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

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



“They treat us like animals”

Heat waves rose off the cement wall as we walked past a long line of people standing, squatting, and sitting on the dusty sidewalk. On the street corner a man with a small cart sold water, potato chips, and thick bread, twisted up and coated with sesame seeds. The lineup snaked past this cart and around the corner in the shape of an L. More than fifty men, women, and children waited to enter the Regional Asylum Office in Athens. Most people were there to register to seek asylum. Others were picking up legal documents or going in for their asylum interview—all necessary steps to entering the asylum system in Greece—in hopes to obtain the coveted refugee status.

I was accompanying Amanda, a legal aid volunteer from Spain, and three unaccompanied minors² from Pakistan whom we were aiding with their asylum applications. Amanda held a laminated makeshift card that explained her role as a legal aid volunteer, allowing her to both skip the queue and enter the asylum office as an accompanying legal aid counselor. Once at the security gate we were approached by Amal, a border crosser³ whom Amanda knew. Amal asked for Amanda’s help to enter the asylum office, as the guard at the gate had refused him entrance. Amanda complied, and together Amanda, Amal, the three youth, and I walked through the gate and subsequent security area.

Once past the X-ray conveyor belt and the metal detector, we were inside. The asylum service was all outdoors; although there was a large building, asylum seekers were generally not permitted to enter it. Instead, they sat outside under an awning or in a large tented area on uncomfortable wooden benches—whether in rain, shine, or like today, overwhelming heat. The wait was long, and I found my way to the small outhouse, which served as the public bathroom. The outhouse had no running water, was covered in feces and empty water bottles, and used toilet paper had shriveled and dried in the heat, sticking to the walls and floor like gum.

“They treat us like animals,” I had been told on a number of occasions. The border

² An unaccompanied alien minor (UAM) is a border crosser under the age of eighteen who is travelling alone or without parents/relatives.

³ I term all migrants “border crossers” to avoid symbolic and epistemic violence of the labels “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” and “economic migrant”, which is elaborated upon later in this section.

crossers relaying this were referring to the European Union, the Greek state, and the structures in place that kept camps such as Moria, on Lesbos island, in a perpetual state of decay. “They” was a catchall pronoun to refer to the variety of actors and institutions that created and implemented policies of exclusion, policies that: filtered border crossers into deserving refugees and undeserving Others, created such severe overcrowding in island camps that minors as young as ten were attempting suicide (BBC News 2018), and kept asylum seekers in limbo for years awaiting decisions to their claims. Holding my breath in this fetid outhouse, I caught a glimpse of what these border crossers meant when referring to being treated as animals.

After roughly two hours of waiting, the unaccompanied minors were called one by one to the “office” for vulnerable asylum seekers. This was a small shipping container known as an isobox, where two Greek Asylum Service (GAS) agents sat. The GAS was responsible for the bureaucratic asylum procedures and their staff made decisions on asylum claims. There was a window the width of a computer screen looking into this office. Amanda helped translate the minors’ asylum requests into Greek, and each minor gave the GAS agent a birth certificate. It took only ten to fifteen minutes per minor to get pre-registered. They would be called in one to three months’ time to return to pick up their trifold (known colloquially as “the white card”), which was a temporary document that contained an asylum interview date, some biographical data, and a passport-size photo. It also served as a valid identification and could prevent one from being imprisoned in a detention center for being “illegal.”

When Amal was finally called to the desk, the GAS agent pointed to his birth certificate and shook her head—at age twenty-four Amal was not a minor, and the doctor’s note he carried did not grant him the qualification necessary to access this asylum office, which was reserved for unaccompanied minors, “vulnerable” asylum seekers, and those from specific countries. Weeks previous, Amal had found help through an informal association of volunteers, which had tens of short- and long-term international informal volunteers working on various projects. These volunteers, among whom included Amanda, connected him to a medical non-governmental organization (NGO) where a doctor assessed his physical health, finding that he had a severe and dangerous chronic illness. The doctor was only able to offer partial support, as medications were expensive and hard to come by.

She wrote up documents as proof of this illness to show asylum personnel, so that he could seek asylum in person as a “vulnerable” case. However, his documents of vulnerability were rejected because although the asylum service prioritizes certain types of vulnerabilities—for example, pregnancy or severe illness—in practice, the operationalization of this priority is increasingly more exclusive due to the large numbers of vulnerable candidates.

Eventually, a large man in green khaki military attire led Amal away from the window. “Skype” he said, gently at first and when Amal didn’t respond, the man got louder—“Skype” he yelled out repeatedly. Amal knew that those who were not considered vulnerable had to call a line set up via Skype in order to seek asylum on mainland Greece. During previous attempts to seek asylum, Amal spent months calling the line during the appointed time for Urdu speakers, yet had never been able to get through to someone, leaving him undocumented while actively trying to file an asylum claim.

Later that evening, Amal was stopped by police in the Omonia neighborhood and asked for documents. He showed them his birth certificate and medical documents, but he did not have the white card, the document he had been so desperately trying to attain over the past months via Skype and that morning at the asylum office. Without the white card, he was considered illegal; he was arrested and brought to the police station. Later he was moved to the large detention center, Petrou Ralli, which has been denounced by multiple human rights groups as inhospitable due to the lack of space, inadequate food, and unhygienic conditions (GCR accessed 2018 (June); GDP 2018). Amanda and other volunteers on the legal aid team worked for the next few weeks trying to have him released from detention. They were ultimately successful some two months after his arrest. From my last contact with people on the ground, I heard that Amal was living in a refugee camp outside of Athens and had eventually been able to file an asylum claim. He is currently awaiting his asylum interview, which will take place in late 2021, roughly four years after his initial arrival in Greece.

This vignette above offers a glimpse into the lived experiences of border crossers seeking asylum in Greece. It exposes the many barriers they experience, the structural violence they face, and the types of interactions they have with the volunteers who aid them and the government bureaucrats who decide their fate. It also introduces an

important element in the landscape of asylum: how informal volunteers aid border crossers in multiple ways. They help them physically access the asylum system, connect with medical personnel, and fight for legal rights. Put simply, the volunteers recognize the border crossers in ways the state does not.

I became interested in the experiences of border crossers in Greece upon reading news headlines about overcrowded camps and the westward movement of border crossers in Europe in 2015. Media outlets talked of unprecedented numbers of refugees and the moral imperative of states to protect them (e.g. Daley 2015; BBC News 2015). Yet rhetoric of the protection of refugees soon turned to one of the protection of European values (Roth 2015). At the same time, another new phenomenon was taking place: the arrival of informal volunteers from around Europe to offer aid to these border crossers in novel ways. These volunteers met with local solidarity groups and lined beaches to help people out of rubber boats; they distributed food and blankets; they organized transportation. And later, when new policies stopped the westward movement of the border crossers, these volunteers, along with local “solidarians”—those who engage in horizontal anti-institutional and informal solidarity—began to offer free medical and legal services, housing, and education, and helped with the manifold issues border crossers faced in Greece.

This thesis articulates the experiences of international informal volunteers. This is a diverse group of people who were largely socialized by local solidarity groups. Their anti-hierarchical, egalitarian and non-discriminatory ethos and actions separated them from regular volunteers, who volunteered with larger or more structured organizations, often came for short amounts of time, and usually were not politically active. In particular, the thesis puts forth new ways of thinking about informal volunteerism with border crossers against the backdrop of a fractured, complex humanitarian landscape. The main research question asks: how does the relationship between informal volunteers and state-sanctioned institutions affect the aid landscape as a whole, and how does it affect the border crossers in their charge?

For scholars researching forced migration, borderscapes, civil society action, and humanitarianism, Greece offers a particularly robust field site. Greece’s history as a country with decades of tension and even outright conflict between civil society and government actors, coupled with severe economic collapse and the influx of hundreds of thousands of border crossers, has created unique spaces of solidarity as well as of corruption, neglect, and hostile politics. There exists a large body of research that explores the multifaceted aspects of solidarity, government and police corruption, and the lived experiences of border crossers in

Greece (e.g. Rozakou 2012; 2016; 2017; Rakopolous 2014; 2015; Serntedakis 2017; Dalakoglou 2013; Papanicolaou and Papageorgiou 2016). This thesis builds on much of this foundational literature, but departs from these relatively Greek-centered explorations to uncover how *international* informal volunteers play a role within the aid landscape in Greece. This is important because international civil society actors represent a large portion of aid delivery and solidarity within the “humanitarian arena”—defined as a competitive and conflicting aid landscape—in Greece (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010). The volunteers’ contributions to, criticisms of, and contradictions within the aid landscape bring to light structural failings of the border, asylum, and humanitarian regimes, and open up opportunity for critical reflection and new theoretical insights.

The main actors and institutions under analysis are international informal volunteers, international and local aid workers, government employees, grassroots organizations, (international) non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and a range of state and supra-state institutions. In the narrative above we saw that many actors intersect; Amal was excluded from applying for asylum due to the problematic Skype system and the exclusionary in-person asylum office. Informal volunteers worked to help him become included into the asylum system by connecting him with a doctor who created proof of vulnerability so as to apply for asylum in person. Yet this was not enough, and the exclusion led to his illegality and ultimate imprisonment. This theme of inclusion and exclusion is the thread that winds its way through all chapters. Specifically, this thesis explores how border crossers are both included and excluded: whether in, or out of, the asylum system; meeting refugee and vulnerability criteria or not; as recipients of certain types of aid; accommodation and hosting by camps, the nation, and the EU. For example, border crossers are included into the polity when they can prove that they have suffered in ways that “the state”—as represented by asylum service personnel, police, and local and federal government actors—accept. Border crossers become asylum seekers first and then legal refugees if their stories of persecution are believed and if they fit the definition of “refugee” as stipulated by the Geneva Convention. But even becoming an *asylum seeker* can be fraught in certain locations, as shown through the opening vignette, because here border crossers must prove vulnerability before being granted access to the asylum office. They otherwise remain undocumented—that is, what state institutions and related legal documentation would call “illegal.”

This theme of inclusion and exclusion also permeates the aid landscape in less obvious ways. For example, informal volunteers use various forms of agentive power to help border crossers navigate categories of deservingness. Yet they are caught between, on one

side, using different forms of capital and their European Union (EU) or Global North citizenship to help border crossers attain certain entitlements and, on the other side, being guests in Greece who are susceptible to criminalization by the authorities. This thesis therefore attends to the ways in which informal volunteers navigate their own experiences of inclusion and exclusion with regards to their own supposed (il)legitimacy to offer aid. During this research, which took place in Athens and on Lesbos island in 2017-2018, informal volunteers were harassed, targeted by police, criminalized, and in some cases arrested and jailed for their volunteer work, solidarity, and activism. Furthermore, as the majority of this volunteering was informal, volunteers faced ethical quandaries that were difficult to navigate. For example, there were thousands of border crossers sleeping on the streets in Athens, including unaccompanied minors. Volunteers were forced to make difficult decisions concerning aiding them personally, which created potential risks to both volunteer and border crosser, or else witnessing the failing system continue to neglect them, which also entailed risks.

This research views civil society volunteerism, humanitarianism, and state bureaucracy as cultures in their own right. It explores the messy interaction between these cultures, and tries to articulate how individual agency responds to bureaucratized structural constraints. Much research has shown how humanitarian action has at times furthered neocolonial inequalities (e.g. Malkki 1996; Fassin 2005; 2011a; 2011b; Ticktin 2011); how solidarity has emerged within Greece as an antidote to structured humanitarian action (Rozakou 2012; 2016; 2017; Rakopolous 2014; 2015); and how various actors have engaged in different and at times contradictory forms of aid (Hilhort and Jansen 2010; Haaland and Wallevik 2019; Martin and Nolte 2019). Recent scholarship has furthermore shown how pro-migrant civil society actors become criminalized (Vosyliūtė and Conte 2019; Carrera et al. 2018; Fekete et al. 2017; Heller and Pezzani 2017). Yet, there has been a dearth of research exploring how the interaction between informal volunteers, border crossers, aid workers at large aid organizations, and government actors has produced ethical quandaries, tensions, and spaces of exclusion. My contribution to this cannon of literature is both theoretical and ethnographic. First, I show how informal volunteers—characterized as offering spontaneous, inclusive aid that resists border policies and state hegemony (Guribye and Mydland 2018; Vandevordt and Verschraegen 2019; Castañeda 2013; Sandri 2018; Schack and Witcher 2020)—who possess little political capital, have been able to aid border crossers to attain rights and entitlements, thereby interfering with the exclusive aspects of state sovereignty. Second, I show that these volunteers can subvert hegemonic forms of humanitarianism to

offer new (and more intimate) ways to engage with border crossers. Third, I expose the ambiguous ethical landscape that plagues informal volunteering and the risks of criminalization that these volunteers face. And finally, I show that although the aid landscape is fractured and competitive, informal volunteers are able to enact real change in the lives of border crossers and to influence structural configurations of the asylum regime. Through detailed accounts of events, I show how volunteers interacted with other stakeholders to produce new forms of humanitarianism and to engage in alternate forms of situated ethics.

The chapters that follow (2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) reflect the shape of journal articles that they were originally written as, and as such, contain different theoretical arguments. Each article is built around its own standalone argument, requiring a narrow focus and its own research question. I therefore take time in this introduction, as chapter 1, to further explicate the theoretical underpinnings of my arguments, the field sites, and contextual background as well the methodological and analytical strategies I employ. Chapter 7 serves as my conclusion to the thesis.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this thesis I employ the term “border crosser” when speaking about migrants. This term encompasses undocumented migrants, would-be asylum seekers (those who are trying to seek asylum but face barriers to accessing the asylum service), asylum seekers, and refugees. It does not include international tourists, businesspeople, or aid workers and volunteers. The reasons for choosing this label are manifold though center on the desire to avoid symbolic and epistemic violence associated with value-laden labels. For example, the border crossers within this research migrate for multiple (sometimes overlapping) reasons, including but not limited to: state persecution, religious persecution by armed groups, state-sponsored conflict, generalized violence, and economic insecurity. A border crosser may not be granted refugee status, but may have fled extreme violence or a slow death through poverty. Calling someone an “economic migrant” or a “refugee” adds a layer of judgment about their⁴ deservingness, and obfuscates the historical, political, and structural factors that have culminated in their decision to migrate. On occasion, I use the term “asylum seeker” to note that the person is in the bureaucratic process of seeking asylum and therefore fully under

⁴ I have chosen to employ the third-person plural form for pronouns and possessive adjectives to use gender-neutral language and therefore avoid symbolic violence often overlooked when using male pronouns for a majority of third-person explanations.

the responsibility of the Greek state. I use the term “refugee” when explaining their historical relation to Greece as well as to explicate the use of the term in practice.

This thesis focuses on international informal volunteers—whom I often refer to simply as “volunteers” for ease of readability. I define these volunteers by three main points: they volunteer for informal organizations, which differ from large organizations (which sometimes employ formal volunteers) through their inclusivity of border crossers into decision-making processes, their aim to be non-hierarchical, and their freedom in implementing projects. Second, the volunteers are subversive to state-sponsored forms of aid due to their aim to include, rather than exclude, all border crossers into the polity; that said, they sometimes do the work of the state, and in this way can inadvertently reproduce the status quo. And third, they conceptualize their involvement as necessary due to the state’s inaction and the inability of large organizations to adequately and ethically aid border crossers in the immediate term. A majority of informal volunteers in this research were of European origin and came mostly from outside Greece.

The Asylum System in Greece

To grasp the complexity of experiences described in this thesis, it is important for the reader to understand certain aspects of the Greek, European, and international asylum regimes. This section begins with an explanation of the policies and conventions relating to refugees, which lay out the legal requirements of (EU) states with regards to the protection of asylum seekers. It then explains the on-the-ground practices of asylum service personnel in how they decide who becomes a refugee and who is rejected.

Created in the aftermath of WWII, the Geneva Convention defines a refugee as someone with a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”⁵ Its use was originally humanitarian in nature and called upon states to honor the so-called intrinsic right of individuals to life—thus the refugee had the right to seek safety from persecution, and (ratifying) states were legally obliged to respect this right (*ibid.*). Although not initially meant to last for more than three years, nor to be an international response, the convention was amended in 1967 and is the globally recognized authority for international refugee law (Betts and Collier 2017).

⁵ Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. UNHCR. Text of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Text of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Resolution 2198 (XXI) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>.

The EU has its own framework for the reception, protection, asylum decision and allocation of asylum seekers and refugees. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was created in 2008 and promoted three main pillars, as follows:

bringing more harmonisation to standards of protection by further aligning the EU States' asylum legislation; effective and well-supported practical cooperation; increased solidarity and sense of responsibility among EU States, and between the EU and non-EU countries. (CEAS 2019)

CEAS revised a number of procedures, including the Asylum Procedures Directive, which aids state agents in making quick, humane decisions, with special attention to persons of concern, such as unaccompanied minors; the Reception Conditions Directive, which lays out minimum standards for reception; the Qualification Directive, which explains the basis for the qualification of refugee status; the Dublin III Regulation, which clarifies which states are responsible for attending to asylum requests; and the EURODAC Regulation, which allows law enforcement to access the database that keeps the fingerprints of all asylum seekers and refugees, for the purpose of both the asylum process as well as issues of criminality (*ibid.*).

The Dublin III Regulation stipulates that would-be asylum seekers must ask for asylum in the first EU member state they enter (European Commission 2019). Greece is therefore required by law to register and decide asylum claims rather than to allow asylum seekers to travel north to seek asylum elsewhere. The EURODAC system registers the fingerprints of all asylum applicants, and if an asylum seeker has been fingerprinted in Greece and later makes their way to another country to seek asylum, they may be returned by that country to Greece (Mouzourakis et al. 2016). In 2010, Afghan asylum seeker Samir Samimi was fingerprinted as he travelled through Greece on his way to Belgium, where he sought asylum. Under the rules of the Dublin III Regulation, he was deported to Greece, where he experienced deplorable reception conditions, difficulty accessing the asylum service, and a lacking social support and accommodation system. Samimi took his case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which, in 2011, advised EU states not to deport asylum seekers back to Greece. EU states, however, had largely still been returning asylum seekers to Greece (Cabot 2014; Sarantou and Aggeliki 2019). In 2015 chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, chose to suspend the deportation of Syrian nationals from Germany to Greece, thereby resulting in a massive increase of border crossers attempting to reach Germany (Pries 2019; Betts and Collier 2017). After less than a year, however, more border crossers travelled through Greece and other countries attempting to reach Germany

than the previous five years combined (roughly one million), and the EU-Turkey Agreement was implemented to stop this westward movement of border crossers (Betts and Collier 2017).

This EU-Turkey Agreement mandated the return of rejected asylum applicants to Turkey, thereby dramatically decreasing the number of asylum seekers to Greece—precisely its intention. Turkey has received substantial benefits from this agreement: the country received six billion euros from the EU, and visa liberalization talks were to be sped up, in which Turkish citizens are to receive visa-free travel to and within the EU once specific conditions are met by Turkey. Further, the EU committed to relocate one Syrian refugee from Turkey for each asylum seeker returned to Turkey from Greece (European Commission 2016a; 2016b). Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has described the EU-Turkey statement as “a horror story, with terrible consequences for people’s lives and health” (MSF 2017, 20); Human Rights Watch called it “an unmitigated disaster for the very people it is supposed to protect” (2017); and Amnesty International has titled it a “blueprint for despair” (HRW 2017, 5). Turkey is not a signatory to the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees—which updated the 1951 convention to remove the European geographical restriction—and therefore does not give refugee status to non-Europeans, opting for a temporary guest status for Syrians, while having no effective status for other nationalities (Baban et al. 2016). This renders all would-be refugees unstable in Turkey, which now hosts more refugees—under guest status categorization—(around four million) than any other country on Earth (UNHCR 2020a).

The Greek Asylum Service (GAS)

Before 2011, there was no GAS. When border crossers arrived to Greece hoping to seek asylum, they had to ask the police, many of whom had no clear mandate and did not know the proper protocol with regards to the Geneva Convention (Personal communication with creator of asylum service in Greece). As more border crossers began applying for asylum, asylum offices opened in main cities, but these were few and far between (AIDA Asylum Information Database 2015; Campaign for the Access to Asylum Network 2015). Once opened, the main asylum office in Athens had a weekly limit of registering about 250 asylum seekers, approximately fifty per day. At first, only between ten and twenty arrived each day, so the office scaled back its caseworkers and interpreters accordingly. Then, almost overnight, there were hundreds of people seeking asylum each day. Furthermore, these asylum seekers needed interpreters, and they did not all speak the same language. If you had

200 Farsi speakers and two interpreters, for example, it would take months to register all of them, with the necessity that they return each day and wait in line for hours (personal communication with Giorgos, a former asylum service creator). This logistical issue led to the creation of the Skype line for asylum.

In mainland Greece, to seek asylum one has to call a Skype line unless the asylum seeker is considered extremely vulnerable, for example, by being an unaccompanied minor or having a severe medical condition. Speakers of each language have a specific number to call and a specific day and time (usually two hours per week) during which that number should be accessible (see Asylum Service | Ministry Of Migration Policy 2018). Due to a very small number of people operating the line and many hundreds, or possibly thousands, calling, it can take months to even get through to someone on the line set up via Skype (Talagkas 2017). The opening vignette showed how detrimental this system can be for an individual who cannot access the asylum service. Compounding difficulties, this call is only to take care of pre-registration—meaning that only limited biographical data is obtained, such as country of origin, a very brief reason for leaving one’s country, name, age, and dependent family members travelling together—with the official asylum interview to take place many months in the future. On the islands this process happens in person at a “hotspot”, which is essentially a registration center where border crossers are registered and filtered into different categorizations. It is where EU personnel choose who will be included (i.e., have their asylum accepted) and who will be excluded (i.e., deported). The pre-registration allows the asylum seeker a legal document, the trifold or “white card”, which they pick up one to three months after a successful pre-registration. Until having a white card, they are considered illegal and can be detained, as was the case for Amal.

The next phase is the asylum interview (occurring anywhere from three to thirty-six months after registration) in which the asylum seeker recounts their life in the country of origin, reasons for leaving, and certain aspects of their migration journey. This interview usually consists of the asylum case officer, an interpreter, a note taker, the applicant (asylum seeker), and a lawyer (if the applicant has access to one) (Mouzourakis et al. 2016). The questionnaire aims to pin down the “true” reason the applicant left their home country. Here the applicant must show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution “for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (from 1951 Refugee Convention). The system allows for an appeal to a rejection and the possibility (although rarely enacted) of taking the second rejection to court (ibid.).

Greece and the Field Sites

Historical Relation to Refugees

Greece has a long history of relations to refugees. The capital was moved to Athens in part to accommodate 1.3 to 2 million refugees from Asia Minor and Anatolia in a forced population swap in 1922 (Gillespie 2018; Papataxiarchis 2016c; Hernandez 2016). Roughly 45,000 of these refugees went to the island of Lesbos, and as much as 60% of the island's population claims a refugee lineage (Papataxiarchis 2016a; Carstensen 2015; Pantelia 2016). In conversations with locals I came to find that many of the island's inhabitants self-identify as being "pro-refugee". Border crossers continued to trickle into Greece, in varying numbers from countries as faraway as Ethiopia and Egypt to as close as Albania. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Eastern Bloc created an influx in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while the conflict in the former Yugoslavia added more border crossers in the mid- to late 1990s. It was during this time that racism became institutionalized and the law of *jus sanguinis*, citizenship based on blood, began to be quoted by the ordinary Greek citizen. Many of the new border crossers, therefore, were not assimilated or easily accepted (Voutira 2004; Dalakoglou 2013). Greece, however, was not only a country of immigration: "between 1950 and 1974 more than one million Greeks migrated to Western Europe, the U.S., Canada, and Australia" (Iliadou 2019, 64).

The year 2001 was of significance for Greece because it marked the beginning of large amounts of Middle Eastern refugees arriving (fleeing conflicts involving the United States in the aftermath of 9/11) (Papataxiarchis 2016b). The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens created the necessity for huge amounts of human labor and construction work, while the debt crisis later in the decade allowed for cheap migrant agricultural labor, which was both a blessing and a curse, as these border crossers helped Greece's agricultural sector survive during the worst years of the financial crisis (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005), although many locals reported that their jobs were taken. This, in part, contributed to the rise of alt-right groups, such as the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, which had seats in Greek parliament until 2019 and the European Parliament until 2021; the member of the European Parliament (MEP) was convicted of running Golden Dawn as a criminal enterprise and was extradited to Greece where he has begun a thirteen-year prison sentence (Kitsantonis 2021). This party is xenophobic and nationalistic, and has both engaged in, and condoned, the use of violence against border crossers (Dalakoglou 2013; Papanicolaou and Papageorgiou 2016).

In the early 2000s and 2010s, tens of thousands of border crossers made the journey to Greece. Until 2011, there was no asylum system, and asylum seekers were dealt with in various bureaucratic and administrative ways, which was typically chaotic, unformed, and unorganized (personal communication with UNHCR). Border crossers were kept mainly in police stations and closed detention centers that were reported to have widespread hygiene issues, overcrowding, and violence (Amnesty International 2010; Carr 2015). Greece subsequently came under fire from various human rights organizations for its inhumane and degrading treatment of asylum seekers (UNHCR 2009; Amnesty International 2010; 2012a; Carr 2015). An asylum system was created in 2011, which laid out proper guidelines for asylum decisions, aiming to bring the country under one framework, yet it did not begin officially registering and deciding cases until Law 3907/2011 entered into force in 2013 (AIDA Asylum Information Database 2015; Campaign for the Access to Asylum Network 2015). In 2012, operation Xenious Zeus, ironically named after the Greek god of hospitality, was implemented. This operation “was a stop, search, arrest and deport practice combined with the use of physical abuse” (Iliadou 2019, 73).

It is clear from this history that Greece had been dealing with border crossers insufficiently for years. Yet, conflicts across the Middle East, especially after the 2011 Arab Spring, as well as economic precarity and generalized violence in a swath of other countries forced many more to seek safety in the EU in subsequent years. And Greece was, by geographic proximity, the closest EU country to reach. The year 2015 was marked as “the long summer of migration,” with more than 800,00 border crossers passing through Greece (Oikonomakis 2018, 65-6). They came in large numbers partly in response to Germany’s declaration to temporarily suspend the Dublin III Regulation (European Commission 2019; Betts and Collier 2017). This suspension effectively allowed the border crossers to travel through Greece and the Balkans to seek asylum in Germany (Betts and Collier 2017). However, this large migration quickly became problematized in media across the continent, and border crossers were cast as threats to the security and cultural values of the EU (Betts and Collier 2017; Holmes and Castañeda 2016).

Countries in the Balkans began to erect fences and position border guards along the route in late 2015. This was followed by the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement on March 18, 2016.⁶ Although fewer border crossers have arrived in Greece since the agreement

⁶ The EU-Turkey Agreement was actually signed on the 18th and entered into force on the 20th. In my observations and interviews with legal aid volunteers, I witnessed how the ambiguity caused by the two dates resulted in some border crossers receiving different treatment than others who arrived on the same date.

(roughly ninety per day as opposed to many thousands each day), more than 100,000 remain stuck within Greece (UNHCR 2019a; 2019b). These border crossers are forced to seek asylum in Greece rather than elsewhere within the EU, are corralled into small camps in numbers many times the camp capacity, or are left to sleep on the streets. Furthermore, they often do not have access to legal or proper medical aid and are usually not given information concerning the length of their stay or the process of their asylum.

Accessing the asylum service and state-sponsored housing—two recurring subjects in this dissertation—vary considerably between the islands to the mainland. The islands’ hotspot approach and the mainland’s Skype line approach to asylum have effectively created two distinct field sites, with different measures to aid, solidarity, and volunteerism. A large majority of border crossers entering Greece arrive by boat from Turkey to Lesvos. The island is in close proximity to Turkey (with as little as twelve kilometers separation). In 2015 and early 2016, 800,000 border crossers passed through Lesvos, an island with a baseline population of 86,436 (City Population 2019). Athens, on the other hand, represents a second destination, which border crossers attempt to reach clandestinely after having become stranded on the islands due to the implementation of an island restriction in early 2016. A large portion of the country’s NGOs is in Athens, as are the main hospitals and many camps.

The Research

To account for the varying ways in which volunteer aid and administrative practices were implemented, I chose to conduct fieldwork both in Athens and on Lesvos. I spent a total of ten months in Greece: from June to September 2017 and the months of April and August 2018, I lived in Athens. From October to November 2017 and May through July 2018, I lived on Lesvos.



The Field Sites: Lesvos

The closing of the Balkan route in late 2015 and early 2016 and the subsequent EU-Turkey Agreement significantly reduced the number of arrivals to Greece. Still, at present, border crossers continue to land on Lesvos; 24,000 arrived to the island in 2019 alone (UNHCR 2019a). Due to the EU-Turkey Agreement, an island restriction has been implemented, meaning that border crossers are not entitled to free movement beyond the island on which they arrive, and therefore remain on Lesvos until their asylum acceptance or rejection and deportation. This has led to severe overcrowding in island camps (MSF 2017; 2019). Due to the lack of specialized healthcare, certain border crossers deemed to be “vulnerable” by government agents may be transferred to the mainland, while others pay smugglers to get to Athens by clandestine means. Therefore, the population of border crossers on Lesvos is in continual flux; as of February 2020, it was around 28,000 (UNHCR 2019a).

In attempts to handle the large quantity of asylum seekers, the hotspot approach was created, with help from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Frontex (the EU border agency), the EU Judicial Cooperation Agency (Eurojust) and Europol (Neocleous and Kastrinou 2016). This approach entails receiving all border crossers who enter Greece by boat through a reception center on one of five islands: Lesvos, Leros, Kos, Samos, or Chios. A map can be found as appendix B of this chapter. These reception centers are

jointly administered and managed by the army, the Greek police, special police units such as the MAT (the “riot police” operating under the name “Units for the Reinstatement of Order”), Frontex and Europol. (ibid., 3)

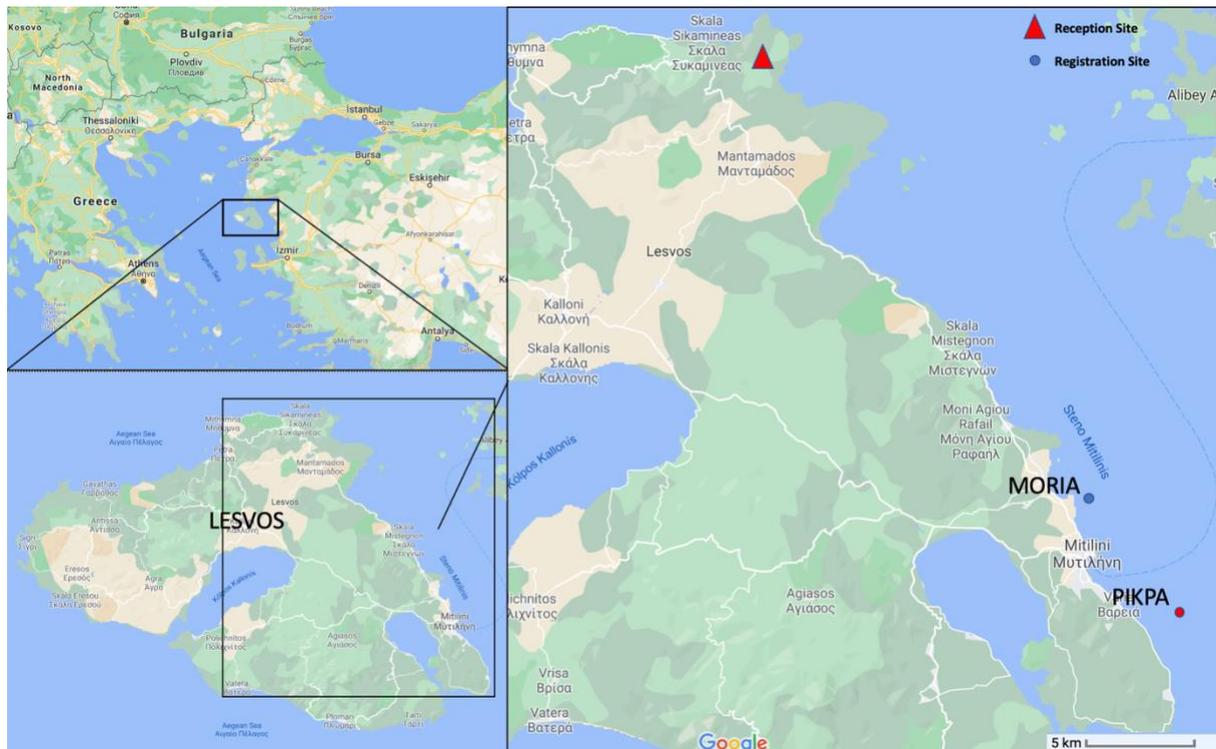
The hotspot approach has come under criticism from humanitarian organizations and scholars for propagating unsafe living conditions, long waiting times in camps, and inequitable deportations (Christou 2019; HRW 2017; Mitchell and Sparke 2020).

On Lesvos, the hotspot approach led to the creation of Moria camp, which had a fluctuating population between 5,000 and 9,000 residents during fieldwork, in a space for just 2,400 (MSF 2017). Moria was run by the Greek military, with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Christian NGO EuroRelief, and many other organizations and state actors. It sat on an old fenced-in military base, with the words “Welcome to Prison” spray-painted on a small section of cement wall. Inside Moria was the official hotspot, where registration and other bureaucratic procedures took place. Moria also held a detention center, known as

Section B, where certain types of border crossers who were deemed a flight risk (those from certain countries) or were suspected smugglers or traffickers were detained (personal communication with governing body of Moria). Others who lived in the camp could come and go as they pleased, but could not leave the island.

In addition to Moria, there is one transit camp, known as Stage Two—which accommodates border crossers on the north of the island for anywhere between a few hours to a few days before being sent to Moria camp—and two long-term camps, Pikpa and Kara Tepe. Pikpa, south of the capital Mytilini, was evicted in October 2020, but during fieldwork it had a capacity for roughly 120 residents, and was run mainly by volunteers and a few core staff. It was part of the organization Lesvos Solidarity, and aimed to incorporate border crossers into decision-making and daily management. Although UNHCR officially transferred the most vulnerable border crossers to Pikpa, Pikpa camp was in a precarious legal position with the authorities and often faced threat of eviction and closure (Lesvos Solidarity 2018). Kara Tepe camp is a few kilometers north of Mytilini, and has a capacity of around 1,200 residents. It is run by the Municipality of Lesvos and a number of organizations, mainly employing volunteers. It is considered to be the “family” camp, with vulnerable women and children making up a large portion of the residents (Iliadou 2019). A map of Lesvos that highlights the camp can be found in the appendix of this chapter. In 2016, *The Guardian* reported that eighty-one NGOs were operating on Lesvos (Nianias 2016), while the January 2020 NeedsHub count rested at forty NGOs and five government organizations (NeedsHub 2020). More than 8,000 volunteers had registered on Lesvos in 2015-2018 (personal communication with UNHCR employee).

This research took place mostly over four locations, including three camps: Mytilene, where a number of NGOs are based and whose squares regularly contend with demonstrations; Pikpa camp; locations near Moria camp; and Skala Skiamangas, which represents the majority of landings on the north end of the island and where Stage Two camp is located. I chose these locations according to the type of participants I sought. Pikpa camp was viewed largely as an informal space, where informal volunteers held values and espoused an ethos similar to those I observed in Athens. The camp management was contacted for me via connections I had made in Athens. Skala Skiamangas was chosen because it represented a more controlled and coordinated approach between volunteers, border guards, and government actors, and is on the opposite end of the island. And finally, NGOs in Mytilene were chosen because they represented legal, protection, health, and social services for border crossers, and therefore displayed a wide range of stakeholders.



Google maps Greece, Lesvos (2020).

The Field Sites: Athens

As on Lesvos, the number of border crossers in Athens is in flux. This is due to both legal transfers from the islands and border crossers making their way clandestinely from the islands as well as outward in unauthorized migration beyond Greece. Some border crossers also pass through the land border by Evros and arrive to Athens without having gone through the hotspot. Athens contains a number of camps within a relatively close radius to the city (one to two hours by transportation). In addition, there is a government housing scheme for both locals and border crossers that can be accessed through a few NGOs in Athens. This is through the National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA). However, there are very limited spaces in the camps and the housing scheme. Waiting lists are many months long, meaning that border crossers wait for space while being homeless or in illegal squatted settlements, the latter of which are continually under threat of eviction. Extensive homelessness among border crossers can be partly attributed to the Skype asylum system rather than the hotspot approach. As has been widely reported, would-be asylum seekers, particularly from certain countries, have a very difficult time accessing the asylum service and can be months without papers, which affects their ability to access camps and state housing (Talagkas 2017). Homelessness in Athens is endemic for both minors and adults, particularly for those who have yet to access the asylum service.

Athens is the base for a large portion of the country’s NGOs and volunteer associations. The Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues reported in 2018 that it had “75 member bodies with more than 200 delegates”; each member body is an NGO, a government actor working on migration, or a delegate from the border crosser community (Athens Partnership 2018).

I spent a large amount of fieldwork time in the neighborhood of Exarcheia. This area is famous for anti-fascism activism and the takeover of buildings to form squatted settlements. This began in the 1980s and continues to the present day; in 2017, for example, illegal squatted settlements in Athens housed roughly 2,500 border crossers (Kritidis 2014; Strickland 2017). The main square in Exarcheia is a meeting point for border crossers, anti-fascists, solidarians, and informal volunteers. The neighborhood is protected by local people patrolling its borders with bats, tear gas, and other instruments. Homeless border crossers are generally safer sleeping in Exarcheia square than other places in the city. They are protected from police violence because the police rarely enter the neighborhood and, when they do, local street patrollers often engage in violent conflict with the police.

The next section explains the theoretical foundation of this thesis. I situate my work in relation to literature that critiques humanitarian governance and volunteerism as well as relevant literature in relation to solidarity, asylum seekers and refugees in Greece.



Google maps Greece, Athens (2020).

Conceptual and Theoretical Background

The main theoretical underpinning of this thesis is that of inclusion and exclusion, and more precisely, a form of “differential inclusion” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012). I focus on how the Greek border (including within Lesvos and Athens) is a site of struggle. In the geopolitical sense, the two field sites of Athens and Lesvos represent a battleground between regional (islands), state (Greek), and supra-state (EU) sovereignty. The borderspace also represents ideological and legal conceptions of the EU as a safe place encompassing a strong humanitarian ethos. The border between Greece and Turkey is a space that exists physically in the Aegean Sea and at the land border of Evros, but also cognitively as “an epistemological device” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012) in which distinctions and categorizations between insider and outsider are made and remade. These categorizations shift over time and space, based on changing political affiliations, geopolitical developments, and a number of other concerns. Border crossers, however, are not simply excluded from Greece and the EU. They are “differentially included” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012), in what De Genova describes as “the obscene of inclusion” (2013, 1185). This differential inclusion complicates the binary of inclusion and exclusion to account for the myriad processes of filtering border crossers and deciding who to include and exclude, and in which ways (Ibid.). For example, there exists an obscene inclusion of cheap undocumented labor, while at the same time a strict policing of the borders, coupled with stopping, detaining, and deporting border crossers. This shows how border crossers are simultaneously exploited through cheap labour and also illegalized to the point that their crossing of the border is considered an unforgivable transgression (Ibid).

Furthermore, in the contemporary border regime, the spatial boundaries of the border have grown to include areas not at, or even close to the physical border; this extension of the border results in an extension of bordering practices. As De Genova postulates, “the border is effectively everywhere, so also is the spectacle of its enforcement” (2013, 1183). Border crossers, for example, are stopped and searched for documents regularly throughout Greece, based on their physical appearance. As was with the case of Amal, they are often imprisoned indefinitely in detention centers when they cannot show asylum or refugee papers.

Following Hilhorst and Jansen (2010), I conceptualize this border region as a “humanitarian arena” where multiple actors and institutions compete to “aid” border crossers. Within this arena, the Greek state employs a form of “hostile hospitality” (Derrida 1999) toward border crossers, which in the Foucauldian sense is both caring and controlling, inclusive and simultaneously exclusive. The state is hospitable in allowing border crossers to enter, in registration, and the allocation of basic material services (all of which is inclusive).

Yet it is hostile in how it conceptualizes and patrols the border, essentially externalizing asylum to Turkey (all of which is exclusive). The destitution of the camp system, the criminalization of border crossers, and the bureaucratic procedures that make attaining asylum a nearly impossible feat are further examples of state hostility. State actors allow humanitarians and informal volunteers to aid border crossers, but only to the extent that they do not challenge the state's approach to hospitality.

Within the humanitarian arena, border security actors, humanitarian workers, volunteers, solidarians and citizens engage in “humanitarian borderwork,” which is the enactment of humanitarian principles at the border that respond to the structural and physical violence of the border regime (Pallister-Wilkins 2017). Informal volunteers, who account for the main perspective of this thesis, are embedded in the humanitarian arena, but contest many of the hegemonic forms of aid offered. Their approach to aid is generally that of solidarity rather than humanitarianism; it is unconditional hospitality as opposed to conditional—which is synonymous to hostile—hospitality; and it aims to be egalitarian rather than hierarchical. In practice, informal volunteers are unable to fulfill all these principles all the time, and their struggles within the bureaucratized systems are exposed in this thesis. Returning to the theme of inclusion and exclusion, I show how these volunteers are largely excluded from offering certain forms of aid, particularly if it requires registration and bureaucratization. At the same time, they attempt to include themselves within this system by, for example, helping border crossers register to seek asylum or to enact vulnerability to get into the asylum process, both of which were shown in this chapter's opening narrative.

Border areas are also sites of geopolitical struggle; power imbalances and contestations permeate the policies and practices of states and supra-states, aid organizations, and individuals. These struggles directly affect the lives of border crossers, who, although enacting various forms of agentic power, become subjects of bio-political governance techniques (Mitchell and Sparke 2020). Through the use of labels such as “safe third country” (in the case of Turkey) or “safe country of origin” (for example, Pakistan), the asylum regime legitimizes sending border crossers back to inhospitable and often very dangerous locations, while also creating unsafe holding spaces in Greece while these border crossers' cases are pending (*ibid.*). This is what Mitchell and Sparke call a “geopolitical projection of safe space” (*ibid.*, 5), which contrasts with an actual safe space.

This type of border regime, furthermore, creates a hierarchy of deservingness in which certain border crossers are considered more deserving of the right to refuge than others, based on which country they came from and what type of suffering they have

endured. I found in my research that border crossers from Pakistan or Algeria, for example, were generally considered to be voluntary rather than forced, and their suffering was considered less relevant to the current asylum regime than those who fled Syria. Fassin (2005; 2011a; 2013) and Ticktin (2005; 2006) emphasize the inequality of humanitarian aid to refugees through its differentiation from and exclusion of migrants whose experiences of economic violence relegate them not only to being unworthy of aid, but even criminal. The binary of the “economic migrant” versus the “deserving refugee,” for example, is emblematic of a hierarchy of suffering, where political violence trumps economic violence. Here the theme of inclusion and exclusion is directly related to categorization and a hierarchy of deservingness based on a perceived severity and type of suffering.

Humanitarian Governance

To date, literature that problematizes humanitarianism has focused on the following: humanitarian action as both a response to, and a part of, violent border policies (Pallister-Wilkins 2017); inequalities that emerge through caring for certain forms of suffering and not others (for example, persecution over poverty) (Ticktin 2011; Fassin and d’Haullin 2005; Watters 2007); the apoliticization of displacement (Fassin 2013; Ticktin 2005; 2006; Malkki 1996; Hyndman 2000); and the perpetuation of marginalization through the unequal power relation of “giver” and “beneficiary” (Rozakou 2016; Feldman and Ticktin 2010). All of these works speak, explicitly or implicitly, of contradictions in humanitarian practices at the border.

Humanitarian practices generally claim apolitical neutrality, which allows them to work in conflict zones, refugee camps and other contested spaces spaces. However, their operation in certain states without critiquing those states can uphold the status quo (Kalir and Wissink 2016). For example, within the EU many NGOs do not question the apparatus of deportation. Instead, and perhaps in part due to EU funding, these organizations simply work within these structures to offer aid, without aiming to dismantle the system that helps create the need for aid in the first place. The “humanitarian’s tragedy” then, to borrow a phrase from de Waal (2010, S130), rests in the burden of having to choose whose lives are worthier of being saved. This is what Fassin calls the “politics of life” (2007, 500), in which humanitarian organizations further the hierarchies of deservingness, and similar to medical triage, mark some people to be saved and others to perish. Arendt calls this the “right to have rights” (1973, 296).

Humanitarian action, furthermore, can have long lasting bio-political consequences for those it “governs.” For example, Feldman found that the categorizations of refugees in Palestine (Gaza), which were decided upon by the American Friends Service Committee and the United Nations (from 1948 to 1950), were based on seemingly arbitrary and fluid notions of distinction between citizen, native, and refugee (2007). Only the refugee was afforded humanitarian aid, and these labels have continued to define the lives of Palestinians for more than fifty years. We see then that “humanitarian operations are frequently compelled to make distinctions among people that seem antithetical to their core principles, with significant and often long-term implications for those populations” (Feldman 2007, 155). In this respect, questions of “refugee-making” and categorization are explored in chapter 2, particularly the fraught engagement that informal volunteers have with the category as they aim to help all border crossers attain entitlements. Humanitarians and even volunteers are faced with a double bind because, while claims of universalism are the tenants of humanitarianism, differentiation is seemingly a prerequisite for aid. For the caseworkers, lawyers, doctors, volunteers, solidarians and aid workers in Greece, this production of “refugeeness” inherently differentiates and excludes, and for those lives of exclusion, the punishment can be as serious as death (in the form of being *refouled*, or returned back to the country of origin).

Civil Society Actors

The theme of inclusion and exclusion is not solely related to border crossers. This also permeates the humanitarian landscape. Issues concerning who should or should not be able to provide aid and what kinds of aid should be the responsibility of certain actors lead to tensions between government, humanitarian, and civil society actors and agencies. Informal volunteers have at times collaborated with humanitarian and government actors, yet at other times challenged their forms of aid delivery and their perceived roles in oppression and the perpetuation of structural violence (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Haaland and Wallevik 2019; Martin and Nolte 2019). Research that has explored civil society action in Europe in response to the migration of border crossers has demonstrated that NGOs and civil society respond to the gap in services left by the “organized non-responsibility” of states (Preis 2019, 4; Chtorius and Miller 2017). Without these civil society actors, protection and integration of border crossers would be severely lacking (and in some places already fall short).

The literature about civil society initiatives has highlighted the ways in which informal volunteers offer different forms of aid or solidarity to border crossers than that offered by government actors or NGOs. For example, extensive work has been done on

Greek solidarity movement (see Rozakou 2012; Rakoplous 2014; 2015; Cabot 2014; Rakopolous 2014, 2015; Leontidou 2014; Theodossopoulos 2020). An important aspect of the informal aid landscape in Greece is its relationship to economic collapse and austerity.

The 2008 global economic crisis hit Greece very hard. The country was bailed out by the European troika (the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Commission) to the sum of 110 billion euros (CFR 2019). In subsequent years, strict austerity measures were put in place so that the country would not default on the loans. Greek citizens largely felt that the loans had not helped them, and were against austerity, as shown by a 2015 referendum in which 61% of the population voted against continuing austerity measures, which continued regardless (ibid.). In response to austerity, many Greeks became members of solidarity movements and grassroots coalitions that provided services and products directly from producer to consumer. Solidarity has been described as informal, anti-institutional, and non-hierarchical sociality, which contrasts bureaucratic and top-down forms of aid (Rozakou 2016; Cabot 2014; Rakopoulos 2015). International informal volunteers have largely been socialized by solidarians and employ a horizontal form of aid delivery and solidarity.

Recent research has explored how civil society groups in Europe subvert hegemonic forms of aid delivery via the state and large aid organizations. For example, Vandevordt and Verschraegen (2019) have shown that activists in Europe aim to help those who the majority of humanitarian organizations have neglected, such as undocumented migrants. The authors have described this as “subversive humanitarianism”. In Germany Castañeda has likewise shown how civil society actors include people in services who would otherwise be excluded, by offering medical care to non-citizens, therefore engaging in “acts of citizenship” (2013). And Stock describes informal volunteers who help border crossers slated for deportation as enacting “a certain kind of civil disobedience” (2019, 129). Here again we see that informal volunteers are embedded within the theme of inclusion and exclusion: they aim to include border crossers who would normally be excluded from the states within which they work, while simultaneously excluding various normative structures of these states, such as laws relating to citizenship.

Contestations of Agency and Structure

Implicit within the tensions of the humanitarian arena are contestations of structure and agency. Various definitions abound, but scholars generally agree that agency relates to the power to act and affect change in a given situation (Bakewell 2010).

To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degrees of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree. (Sewell 1992, 20)

Structure, on the other hand, has been defined as “any recurring pattern of social behaviour; or, more specifically, to the ordered interrelationships between the different elements of a social system or society” (Scott and Marshall 2009: “structure”). This structure/agency debate is what drives disputes in legal categorizations of border crossers. For example, a “refugee” is someone who is considered “forced” to flee, in contrast to those who are labeled “voluntary.” Concerning the former, Bakewell points out that “to go too far towards explanation and ascribing any agency to such people may undermine their case for refugee status” (2010, 1690). Of course, people migrate for a range of reasons, which often occur simultaneously. Holmes and Castañeda explain that conceptualizing the migration of some border crossers as “voluntary” and others as forced “elides the realities of structural violence and postcolonial economic inequalities that push people to migrate in order to survive” (2016, 17)—doing what Betts and Collier term “survival migration” (2017, 44). Binary thinking (and theorizing) does a disservice to the realities of this type of border crossing; rather, it should include both structural and agentic conceptualization. Giddens’ theory of “structuration” accounts for the symbiotic and dual nature of structure and agency: the structure produces (or allows) certain types of agency, while agency then works on and transforms structure (1984). However, authors point out that this structural change takes time, and is therefore not dualistic, but rather processual (Archer 1995). This debate relates to the humanitarian landscape, specifically as I describe and analyze the exclusionary structural forces of the EU, Greece, and certain organizations compared to the inclusionary agentic power by informal volunteers (Haaland and Wallevik 2019). I argue that these volunteers enact discretionary power, which challenges notions of state sovereignty and may, over time, work to transform certain migration structures. This is elaborated upon in chapter 6 when I argue that these informal volunteers engage in a war of position (Gramsci 1971) that challenges the prevailing cultural hegemony of the state and state-sanctioned aid.

In the humanitarian arena, state actors and large organizations, such as UHNCR, hold most legitimate decision-making power. For example, they create and organize camps and implement much of the formal aid such as registration, asylum decisions, housing, cash allocation via debit cards, and the distribution of material resources. At least, these are their

primary responsibilities on paper. These forms of aid distribution both include and exclude border crossers simultaneously. Those included are the ones who can show that they have suffered in certain ways or are considered vulnerable in specific ways. Civil society actors, by contrast, are considered by many state actors illegitimate, untrained, or even dangerous and subversive to state and large organization's forms of aid delivery (Martin and Nolte 2019). For example, the squatted settlements—generally organized and managed by a mixture of local Greek solidarians, international informal volunteers, and border crossers—have been criminalized by the state, and furthermore often expound anti-government and anti-humanitarian rhetoric. The difference here is that the majority of their work is inclusionary. They do not exclude on the basis of nationality, vulnerability, or specific forms of past or present suffering. These informal volunteers, solidarians, and border crossers employ various forms of agentive and discretionary power that can be seen as a form of resistance against the structural violence of the border regime. Both international civil society actors and local solidarians are opposed to the paradigm of “limited resources” because they see this as a form of manufactured scarcity. Solidarians, furthermore, are explicitly anti-neoliberal, which undercuts much of the ways in which aid is delivered via NGOs and the government.

By describing these regimes as a form of structural violence, I want to point out the deleterious consequences that result from exclusionary policies such as the EU-Turkey Agreement and the island restriction. Moria camp, for example, had severe overcrowding, unhygienic conditions, lack of food and water, waiting times in the hours for bathrooms, showers, and food, and endemic violence for years (MSF 2019). Many NGOs pulled out of Moria camp in protest of the inhospitable and unhealthy spaces it created, but such maneuvers only paved the way for other NGOs to take their place. Border crossers who lived in Moria and now live in its replacement, after it burned to the ground,⁷ remain in a sort of “protracted legal limbo” (Iliadou 2019, 22) while they wait years for the outcomes of their asylum claims. While waiting, they do not have the rights attributed to recognized refugees or Greek citizens, and their physical bodies are kept alive at the expense of their social and political bodies; in essence, they are left to what Agamben calls “bare life” (1998). According to Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004, 1):

⁷ Moria camp burned down on September 9, 2020, well into the COVID-19 pandemic. This is elaborated on in the epilogue in the last chapter of this thesis.

violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality—force, assault, or the infliction of pain—alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim.

Moria camp is a prime example where the dignity and worth of border crossers are continually assaulted. Galtung calls such structural violence as a “violence that works on the soul” (1969, 169).

This form of violence—registrations, segregations, years of waiting, and receiving charity rather than rights—is bureaucratized and, as such, it “disappears from view and cannot be thematized as violence at all” (Gupta 2012, 5). This bureaucratization, furthermore, masks the chaotic and often fluid nature of on-the-ground processes or “street-level bureaucracy” (Lipsky 1980), where GAS personnel and other state and NGO agents use their own discretionary power to decide on asylum cases and aid. Griffiths, for example, found that asylum personnel in the UK often made bureaucratic mistakes, resulting in harm to asylum applicants (2012). Likewise, in Greece and throughout the EU, discretionary power, bureaucratic mistakes, and inconsistent decision-making have resulted in the inequitable treatment of border crossers and failed asylum claims based on emotions rather than facts (Cabot 2014; Ticktin 2011).

While the literature mentioned here is not exhaustive, it has contributed to both my understanding of the humanitarian landscape and to my methodological and theoretical approach to studying informal volunteers within this landscape. Each chapter takes up additional literature that supports its specific argument.

My Theoretical and Ethnographic Contribution

Collectively, the body of research on civil society initiatives frames informal volunteers as enacting an alternate or oppositional type of aid to that offered (or said to be offered) by government actors and large organizations. This thesis considers civil society volunteering in a similar vein, and goes further to address gaps in research. First, the literature has not fully attended to the agentive power that international volunteers enact when countering the structural violence of the border regime. In chapter 2, I explore the discretionary power of informal volunteers as a form of “informal street-level bureaucracy” and show the ways it both subverts and reinforces state-sanctioned categories of “refugee” and “vulnerable person.” Second, although there is more literature coming out about the subversive nature of civil society in Europe, research has yet to explore the ethical quandaries and double binds

that these informal volunteer practices respond to and produce, a research gap addressed in chapters 3 and 4. Third, while some literature has exposed extensive criminalization of civil society initiatives (Vosyliūtė and Conte 2019; Carrera et al. 2018; Fekete et al. 2017; Heller and Pezzani 2017), none to date has fully hypothesized why this is occurring. The co-author of the article that forms chapter 5 and I offer a hypothesis for this criminalization. And finally, in chapter 6, I add to the literature critiquing humanitarian and state aid, arguing that informal volunteers use discursive tactics aimed to delegitimize the state and state-sanctioned aid. In effect, they challenge the cultural hegemony of the state and subvert the border regime.

My contribution to the theoretical cannon is articulated in the everyday struggles of international informal volunteers. I show the tensions and ethical questions that are produced when these informal volunteers act to affect change in the lives of border crossers and how various forms of inclusion and exclusion act on, and are acted upon, by all stakeholders. And although the main perspectives presented here are those of informal volunteers, I describe and analyze the precarity that border crossers experienced in Greece. Throughout the thesis, I attempt to show the various ways their bodies are subjugated, how they are placed (and continually replaced) into categories of deservingness, and how their livelihoods become dependent on the political subjectivities of various actors, temporalities, and spaces. What will not be heard, however, are the voices of border crossers themselves. I elected not to engage directly with border crossers because of issues of re-traumatization. This is elaborated in more detail below.

This research and the theoretical contributions it offers fall within the canons of both critical and interpretive anthropology. Critical anthropology looks beyond individual interactions to explore how structural forces shape power differentials and aspects such as health, economic, and educational outcomes (Farmer 2004; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). While the critical frame encompasses the entire thesis, it is most elaborated upon in chapters 2, 5, and 6. Interpretive anthropology explores how people make sense of their experiences. This approach incorporates conceptions, feelings, and particularly ideas around meaning-making (Geertz 2008). An aspect I incorporated into the interviews was how interlocutors made sense of the aid landscape and their own roles within it. I asked reflexive questions that challenged interlocutors to explore how their biases and subjectivities affected their conceptions of, and actions within, the aid landscape. This interpretive lens is most fully elucidated in chapter 4, where I explore the double-bind informal volunteers faced, and in chapter 2, which explores how the moral reasonings of volunteers affected their actions.

Methods

My Own Subjectivities

This section attempts to expose my own subjectivities and how they related to the interest in, formation of, and interaction with the research and interlocutors. Within qualitative research the researcher is not an objective outsider, but comes to the research with existing knowledge, biases, and personal characteristics that affect the types of questions they ask, the spaces they are able to access, and the actions and responses of interlocutors who agree to be interviewed and/or observed (Green and Thorogood 2014). Unconscious biases and power relations can inadvertently reproduce hegemony (Richardson 1998), and therefore an exposition of one's subjectivities becomes essential in demystifying the research and analysis process.

I therefore explain how I came to this research, my first weeks in the field, and the emotions I experienced as both a researcher and a volunteer. Furthermore, at times throughout the thesis, I employ auto-ethnography, in which I emplace myself and my voice into the narrative (Ellis and Adams 2014). In addition to laying bare my own subjectivities, I employ this auto-ethnographic lens to deepen the understanding of complex issues and to add a reflexive layer to subjective experiences. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg, "reflection means interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author" (2000, vii). The realization of my own bias allowed me to reflect on and articulate the tensions endemic in the aid landscape. This comes through in all of the chapters, but particularly in chapter 6, when I explore this theme in-depth.

I became interested in humanitarianism, and specifically refugee issues, in my early twenties. Having a Canadian passport allowed me to travel extensively, and I quickly became aware of my own privilege within what Glick Schiller and Salazar call the "mobility regime" (2013, 188). This regime privileges the movement of particular people, generally those from the Global North, while stigmatizing and criminalizing the movement of "the poor, powerless and exploited" (ibid., 188). In 2014-2015, I undertook a master's project that explored how border crossers from sub-Saharan Africa experienced the journey to and through Morocco. I uncovered how female border crossers were at risk of various forms of violence, and although they enacted forms of agentive power, the structural, political, and gender violence they faced cornered them into difficult positions with few viable options for survival. For these women, Europe was imagined as a place of economic and physical security, and the

majority of them had hopes to one day cross onto this prosperous continent. But what exactly was the experience like for those who made it into Europe? My interest in the whole process of migration from the beginning, to, and through the “final destination” encouraged me to explore the policies and practices that were occurring on European soil. Thus began my initial interest in Greece.

Engaged Volunteering

When I arrived in Athens in the summer of 2017, I immediately began to volunteer for an informal civil society organization. I chose the organization based on my experience with a previous scouting trip in which I encountered its informal nature and made contacts with a number of informal volunteers. The purpose of this volunteering was manifold: I wanted to understand the situation on the ground as quickly as possible, I hoped to offer something practical, and I needed to gain access to and trust of informal volunteers, who would become informants. I was present and often personally involved in many of the situations that I write about, which lends a level of corroboration to the interviews conducted. For example, in chapter 5, when my co-author and I explore instances of criminalization of solidarity, I was active as a volunteer in a camp that was criminalized as well as within a boat-spotting and SAR organization whose many volunteers experienced criminalization.

My first months in Athens were a crash course in all things related to asylum. I began volunteering within a legal aid team where I learned how the volunteers helped border crossers prepare for their asylum interviews and fit the refugee category. The volunteers, I quickly realized, felt deeply ashamed of the EU and Greek “hostile hospitality” (Derrida 1999), which required border crossers, in the words of one volunteer, “to beg [. . .] to show how bad their suffering is” in order to be eligible for asylum and some forms of aid. Informal volunteers for the most part challenged the hierarchy of deservingness that prioritized certain border crossers over others. Foreign volunteers often talked about their own migratory trajectories. “I’m a migrant too!” exclaimed a volunteer from Germany, when expressing indignation at the way Pakistani youth were treated in Athens; whereas the volunteer was considered an expat or a cosmopolitan, the youth could only be an “economic migrant” or a refugee. Many of the volunteers struggled with this mobility regime, feeling guilty at their near limitless possibilities to travel, while border crossers from certain countries faced extreme difficulties with mobility. I also began to understand that the humanitarian landscape— assembled by a constantly changing mixture of short-term and long-term international and local volunteers and solidarians, aid workers, and government actors—was

not a cohesive system with a single goal of aiding border crossers. Instead, I found a mash-up of divided and divisive groups, organizations, and associations, all with different motivations and obligations. While many organizations worked together, others did not, and still others refused to work with certain types of organizations. Organizations therefore sometimes excluded each other.

As a volunteer and a researcher, I, too, struggled with aspects of the humanitarian landscape. As I volunteered alongside, and lived with, volunteers from informal organizations, I began to reflect on my own positionality and assumptions. Within two weeks of my arrival in Athens, I was volunteering on a legal team, giving legal aid and information to border crossers. It was surreal to have been in the country a mere fifteen days and to be giving advice, accompanying border crossers to services, and offering aid through a variety of avenues. The majority of the border crossers I aided had been in Greece much longer than I. I felt something akin to imposter syndrome mixed with White privilege—who was I to “help” these border crossers? I was not a refugee or a humanitarian specialist, nor did I have specialized medical or legal expertise. I was not even Greek! Yet, my research and travel background, as well as an enthusiasm to help, were all that the informal organizations for which I volunteered needed. Although there were border crossers volunteering for some of the same organizations, they often complained of feeling “less than” their European or North American counterparts: the language of meetings was always English, the jobs with the most skill and respect went to Europeans or North Americans, and volunteers from the Global North sometimes acted as though they were in charge. Despite attempts to draw on non-hierarchical and group decision-making, neocolonial sentiments and practices permeated much of the aid and supposed solidarity landscapes.

Another aspect of my subjectivity that puts me slightly ill at ease is my own position as a scholar within the refugee regime. As Andersson succinctly points out, scholarship is also a business, and becomes mixed up in various aspects of the “illegality industry” of migration (2014). The propensity of anthropologists to chase crises, not unlike the humanitarian actors discussed in this thesis, can perpetuate the neoliberal model of short-term funding and subsequently decontextualized rapid ethnographies (Cabot 2019). Cabot has highlighted how in Greece (as in other less affluent countries), local scholars with years of experience often cannot access funding and therefore are unable to contribute academically or can be “treated as informants and research assistants” (*ibid.*, 267). In addition, less knowledgeable researchers often present findings without acknowledging the Greek scholars who have spent decades researching forced migration in Greece (*ibid.*). I therefore want to

acknowledge that, as a PhD candidate, I did not put in the required time to learn Greek, nor do I understand the nuances of forced migration and the humanitarian landscape in Greece to the same extent as many local scholars do. In this introduction and throughout the thesis chapters, I therefore do my best to contextualize my findings with those of Greek scholars and to articulate any limitations I encountered due to my positionality.

The Methodological Approaches and Interlocutors

This research is part of a consortium of projects funded by the Erasmus Mundus Trans Global Health program, which sought to fund transdisciplinary research. Research was expected to uphold certain aspects of transdisciplinarity, namely: to be solution-oriented, to include stakeholders from the beginning of the project through dissemination of results, and to include a wide variety of stakeholders and disciplinary angles (Pohl and Hadorn 2008; Jahn et al. 2012; Lyall et al. 2015). This research included transdisciplinary methods and analyses. I began by inviting volunteers and aid workers in both medical and legal work to help synthesize a thematic codebook, based on themes that they viewed as essential to the inquiry of wellbeing within the humanitarian landscape. I used this as an outline for interviews and adjusted questions based on their continued involvement and advice. The majority of the articles that make up this thesis were analyzed through a solutions-focused lens and submitted to interdisciplinary journals. Furthermore, one article was written for a non-academic audience and published in *Forced Migration Review*, which requires a list of recommendations, is published in multiple languages, and whose main audience comprises aid workers and policymakers.

Re-traumatization can occur in interviewing refugees about sensitive issues (Goodhand 2000; Zwi et al. 2006). Intrusive questioning, coercion to answer, and consent that is not well-informed are all factors that can lead to re-traumatization. Furthermore, according to Ellis and Adams, “concerns about research being an invasive and oppressive colonialist enterprise is directly connected with the ethics of researching and representing others” (2014, 11). I began the project with the aim to uncover how the interaction between various stakeholders affected the wellbeing of border crossers. Yet, due to my own ethical confliction as to how research aids or harms the participants, I chose not to interview border crossers.

Following Nader, who calls on researchers to “study up, down and sideways simultaneously” (2008), I incorporate a range of stakeholders for the purpose of understanding phenomena from a number of angles. Interlocutors therefore include unpaid

volunteers, paid aid workers, and government employees. Shore and Wright, furthermore, encourage us to “study through” in order to express “the ways in which power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space” (1999, 3). In response to Shore and Wright, I explore the interactions between various stakeholders, viewing these temporally and spatially fixed experiences as phenomena under study. I pay particular attention to the tensions and moments of disjunction that often permeated interactions between the three groups under analysis. Through exploring these tensions, I uncover power inequalities and contestations, which affected not only the parties involved, but also the wider humanitarian landscape as a whole.

Fieldwork was carried out for ten months, from June 2017 until August 2018. I conducted seventy-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews with sixty-eight participants. In addition, I aimed to triangulate the data with other methods (Bryman 2016; Bell 1999). For example, participant observation, volunteering, informal conversations, and analyses of legal documents, policies, organizations’ manifestos, and codes of conduct all contributed to the triangulation of data and served to legitimize personal accounts of events. As mentioned, I volunteered in a legal team, a SAR group, and a camp, during which time I took extensive field notes and experienced many of the issues volunteers spoke about firsthand. Volunteering was an easy way to gain access to other volunteers, and I often met aid workers and government employees through collaborations during volunteer work or in passing at meetings, camps, or organizations. I asked for participation in person and via email, calling, texting, and social media messages. Interviews took place in cafes, camps, apartments, NGO headquarters, beaches (during long boat-spotting nightshifts), and homes; and three interviews took place via Skype. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, save for interviews with three government actors and one with a camp manager who preferred not to be recorded. In the latter cases, I took notes with pen and paper. I also had hundreds of informal conversations and visits to multiple camps, organizations, and squatted settlements.

Participants were chosen through a mix of purposive and snowball sampling. I selected participants based on efforts to represent the humanitarian and volunteer landscapes within which they worked. For example, I incorporated aid workers and volunteers from a range of organizations. I included large, well-funded international organizations with years of humanitarian experience as well as small local solidarity associations and informal anti-fascist groups that would not consider themselves volunteers but rather comrades or solidarians. The variety of actors included aid workers and volunteers who worked in official refugee camps and housing projects, “illegal” squats, medical and legal organizations, soup

kitchens, hospitals, SAR and border monitoring organizations, activist groups working on political issues, and a range of other associations and organizations that offered a variety of services including language and music lessons, dentistry, clothing distribution, and counseling. Names, including those of most organizations, and nationalities have been changed to protect anonymity. In addition, certain personal details have been changed and narratives tweaked, so as to fully anonymize participants.

One aspect of conducting research is performative: I often felt the need to act a certain way depending on whom I was interviewing or shadowing. Even gaining access to certain interlocutors (some government actors and especially volunteers on the far left) required multiple inquiries, someone to vouch for me, and an assessment if I was worthy of their time or story. When meeting potential interlocutors, I often felt the need to explain that I knew a lot about the situation and was volunteering myself—I was not just another researcher, of which there were many. My conveyed decision not to interview border crossers on the premise of not further harming them through re-traumatization ended up being helpful to garner interviews from volunteers and aid workers.

Conducting fieldwork is an iterative process; I therefore began analysis in the field, tailoring my further research accordingly. I entered the field with a theoretical toolkit that I believed would help to make sense of the data. However, I soon realized my theories of governmentality and liminality related more to border crossers than to the volunteers and aid workers whom I studied. Therefore, I moved to a more grounded theoretical approach that allowed the theories to emerge from the data. As the fieldwork progressed and I began analyzing the data, I chose to reorient the project to focus more narrowly on experiences of international informal volunteers. This permitted a deeper understanding of the complex experiences and conceptions that these volunteers had. It also allowed a more nuanced analysis of the many contradictions that permeate the humanitarian landscape.

It can be difficult to know exactly when saturation has been reached. For Strauss and Corbin (1990), saturation is the point at which no new themes emerge from the interviews. Hennink and colleagues go further to differentiate between code saturation as having “heard it all” and meaning saturation as having “underst[ood] it all” (2017, 605). This method produced theories of inclusion and exclusion, criminalization, and situated ethics—these themes were reoccurring, and after fifty or so interviews, I began to understand the humanitarian landscape on a deeper level. I continued to conduct interviews, but later participants were selected much more carefully and on the basis of their ability to fill gaps in my understanding of a phenomenon.

A table as appendix A shows each interlocutor's nationality, age range, type of volunteer, whether the work is considered humanitarian or civil servant, location, and gender. Most of the forty volunteers were European (thirty-four) and volunteered for informal organizations (thirty-three). The twenty-three paid aid workers were predominantly Greek (ten), followed by English (five). A number of paid aid workers had begun as volunteers (six), while the majority had specific skills pertaining to their job, such as legal, medical, financial, or social work backgrounds. The majority of the five government actors were Greek (four).

The Chapters

This introduction presented the context, background, and field sites of my research. I have also explained the theoretical underpinning of the thesis and how it relates to civil society volunteering. I have shown how my own subjectivities impacted the methodological and analytical choices, and explained how I approached participation, how I chose interlocutors, the forms of data I generated, and how I analyzed this data. Finally, I explained the main policies and practices related to asylum seeking in Greece.

Chapter 2 looks at how volunteers struggled to enact their ethical principles in the face of multiple constraints and challenges: exclusionary EU policies, a problematic Greek asylum system, and an aid landscape that often contradicted the ways these volunteers wanted to deliver aid. The research questions that inform this chapter ask: in which ways do the actions of informal volunteers relate to their conceptions of the border and asylum regimes? And how do these informal volunteers interact with, act upon, and (re)produce categories of deservingness? Employing the concept of “informal street level bureaucracy” (Partridge 2008; Lipsky 1980), I show how volunteers used their discretionary power as citizens of the Global North to affect the residence status and rights of border crossers who would otherwise be deemed undeserving. These volunteers viewed the asylum regime and the closure of borders to people fleeing generalized and economic violence as unjust. They therefore aided border crossers in fitting into two categories that would help them attain entitlements and rights: the “refugee” and “vulnerable person” categories.

Chapter 3 outlines situational difficulties that volunteers encountered in Athens and on Lesbos due to the overburdened aid organizations and government actors' inability to effectively aid border crossers. I expose situations in which informal volunteers took over responsibility: contacting family members after a border crosser's death, housing minors in a hotel, and my own experience of aiding a man with suicidal ideation. In each case, large

organizations were contacted to help, yet were unable to do so in the immediate term. This short chapter, written for a non-academic audience, exposes the gap between necessity and available resources, and gives concrete recommendations for organizations with respect to training and collaboration.

Chapter 4 is co-authored with Dr. Victòria Fumadó, of ISGlobal. It follows the theme of the previous chapter, and puts forth a new concept which my co-author and I call the *informality double-bind*, to account for the difficult choice informal volunteers are forced to make due to their informality. The chapter analyzes the intimate solidarity (Scheibelhofer 2019) offered by informal volunteers, which we define as both social closeness and emotional attachment. This chapter explores one particular instance of intimate solidarity, in which two informal volunteers housed two unaccompanied minor border crossers in their Athens apartment for three months in 2017. The informality double-bind revolves around the difficulty faced by informal volunteers in deciding how and in which ways to offer aid: on one hand, intimate solidarity may be considered necessary because without it in certain situations border crossers are left on the streets with little or no aid. On the other hand volunteers who engage in intimate solidarity can put border crossers and themselves at various forms of risk. We explore the ways in which informality responds to and produces risks for both border crossers and volunteers, juxtaposing the informal nature of civil society action, with the bureaucratization of formal aid work.

Chapter 5 is co-authored with Laura Schack, of University College London. Our research question asks: how does the criminalization of civil society volunteering affect the volunteer and humanitarian landscape? And why are informal volunteers being targeted by the Greek state? In this chapter we analyze the criminalization of informal volunteers through Derrida's concept of "hostile hospitality" (1999). Specifically looking at search and rescue (SAR) and informal housing spaces, we create a framework that guides our analysis to hypothesize why state actors are criminalizing solidarity and rescue. Although there is recent literature on the increasing phenomenon of criminalization of solidarity and volunteering, none to date has sought to answer why this is occurring. We therefore take up this challenge here. We argue that informal volunteers are criminalized based on four key findings: first, the form of hospitality offered by informal volunteers is unconditional—that is, it is offered to all border crossers regardless of whether the state prefers not to offer them hospitality; second, volunteers contest the state's authority expressed as hostility; third, the forms of housing that

volunteers offer show a successful alternative to the state's approach; and fourth, informal volunteers, most of whom are international, expose new ways of thinking about "guest" and "host," thereby challenging the notion of hospitality and sovereignty altogether. Finally, an additional finding was that volunteers doing SAR and border monitoring were able to witness and publicize instances of hostility and illegality on the part of Greek authorities, thus further challenging the Greek state's sovereignty.

Chapter 6 explores how informal volunteers discursively frame state actors and aid workers as unethical and violent, and how the volunteers are, in turn framed as untrained and potentially dangerous, by the state and specific aid agencies. I employ Gramsci's war of position to show that these discursive practices aim to discredit and delegitimize the other, in effect, aiming to either challenge (in the case of the volunteers) or uphold (in the case of the state and large organizations) the status quo of the humanitarian and border regimes.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis with an analysis of how these chapters come together to produce new contributions and theoretical insights. I have included an epilogue, that explains some of the new developments in Greece since this fieldwork took place.