

A Different Sunday



This was not a Sunday I was looking forward to. Instead of my usual and much needed alone time, I had to attend what I expected to be a rather boring event as part of my work. This meant getting up early, dressing professionally, taking the bus to a far-away neighborhood that I hardly knew and mentally preparing to do some public speaking and shake hands with strangers. Not my cup of tea, especially when it came in the place of my favorite lazy Sunday cup of coffee in bed.

I do like buses, though, with the stillness of time they offer as they drive you to your destination. On my way back from the event, I noticed some old derelict houses and I remembered stories about this neighborhood, how refugees settled there and started a new life.

A little further on, I saw from afar the chimney of the old gas factory, now a cultural center. I suddenly remembered the exhibition there, which I wanted to visit, about racist violence in Greece. One more thing on my list, something important struggling to find its place and time. I jumped off the bus without thinking twice. I had to go.

The exhibition room was big, with low lighting. Few people were there. I took a quick look around to orient myself and headed towards the first visual, depicting a violent incident. There is a sketch and some accompanying text, describing what happened. The second visual follows the same pattern. As I walk through the exhibit, it becomes clear that the pattern is not the sketch and the text. The pattern is weapons, blood and sudden merciless attacks, very often committed against victims whose names are foreign.

As I am trying to internalize every detail of the attacks, memorize every victim's name, my heart is filled with anger and my eyes with tears. I consider myself an informed citizen. Why didn't I

know about most of these violent attacks? Why didn't they make the news? Knowing about these incidents is the least we can do. Now that I know, I feel the need to act. I have been looking for a way for a long time now. Nashar, Sahid, Ualid – how can I show my solidarity? How can I help make you less vulnerable?

Two days later, during my Arabic class, held in a forum that provides support to refugee families, I ask my teacher if I can help with the Greek lessons being given to refugees. So, the following Sunday is not a usual one, either. My quiet time gives room to a noisy classroom. Arabic women with headscarves. They tell me that people on the street look down on them because of their scarves. I will help them speak up.

Just three weeks later, the country goes into lockdown because of COVID-19. The classes are postponed. My desire to resume is one of my many reasons I yearn for the pandemic to end.

As I write these lines, I am listening to the news. The verdict on the Golden Dawn trial, the group responsible for many racist attacks in Greece, will be announced any minute now. The streets will be a little safer afterwards, but the struggle against racism is far from over.

Natalia Tsigaridou joined Greenpeace in 1995 as a volunteer and activist, and is currently working as Grassroots and Special Projects Campaigner in Greenpeace Greece. She is interested in social justice issues and loves dogs, sailing and learning languages.