Construction of Compassion", Amy Blackstone (2007) investigates how activists and volunteers socially construct compassion through their actions and identities. By performing acts perceived as "good", they are also "good people". Based on data from ethnographic research in the breast cancer and antirape movements, Blackstone claims that activists' acts of compassion are gendered, that is that compassion is seen as a stereotypically feminine emotion. A contradiction Blackstone found in her analysis is that while the participants worked to "undo the *consequences* [emphasis in original] of essentialist gender constructions /.../, their actions and identities sometimes reify traditional visions of gender" (Blackstone, 2007, p. 3). Inspired by these findings, my study takes an interest in the possibility that volunteers' acts of compassion might also reify unequal power relations between aid workers and refugees.

**2.3** Clara Luthman's (2014) Bachelor thesis in political science *Volontären, vem är hon och hur skapas hon?* (The volunteer, who is she and how is she created?) examines how marketing and information material from organizations involved in the volunteer industry constructs the image of the Western volunteer. Through postcolonial theories, Luthman concludes that volunteers are portrayed as superior to the Other, the one who is in need of help. Thus, according to Luthman, the way volunteers are portrayed and created in marketing and information material "bear[s] traces of a postcolonial structure in which the West possess power over the Third world" (Luthman, 2014, abstract). While Luthman's method consists of analyzing depictions of volunteers, my thesis is based on interviews with volunteers and therefore focus on real-life actions and emotions. My study also explores events taking place

in Sweden, compared to Luthman's thesis that investigates the portrayal of volunteers working in Third World countries.

**2.4** Samantha A. Montgomery and Abigail J. Stewart (2012) have examined how persons with heterosexual privilege become allies in the struggle for lesbian and gay rights. Through a quantitative research method where participants were asked to complete a survey with statements about heterosexual privilege, where the participants' identification with the different statements was to be rated between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree), Montgomery and Stewart investigate how awareness of heterosexual privilege corresponds to the level of engagement in lesbian and gay rights activism. The result of the study suggests that heterosexual women are more aware of their heterosexual privilege and are therefore more inclined to become allies in lesbian and gay rights activism. The limitations to this study is, as Montgomery and Stewart (2012, p. 174) point out, that because of its quantitative nature it can only be seen as an indicator of awareness of individual privilege. For example, the participants could not specify if they thought their privilege is unearned or unjust. The research presented here is still interesting as it indicates that awareness of one's privileges is an important aspect of one's identification as an ally in different forms of activism. I refer to Montgomery and Stewart's study in the applicability section of this thesis as an example of the importance of privilege awareness among allies, making the outcome of my study beneficial for volunteers and individuals who want to engage in refugee related aid work.

**2.5** My thesis contributes to research on volunteers as it takes into consideration how the informants relate their compassion not only to the refugees and the actual aid work but also to attitudes in the society at large as well as their own everyday lives and privileges. By arguing that the volunteers' compassion results in them having two conflicting positions, I also contribute to the idea of compassionate authoritarianism described by Elizabeth Holzer. Further, my study benefits from being based on fieldwork during the intense period of time in Malmö in the fall of 2015, making it an academic documentation of the specific situation.

### 3 Theoretical framework

Below, I present the theoretical concepts that will be used in the analysis. This section also includes an introduction to the anthropology of emotions, as the volunteers' expression of compassion towards the refugees is the starting point for the analysis that follows. To conclude, I summarize how these concepts will be applied to the empirical material.

#### 3.1 Compassion

The word compassion is used to describe both “*suffering together with one another /.../ and an emotion felt on behalf of another who suffers* [emphasis in original]” (Berlant, 2004, p. 20). In the second sense, compassion is expressed towards someone who is not in the same situation as you. Instead, the sufferer is “over there” (Berlant, 2004, p. 4). Laurent Berlant (2004, p. 1) notes that compassion is an emotion that “implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers”. Inherent in this relationship are issues of power and ethics of privilege. As the person who feels compassion is free from suffering, he or she is also in a powerful position compared to the one the emotion is aimed at (Berlant, 2004, p. 20).

To feel compassion also means one is valued as a person that does not turn one's head away but “embrace a sense of obligation to remember what one has seen” and respond to that by helping to make something better (Berlant, 2004, p. 7). Being compassionate is therefore seen as a virtue and is something that makes you a “better person”. However, as Berlant points out, the human activity compassion results in need to be examined. Problems arise when the acts are not effective but just a part of “the practice of injustice” (Berlant, 2004, p. 9).

In this thesis I consider compassion to be a social construction. According to Ian Hacking (1999) social construction work is critical of the status quo, the idea that the identity of X is something natural and essential. Instead, X is “brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history, all of which could have been different” (Hacking, 1999, p. 7).

Compassion can be seen as a social construction as it is an emotion that is often created through “social training, emerge[s] at historical moments /.../ and take[s] place in scenes that are anxious, volatile, surprising, and contradictory” (Berlant, 2004, p. 7). Examples of moments and scenes that often construct compassion are wars, natural disasters and famine.

Journalist analysts argue that media's coverage of images and stories of tragedies and suffering, often from Third World countries, can cause a so called compassion fatigue, a "[reaction] to suffering abroad and the unwillingness to respond to yet another disaster" (Berlant, 2004, p. 19). A large number of scenes that call for compassion causes a feeling of hopelessness and can instead result in a resistance among the general public towards helping those who suffer. In this thesis, compassion is seen as an emotion aimed at, or not aimed at, persons that have suffered abroad. My analysis explores the emotional responses that arise when these individuals are no longer abroad and the compassion materializes in the compassionate one's home country.

### **3.2 The anthropology of emotions**

The anthropology of emotions has long debated to what extent emotions are universal or cultural (Svašek, 2005, p. 5). In their book *Emotions: A Cultural Reader* Jennifer Harding and E. Deidre Pribram (2009) state that emotions have had a low status in culture studies because of being understood as something too personal and therefore difficult to explore. It has also been labelled the "antithesis of reason" (Harding & Pribram, 2009, p. 1). When anthropology was first established as an academic discipline the dominant perspective was rationalist, where the dichotomy of "soul and reason" and "passion and flesh" was seen as an objective truth (Svašek, 2005, p. 2f). Emotions were strongly associated with the body, which was dangerously driven by wild passion that needed to be controlled by the mind (Svašek, 2005, p. 2). These ideas were used to establish divides between men and women, as well as creating notions about colonized people being primitive, trapped in their bodies and their "natural instincts" and therefore subordinate (Svašek, 2005, p. 3). Early anthropologists were therefore keen on producing an image of themselves as rational scientists who produced objective truths about reality and ignored emotional effects (Svašek, 2005, p. 4).

Because of this, emotions have traditionally been marginalized in knowledge production. Also, since emotions have mainly been examined within biology, psychology and psychoanalysis they are viewed as being located in the body and in the psyches of individuals. In later days however, emotions have undergone a "cultural turn" and have become a subject dealt with in anthropology, sociology, history and cultural studies. This has led to emotions being seen not only as individual and inner but something that can be collective and culturally produced. For example, Deborah Lupton argues that emotions should not be seen as

“inherent, instinctive and universal responses to stimuli, since bodies are not themselves ‘natural’ products” (quoted in Harding & Pribram, 2009, p. 7). Instead, emotions and bodily experiences are always constructed and shaped by society as well as by cultural and historical contexts.

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2004) argues that emotions are cultural practices. Through emotions, our bodies are given meaning. That way, bodies and individuals are connected to a community and to an ideology. According to Ahmed, emotional responses that lead to this community are often created by the repetition of language and non-verbal signs. Emotions therefore also create “others”, as we identify with a group of people who interpret emotions the same way as we do and marginalize others.

As was previously mentioned, in this thesis I consider emotions to be socially constructed cultural practices. Similarly to Ahmed, social construction theory sees “emotions and their expression [as] quite specific to a social and linguistic group” (Hacking, 1999, p. 18). That is, how an emotion is expressed varies from group to group. According to social construct theorists like Harré and Parrott (paraphrased in Hacking, 1999, p. 18), how an emotion is experienced is also affected by how that emotion is talked about and described. Ian Hacking (1999, p. 10) states that, what is socially constructed are not individual people but rather a classification, for example the idea of “the volunteer”. However, this classification also has an effect on individual people. By being classified as a volunteer, the individual’s experience of him- or herself changes (Hacking, 1999, p. 11). Individuals are therefore influenced by the idea of their identity, and tend to act and appear according to that, for example by being compassionate.

Theories of emotions have distinguished between its “inner” and “outer” aspects.

Anthropologist Bambi Schieffelin conceptualized these ideas by defining “emotions” as the inner, experienced feeling while “affect” is the behaviours these feelings are expressed by (Svašek, 2005, p. 8). For example, Schieffelin’s research on the Kaluli people in Papua New Guinea (described in Svašek, 2005) indicates that emotions are socially located and have a social aim. As emotions are affected by social situations and interactions they can be considered as socially constructed (Svašek, 2005, p. 8). Similarly, in this thesis I see emotions as the volunteers’ inner experiences as they react to the refugees’ arrival and to the society at large, and look further at the effect these emotions have for the aid work and for the way the

volunteers position themselves in a larger societal context.

### 3.3 Orientalism

In the case of the field of my thesis, the refugee reception in Malmö, the scene that called for compassion involves individuals from Syria and other countries in the Middle East, a part of the world traditionally referred to as “the Orient”. In the analysis I will further discuss how this affected the general society’s opinions about the refugees, and how the volunteers positioned themselves according to these.

Edward. W. Said uses the term *Orientalism* to show the way the Western world relates to the so called Orient (a name referring to Asia and the northern parts of Africa)<sup>1</sup> (Said, 2004, p. 63). Through being its counterpart, described as having an “opposite personality and an opposite experience” and portrayed as an “exotic other”, the Orient has been important in defining the Western world, or, more exactly, Europe (Said, 2004, p. 64). This exoticization has for example taken its form in the way the West has imported art, goods and food in order to take part in the culture of the Other, but also in the way “the oriental” person is portrayed as more primitive, creating an “ideological construction of the Orient that is mythical and transhistorical” (Pease, 2010, p. 45).

In his concept of orientalism, Said also include the ways the Western world has dominated the Orient by “describing it... colonizing it, ruling over it” (Said, 2004, p. 66). Bob Pease (2010, p. 39) calls this *Eurocentrism*, which takes place in a system that “views countries as occupying interdependent roles in a world economy”. As he explains

the most developed countries... have gained their prominent place historically due to conquest, protective trade policies and economic support from the state. Less developed countries are caught in dependency relations with developed countries through foreign debt, import and export patterns (Pease, 2010, p. 39).

This is often referred to as imperialism, a concept used to understand global hierarchies in which a small group of industrialized nations dominate over Third World countries, even if the latter are formally independent (Pease, 2010, p. 39). As the gap between the industrial countries of the West and the impoverishment of the non-West grows, the values of the West

is seen as superior and something all countries should adapt and strive for (Pease, 2010, p. 41). As Bob Pease (2010, p. 41) puts it, “[t]his belief in the superiority of the Western values and rationality is what constitutes the myth of Eurocentrism”. The image of an inherent superiority of the West over the Orient is further established by the normalization of orientalism, which also results in unawareness among Westerners of the impact the West has on non-Western countries (Pease, 2010, p. 41, 45). The greatest impact of the West, according to Pease (2010, p. 42), is the “power to define what is progress and ultimately what it means to be human”.

### 3.4 Imagining a global world

As Bob Pease (2010, p. 40) describes, the issue of certain groups’ privileges needs to be understood within a global frame, and not just consider how social justice will be reached for citizens within a certain national border. Here, the privilege of Eurocentrism can be seen as especially problematic. One of the solutions might be what Arjun Appadurai (1996) describes as a post-national world. In his book *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai (1996, p. 19) states that an increasingly globalized world leads to a crisis for the nation-state as “[n]ation-states, as units in a complex interactive system, are not very likely to be the long-term arbiters of the relationship between globality and modernity”.

According to Appadurai, a key element to imagining and creating alternatives to the national states is the relationship between mass mediation and migration (1996, p. 21). As both media and people cross borders, “diasporic public spheres” emerge (Appadurai, 1996, p. 21). These spheres link people across national borders, giving goods, information, images and human beings a more fluid nature (Appadurai, 1996, p. 22). This way, the idea of what a human community is might be reimagined, creating an understanding of the world as global instead of national. Appadurai (1996, p. 33) states that

many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds /.../ and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them.

In my analysis, I use Appadurai’s idea of imagined worlds to show that volunteers imagine themselves as citizens in a global world and thus a counterpart to a society that wants to close

its borders for refugees, a sign of imagination being “a staging ground for action, and not only for escape” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 7). I argue that the volunteers emphasize the identity of being compassionate citizens of the world by expressing how their physical work is a contrast to the individuals who “do nothing” or choose to donate money instead. In the next section I present Sara Ahmed’s thoughts on orientation, which will be addressed to show how the volunteers rely on their bodies in order to position themselves in the field.

### 3.5 Orientation in space

Sara Ahmed has coined the term *queer phenomenology*, which aims to reveal the way social relations are spatially arranged and to show “how bodies become oriented by how they take up time and space” (2006, p. 5). In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed explores the way bodies are gendered, sexualized and raced. Taking an interest in the term “orientation”, as in for example “sexual orientation”, Ahmed (2006, p.3) develops on how our orientations not only shape the way we inhabit space but also how we “apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward”. To start investigating what it means to be oriented, Ahmed takes the example of walking blindfolded into a room. As she argues, “in order to become oriented one must first experience disorientation” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 5). Once familiar with the room, one can start to extend, reach out and move the body. As Ahmed (2006, p. 7) describes it “[o]rientation involves aligning body and space: we only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing* [emphasis in original]”. However, knowing what way we are facing and where to turn or finding something to hold out to when we reach out is not something “casual”:

Rather, certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken; our ‘life courses’ follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of ‘being directed’ in a certain way (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death)... (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21)

Ahmed’s concept of orientation suggests that our lives are directed in some ways rather than others, with the requirement of us following a path that was seemingly already given to us (2006, p. 21). That is, orientation has to do with feeling at home in a space, knowing how to



move and behave and having certain objects within reach. This also creates social relations between people and a notion of Others, those who are not oriented.

Ahmed (2006, p. 112) continues by discussing race as an “embodied reality” as “seeing oneself or being seen as white or black or mixed does affect what one ‘can do,’ or even where one can go...” My study will use Ahmed’s ideas in order to show how the volunteers orient the spaces where the aid work takes place by Othering the refugees. I will also investigate orientation from a class perspective, by arguing that the volunteers emphasize on their bodies and physical aid work in order to distance themselves from what they consider to be non-volunteering individuals in the Swedish middle class reluctant to let go of their privileges. As my analysis explores how the volunteers also benefit from privileges, the next section will shortly define this concept.

### **3.6 Privilege**

A privilege is an unearned right or advantage that is given to members of a dominant group (T. Israel, 2012). The concept is often used in the context of social inequality, and can for example refer to social class, race, gender or sexuality (Pease, 2010, p. 3). Examples of a privilege can be to have an education, a job or a place to live. It can also be emotional, and result in a person having a higher sense of belonging and worth in society. As the sociologist Michael S. Kimmel writes, some who benefit from privileges are unwilling to acknowledge it (Kimmel & Ferber, 2010, p. 5). Acknowledging one’s privileges also forces one to admit that they are not results of personal efforts, but that one is part of a system that is based on inequality (Sue, 2010, p. 37ff).

### **3.7 Synthesis of theories**

In the analysis, compassion is seen as having two main characteristics, by being an *emotion* as well as including *power*. I am going to discuss how engagement in the refugee reception and acts of compassion might be produced by the experience of living in a globalized, unequal world where a culturally established orientalism creates an opposition between the West and the East, a relationship where the Western world has the powerful position. I will show how the volunteers position themselves in this world in relation to anti-refugee attitudes in the society by feeling a responsibility for those who suffer. The volunteers motivate their

compassion by imagining a globalized world without borders and by identifying themselves as citizens of the world and fellow human beings to the refugees. This position also includes a class perspective where the volunteers are distancing themselves from other groups in the Swedish society by emphasizing the physical work and orientation of their bodies in the spaces where the aid work takes place. Further, I will problematize this position by investigating the volunteers' ability to orient freely because of their own belonging to a Western society that gives them privileges as well as power in the situation they operate in.

#### **4 The ethnographic field**

The empirical material in this thesis was mainly collected in two ethnographic fields: Malmö Central Station and a social and cultural centre in Malmö called Kontrapunkt. These became the two most important spaces during the refugee reception as it was here where the refugees were welcomed, informed, given food, clothes and somewhere to live etc. All the interviewees presented in my study have some connection to either or both of these places. My research team and I either met them on location or arranged a meeting. This way, the aid work as well as our research became very place specific. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2006) notion of orienting in space, we could see that the way the volunteers acted in these spaces was affected by how they identify themselves. Edward S. Casey sees places as "the most fundamental form of embodied experience – the site of a powerful fusion of self, space and time" (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 9). As will be further developed on in the analysis, being at Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt became an embodied experience both for the volunteers and for me as a researcher. I also had to decide which role I should play when being in the field. This makes it interesting to study the actions and emotions of the volunteers when being in these places, as well as to investigate how they orient and position themselves there.

What follows are short introductions of Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt that describe the two spaces and their roles in the aid work.

#### **4.1 Malmö Central Station**

Malmö Central Station was first built in 1856 and is today Sweden's fourth largest train station. With its connection to Copenhagen, Malmö became an important gateway for refugees during the period of my research, as it is the most "natural" way into Sweden from the European continent. As a city, Malmö has a history of receiving refugees from war zones, for example during the 1990's Balkan wars and the aftermath of the Second World War, when the city was nicknamed "Hoppets hamn", the Harbour of Hope (Åberg & Gertten, 2011). This name was also referred to by media in the beginning of September 2015, in order to describe how Malmö, in a situation when Denmark and other European countries were beginning to close their borders, was once again a harbour of hope for refugees (Moreno, 2015, September 8).

#### **4.2 Kontrapunkt**

Kontrapunkt is a cultural and social centre in Malmö with an aim to be a platform for the city's "free and unestablished cultural life" (Om Kontrapunkt, n.d., my translation from Swedish). It also functions as a centre for local grassroots movements. On their website, Kontrapunkt express a wish to be a part of the work towards a more equal society and "promote[s] diversity, inclusion and community between people from different backgrounds and social groups" (Om Kontrapunkt, n.d., my translation from Swedish). During the period of our research Kontrapunkt rearranged their activities in order to offer accommodation, food, hygiene supplies, social contact as well as medical and legal support for refugees. As of January 2016, Kontrapunkt had provided various types of aid to an estimated number of 17000 refugees (Svensson, 2016, January 20).

### **5 Methods**

The data collection for the research project that this thesis is based on took place between September 11 and the middle of November of 2015. This consisted of qualitative methods such as interviews with volunteers, observations from Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt as well as material collected online, primarily from Refugees Welcome's

Facebook group. My analysis also consists of autoethnography, where I reflect on my own experiences and emotions while doing the research as well as my own position in the field.

### 5.1 Qualitative interviews

In total, in depth-interviews with seventeen individuals who volunteered or in some other way were connected to the activism surrounding the refugee reception were conducted. Because of the purpose of this thesis, I have focused on the fourteen interviews with volunteers engaged in the aid work at Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt, out of which twelve are quoted in this thesis. The interviewees consist of eight women and four men, a ratio that matches the overall aid work where women have been overrepresented (Wesslén, 2015, September 9). The volunteers interviewed were a mix of ages, ranging from 25-65. Most of the volunteers were native Swedes while others had been living in Sweden for several years and spoke the language well. Therefore, the interviews were mostly done in Swedish, as it gave the interviewees the possibility to express themselves more freely. The quotes used in this thesis have then been translated from Swedish into English. To protect the participants' anonymity, I have also given them other names in the text.

The interviews were conducted by a research team consisting of Cristina Ghita, Isabel Rescala, Carissa Typaldos and myself, all master students in Applied Cultural Analysis at Lund University. We all did a number of interviews each, all of which were then transcribed, collectively read and analyzed. The majority of the informants quoted in this thesis were interviewed by Isabel Rescala, while the other interviews were made by me. During the research, we used two different types of strategies for interviewing. One, where volunteers were approached and interviewed on location. These interviews were often short and improvised, with some questions and themes reoccurring. This interview-style can be described as “quick and dirty” and is often “intensive, potentially intrusive, and involve asking what [the interviewees] might think are irrelevant questions” (Morgan & Pink, 2013, p. 353). In these interviews, we were also able to observe the environment the volunteers worked in and the activities they engaged in, as they were often occupied with different tasks.

Other interviews were done by setting a time and place with a volunteer, for example at a coffee shop or at another location of their choice. Here we were able to talk for a longer period of time, and most of these interviews were approximately one hour long. These

interviews were semi-structured, which gave us the opportunity to both follow a questionnaire as well as go after interesting topics that the interviewees brought up spontaneously (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 29). Billy Ehn describes the ethnographic interview as a “combination between intimacy and instrumentality” (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 136, my translation from Swedish). I personally experienced that setting up a safe interview environment by engaging in small talk and not being focused on the predetermined questions created the feeling of a mutual conversation. This way, I could use intimacy in order to establish a trusting relation, get closer to my informants and therefore also get to know more about them (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 132f). The feeling of being in a safe situation gave the interviewees time to become comfortable and more able to elaborate on their thoughts. At the same time, interviewing is “instrumental”, meaning that I have distanced myself from the intimate conversation and look at the interviewee’s individual quotes as parts of a larger cultural phenomena (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 135). Interviewees often does not describe themselves as part of a cultural pattern, making it the researcher’s job to interpret their stories and experiences and put these into a theoretical and analytical context (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 136). In this, an important issue is to consider how the interviewees present themselves and why they do so (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 137). A common issue is how informants adapt to social norms and expectations, for example concerning the current social debate (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 137). For example, the volunteers quoted in this thesis generally expressed having a positive image of refugees. This was a way for them to distance themselves from xenophobic attitudes, but could also be seen as a personal interest in portraying oneself as a “good person”. Because of this the interviewees’ quotes should not be used as direct information about what the individual person thinks. They must also be seen and analyzed as forming a social construction of the cultural category “volunteers” (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 137).

## **5.2 The third voice**

In my analysis I use Oscar Pripp’s (2002, p. 46) idea about a third voice, “an inaudible questioner”, being present in the interviews. By referring to the way friends, family members, politicians and other members of society view and question their engagement in the refugees’ situation, the volunteers position themselves and form their own identity as allies to the refugees. However, as will be shown in the analysis, this third voice also affects how the volunteers relate to the refugees and their own engagement, as their position in the Swedish society gives them certain privileges.

### 5.3 Autoethnography

As it is pointed out by Billy Ehn, an important part of balancing the close relation to informants and keeping an analytical distance requires reviewing your own part in the research process, so called autoethnography (Ehn & Löfgren, 1996, p. 137). As a researcher, you always use yourself when you do fieldwork. Your own body, your mind and your personality are as important in the gathering of knowledge as scientific methods (Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk, 2016, p. 102). By using autoethnography I start off the analysis in this thesis by investigating my personal practices and emotions while in the field, and reflect on how I positioned myself there (Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk, 2016, p. 102). As will be further explained in the following section as well as in the analysis, my own experience of being in contact with the aid work at Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt affected how I approached the fieldwork and my specific interests of the study. My autoethnography has also had importance for my writing of this thesis and I have included myself in the narrative of the analysis as a way of expressing the complexity of the fieldwork and my own research process (Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk, 2016, p. 102).

### 5.4 Observations

Doing observations is another method where the relation between closeness to the object of study and scientific distance becomes apparent. During the research I took on the role of a “complete observer” (Davies, 2008, p. 82). That is, I chose not to do participant observations where I myself became a volunteer and engaged in the aid work. Instead, I remained an outsider to the field and did not share the interviewees’ experiences and emotions. Therefore, understanding those aspects on a deeper level has been an important part of my study. My choice of not doing participant observations was partly affected by me questioning how the volunteers would react to us doing research in such a vulnerable situation, something that I will address further in the following analysis. This led me to take a step back from the actual acts that took place and emphasize on my role and identity as a researcher. As I have directed the topic of my study towards how the volunteers position and identify themselves, as well as a critique of their privileges and powerful position in relation to refugees, I find that my role as a complete observer has been beneficial. As Charlotte Davies states, in some research situations participation might result in the researcher being too involved to recognize the nature of the field he or she studies (Davies, 2008, p. 85). “Only” observing and not

participating has made it possible for me to interpret the significance of the volunteers' identities, acts and emotions differently than the volunteers themselves, and to give it different meanings, as opposed to if I would have been personally invested in the volunteer community (Davies, 2008, p. 84). Keeping a distance to the informants has therefore helped me in problematizing their identities and positions.

Observations took place at Malmö Central Station, Kontrapunkt and at other activities related to the refugee reception, for example demonstrations. There I could observe how the aid work was organized and how the volunteers behaved and interacted with the refugees, each other as well as with non-volunteers. In this regard, I have been influenced by what Sarah Pink calls "sensory ethnography", which deals with understanding participants movements and behaviours in ways that are not expressed verbally (Pink, 2011, p. 124). Therefore, this thesis takes its data from the interviewees' quotes as well as the "nonverbal experiences" (Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk, 2016, p. 103) I personally had in the field, and those the volunteers expressed through their actions, movements and emotions.

## 5.5 Netnography

Some of the material relevant for my analysis was collected through Internet ethnography (Davies, 2008, p. 151), often also referred to as "netnography", where my colleagues and I examined social media to see how voluntary organizations informed, communicated with and recruited volunteers. Data was collected from the organization Refugees Welcome's Facebook group where one asks to join and is admitted by one of the administrators. On the group's discussion board, both administrators and members can post messages. As I am writing this thesis, the group has 10090 members. The data used in the analysis consists of posts that aim to recruit more engagement, in which the organization refers to members' everyday lives.

As Charlotte Davies (1998, p. 154) writes, data consisting of typed messages has practical advantages for researchers as there is no need for transcribing. However, non-verbal cues are difficult to interpret. Even if emoticons and acronyms like ☺ and "lol" are common, they are not equal to facial expressions and body language in a face-to-face encounter. This makes it difficult to research emotions in an Internet environment. In our research process my colleagues and I limited ourselves to the role of "lurkers" at such discussion boards, as we

have only observed without participating in the discussions (Davies, 2008, p. 156). Therefore we have not contacted representatives from Refugees Welcome to do more in-depth interviews about the ways they communicate with their members. In the same way, we have not asked the members how they react to references to their everyday lives in the organization's recruitment of volunteers. However, we have treated the individuals and organizations online as if they also "exist and participate in off-line social contexts" (Davies, 2008, p. 158).

## **6 Analysis**

### **6.1 My position in the field**

On first glance, it almost seemed like an ordinary day at Malmö Central Station (Observation, September 14, 2015). Commuters were hurrying to catch their train, buying a cup of coffee or waiting around keeping an eye on their luggage. In the middle of the aisle leading from the entrance to the train tracks, Vänsterpartiet (the Swedish left wing party) had a stand with information about their politics. For them, this day had been planned for months. The next day they would be informing possible voters at another location. Inside the station building, only a few things indicated that something out of the ordinary was taking place. On Vänsterpartiet's tables were posters with the text "Refugees Welcome". Policemen were circulating around the area, and representatives from the Swedish Migration Board were waiting to inform arriving refugees about the asylum process.

I had come to the Central Station with a colleague from my research team and our supervisor from the Regional Museum in Kristianstad. As we walked outside the station building we were met by a stark contrast to the seeming normality of the events we had just seen. Only one hour ago we were planning our research, discussing ways of approaching the subject, questions to ask, possible theoretical frameworks and so on. Now we were confronted with the reality of our field, the refugee reception in Malmö. As we started to walk around the area, we soon met a group of teenage boys who told us that they wanted to go to Haparanda, where their families were living. Our spontaneous reaction was to laugh and say "Oh, wow!" For us, Haparanda is almost as far north you can get in Sweden, and a very long way from Malmö. The boys looked at us and laughed too, a bit nervously. But I could see the determination in



their eyes. And this was the moment when I realized that these boys already had a very long journey behind them. The thought was overwhelming. How long had it been since they were in their home country? Weeks? Months? For them, the distance between Malmö and Haparanda was nothing.

As Hamid, a volunteer at the Central Station, later told us in an interview, the fact that the aid work took place in a public space had an impact on the way the citizens of Malmö were confronted with and affected by the refugees' situation.

“The regular people”, the individuals who passed by [Malmö Central Station] and could see the desperation and the aid [the refugees] needed became upset, and many felt that they wanted to do more (Hamid, October 1, 2015).

Arriving to this field was an emotional experience, and the overwhelming feeling stayed with me when we started to walk around the area just outside the Central Station where the aid had been organized in the form of food stands and a wardrobe where refugees could get warmer clothes. Among Red Cross-representatives and more polices, volunteers were busy doing their job. Handing out food, talking to refugees, trying to get a hold of buses for transportation. I immediately felt a resistance. What was I going to ask the volunteers? How was I going to approach them? How would I explain our project, and how would the volunteers react to us? I questioned why we should interrupt them. In that specific situation, their work seemed so much more important and meaningful than our research.

Thomas Bille and Vibeke Oestergaard Steinfeldt (2013) have written about how ethical matters and situations where researchers have doubts about their own presence in a fieldwork situation can lead to awkwardness. They describe it as a “deeply felt unsettlement within the body when facing a new and uncomfortable situation” that can affect the researcher's emotions and bodily positions (Bille & Oestergaard Steinfeldt, 2013, p. 11). Gunnar Karlsson states three components that lead to awkwardness: “the *will* (intention and motivation), the *should* (morality and ethics) and the *can* (competence and ability) [emphasis in original]” (Bille & Oestergaard Steinfeldt, 2013, p. 12). My first experience in our field was overwhelming. I had a hard time starting conversations and kept in the background, feeling uncomfortable. My colleague managed the situation better and approached people, resulting in the first interviews for our project. I also had a will to do the research, but was hesitant

about my ability and even questioned if I *should* do it. All of this created a conflict within me. My body started to feel uneasy. I did not know how to stand, where to look or how to behave (Bille & Oestergaard Steinfeldt, 2013, p. 2). As I was not familiar with how the activists had organized themselves at Malmö Central Station, I was worried about disturbing their work, annoy them or making them suspicious of my motives for being there. In fact, I experienced a strong feeling of *not wanting to be there*. Using Sara Ahmed's (2006) term, I was disoriented and did not know how to move or behave in that specific environment and felt out of place. At the same time, I experienced a need to distinguish myself as a researcher and not become a volunteer myself, something that would have resulted in me gradually learning how to orient the space. Being a part of the academic world, this was the role I felt most comfortable with. Doing observations and interviews is something I have done before and know. This is where I feel most at home. The objects I have within my reach are those of analysis and critical thinking, leading to me having a certain amount of power over the research participants (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21). For me, being able to leave the field and go to the University to transcribe interviews, or spend a Friday evening at home in the sofa after a workweek felt good and gave me a necessary break from the project. I have not participated in any practical aid work and have not donated money to the cause. I might actually be one of the individuals the volunteers will later in this analysis refer to as "lazy".

The very specific situation turned Malmö Central Station into a space that created emotional effects. I reacted by being uncomfortable and making sure my role remained that of the outside researcher. And even if I was emotionally affected by the situation the refugees were in and considered the aid work to be a good thing, I was not personally invested and kept an objective perspective. I think most people in Sweden positioned themselves in this issue in one way or another, whether it was in support of the refugee reception or against it. This thesis takes an interest in the group whose position at first glance might be the most obvious, for example that they help the refugees and are against xenophobia. However, as I will argue, the volunteers' emotions and positioning of themselves actually make them the most ambivalent and complicated group of individuals in this situation.

In the following section, I will investigate how Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt became spaces where the volunteers could express their emotions by performing compassionate acts during the aid work.

## 6.2 A situation that creates compassion

In *Governing Disasters: Beyond Risk Culture*, Sandrine Revet and Julien Langumier (2015) write about situations such as wars and natural disasters. While the field my colleagues and I entered cannot be described as a disaster in the same way, it is the consequence of a disaster. The volunteers we have talked to help refugees that are fleeing from war. According to Nicolas Dodier, a disaster can be described as a “departure from a situation that is judged to be, by contrast, normal” where actors “in response to threats to collective security” establish “a regime of exception” (Revet & Langumier, 2015, p. 224). As has been previously illustrated, the aid work for refugees at Malmö Central Station was a departure from what would be considered “normal” events in that space. Also, the organized aid was a direct response to what was experienced as a lack of help from politicians and more established organizations. Nadja, a volunteer at the Central Station expresses frustration about the situation, both for herself and for the refugees: “I haven’t slept at all, and there have been several trains that left with empty seats, [seats] that could have gone to the ones who flee” (Nadja, September 11, 2015). The frustration seems to come from a sense of the situation becoming worse. More and more refugees arrived to Malmö, but the volunteers were not able to help them get on trains or buses to other locations. Nadja points out that everyone who works there are individuals. As she says, the Swedish bus and train companies seem to value economic gains higher than humanitarianism. Politicians were also absent from the events at Malmö Central Station, those who according to Nadja can really make a difference and whose “role it is to do this” (September 11, 2015). Several other volunteers we talked to express the same feeling. Political parties and established organizations with economic resources did not engage in the aid work, creating a sense of helplessness among the volunteers. As Kim (September 11, 2015), a volunteer who spontaneously joined the interview with Nadja, says: “As a fellow human being, you are responsible. The politicians don’t care about being here. If we’re not doing it, who will?”

Hamid (October 1, 2015) says he thinks that the City Council of Malmö wants to help the refugees, but when they have seen the activities at the Central Station, they have decided to let it go and let the volunteers take over. This had negative consequences for the refugees and the aid work as engagement from the City Council would mean more economic resources. However, from a cultural analytical point of view, it was interesting to see how these individuals took what they thought of as their responsibility, claimed the space and organized

the aid. Instead of “recogniz[ing] and account[ing] for what disaster destroys” we could examine “what it contributes to producing, the social recomposition it brings about” (Revet & Langumier, 2015, p. 5).

As Hamid says, even if large amounts of refugees have come to Sweden before, for example in the 1990’s, this situation is extraordinary, making people who have not cared before wake up and realize they have to get involved and help out (October 1, 2015). Because of the urgency of the situation the volunteers express feeling a need to do something exceptional. And so they did, as they reorganized a public space in order to make sure the refugees were safe. At the same time, a space filled with emotions was created. As Lauren Berlant (2004, p. 7) states, compassion often takes place in historical moments or anxious scenes. Several of the volunteers we interviewed talk about the feeling of being part of something historical, and at Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt they were able to show their compassion towards the refugees. In this situation, compassion was felt on behalf of another who suffers (Berlant, 2004, p. 20). Non-sufferers’ compassion towards sufferers often materializes in different forms of charity and support (Berlant, 2004, p. 23). Compassionate acts performed by the volunteers include giving refugees information when they arrive, administrating transports for the refugees’ continuing journey, driving refugees from Malmö Central Station to Kontrapunkt, working in the so called “wardrobe” where clothes were handed out to refugees, cooking food and delivering it to the refugees as well as collecting money from family and friends to buy necessities. Stories of compassionate acts also include social interaction with the refugees, in the form of conversation, comforting words, a hug, or by simply being a listener. For the volunteers, these meetings often became emotional experiences. Maja reminisce one memorable encounter:

There was a little boy at Kontrapunkt, his dad later told me he was two [years old], that came up to me when I sat on a chair. He wanted to come up, wanted to climb up [on my lap]... So I lifted him up, and then he sat there and touched my hair and my cheek. And I talked to him, he didn’t have a clue what I was saying but I kept talking... Then his dad came and we talked, through an interpreter. His wife and other child were left [in their home country] and he hade gone with this child. And then he smiled, the dad just smiled and got up and went back to sit with some others. Eventually the little one fell asleep, and I felt like: “My heart is breaking now!” I let him stay with me for a while, and then I

lifted him and lay him in his dad's arms. After that I had to go out and cry for a while (Maja, October 1, 2015).

Sometimes the compassion from the citizens of Malmö even took excessive proportions. Hamid (October 1, 2015) told us about when the volunteers had posted on Facebook about needing two baby carriages. In only a few hours there were twenty-five at the Central Station. For a time, there were so many donations that the Refugees Welcome had to write on their Facebook page that they were not able to receive more. According to Hamid (October 1, 2015), this also resulted in donors being angry and disappointed, feeling like they were not welcomed to take part and being able to help like they wanted to. Some individuals that wanted to engage but could not because of limitations to the need seem to have become frustrated, not because the aid work did not function but because they could not participate in it. They were denied taking responsibility for the situation, which as previously mentioned is a motivation for the volunteers. The individual taking responsibility when other forces, like the government, fail is a recurring theme in the interviews. In the next section, I will discuss how this feeling of responsibility is expressed and created.

### **6.3 A sense of responsibility**

Peter, a man who helps out at Kontrapunkt, claims that “everyone [in Sweden] can help out” and that everyone “should do so” (October 9, 2015). He continues by stating that the world is unfair, “but that does not mean that we should accept it” (Peter, October 9, 2015). Peter acknowledges that we live in an unfair world, where it is a fact that some have certain privileges. Sweden is part of the Western world and therefore also benefit from the “myth of Eurocentrism”, where values of the West is seen as superior to those of non-West countries (Pease, 2010, p. 41). Sweden is also a so called developed and industrial country, placing it in a small group of nations that within a global hierarchy can dominate over Third world countries (Pease, 2010, p. 39). This way, the less developed countries are dependent on the more developed countries, for example in the form of import and export (Pease, 2010, p. 39). In the refugee reception in Malmö, individuals affected by the war in Syria are dependent on aid from Sweden and the Swedish volunteers. Peter further suggests that there is a possibility to change this inequality by being compassionate. He hopes there is a “common compassion” amongst people that makes them realize that being a refugee is not something people choose (Peter, October 9, 2015). As Peter puts it: “it must be a very difficult choice to take one's

children and things and set out on such a journey” (October 9, 2015). He emphasizes the meaning of compassion even more by saying: “If there would be compassion everywhere, this situation would not have occurred in the first place” (Peter, October 9, 2015). This also implies that compassion is not something that exists everywhere. Sweden, however, is a country Peter seems to consider as compassionate.

Peter’s quote puts forward a story about Sweden as a nation where everyone has the possibility of helping out in the form of donating money or by volunteering. Jonas Frykman has described the idea of “the national” as an established story about a country (Linde-Laursen, 1995, p. 105). For example, what is “Swedish” is not only a geographical marker. It also has to do with practices and values that work to differentiate Sweden to other countries (O’Dell, 1998, p. 24). A “unique ‘Swedish quality’” (O’Dell, 1998, p. 24) can refer to how good and healthy Swedish meat is compared to other countries’ products, but also to Sweden being considered a welfare state with equality between the sexes and no major class divisions. One of the established stories and considered qualities about Sweden is that of the compassionate country that receives refugees. Several of the interviewees make references to how Sweden was politically neutral during the Second World War and received victims from the concentration camps after the war had ended. Here, Malmö had a special function. Because of the city’s location this was where many of the refugees first arrived (Åberg & Gertten, 2011). For example, refugees were accommodated at Malmö Museum (Åberg & Gertten, 2011, p. 142), a sign of how the city’s institutions opened up and took part in the aid work, and a contrast to what the volunteers we interviewed describe as a much less engaged City Council. Hamid (October 1, 2015) develops on the image of Sweden as an engaged and compassionate country by comparing it with Denmark’s refugee politics, which he describes as “very strict”. During the research period, Denmark became a “transit country” that most refugees avoided because of its increasing anti-immigration laws (Orrenius, 2015, September 18). One example of this is a campaign ad in Lebanese newspapers where the Danish government described Denmark’s restricted immigration politics, a message with the aim of telling refugees not to go there (Orrenius, 2015, September 18). In contrast, Sweden became the country that welcomed the refugees and saw an increasing engagement among the population. This is something that several of the volunteers see as common for Sweden. Hamid says: “I think people are used to us helping out. That we are a society that helps out, that gladly donates money to different causes” (October 1, 2015). By comparing Sweden to Denmark, Sweden is portrayed as the “good country” in this situation. “The compassionate

country of Sweden” can be seen as a social construction that also makes the inhabitants behave accordingly (Hacking, 1999, p. 11). Helping out in these causes is considered something that is common for Swedes, an act that they are happy to take part in. However, later in this analysis I will consider the volunteers’ opinions about those who are *not* engaging, and argue that the volunteers use references to non-volunteers as a way to position themselves as those who are actually living up to the image of the compassionate Swede.

The ideal Swede is portrayed as compassionate, but Hamid describes how many seems to have “too much faith in the government and other agencies to solve all problems” and as a result forget their own roles and responsibilities in society (October 1, 2015). It is clear that the volunteers we interviewed have a strong opinion about their role and responsibility in the refugee reception. They have taken on tasks that others, non-volunteers, might think should be dealt with by Malmö City Council and the Swedish government. Therefore, one can guess that these non-volunteers do not share the volunteers’ emotions, and not volunteering does not necessarily mean that they reflect on or have bad conscience about not doing so. To use Hamid’s ideas, they have faith in the government and do not see it as the individual’s responsibility. However, the “should” in Peter’s (October 9, 2015) previous quote about how everyone in Sweden have the ability to help out and “should do so”, implies that individual Swedes have a duty to help those who are not in such a fortunate situation. The volunteers’ view on this can be seen as a form of *responsibilization* (Rose, 1999, p. 74), as individual citizens have “acquired particular political responsibilities” (Rose, 1999, p. 45).

Responsibilization can be explained as a technology, where individuals are given responsibilities that will be beneficial on a personal level as well as for the “social body” (Rose, 1999, p. 74). In his book *Powers of Freedom*, Nikolas Rose (1999) takes the example of how a society’s good health and good order require that citizens takes care of their bodies, keep themselves and their surroundings clean, have good morals and behave accordingly. If the individuals take responsibility for themselves they are also expected to take responsibility for the society at large.

In the context of the refugee reception, the need for action from the government and Malmö City Council decreased when the volunteers were fast to organize the aid. The volunteers are frustrated with the thought of the refugees not being helped. But, as expressed by Hamid (October 1, 2015) earlier, there is also a notion of how help from the state and the municipality is not coming since the volunteers are already doing the job. The individuals

already felt a responsibility to engage, which diminishes the need for action from the state. This pre-existing sense of responsibility might have been created by what Nikolas Rose (1999, p. 45) calls “technologies of moral training”. A society that wants to continue being seen as open and welcoming towards refugees needs individual citizens who inhabit these qualities. By emphasizing on the story about Sweden as a historically compassionate welfare state with generous asylum laws and a “good country” for refugees to come to, Swedish citizens also learn that this is a good way to act. As a result it both turns individuals into good fellow human beings and is beneficial for how the country is perceived. The volunteers interviewed all express this morality and share the feeling of great responsibility for the refugees.

Hamid (October 1, 2015) thinks engaging in the aid work or not is a question of how “one sees oneself in the society” and has to do with an “idea about a collective mindset.” As he says, “we are not lonely individuals. We need the collective movement” (Hamid, October 1, 2015). Here, Hamid imagines a society where every citizen takes responsibility for one’s fellow human beings. This can be done by “hav[ing] a coffee with someone, help[ing] someone fill out a form... [By doing] simple things that makes a person feel like a part of the society” (Hamid, October 1, 2015). This is even more emphasized by Jasna, a volunteer who also shares the experience of being a refugee as she came to Sweden because of the Balkan wars during the 1990’s. She vividly describes her first time in the country:

We got off the bus and were met by Swedes who gave us food. It was a very warm welcome. /.../ We lived in small cabins /.../ and people were not afraid to get in contact and came knocking on our door. We learned how to pick cloudberries and how to make candles. Making people feel like they’re a part of something is so easy, it doesn’t take much effort (Jasna, October 6, 2015).

For Jasna, the first meeting has stayed with her, and her own engagement in today’s refugee reception is motivated by the wish to give others the same experience. As she says, “the first meeting has to be human” (Jasna, October 6, 2015). Seeing refugees sleeping at the Central Station while representatives from agencies stood around without approaching them made her think: “Have we not improved more than this?” (Jasna, October 6, 2015).



Being a volunteer and engaging in aid work therefore seems to be part of taking responsibility for one's fellow human beings. When asked about what defines being a volunteer and taking part in activities linked to activism, there is a common theme among the interviewees. They all describe a commitment that takes place "outside of oneself and doesn't have to be beneficial for [the] individual. It is for the greater good of society" (Hamid, October 1, 2015). The volunteers recognize that the work they are doing takes place in a global world, where some are in the situation of having to flee from war and others can help them.

The volunteers' feeling of responsibility is motivated by what they see as a passive Swedish government and Malmö City Council, and they consider their work to be a duty. Nadja wonders what would happen if she just walked away from her position as a volunteer: "If someone who does not understand the situation [and how the aid has been organized] would come now, she would not be able to do it the same way [as me]. That's a problem" (Nadja, September 11, 2015). This way the volunteers seem to have made the aid work depend on them. They feel like they have a responsibility to stay and make sure everything functions "the way it should" and that someone else might not be as well equipped for the task. This great responsibility also has emotional effects for the volunteers. As Maja (October 1, 2015) explains, one of the reasons for helping out is to "ease [her] conscience". She describes being "heartbroken" if she does not do anything to help.

Even if the volunteers do important work, they also express frustration about the critical state of the situation where economic and logistic help from the government could make a big difference. And even though they volunteer and engage as much as they can, they still express guilt about "not doing enough". The notion of what is considered "doing enough" refers to both themselves as individuals, but also to a national level. Having guilt about living in a privileged country in the unequal world seems to be an essential part of the volunteers' feeling of responsibility. One aspect of guilt has to do with "duties not performed and obligations not fulfilled" (Taylor, 1985, p. 87). When one is feeling guilt, one also takes responsibility for one's wrongdoings (Taylor, 1985, p. 91). As will be further emphasized later, this guilt takes its form in how the volunteers express that they should always do more work. But a part of the guilt the volunteers feel also seem to be on the country of Sweden's behalf. This can be seen as part of a collective guilt present in the Western world, for example expressed in Peter's quote about how "everyone should help" (October 9, 2015). The notion of collective guilt might for example be produced by an awareness of injustices between

nations and people created by European colonialism (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004, p. ix-x). In the context of the refugee reception in Malmö, the volunteers can therefore be said to feel guilt about and taking responsibility for what they consider to be the Western world's wrongdoings.

#### **6.4 Being a citizen of the world**

On several occasions the volunteers touch upon their own positions in the unequal world. For example, Maja (October 1, 2015) reflects on her feeling of being privileged: "I have not done anything for my privileges, except managing to be born by a Swedish mother". The subtitle to Bob Pease's (2010) book *Undoing Privilege* puts light on this feeling. Here, privilege is referred to as an "unearned advantage in a divided world". Maja describes her engagement as being motivated by living in an unjust world, where her own life is the result of the pure luck of being born in Sweden. She has not done anything to deserve that position. In the situation revolving the refugee reception, being Swedish and living in Sweden means that Maja has not been personally affected by war in the sense that she has not had to flee her country and has not experienced a war zone up close. It also means that she can take on the role as a helper to the refugees. However, even if being Swedish gives Maja privileges, she does not simply identify as a Swede in the context of volunteering in the aid work for refugees. "I am a citizen of the world. I think everyone is entitled to what I have", she says (Maja, October 1, 2015).

The terms "world citizen" and "global citizen" describe a person "who identifies with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building this community's values and practices" (R.C. Israel, 2012). One way in which this global identity is shaped is by how technology makes it easier to connect to the rest of the world, as well as providing information and images of humanitarian disasters (R.C. Israel, 2012). This ties in with Arjun Appadurai's (1996, p. 21) idea of imagining alternatives to the national state, where mass mediation and migration plays an important part. In the global world, information and goods but also people cross national borders (Appadurai, 1996, p. 22). This creates an idea of a world where geographical and political borders are irrelevant and a notion that humanity is one, even if borders and nationalities do in fact exist and divide people (Appadurai, 1996, p. 22, 33). By identifying herself as a citizen of the world, Maja imagines herself as being part of this global humanity and is of the opinion that a person's country of birth and nationality should not determine the level of one's possibilities and freedom.

As a citizen of the world, Maja also understands herself as having a responsibility for the world as a whole and for her fellow human beings (R.C. Israel, 2012). As the second part of Maja's quote implies, by helping the refugees she hopes to contribute to an improvement of their lives. The future goal is that all of the world's citizens should have the same rights and living conditions as her.

By calling herself a citizen of the world, Maja emphasizes that her engagement does not only involve helping the individuals arriving to Malmö Central Station and those living at Kontrapunkt. For her, volunteering seems to have an even greater mission. Similar to Peter, she acknowledges that the world is an unfair place where some groups, a group that she herself belongs to, have privileges. In this sense, volunteering also becomes a commentary about the state of the world and the treatment of the refugees.

## **6.5 The political motivation**

In her book *The Concerned Women of Buduburam: Refugee Activism and Humanitarian Dilemmas* Elizabeth Holzer (2015, p. 4) sets out to explore the "relationship between humanitarian action and political action". She poses the question if it is possible to see a connection between compassion, human rights and politics (Holzer, 2015, p. 5). During the research we could sense that there is a political side to the volunteers engagement, their identities and their compassionate acts. Even if many of them do not have an outspoken political agenda, and some even take a stand against what they experience as a stereotypical notion of the political activist, all interviews touch upon the subject of a growing xenophobia in Sweden, and the nationalist party the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna). However, in line of their global point of view, this is not limited to Sweden. The volunteers' political motivations seem to be an extension of their identification as world citizens. It is clear that a so called "third voice" (Pripp, 2002, p. 46) in the form of refugee opponents is present in the interviews, a voice the volunteers relate to and are motivated by in their engagement. As Hamid (October 1, 2015) notes, "one cannot ignore that the right wing extremism is increasing in Europe, which tries to portray these desperate people as 'luxury refugees'". According to several of the volunteers, the idea of refugees being on the search for a more "luxurious" life in Sweden is a common theme among opponents in the immigration debate. The largest threat towards a nation is often portrayed as being too many influences from other cultures, making it difficult to distinguish what is specific about this nation in comparison

with others. For example, opponents to an increased immigration might state that the “Swedish culture” is threatened when it is “confronted with a world of others” (O’Dell, 1998, p. 24). Ingrid (October 20, 2015) describes how friends and family members who are questioning why she engages in the refugees’ situation often talk about how “our jobs [will disappear], the taxes will rise and the money will go to the immigrants. What about us? Do you really want them all to come here?” The integration of immigrants in the Swedish society is put next to what is seen as the Swedish welfare. People suggest that a large number of new citizens will force the ones already living in Sweden to what they think of as a lesser living standard.

During our research one of my colleagues and I attended a demonstration aimed to put pressure on Malmö City Council to take action. While my colleague took photographs, I walked among the marching people to experience the atmosphere. On one occasion I could overhear an onlooker who had approached one of the demonstrators asking what the cause of the protest was. When he realized it was connected to refugee issues his immediate follow-up question was “Don’t you want to be able to get an apartment?” (Demonstration, September 21, 2015). For him, the arrival of refugees to Malmö clearly equalled not being able to get an apartment. This corresponds to the comments Ingrid has got about her engagement.

According to her, people who question large amounts of refugees have arguments like: “We don’t have enough space. There are no jobs and no roof above our heads. Our young one’s can’t get a job, they have to live at home until they’re thirty because there’s no apartments” (Ingrid, October 20, 2015). These arguments portray refugees as a group that causes a decrease in the Swedish welfare, having negative effects for those who are native or long time residents. According to the volunteers, these are statements that add to the xenophobia in the Swedish society as well as to the support for the Sweden Democrats. Ingrid also sees this xenophobia in a historical light and draws parallels to the period before the Second World War.

In bad times it is easy to find a scapegoat. It’s been like that before every World War. Before Hitler. It’s the same pattern. The same propaganda they use. The same lies. Just different faces and another time (Ingrid, October 20, 2015).

In the debate about immigration, the refugees are created as scapegoats for problems such as unemployment or housing shortage in the Swedish society. However, the volunteers we

interviewed suggest that this is, in the words used by Ingrid, lies and propaganda. Instead, they present another image of the refugees. They acknowledge that most of the persons who are able to leave their home country and make it all the way to Sweden are those who are economically well off or have been able to collect money. They are often well educated, have jobs and live what in Sweden would be referred to as a “good life” (Ingrid, October 20, 2015). As they begin the journey towards Sweden, they become identified as “refugees”, a category with negative connotations. In the interviews it is clear that the volunteers try to humanize the refugees. However, they do so not so much by describing individuals they have met. Instead they imagine themselves in the refugees’ situation. Ingrid gets emotional while thinking about what it would feel like having to leave Sweden and wanting to enter another country.

If there would be war and if [I] would have to pack [my] bag. What should I bring?  
Where should I go? Can I get something to eat? And then walk and walk, sleep  
outside and freeze and not being able to attend [my] hygiene. And then reach a border.  
“Stop!” (Ingrid, October 20, 2015).

She starts crying as she thinks about how the refugees have been treated on their journey through Europe, often being harassed and met by closed borders. These are situations Ingrid feels she can sympathize with, and she has a hard time understanding how anyone cannot. “You don’t do that to a fellow human being” she says, wiping her tears away (October 20, 2015). The thought of experiencing the same thing as the refugees gets her motivated to help them. In the same way, Alice (October 1, 2015) explains that she helps out now with the hope that someone would do the same for her: “If I ever get in this kind of trouble, I hope someone does the same and helps me”. Once again, the idea about living in a global world becomes visible. As the quotes above indicate, the volunteers see themselves as citizens of the world with a responsibility to help their fellow human beings. They also have faith in that they would have received the same help if they were in the same situation. With this point of view, refugees are constructed as persons who are “just like you and I”. It also suggests that either one of the volunteers could have easily been in the refugees’ position. When described in this way the volunteers’ compassion seem to mean that they suffer *together* with the refugees, which according to Lauren Berlant (2004, p. 20) is one of two possible interpretations of the emotion. By identifying as citizens of the world and the refugees’ fellow human beings the volunteers also take on and relate to the suffering, as is indicated by Ingrid’s and Alice’s quotes. However, further on in this analysis I will show that the volunteers’ compassion also

include the more unequal relationship where the emotion is aimed towards another person who suffer (Berlant, 2004, p. 20).

## 6.6 The wake-up call

Historically, the Western world has been fascinated by the Orient and the culture of the Other, for example by importing art and food as well as being influenced by philosophical movements. However, this type of orientalism (Said, 2004) is also based on keeping a distance. “We” in the Western world have taken what interests us from “them”. When people flee their home country and come to Sweden as refugees, this distance starts to decrease. As has been noticeable in the situation in Malmö this can lead to a growing resistance towards the refugees. Suddenly, the influence of other cultures is not something positive but something that is seen as a threat to the Swedish culture. Importing good food is welcomed, but receiving people from war zones is considered more problematic. But the reduced distance has evidently also had an effect on the number of people who are concerned and emotionally invested in the refugees’ situation. Several of the volunteers also talk about how the Swedish society benefits from the arrival of refugees. Some even express how meeting refugees can teach them something and give them new perspectives. For example, Elin (October 7, 2015) describes how meeting with people who are in a lesser situation than you can be a “wake-up call” and a realization of “having a good life”. This also becomes a type of orientalism as Elin describes the fact that volunteers identify themselves by opposing their own lives with the refugees’. In this way, the arrival of refugees to Sweden contributes to the image of the country as a part of the Western world and volunteers as the “good people” who help the “sufferers” and can benefit from the “Other”. For the volunteers, paying attention to their wake-up call and having close contact with the refugees is presented as something desirable. Being a volunteer therefore seems to require a certain characteristic, as this is not the truth for everyone. People who choose not to volunteer instead seem to shy away from what is happening to the refugees. Elin (October 7, 2015) explains that she “gets why people don’t want [to get the wake-up call], we want to continue living in our own [bubble], walk around in our own [world], our own lives, [because] it’s comfortable”. Elin describes that for many, taking the step to help the refugees is considered being tough, uncomfortable and perhaps even scary, as it forces someone who is living a privileged life to see that the world is unfair and that oneself is in a fortunate position.

Bob Pease (2010, p. xi) argues that members of privileged groups have a choice to make between holding on to their privileges or challenging them. Here, volunteers position themselves as persons who are willing to accept the challenge. They take a step out of their own lives and do something for the benefit of someone else. But becoming aware of one's privileges does not necessarily mean that one is ready to let go of them entirely. Elin (October 7, 2015) describes some of those who take part in activism as belonging to a "conscious middle class". They are politically aware and engage in various issues of injustice but are also living privileged lives. This is a social position that the volunteers interviewed strive to distance themselves from. In the next section I will, inspired by Beverly Skeggs' (1999) study on how the idea of respectability influences notions of social classes, investigate how the volunteers "articulate class" (Skeggs, 1999, p. 121, my translation from Swedish) and position themselves in relation to class.

### **6.7 The working class heroes**

In Beverly Skeggs' (1999) research, interviews with a group of women show how these dis-identify with the working class by expressing negative characteristics that to them signify individuals from this group, for example being "poor" and "vulgar", and making sure to show that they do not possess these in the way they dress, act and so on (Skeggs, 1999, p. 121). In contrast, for the volunteers quoted in this thesis, the working class seems to be a desirable position to inhabit. I would like to point out that I do not claim that the volunteers *are* part of the working class. Instead I am using the term as a metaphor for how they portray themselves. The volunteers take part in the aid work on their own will and are not getting any economic compensation. Many of them also have another job or studies that provide an income. However, there are similarities between how the working class is described and the way the volunteers we interviewed identify themselves. According to Marxist theory, members of the working class are positioned in the centre of a society's production of goods and services (The working class, n.d.). However, they do not own the product of their own labour. Even if they are paid, the work they perform is often physically demanding and sometimes even dangerous. Below I will show how the volunteers contrast their own physical work with those who for example donate money. By doing so, they position themselves as the most important actors in the refugee reception.

As “citizens of the world” and “compassionate volunteers”, the interviewees express a dis-identification with what they view as a privileged middle class. This middle class can refer to both those who are not willing to engage “as much as others”, and to non-volunteers. The interviewees are dissimulating, that is trying to hide signs of their own belonging to this group, by emphasizing their sacrifices of what they consider to be privileges (Skeggs, 1999, p. 119). Elin (October 7, 2015) mentions that she does not own a TV, and jokes about how this gives her “activist points”. This is also evident in the way some of the interviewees talk about those who “only” donate money instead of helping out on-site. This is described as lazy, and as a way to “buy oneself free of guilt” (Maja, October 1, 2015). As Peter (October 9, 2015) says, persons who are not willing to volunteer in the physical aid work tend to give a sum of money and then feel like they can wait a couple of years until next time they donate. Amir (October 16, 2015) states that making a difference is “not about dialing a number and donating 50 [Swedish] crowns”. This seem to imply that there are those who donate money and feel good about it, but being a “real” aid worker requires hard work, sweat and tears. As Ingrid (October 20, 2015) puts it:

I give [the refugees] my time, my engagement and my heart! I might pat someone on the cheek. Give a tired person a hug. Get a smile from a child. That’s worth so much more than sending a couple of hundreds.

Actively helping out versus donating money seems to constitute what is “making an effort” and what is not. An important aspect also seems to be to actively make a difference, for an individual or on a greater scale. This difference is made not with money but with human contact and compassion. As Jasna (October 6, 2015) says: “Making people [feel welcomed] and part of something does not cost a lot, it’s not hard to do”. These quotes make it clear that there is a hierarchy between those who “just donate money”, to “buy themselves out of it” (Maja, October 1, 2015), and those who volunteer on location. The interviewees state that they feel good about belonging to the group that takes action and does physical work.

Expressing tiredness and loss of income and social life becomes a way for them to show how demanding it is to engage in the aid work, and that they are willing to do it. Volunteering is therefore a bodily experience, and the volunteers use their bodies both in the practical aid work and as a way to position themselves against the individuals who are not there. As Sara Ahmed states, how individuals orient in certain places has to do with “aligning body and space” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). By being present at Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt, by



moving around, by using their bodies and performing activities, the volunteers are able to take charge of these spaces. Arranging the aid work has given them the power of defining what take place, and the possibility to define themselves. By contrasting their own working bodies with those (i.e. Malmö City Counsel, the Swedish government and non-volunteers) who remained passive, they are also able to position themselves against these groups. With a focus on bodily labour, exhaustion and work that makes a “real difference”, the volunteers can portray themselves as the working class heroes of Sweden’s refugee reception. They are the ones who do the “dirty work” when for example the Swedish government, in the interviewees’ opinion, have failed to do what is required of them. The volunteers sees themselves as those who really care about the refugees and see them as human beings, as opposed to statistics or threats to the Swedish society. They are producing the aid work, and are doing it without any economic compensation. Here, the volunteers even more position themselves as the refugees’ allies and fellow human beings. They also identify as an important resistance towards xenophobia and refugee opponents, as well as a contrast to the “lazy” general public.

The volunteers’ work has evidently been necessary, and it has made a difference for many refugees. However, the distancing from a non-volunteering middle class becomes problematic when put in the context of how the volunteers talk about their own lives. What follows is therefore a problematization of how the volunteers have positioned themselves in relation to the rest of the Swedish society, with a focus on their own belonging to this society and their everyday lives that always give them the possibility to stay at home.

### **6.8 The volunteers’ everyday lives**

Laurent Berlant (2004, p. 6) asks how a scene of compassion can be used to organize a public response. An example the interviewees mention is the published image of three year-old Alan who drowned during his family’s journey over the Mediterranean Sea (GP/TT, 2015, September 3). This is described by several as an eye opener to how difficult the situation is for the refugees, and became a motivation for helping out. As mentioned earlier, the volunteers’ compassion are motivated by media reports of the crisis in Syria and the refugees’ difficult journey, or as a reaction to the political state in Sweden as well as the rest of Europe. But scenes of compassion are sometimes also created by voluntary organizations like Refugees Welcome. In this context, stories about refugees are not the only thing that is being

used. We could also notice instances when the administrators at Refugees Welcome's Facebook group hinted at their members' privileged everyday lives as a reason for them to volunteer. In one post, one of the administrators asks if there is anyone who has not parked the car and started their cosy Friday night at home and is available to come to the Central Station instead (Refugees Welcome, 2015, October 16). Another post encouraging members to sign up for volunteering reads:

Have you been forced to cancel this weekend's walk in the forest due to bad weather? Do not fear! As a guide at Malmö Central Station you can gain a lot of steps, just ask [name of another volunteer]'s pedometer ;)" (Refugees Welcome, 2015, October 17, my translation from Swedish)

On another occasion, an unusually large number of refugees had arrived to Malmö during the night, and a lot more were expected to come during the early morning. The message asks: "Have you woken up ridiculously early even if it's Sunday and are now laying in bed checking your phone?" (Refugees Welcome, 2015, October 18, my translation from Swedish).

All of these posts imply that the group's members have a choice to make. Either, they spend their time doing things that are a part of their own lives and could be considered privileges of being Swedish citizens, acts that have previously been named "unimportant". Or, they can choose to do something that is considered important, by helping the refugees. According to several of the interviewees, helping out also includes a sense of bad conscience. As Jasna (October 6, 2015) says, there is always someone who does more than you, or a sense that what you do is not enough, resulting in guilt and the feeling that you should volunteer more. This is an aspect that becomes visible in the interviews. Refraining from this type of unimportant activities in one's everyday life seems to mean that one also becomes a "better" volunteer. When asked about if there are certain characteristics needed for taking action in causes like this, the interviewed volunteers' individual answers forms a very uniform description of the ideal aid worker as a person that does something outside of their comfort zone and changes something in their everyday life. As Hamid (October 1, 2015) puts it, when volunteering or taking part in activist activities it is necessary to see outside of one's own personal sphere. This creates a social construction of "the volunteer" and also puts

expectations on those who volunteer and engage in the refugees' situation to have these qualities (Hacking, 1999, p. 11).

One's own effort is therefore always put in contrast to those who fit into this archetype. Jasna (October 6, 2015) thinks she does "very little" compared to others she meets, as they take time off from their jobs to be able to help out as much as possible. Hamid claims that: "There are people you could interview that are much better and more engaged than I will ever be" (October 1, 2015). It is clear that Jasna and Hamid value their own work lesser than those who have the possibility to engage more often, those who step out of their everyday lives and comfort zones. The sacrifice of privileges such as job, money and spare time gives an individual higher status as a volunteer, which also creates a hierarchy within the volunteer community.

The pressure of "being there" is also experienced as physically and mentally draining. In our interview with Nadja (September 11, 2015), she immediately pointed out that her own powers were declining because of not getting enough sleep. Lack of sleep is a recurring theme in the interviews, where volunteers talk about how their engagement requires a lot of energy. Staying home from work is also something the volunteers mention. Even if it is voluntary, not getting an income is a major concern for some of the interviewees. At the same time, several of the volunteers express a sense of not being able to leave the aid work. Jasna (October 6, 2015) describes how volunteering has become a kind of addiction:

I can't say I'm enjoying this. I've been so tired and I haven't met my friends for a long time... But then I meet these [refugee] children, and I think: "If one has been here once, how can one not come back again?" It's like some crazy addiction.

Refugees Welcome's references to the members' privileges in their posts on Facebook might result in an increasing engagement. However, the aim is reached by creating conflicting emotions among those who read the posts. Suggesting that the members have a choice to make, where spending time in bed checking their phones is presented as the wrong one, might create compassion for the refugee's situation but also mean an increased level of guilt.

The volunteers' complicated relationship to their everyday lives also comes across in the interviews. Even if some describe themselves as "citizens of the world", their Swedish

citizenships plays a major role in their lives, and especially in their role as volunteers. The citizenship gives them the power of controlling their own situation. They always have a choice and an opportunity to “escape” the situation. The engagement takes place at Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt, but the everyday life outside of these spaces is often referred to by the interviewees. This is mostly done by mentioning what has to be sacrificed in order to volunteer. For example, Alice (October 1, 2015) says that “you don’t have to give up a lot [to be a volunteer]. The things you refrain from tend to be quite unimportant, like watching Netflix on a day off.” When Alice decides to volunteer instead of staying home to watch a TV-series, she refrains from a part of her everyday life. Watching Netflix is unimportant when put in context of the refugees’ situation, but is also something Alice could easily have decided to do instead.

Ingrid talks about living alone in a three room-apartment but not feeling comfortable enough to accommodate one or several refugees there. Letting someone into her own home seems to be a big step, and not something that she is ready for at the moment. This makes her feel ambivalent. Even if she feels it would be the “right thing” to do, she describes how she is “not there yet”. “First of all, I only have one bathroom”, Ingrid (October 20, 2015) says. She admits that it is a first world problem, especially compared to the refugee’s situation. Ingrid is aware that having somewhere to live, and a bathroom, is a privilege. She knows how desperate the situation is, and the thought of herself living alone in an apartment with “too much space” gives her a guilty conscience. But, she has an expectation of how her life should be. Having “only one bathroom” is presented as a problem. In contrast, the imagination of herself being a refugee includes doubts about not being able to attend to her hygiene at all and having to relieve herself outside (Ingrid, October 20, 2015).

People’s identification with sufferers is sometimes created from a fear of the same thing happening to them (Berlant, 2004, p. 16). What would happen if Ingrid would invite one or several refugees to live with her in her apartment? She would have to let go of some of her privileges, for example that of having a bathroom all to herself. She is not in danger of having to flee for her life, but the thought of losing a certain kind of living standard is also presented as uncomfortable and a possible threat. The comfort of having a bathroom described by Ingrid is a physical one, having to do with “the relationship between one’s body and its immediate physical environment” (Shove, 2003, p. 24). This way, as Elizabeth Shove (2003, p. 24) puts it, comfort has to do with “things, conditions and circumstances”. Ingrid expresses that having

a bathroom of her own is important to her and a sign of the conditions she lives in. In the circumstances of her engagement in the refugees' situation, she knows that this is a luxury element to her everyday life. However, the feeling of having an apartment with a bathroom also has significance as it proves something to come home to. She is not only a volunteer. She is also an individual with her own private life. Ingrid's feelings about her bathroom signal that this is important to her. She needs the private space at home in order to have the energy to help out at Malmö Central Station.

In Beverly Skegg's (1999, p. 144) words, each place is a marker for something specific. For the volunteers, Malmö Central Station and Kontrapunkt stands for their engagement in the refugees' situation and their identities as citizens of the world. In contrast, Ingrid's quote implies that her home is an important place for creating a notion of her Self (Skeggs, 1999, p. 144). Here, Ingrid positions herself as a part of the Swedish society, where she feels that having a private bathroom is a common comfort and something she needs in order to cope with her engagement. But what does having a bathroom symbolizes? When Ingrid imagines how the refugees have not been able to use a toilet, her feelings toward her own bathroom create a strong contrast. Ingrid is a Swede and the individuals she helps are refugees. Having an apartment in Sweden means that one is able to keep clean and attend one's hygiene. If one is a refugee, these are comforts that cannot be taken for granted. What is an important and "natural" part of Ingrid's everyday life creates an opposing image between her and the refugees she helps. Ingrid and the other volunteers are able to go home and relax, take a shower and come back with new energy. The refugees are dependent on the volunteers and places like Kontrapunkt in order to get somewhere to sleep, eat and use the bathroom. Here, the contrast between being clean and being dirty also becomes an image of the orientalism described earlier, with the idea of the "orientals" being more primitive (Pease, 2010, p. 45). Elizabeth Shove (2003, p. 94) suggests that "bathing is usefully understood as an expression and realization of symbolic and structural concerns regarding the positioning of self in society". Mary Douglas (1984, p. 36) has written that where something can be considered to be dirt, there is a system. Making something clean again "involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (Douglas, 1984, p. 36). One might say that Ingrid creates her own identity as a non-refugee by being able to get rid of dirt, to take a shower or use her bathroom in private. This can be seen as an image of the refugee reception, where the refugees is in a constant subordinate position and in need of help. Sweden is a country where the citizens expect a certain living standard. If Ingrid would let refugees stay in her apartment and use her

bathroom, she might experience a sense of decrease of this standard. Here it become clear that there is a sense of difference between Sweden and the refugees' home countries, despite the volunteers' ideas about living in a global world where everyone are fellow human beings. And even if the volunteers express a disagreement, for example with Swedish refugee politics, as Swedish citizens they have all "conform[ed] to an ideal order of society" (Shove, 2003, p. 82) in one way or another. This means that leaving parts of their everyday life in order to volunteer is not as easy as it might sound. The volunteers can be allies to the refugees in heart and mind and in the spaces where the help aid takes place. However, they are not in the same situation as the refugees. And even if it would cause them feelings of guilt, they are also always able to choose not to take part in the aid work. In this situation, the fact that the volunteers are a part of the Swedish society gives them privileges. The volunteers' decision to be there has an immediate effect for the refugees. Their choice between volunteering and staying at home on a Friday evening puts them in a powerful position. Frida (October 16, 2015), who volunteers at Kontrapunkt, describes how vulnerable the refugees would be without the volunteers:

[The refugees] would be stuck at the Central Station and be hungry and tired... And I'm thinking that [refugees] would disappear, try to find something on their own and be exploited. [Other people than volunteers] would maybe want money [from the refugees] to drive them or letting them stay in their homes.

The refugees' safety is dependent on the volunteers' engagement. If all the volunteers would suddenly choose to stay at home to "watch Netflix" they would also put the refugees in an even more vulnerable and dangerous situation. Because of their double identity as refugee allies and privileged Swedish citizens they are also in a powerful position. This way, the volunteers interviewed in this thesis fits into Elizabeth Holzer's (2015) concept of "compassionate authoritarianism". Their compassion frames them as persons that work to relieve the refugees' suffering. At the same time, they become authorities as they have the power to determine how the aid work is organized, who is getting helped and in what way. The refugees on the other hand have little possibilities to affect their own situation once they arrive to Malmö. They rely on the volunteers to help, and in a larger context on the decisions from the Swedish government.

The final section of this analysis explores various ways in which the volunteers are in a powerful position in relation to the refugees. This is for example the ways refugees are described as well as differences in abilities to orient the spaces where the aid work takes place.

### **6.9 The compassionate authorities**

One of the volunteers interviewed, Amir (October 16, 2015), thinks today's society has a

twisted idea about what a human being is, we concentrate more on religious affiliation and social class than actually seeing each other for what we really are, biologically, heart, lungs, eyes, mouth.

Here he expresses a biological idea about what human beings are: bodies that are equipped with the same parts and functions in the same way. A statement that matches the feeling of being a citizen of the world. Amir (October 16, 2015) continues by stating that “showing that these people are human beings” is important in the struggle against xenophobia, as he thinks dehumanization of the refugees seems to have become normalized. However, as Amir also points out, it needs to be considered that the world we live in has developed around ideas that divide human beings into races, religious and cultural groups and social classes. In this view bodies are identified because of how they differentiate from one another. The situation that is the focus of this thesis is an example of how some bodies are identified as Others, an identity that have consequences for how they are able to orient (Ahmed, 2006, p. 112). As previously described refugees have often been harassed and met by closed borders on their journey towards Sweden, making their situation even more dangerous and vulnerable. But this powerlessness to orient continued as they arrived to Malmö. There, they became dependent on the good will of volunteers to be able to get information and be able to continue their journey. This unequal relationship is also evident in the way volunteers describe the refugees. Here, it most often becomes clear that the refugees are in a position where they are unable to effect their own situation. Consequently, the volunteers describe themselves as those who are able to help and make a difference for the refugees. The image of the refugees one gets when reading the interviews are that of people waiting to get helped and being dependent on the actions of volunteers, as described here in a quote from Jasna (October 6, 2015):

There were people sleeping on the floor, and they had been there for a long time. Tiny babies... [she shows with her hands how small they were]... I think that was the toughest, because as soon as [I] approached them and asked something the whole family immediately got attached to you. My task was to follow the children to the bathroom, change their socks and give them a banana. /.../ The mothers were exhausted. Everyone was swollen, all the babies had swollen feet and... I think it's liquid, they haven't moved in the correct manner and perhaps haven't eaten right.... They came barefoot with their feet soaking wet.

This is the reality the volunteers have met, but it also portrays the refugees as victims. At the same time it illustrates the relationship between volunteers and refugees, where refugees are in need of help and volunteers are those who can help. As Lauren Berlant points out, compassion always imply a “social relation between spectators and sufferers” (2004, p. 1). The fact that volunteers are non-sufferers in this situation puts them in a powerful position when compared to those their compassion is aimed at: the refugees (Berlant, 2004, p. 20) As Elizabeth Holzer (2015, p. 5) writes in her study on aid work in a refugee camp in Ghana it is not uncommon that aid workers are unaware of being in a situation where they besides being a helper also gain, and use, power. During our research there were several occasions when this was noticeable. For example, the volunteers are contributing to the process of determining who should be helped. The very first interview for the research project was recorded outside Malmö Central Station, where my colleague had seen how a man was denied food and told to go away. She approached the male volunteer, who did not state his name, working at the food stand to ask him why this had happened. It turned out that the man who was begging for food was a EU-migrant and therefore not included in the group of refugees the help were aimed at. According to the volunteer, the man had been there several times already and gotten food, and now he was not allowed any more. As the volunteer explained, giving food to EU-migrants was problematic since “those who donate want to see that the refugees get it” (Anonymous, September 11, 2015). Giving food to a EU-migrant is in itself not a problem, as they were also one of Malmö's most vulnerable groups at the time. The problem arise when donators expect that the money, food or clothes they give away ends up helping those who are refugees, those who arrived in Malmö on that day or a few days before. This leads to two very exposed groups being pitted against each other, seemingly with the purpose of pleasing the Swedes who help out. As it was clear to my colleague that the EU-migrant was also in need of something to eat, she questioned this.



Interviewer: But if he also has bad living conditions, isn't he also a kind of refugee?

Volunteer: If he is, then I'm also a refugee. He lives in Sweden

(Anonymous, September 11, 2015).

In this situation, "living in Sweden" becomes a sign that the man is not in need of help. Suddenly, EU-migrants who are seen begging daily at the streets of Malmö are considered somewhat privileged as they are already in the country. This also comes through in Ingrid's description of working in the wardrobe and how EU-migrants sometimes come there for free clothes:

Many are already living in Malmö. The beggars go there to [look for clothes]. "Oh madame, madame! Adidas, Adidas" [She pulls her own sweater and disguises her voice, as to make an impersonation of a "beggar"] Hello, these are clothes for those who are freezing, we're not selling brands. I think that's taking advantage of the situation (Ingrid, October 20, 2015).

Here, Ingrid implies that EU-migrants come to the wardrobe to get "nice clothes" for free, not because they actually need them. She feels like it is a way of taking advantage of the situation, meaning that the clothes are not meant for them. It is clear that she makes a difference between refugees and EU-migrants. Ingrid feels pity for the refugees, but the way she talks about and mimic EU-migrants, "beggars" as she calls them", can be considered degrading and xenophobic. She gets sad about the refugees, but angry about the EU-migrants. As she says, she does not think the wardrobe is organized in the best way possible and needs to be more controlled. She also poses the question if the clothes should really be given away for free. Since she does not agree with the image of refugees as poor luxury seekers, she thinks they could probably pay a symbolic amount of ten Swedish crowns (Ingrid, October 20, 2015).

This way, volunteers are able to affect which group are considered the most vulnerable, and who are in most need of help. Their privileged position also becomes visible by the fact that the volunteers always have the opportunity to *not be there*, to not help out. The choice between helping out or staying at home is always present. They all talk about what they have had to sacrifice to be there; money, working hours, health, sleep... The ones who sacrifice the most are also seen as "better volunteers", and volunteers are constantly battling with the

feeling of wanting to help out more but not having the energy. *Being there* is an aspect that divides the volunteers from the rest of society, but also produces a hierarchy between the volunteers and the refugees. As they are able to move between their homes and the aid work, the ones who choose to spend the most time volunteering are given a higher status. At the same time, the choice between being there and staying at home also showcase the volunteers' powerful position in relation to the refugees. The volunteers are able to orient themselves in and out of both spaces while the refugees are "stuck", unable to move freely. If they want to travel further in Sweden, they are dependent on the volunteers' helping hands. Here it becomes clear that the volunteers' compassion is felt on behalf of another, the refugees, who suffer and are in need (Berlant, 2004, p. 20). Compared to the previous discussion regarding how the volunteers' compassion seemed to be a sign of suffering together with the refugees, this position unveils the unequal social relations inherent in compassion.

The unequal relationship between volunteers and refugees also illustrate injustices in the world in a larger context. The refugee reception in Malmö in the fall of 2015 is a situation where Sweden's position as country in the Western world becomes visible. In the global hierarchy, Sweden is part of the small group of privileged nations that dominate over the refugees' home countries (Pease, 2010, p. 39). This position, together with the Eurocentrism that claims the Western world's superiority, results in a relationship where the latter nations are dependent on aid from the former (Pease, 2010, p. 39, 41). As Clara Luthman (2014, abstract) concludes in her Bachelor thesis, the portrayal of volunteers in marketing and information material "bear[s] traces of a postcolonial structure in which the West possess power over the Third world". My study shows that this finding is also applicable in "real life", where the relationship between Swedish volunteers and refugees can be seen as a representation of the inequality between nations and people in different parts of the world. The volunteers' compassionate acts emphasize that they are non-sufferers and not in the same situation as the refugees (Berlant, 2004, p. 1). As compassionate authorities (Holzer, 2015), they are in a privileged position and the dominant part in the unequal relationship between themselves and the refugees. At the same time, by showing compassion the volunteers want to take responsibility for a situation in which Sweden is a place where refugees are forced to come in search of help. And, as was pointed out by Kim (September 11, 2015) on our first day of research at Malmö Central Station: if the volunteers had not been there, who would have helped the refugees?

## 7 Conclusion and applicability

### 7.1 Conclusion

Analysis of the collected data through a theoretical framework of emotions, globalization, orientalism and queer phenomenology shows that volunteers engaged in the refugee reception in Malmö acquire two conflicting identity positions. On one hand, the volunteers see their compassionate acts as a way to take responsibility for fellow human beings who suffer and are in need of help. A responsibility that in part is created by guilt for the Western world's colonialism that has created a globalized but unequal world. By taking on the guilt and responsibility that they actually think the Swedish government and Malmö City Council should have on its shoulder, the volunteers position themselves as allies to the refugees. They also see their work as a contribution towards the struggle against xenophobia and for a more equal world. This position also includes identifying with the refugees on an emotional level, as the volunteers imagine how they would experience the same situation. By doing so, the volunteer's compassion can be seen as an expression of how they suffer together with the refugees.

A distancing from a general public of non-volunteers also include a class perspective, where the volunteers dis-identify with what they consider being a privileged middle class. They do so by emphasizing their own physical work that takes a lot of energy and have a negative effect on their bodies, for example in the form of lack of sleep. Because of this, they can be considered the working class of the refugee reception. This class position and the way they use their bodies to orient and create the aid work also contribute to the volunteers' identity as being the only ones who takes responsibility and are on the refugees' "side". However, my study shows that volunteers are positioned "in the middle", between the refugees and the rest of the Swedish society. They identify as compassionate citizens of the world, but as Swedish citizens they are also a part of the Western world, a fact that gives them privileges in relation to the refugees. As references to their everyday lives and ambiguous feelings about giving up certain privileges show, the volunteers always have the ability to choose between volunteering and staying at home. Because of this, they also gain a powerful position in the specific situation. This power is present in the way the volunteers describe the refugees as victims and emphasize their own roles as helpers. It also shows in how the volunteers are able

to organize the aid work, and therefore also effect who gets help and how. Who gets help is determined by who is identified as a “real refugee”, excluding other vulnerable groups in society, for example EU-migrants. Some volunteers also question how much help the refugees should get, and if it should be totally free of charge. This illustrates that being a volunteer is a position that includes a mix of compassionate acts and the power to affect in what way the refugees should be helped, a decision the refugees do not have an influence in. At the same time, the lack of engagement from other forces in the Swedish society makes the refugees dependent on the aid from volunteers. To have the choice between engaging and staying at home also means having power, which makes the volunteers compassionate authorities in relation to the refugees. The volunteers’ compassionate acts are, in the words of Lauren Berlant (2004, p. 20), felt on behalf of the refugees’ suffering, and should not be seen as a sign of them being in a similar situation or emotional state. Here, the unequal relationship between sufferers and non-sufferers inherent in compassion becomes visible.

## **7.2 Applicability**

**7.2.1** This thesis contributes to the documentation of the aid work that took place around the refugee reception in Malmö during the fall of 2015. Since the research was part of a larger project initiated by the Regional Museum in Kristianstad, the outcome of my study is beneficial for presenting the assembled documentation in a museum setting. According to Richard Sandell (2002) many museums view the process of collecting and displaying as the final outcome of their project, not as a function to create social value. Displaying objects seems to be more important than the communication of ideas (Sandell, 2002, p. 214). As refugee-related subjects often focus on the refugees, the “others”, it becomes increasingly important to find new ways to understand migration history (Goodnow, 2008, p. 31). In what many of our interviewees described as a Swedish society where xenophobia is growing, refugees are also often talked about and portrayed as outsiders, a group of people who are “deviant” and therefore bad for society (Becker, 1997). The research project that my study is based on aimed at turning this perspective to instead investigate “us”, the helpers. As a part of that, the outcome of my thesis offers a deepened understanding of how volunteers identify themselves and understand their own work. Further, it illustrates how volunteers’ compassion highlights inequalities between them and the refugees and, on a larger scale, postcolonial structures between the Western world and the Middle East.

Understanding the data collected in a larger cultural and theoretical context helps the museum present their documentation in new ways and to be a socially engaged and responsible museum that contributes to combat social and cultural inequalities (Sandell, 2002, p. xwii).

**7.2.2** My study describes a situation that mobilized an unusually large number of volunteers. The outcome of my thesis is therefore beneficial for volunteers working with refugees, or for individuals interested in engaging, as it presents experiences of aid work and raises awareness of the “in between”-position described. It provides insights on how the aid work is organized and on what premises.

Samantha A. Montgomery and Abigail J. Stewart's (2012) study on how persons with heterosexual privilege take part in lesbian and gay rights activism show that privilege awareness has importance for so called allies' engagement in different kinds of activism. The research indicates that an increasing awareness about one's own privileged position also leads to an increasing willingness to help out. The results presented in my thesis can lead to an increased level of privilege awareness among volunteers, a good quality to have when working with refugees. Understanding systems of privilege is important in understanding larger systems of oppression. Being aware of one's own privileged position is therefore a first step towards diminishing inequality (Sue, 2010, p. 37ff). Consequently, this thesis' findings can, in the long run, be beneficial for developing a more efficient refugee reception.

**7.2.3** The findings are also helpful for organizations recruiting and communicating with volunteers as it gives them information about how volunteers motivate, identify themselves and relate to the work as well as to their everyday lives. For example, the results of this thesis can help organizations such as Refugees Welcome develop their communication with volunteers. As Mickey Kaus (Berlant, 2004, p. 24) claims, one of compassion's flaws is that it “appeals to essentially charitable impulses' and thus can fall victim to market forces”. The way Refugees Welcome have created compassion by referring to members' privileged everyday lives as a strategy to recruit should therefore be further problematized, in order to secure the volunteers' wellbeing and future motivation to help out. As feelings of having a great responsibility already surface, my suggestion is that references to people's privileges in a recruitment setting should be avoided in order to limit the amount of guilt among volunteers.

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## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Said's explanation of orientalism has been criticized for simplifying the concept, including historical and geographical errors, as well as for itself being based on the idea of an essential difference between the West and the Orient (Sayyid, 2003, p. 35). According to Bobby S. Sayyid (2003, p. 34), Said also cannot account for how orientalism continues to function outside of the historical power structures examined in his book.

The term *Occidentalism* has been established as a counterpart to orientalism and refers to negative and stereotypical views and representations of the Western world (see for example Buruma & Margalit, 2004; Fazlhashemi, 2005). When using Said's concept one should be aware of the criticism and counterparts aimed towards it. However, his work adds to my analysis of the volunteers' conflicting positions. Because of the purpose and limited space of this thesis I have therefore chosen not to further engage with this critique.