



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Informal volunteering in Greece's discriminatory migrant regime: Practices in inclusivity

Witcher, A.L.

**Publication date**  
2022

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

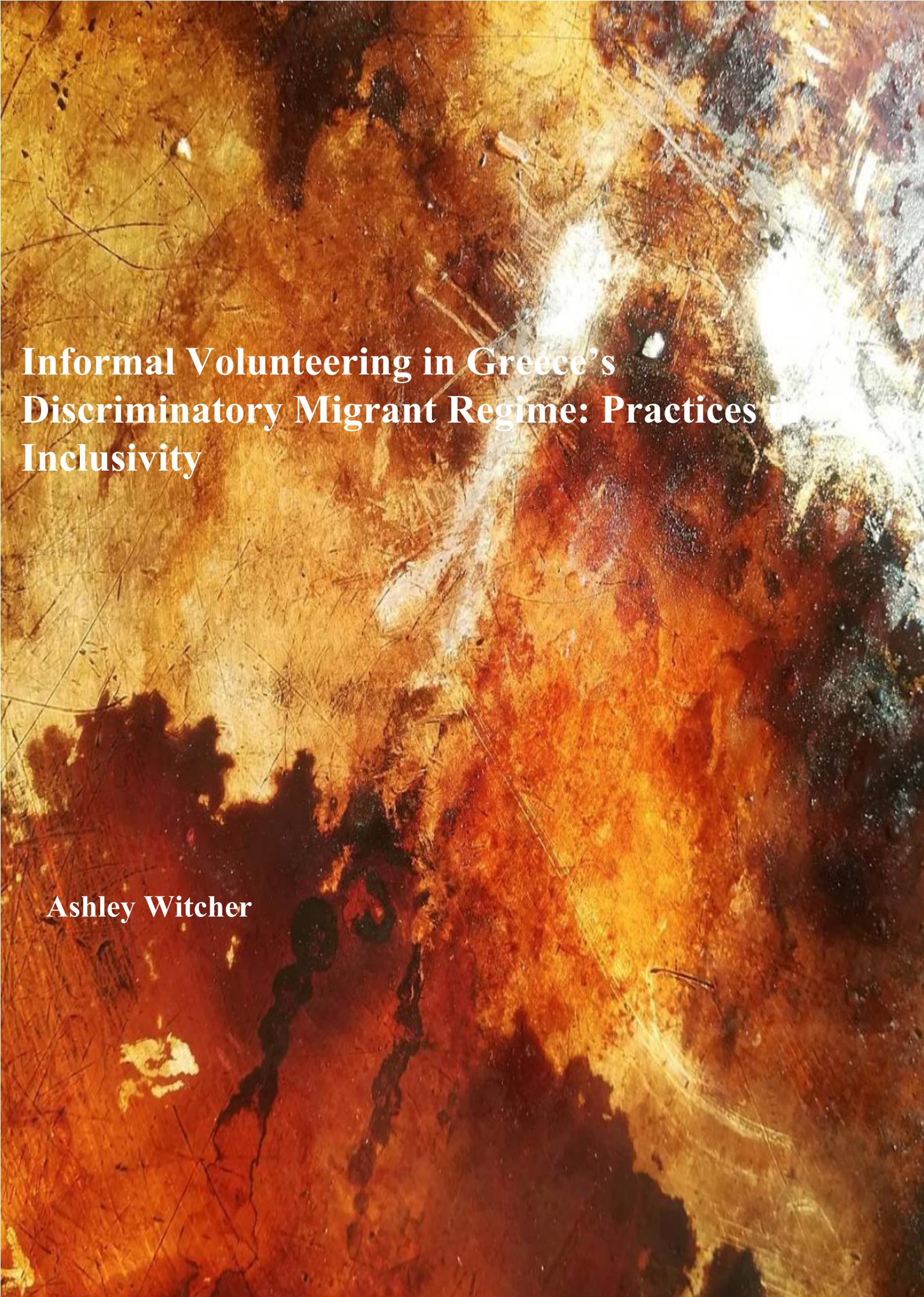
Witcher, A. L. (2022). *Informal volunteering in Greece's discriminatory migrant regime: Practices in inclusivity*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Universitat de Barcelona].

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.



**Informal Volunteering in Greece's  
Discriminatory Migrant Regime: Practices in  
Inclusivity**

**Ashley Witcher**



# Informal Volunteering in Greece's Discriminatory Migrant Regime: Practices in Inclusivity

Ashley Witcher

Informal Volunteering in Greece's Discriminatory Migrant Regime: Practices in  
Inclusivity

**ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT**

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde  
commissie,

in het openbaar te verdedigen

op woensdag 1 juni 2022, te 10.00 uur

door Ashley Laurel Witcher

geboren te Nelson

***Promotiecommissie***

*Promotores:*

dr. B. Kalir  
dr. V. Fumadó Pérez

Universiteit van Amsterdam  
Universitat de Barcelona

*Copromotores:*

dr. R.P.M. Gerrets  
dr. K. Krause

Universiteit van Amsterdam  
Universiteit van Amsterdam

*Overige leden:*

prof. dr. J.C. Navarro  
prof. dr. D. Dalakoglou  
prof. dr. E.M. Moyer  
dr. S. Lan  
dr. J.M.J. Doomernik

Universitat de Barcelona  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
Universiteit van Amsterdam  
Universiteit van Amsterdam  
Universiteit van Amsterdam

Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen

The research for publication of this doctoral thesis received financial assistance  
From the 'Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Trans Global Health Programme', SGA2016-  
1346, under FPA2013-0039.

Dit proefschrift is tot stand gekomen in het kader van het 'International Doctorate in Transdisciplinary Global Health Solutions - Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Trans Global Health Programme', met als doel het behalen van een gezamenlijk doctoraat. Het proefschrift is voorbereid in de Maatschappij- en Gedragswetenschappen van de Universiteit van Amsterdam, in het Institut de Salut Global de Barcelona (ISGlobal) van de Universitat de Barcelona, en het instituut voor tropische geneeskunde in Antwerpen.

This thesis has been written within the framework of the 'International Doctorate in Transdisciplinary Global Health Solutions - Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Trans Global Health Programme' with the purpose of obtaining a joint doctorate degree. The thesis was prepared in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, in the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal) at the University of Barcelona, and the Institute for Tropical Medicine in Antwerp.

Printed by: Ipskamp Printing

This thesis is comprised of five articles (chapters 2-6), that have been accepted or published in different journals. There is an addition of an introduction (chapter 1), conclusion (chapter 7), and epilogue. The articles have been edited and formatted slightly differently as chapters for the purpose of forming a cohesive thesis.

Each chapter is single authored, except for chapters 4 and 5. I co-authored chapter 4 with Dr. Victòria Fumadó of the Barcelona Institute for Global Health. Dr. Fumadó, my supervisor in Barcelona, helped me to conceptualize the data and helped sharpen the final analysis. I co-authored chapter 5 with Laura Schack of Royal Holloway, University London. I met Laura through mutual contacts and realizing that we had both collected substantial data on the topic of criminalization of solidarity, we began to conceptualize our article. We both contributed an equal amount of data, and we wrote the article together.

## **CHAPTER 2**

Greece's Discriminatory Migrant Regime: Volunteers, Informal Street-Level Bureaucrats, and Moral Rationalities

### **PUBLISHED IN**

*Journal of Refugee Studies*

Volume 34, Issue 2, June 2021, Pages 1540–1559

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa083>

## **CHAPTER 3**

Ethical Quandaries Volunteering

### **PUBLISHED IN**

*Forced Migration Review*

Volume 61, June 2019, Pages 41-44

<https://www.fmreview.org/ethics/witcher>

## **CHAPTER 4**

Informal Citizen Volunteering with Border Crossers in Greece: The Informality Double Bind and Intimate Solidarity

### **CO-AUTHORED WITH**

Dr. Victòria Fumadó

**PUBLISHED IN**

*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*

August 2021 (Online)

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1970517>

**CHAPTER 5**

Hostile Hospitality and the Criminalization of Civil Society Actors Aiding Border Crossers in Greece

**CO-AUTHORED WITH**

Laura Schack

Royal Holloway, University of London, United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>

**PUBLISHED IN**

*Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*

Volume 39, Issue 3, September 2020, Pages 477-495

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820958709>

**CHAPTER 6**

The Politics of Aid: Discursive Boundary-Making and the War of Position in Greece's Humanitarian Landscape

**ACCEPTED IN**

*Third World Quarterly*

---

<sup>1</sup> The version of this chapter that was published as a journal article contained the following acknowledgements, which are worth reproducing here, as some are not mentioned in the acknowledgements section: We would like to thank all of our interlocutors who gave up their time to be interviewed during our field research phases. We would also like to thank our supervisors Lizzie Coles-Kemp, Rene Gerrets, Barak Kalir, Kristine Krause, and William Jones for their support, and Hunter Keys and Rüdiger Schack for feedback and editing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	I
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	V
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
“ <b>They treat us like animals</b> ” .....	2
<b>A Note on Terminology</b> .....	8
<b>The Asylum System in Greece</b> .....	9
The Greek Asylum Service (GAS) .....	11
<b>Greece and the Field Sites</b> .....	13
Historical Relation to Refugees .....	13
The Research .....	15
The Field Sites: Lesvos .....	16
The Field Sites: Athens .....	18
<b>Conceptual and Theoretical Background</b> .....	20
Humanitarian Governance .....	22
Civil Society Actors .....	23
Contestations of Agency and Structure .....	24
My Theoretical and Ethnographic Contribution .....	27
<b>Methods</b> .....	29
My Own Subjectivities .....	29
Engaged Volunteering .....	30
The Methodological Approaches and Interlocutors .....	32
<b>The Chapters</b> .....	35
CHAPTER 2: GREECE’S DISCRIMINATORY MIGRANT REGIME: VOLUNTEERS, INFORMAL STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS, AND MORAL RATIONALITIES .....	39
<b>Introduction</b> .....	41
<b>Theoretical Background</b> .....	42
<b>Informal Volunteering in Greece</b> .....	44
<b>Methods</b> .....	47
<b>Part I: Making a Refugee</b> .....	48
<b>Part II: Making Vulnerability</b> .....	53
<b>The Making and Unmaking of Refugees and Vulnerable Subjects</b> .....	57
CHAPTER 3: ETHICAL QUANDARIES IN VOLUNTEERING .....	61
<b>The Humanitarian Landscape</b> .....	63
<b>Gaps in Services</b> .....	64

<b>Responsibility and Relationship Boundaries .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: INFORMAL CITIZEN VOLUNTEERING WITH BORDER CROSSERS IN GREECE: THE INFORMALITY DOUBLE-BIND AND INTIMATE SOLIDARITY .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Informal volunteers and (intimate) solidarity .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Methods.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Informal volunteers and forced intimate solidarity.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Bureaucracy as protection from the informality double-bind.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Institutional neglect as violence <i>and</i> protection .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Informality, intimacy and forced subversiveness .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: HOSTILE HOSPITALITY AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AIDING BORDER CROSSERS IN GREECE.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework: Hostile Hospitality.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Context: Greek Hostile Hospitality and the Criminalization of Civil Society .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>99</b>
Case Study I: Solidarity Initiatives Providing Accommodation Spaces in Pikpa Camp and Athens .....	100
Case Study II: Boat-spotting and SAR on Lesbos .....	104
Cooperation or Criminalization? .....	108
<b>Conclusion and Discussion.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: THE POLITICS OF AID: DISCURSIVE BOUNDARY-MAKING AND THE WAR OF POSITION IN GREECE’S HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>The Humanitarian Arena and Cultural Hegemony.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Research Methods .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>From Moria to Pikpa and Back.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Discursive Practices and the War of Position .....</b>	<b>126</b>
A Bridge to Nowhere.....	126
Boundary Making and Discursive Practices .....	128
<b>Discussion and Conclusion.....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>135</b>

<b>Inclusions and Exclusion .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Ethical Landscapes .....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Border Crossers and Ethical Research.....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Hotspot Geopolitics and Wider Global Implications .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Contributions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>Final Words .....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>EPILOGUE .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>180</b>

## **AKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

After arriving in Athens in 2017, one of my first interviews was with a Spanish volunteer. She recounted that her meetings with asylum seekers in Greece had always reminded her of the poem “Ithaka”:

...Keep Ithaka always in your mind.  
Arriving there is what you're destined for.  
But don't hurry the journey at all.  
Better if it lasts for years,  
so you're old by the time you reach the island,  
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,  
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.  
Without her you wouldn't have set out.  
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.  
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,  
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.  
(by C. P. Cavafy translated by Edmund Keeley)

I thought about this poem many times throughout my fieldwork and analysis. I always attributed it to the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, not thinking that it could also be a metaphor for my own journey to this thesis. I have been lucky to experience this journey

with the support of countless colleagues, friends, mentors, and family members. I want to thank the many people who have helped this thesis come to fruition, and have, in the process, made a deep and meaningful impact on my life.

Above all, I want to thank my wonderful interlocutors, who trusted me with their personal stories and who work tirelessly to create meaningful change in the world. I have promised to keep them anonymous, therefore they shall remain nameless. These are some of the hardest working, inspiring, and dedicated people I have ever met; they work for free and put in long hours because they do what needs to be done. Many of them have become good friends and continue to inspire me. But the true heroes, to whom I dedicate this thesis, are the border crossers themselves. While they were not interviewed, I engaged with them on a daily basis, and was continually inspired by their resilience and grace, in the face of overwhelming misery. Never have I experienced hospitality to such a degree as that offered by the people who had the least (material resources) to give. The central thesis is about the ways in which ordinary citizens (as in, volunteers) have been able to aid border crossers to attain rights and entitlements. But it also articulates the struggles that border crossers face and the violence they are forced to endure. I hope that through these pages I can do justice to some of their experiences and call attention to the deleterious consequences of the asylum and border regimes on the lives of border crossers.

I had a great supervisory team at the UvA, and without them, I would not have gotten to the finish line. I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Rene Gerrets, whose support during and after my master's degree, gave me the confidence to apply for this joint doctorate. Rene co-ran the Medical Anthropology Master's which I completed in 2015, and he was the second reader for my thesis. His dedication to his students is undeniable; not only was he encouraging academically, but he also helped me navigate mountains of paperwork and advised me in many avenues of life. This continued on with the PhD, where he was an active part of my supervisory team at the UvA, along with Dr. Kristine Krause and Dr. Barak Kalir. Kristine has been inspiring in many ways, chief among them, was to remind me that I was doing well. So often criticism can be disheartening, especially when you think you've written excellent material, only to leave a meeting with months of editing and rewrites. Kristine always made sure to emphasize that my work was good, but at the same time, encouraged me to do better. She read and reread my articles with meticulous attention to detail, and always had interesting suggestions I hadn't previously thought about. She was enthusiastic in both her praise and criticism, which was a perfect balance for inspiring hard work and confidence.

Barak was always positive and met me repeatedly for small queries, or sometimes just to chat about Greece or the state of the world. He pushed me to think more critically, and to speak out against the violence of the asylum regime within my work. His continued support has been instrumental in the final months of editing.

I would like to thank my additional supervisor Dr. Victòria Fumadó, at ISGglobal in Barcelona, who has been working selflessly for her patients during this pandemic. Additionally, I'd like to thank my supervisor at ITM, Dr. Koen Peters, who shared insights and stories during humid evenings in Vietnam.

I am indebted to Ana Zamora, who joined a few months of my research in Athens for a rotation of her Medical residency. Although she was technically a research assistant, I feel that she was the one teaching me. She was dedicated to people's well-being in a way I'd never witnessed up close; she was up by 5am, visiting border crossers in different hospitals, offering assistance in any way she could and she often worked late into the night on the legal aid team I speak about so often in this thesis. She gave of herself tirelessly, and she inspired me to be a better person.

My co-author of chapter 5, Laura Shack, was the best writing partner I could asked for. I was given her contact through a mutual friend, and we wrote most of the article without having met in person. Eventually I was able to convince her to join me for an anthropology conference in Canada, where we finally met face to face. She has helped me to become a better, more analytical writer, and more importantly, has become a friend. I would like to give warm thanks to Carola Tize who became a dear friend and confidant. We first met when she showed me around the office one day in my first month at AISSR. I knew within minutes that we would become lifelong friends. Not only has she read each piece of my work at every stage (even when it was so bad I was embarrassed), she trusted me enough to lend me her class at AUC for a semester while she was on maternity leave, and she helped me navigate personal turmoil and life transitions during the pandemic. Likewise, Dina Zbeidy has been a huge help with the content and structure of my papers, as well as a friend to discuss any refugee-related literature. Meelan Thondo has been an incredible source of inspiration and strength, and one of the few colleagues, along with Arsenii Alenichev, who understood the struggles of a joint doctorate. Special thanks to Shahana Siddiqui, who always read my work during the UvA workshops, and had positive comments and constructive criticism. And thank you to Hunter Keys, who has inspired me in many ways along the way and always pushed me to be a better writer. Additional thanks to my editor, Karina Hof, who has been very helpful.

It was with these people, and my supervisors, who really helped me flesh out the ideas presented in this thesis.

Of course, there were many other people who I met in the last four years at the UvA, at conferences, workshops, and classes around the globe, or who have made an impact on me and on this thesis. There are too many to name, but among them are Dr. Stuart Blume, Simone Fattouche, Henny Trippie, Nathan Troussel, Katerina Schmidt, and Lize van Dyke. A few friends came to Greece to get me settled, or to see what I was up to, and they got more than they bargained for. Marlies van Stolk gave me the confident push I needed to get a car so I could drive to the various camps and NGOs (a car with which I later had an accident, but that's another story). I would also like to thank Joanna Wells, who spent the majority of her trip from Canada picking lice of my hair, after I picked it up from Moria camp.

Additionally, I would like to thank two people at the UvA who have been especially important but are often behind the scenes: Muriël Kiesel and Janus Oomen. You've both been very helpful with my (many and frantic) emails regarding administrative confusion and finances.

Last, but not least, I could not have done this without the support (and a little push) from my family. My mother has always been my champion, and instilled confidence in me from a young age, mixed with a sense of duty to bear witness and speak out against injustice. My father has been incredibly supportive, even coming to Lesbos to check in on me. Both have read (or attempted to read) various incarnations of my work, which is no small feat for those outside this academic bubble. And my siblings, Justin, for always being there for me, and visiting many times (although I suspect it was partly the allure of Amsterdam) and Jen, who lent an ear at various times throughout this journey, sharing in my triumphs and pain.

All of the people named and unnamed have helped more than you will know. You have not only gotten me over the finish line, but you've made this journey about so much more than the end result of a PhD. Thank you!

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CfS	Center for Solidarity
CSA	Civil Society Actor
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ECB	European Central Bank
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EKKA	National Center for Social Solidarity
EMN	European Migration Network
ERCI	Emergency Response Centre International
EU	European Union
EURODAC	European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database
FMR	Forced Migration Review
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
GCR	Greek Council for Refugees
GO	Governmental Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organizations
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and others
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGI	Non-Governmental Individual
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SAR	Search and Rescue
SYRIZA-ANEL	Coalition of the Radical Left-Independent Greeks

UAC	Unaccompanied Alien Children
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

## **LIST OF PHOTOS**

Cover picture: Bottom of pot, Pikpa camp, Lesvos. Taken by me, 2018.

Back cover picture: "Tree of Life" at Vatera Beach, Lesvos, taken by Gavriil Papadiotis. CC BY ND 2.0.

Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5: Taken by me in Athens or Lesvos, 2017 and 2018.

Chapter 2: Taken by Knut Bry, Moria camp, 2017.

Chapter 6: Art for #SavePikpa Campaign made by asylum seekers, taken by Liza Comart, 2018.

Chapter 7: Beach of Lesvos, taken by Liza van Dyke, 2017.