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

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EPILOGUE

Since this research took place, there have been many new developments in Greece and globally, which have affected both border crossers and those who help them. This short epilogue (written in November 2020) is an attempt to bring the reader up to date with important changes in policy, practice, and lived experience.

The left-wing SYRIZA party had ruled Greece, with Alexis Tsipras as its prime minister in a coalition with the nationalist ANEL party from 2015 to 2019, during which time my fieldwork took place. This government was more refugee-friendly than the previous years, yet enacted a number of oppressive policies—such as the island restriction this thesis has described. SYRIZA-ANEL was replaced in July 2019 by the more conservative and nationalistic New Democracy party. Led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, this new party has evicted more than 900 border crossers from informal settlements in Athens, placing the majority in closed detention centers; increased its border security forces to stop border crossers from entering Greece; vowed to transfer residents of open camps to closed detention centers; and legislated for faster asylum decisions that would speed up returns to Turkey (Krithari 2019).

Compounded onto increasingly restrictive policies, political conflict between Turkey and the EU in February 2020 propelled Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to temporarily suspend Turkey's obligations under the EU-Turkey Agreement and allow border crossers to exit Turkey once again. To counter the arrivals to Greece, more police and border guards were deployed to border areas; border guards shot live rounds of ammunition at boats in the Aegean Sea as well as towards people crossing the land border at Evros. This resulted in the deaths of two border crossers via gunshot wounds and the drowning of a young child in the Aegean (Galinos 2020).

In addition to more draconian border security measures, the Greek government deployed bureaucratic barriers to halt the new arrivals. For example, Greece temporarily suspended the Geneva Convention, denying the registration of any new asylum claims (Ketibuah-Foley 2020). This was retracted, however, after blowback from human rights and legal organizations for its illegality and outright negation of human rights (HRW 2020a).

In addition to the new arrivals, tensions on the islands increased as plans to create more detention centers culminated in violent protests between citizens and police from January through March 2020 (Ketibuah-Foley 2020). This violence then turned toward journalists, aid workers, volunteers, and solidarians who were considered by angry locals to

be a part of the problem. These humanitarians, volunteers, and journalists were chased by men with makeshift weapons, had their car windows smashed, and some were beaten. Many organizations left the island after these incidents for fear of assault (Ketibuah-Foley 2020; Smith 2020a; Hume 2020).

In March 2020, COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic. Greece has not been one the hardest hit countries in part due to strict COVID-19 measures, such as lockdowns and curfews (Smith 2020b). However, border crossers are particularly at risk in camps due to the inability to socially distance and the lack of resources, such as proper sanitation and ventilation. The UNHCR reported that as of August 2020, there were 121,000 border crossers in Greece (UNHCR 2020b). Until September 2020, Moria camp on Lesvos had nearly ten times its capacity with more than 12,000 residents in a space for just 2,800 (HRW 2020c; Viezis 2020)There were hundreds of people per working toilet and shower; 1,300 people shared just one water tap; and in the overflow of the camp, there were 5,000 residents living without access to water or toilets (personal communication with head of MSF Greece, Apostolos Viezis 2020; Hargreaves et al. 2020). Sanitation was clearly severely lacking, and there was very little possibility of isolating COVID-19-positive residents. To halt the spread of COVID-19, camps around Greece are under a temporary lockdown, with very limited movement of residents being allowed outside. At the camps with active COVID-19 cases, no one has been allowed to leave (Tanrikulu Kizil 2020; HRW 2020b; 2020c).

Moria camp burned to the ground in September 2020. Given the conditions of the camp, the number of inhabitants living in dismal conditions, and the restrictive quarantine, it would not be a stretch to question if this was the work of a resident or residents. Media outlets have surmised that it could have been local Greeks, angry with the large numbers of border crossers on Lesvos, or angry resident border crossers tired of their continued subjugation and oppression (Ketibuah-Foley 2020). Greek authorities have arrested resident border crossers on suspicion of arson (Papantonis and Becatoro 2020). In either case, the polices of Greek and European governments are certainly in part to blame. Rather than create new policies to better aid border crossers, a new camp was quickly erected to take the place of Moria (ibid.). Volunteers, along with aid workers, have been using their social and political capital to bring attention to this unfolding catastrophe and to force the Greek and EU governments to move border crossers out of the camps. Yet, the government has been slow to act and, as of October 2020, more transfers to better accommodation and to the mainland are needed. It remains to be seen how things will unfold for border crossers in Greece. What is clear is that informal volunteers continue to risk their safety in order to aid border crossers.

Meanwhile, the governments of Greece and the EU engage in more stringent lockdown measures that aim to protect Greek and EU citizens from border crossers rather than enacting policies to protect all people from the virus.

Appendix

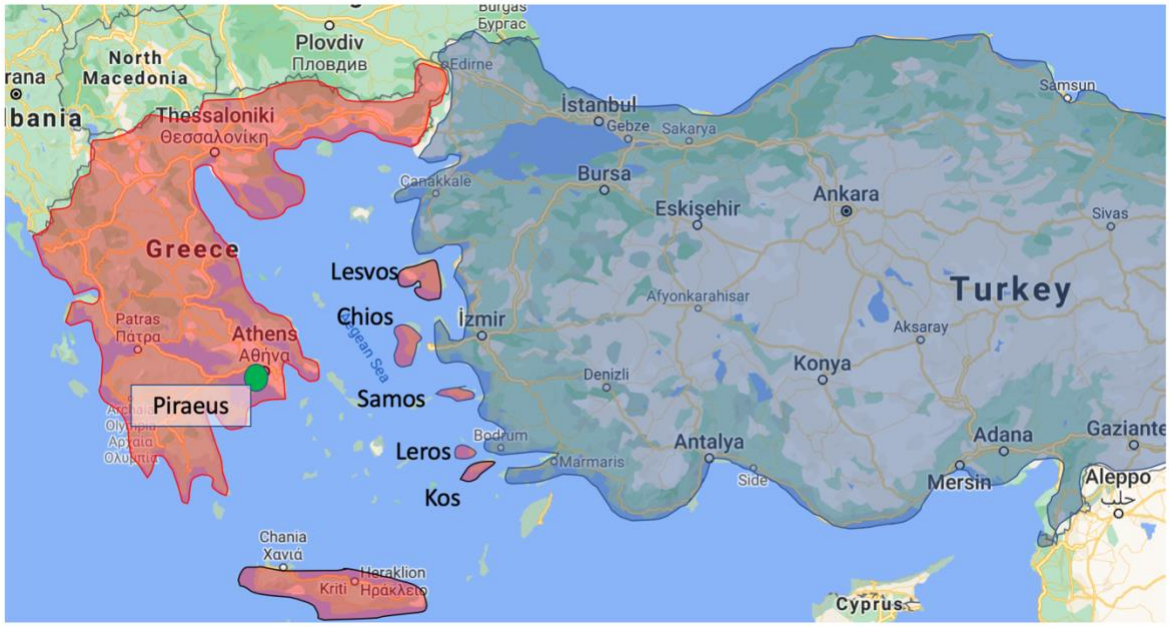
A. Table of volunteers, aid workers, and government employees

Volunteers					
	Nationality	Age range	Type of volunteering/working	Location of volunteering/working	Gender
1.	American	30s	Program manager, health, camp	Lesvos	F
2.	American	20s	Camp work, children, informal	Lesvos	F
3.	Belgian	30s	Camp work, informal	Lesvos	F
4.	Canadian	20s	Teacher, informal org	Athens	M
5.	Dutch	20s	Camp work	Lesvos	F
6.	Dutch	30s	Health, camp	Lesvos	F
7.	Dutch	20s	Activist, informal actions	Lesvos	F
8.	Egyptian	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
9.	English	50s	Squats, camp work, teacher, informal	Athens, Lesvos	F
10.	English	30s	Legal aid, activism, informal	Athens	F
11.	English	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
12.	English	20s	Kitchen coordinator informal	Athens	M
13.	English	20s	Food distribution, camp, informal	Lesvos	M
14.	English	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	M
15.	English	20s	Legal aid, accommodation, informal	Athens	M
16.	English	20s	Informal activities	Athens	F
17.	English	30s	Medical	Lesvos	F
18.	English	20s	Informal org, admin	Athens	F

19.	English	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
20.	English	20s	SAR	Lesvos	F
21.	English	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
22.	French	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
23.	French	20s	Informal activities	Athens	F
24.	German	30s	SAR, activist, informal	Lesvos	F
25.	Greek	50s	Lawyer, informal	Athens	M
26.	Indian	20s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
27.	Irish	20s	Camp work, informal	Lesvos	M
28.	Irish	20s	Camp work, activist, informal	Lesvos	M
29.	Irish	20s	Camp work, activist, informal	Lesvos	M
30.	Italian	30s	Legal aid (lawyer)	Lesvos	M
31.	Italian	30s	SAR, informal	Lesvos	F
32.	Palestinian	20s	Camp work, translation	Lesvos	F
33.	Scottish	20s	Camp work, building, informal	Lesvos	M
34.	Spanish	30s	Translation, legal, informal	Athens	F
35.	Spanish	30s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
36.	Spanish	20s	Translation, legal aid, informal	Athens	F
37.	Spanish	30s	Informal activities	Athens	F
38.	Spanish	30s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	M
39.	Spanish	30s	Legal aid, informal	Athens	F
40.	Syrian	30s	Translator, informal org	Athens	M
Paid aid workers					
1.	Belgian	30s	Camp management	Lesvos	F
2.	Dutch	30s	Medical professional	Lesvos	F
3.	English	30s	Manager, camp	Lesvos	F
4.	English	20s	NGO, funding	Athens, Lesvos	F
5.	English	20s	NGO, finance	Athens	F

6.	English	30s	Camp management	Lesvos	F
7.	English	30s	Camp management	Lesvos	F
8.	French	30s	Protection officer, legal aid	Lesvos	F
9.	German/Palestinian	30s	Protection officer, translator	Lesvos	F
10.	Greek	30s	Social worker, torture program	Athens	F
11.	Greek	20s	NGO, funding	Athens, Lesvos	M
12.	Greek	20s	Camp, social media	Lesvos	F
13.	Greek	20s	NGO, finance	Athens	M
14.	Greek	40s	Coms, manager, IGO	Lesvos	M
15.	Greek	40s	Cash assistance, GAS	Athens	M
16.	Greek	40s	Camp management	Lesvos	M
17.	Greek	30s	Lawyer, torture project	Athens	F
18.	Greek	20s	Social worker, torture project	Lesvos	F
19.	Greek	40s	Camp manager	Athens area	M
20.	Greek	50s	Medical director NGO	Greek wide	M
21.	Irish	20s	SAR	Lesvos	M
22.	Italian	30s	SAR, medical	Lesvos	F
23.	Scottish	20s	Social work, youth	Athens	F
Government actors					
1.	American	40s	(I)NGO	Athens	F
2.	Greek	40s	Camp governance	Lesvos	M
3.	Greek	50s	Vice mayor	Athens	M
4.	Greek	40s	IGO/NGO	Lesvos	M
5.	Greek	40s	IGO/NGO	Athens	M

B.



Google maps Greece, Hotspots (2020).

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SUMMARY

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

Greece is considered the "doorstep of Europe" from the Middle East. In 2015, it served as a transit country for almost one million border crossers, a categorization that encompasses asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants largely fleeing conflict, persecution, economic instability, and generalized violence. The erection of fences along the route to Western Europe and the implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement trapped border crossers in Greece, who before had continued westward mainly to Germany and the United Kingdom (Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017; Oikonomakis 2018). They had become stuck in Greece, and needed legal and medical aid, accommodation, and a variety of services. Local solidarity initiatives that had sprung up after the 2008 economic crisis and ensuing 2011 austerity crisis began offering solidarity and services. Local and international aid organizations offered specialized and technical support, while Greek government agencies offered specific aid, such as accommodation. And last but not least, informal volunteers arrived mainly from elsewhere in Europe to help with services and resource distribution.

I began fieldwork in 2017 in Athens and on Lesvos with the intention of exploring the humanitarian landscape in all its diversity. I wanted to understand how the lives of border crossers were affected by the policies and practices of the state and the European Union (EU), but also by those offering aid. I began by volunteering at an informal association in Athens that offered legal aid and was run mainly by international informal volunteers. I discovered quickly that the aid landscape was not a cohesive system with a singular goal of aiding border crossers. Instead, I found that diverse motives and obligations created conflicting and divisive groups of helpers who aided border crossers in varying, sometimes contradictory ways. In particular, I noticed how informal volunteers advocated for the rights of border crossers, and did so often in conflict with the asylum regime that created or exacerbated precarity and ill-health. I began to formulate a research question to explore this dilemma.

My 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*? In answering this question, during 2017-

2018, I conducted ten months of qualitative ethnographic fieldwork in Athens and on Lesvos with actors involved in the provision of aid and in enacting policy. Understanding the humanitarian landscape in all its complexity required a methodology that incorporated multiple viewpoints and "studying up, down and sideways simultaneously" (Nader 2008). Therefore, I conducted research with a range of actors and categorized them under three main stakeholder groups: informal volunteers, aid workers, and government employees. In addition to interviews, I had hundreds of informal conversations with stakeholders; engaged in participant observation; and analyzed legal documents, policies, and information leaflets distributed by NGOs and associations on the ground. I spent time in camps, legal and medical NGOs, hospitals, soup kitchens, and informal associations that offered services such as accommodation, educational and vocational courses, legal aid, and resource distribution, among other services. Through an iterative transdisciplinary methodology, which included incorporating the suggestions of my interlocutors to reformulate my aims and questions, I began to focus more narrowly on informal volunteers and specific aspects of their interactions with border crossers, aid workers, and government actors. My own volunteering contributed to my understanding of the main issues; in Athens, I volunteered on a legal aid team and on Lesvos, at a camp for vulnerable border crossers and with a border monitoring and search and rescue (SAR) group.

To help navigate the intricacies of the research, I explain the terms employed in this thesis as well as main conventions and policies that restrict and control the movement of border crossers. I have chosen to call my group of interlocutors "informal volunteers" following Castañeda's "acts of citizenship" (2013) and Fechter and Schwittay's "citizen aid" (2019). Castañeda explains that these "citizens express solidarity with migrants beyond the traditional bounds of political community" in which the citizen allies dissent from the state to offer aid to non-citizens (2013, 228). This mirrors the main characteristic of "citizen aid" (Fechter and Schwittay 2019), which is that citizens engage with beneficiaries outside of NGO and state organizations; personal agency and personal ethical decision-making are key to this informal type of aid. I term all people who have entered Greece via alternative routes, such as the land border or sea, or have arrived on false documents, as "border crossers." The reasoning is to avoid employment of labels that imply judgment about deservingness, such as "refugee" or "economic migrant."

In the introduction chapter, I explain important aspects of the asylum regime in Greece. I began by introducing the "refugee" definition as outlined in UNHCR's 1951 Refugee Convention. This definition is consequential because it affects how border crossers

experience the asylum regime; they must prove to Greek Asylum Service (GAS) personnel—a Greek governmental authority tasked with deciding the outcomes of asylum claims—that they are worthy of asylum based on having a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."[26] While a border crosser may have experienced extreme economic insecurity or generalized violence, these are not acceptable reasons to apply for asylum, according to the current system.

The second main policy that permeates all aspects of the humanitarian landscape is the 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement. It mandates that unsuccessful asylum applicants return to Turkey, thereby dramatically decreasing the number of asylum seekers to Greece. As a result, Greece enacted the "island restriction" in which border crossers are not entitled to free movement beyond the island on which they arrive, and therefore must remain on Lesvos until their asylum acceptance or rejection and deportation. As more border crossers arrived to Lesvos, but few were able to leave the island, camps became overcrowded and suicidal ideation and self-harm increased markedly (MSF 2017, 2019). To mitigate some of the rising tensions, the government began to categorize border crossers into varying degrees of vulnerability, with only the most vulnerable being transferred to the mainland.

This thesis explicates two main themes: the first is inclusion and exclusion. Throughout the thesis, I show how border crossers were either included or excluded into the asylum system, accommodation and camps, refugee and vulnerability categories, and the Greek nation and EU more broadly. Volunteers were embedded into the systems of inclusion and exclusion as they attempted to use their agentive power to be more inclusive of border crossers whom the state would wish to exclude (such as undocumented migrants, those considered not vulnerable, or those to be deported). However, volunteers were actively excluded from offering certain forms of bureaucratized aid, such as housing and SAR, and were criminalized for including themselves in certain aid regimes without being sanctioned by the state. Following Hilhorst and Jansen (2010), I conceptualized this border region as a "humanitarian arena" where multiple actors and institutions competed to aid border crossers. Within this arena, the Greek state employed a form of "hostile hospitality" (Derrida 1999) toward border crossers, which in the Foucauldian sense was both caring and controlling, inclusive and simultaneously exclusive. The state was hospitable—that is, inclusive—in

[26] 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.

allowing border crossers to enter, registration, and the allocation of basic material services. Yet, it was hostile—that is, exclusive—in how it conceptualized and patrolled the border, essentially externalizing asylum to Turkey.

I argue that informal volunteers struggled to enact their ethical principles within governance regimes that categorized people in ways that contradicted the volunteers' moral rationalities. Broadly, these rationalities were twofold: first, that those fleeing economic and political insecurities should be granted access to the EU (and beyond); and second, that the asylum regime was unjust and consequently must be subverted. These rationalities compelled volunteers to use their positionalities as educated citizens, who were largely European, to help border crossers access certain resources that they would not otherwise qualify for and to help them access equitable and lawful treatment when dealing with the GAS. I showed how the volunteers helped border crossers attain the coveted status of "refugee" or "vulnerable person" through legal aid and advocacy. For example, volunteers on the legal aid team in Athens helped border crossers accentuate aspects of their personal histories that would be favorable for asylum and grant them access to the refugee status. Likewise, they aided border crossers to attain what I call "vulnerability papers," which would prove physical or mental health issues. These papers could be used to support the case to transfer border crossers off the island of Lesvos or to access the Regional Asylum Office in Athens that was reserved for vulnerable cases. Throughout the thesis, I showcase how ordinary citizens (that is, volunteers), largely without political capital, had the power to affect the lives of border crossers and to challenge state bureaucracy, thereby interfering in state sovereignty.

A secondary theme recurring through the majority of this dissertation is that of a fractured and ambiguous ethical landscape. I found that a widespread explanation among informal volunteers for their placement in ethically ambiguous situations was the gap in services left by the Greek state and large humanitarian organizations. This resulted in tens of thousands border crossers living in precarity; thousands were homeless, while others lacked medical and legal services, and most lacked the resources to live well. Informal volunteers argued that the lack of services forced them to act, regardless of whether they had the resources or institutional capability. For example, volunteers often felt compelled to offer more intimate forms of solidarity, such as sharing their personal phone numbers, impromptu late-night meet-ups to help with serious circumstances, and even hosting border crossers in their personal apartments. On the last point, they were forced to choose between leaving border crossers to sleep on the streets, knowing that no aid or government organization could

help in the immediate, and hosting border crossers personally, which could pose risks to both parties, a term I call the informality double-bind. I argue that the ambiguities the volunteers faced revolved around their informality in offering services; on the one hand, their informality meant that they were able to attend to situations almost immediately, in contrast to the state and large organizations. On the other hand, this informality could pose difficult quandaries, such as a volunteer's decision to take a border crosser into their personal home when the other option was homelessness, a risk of violence, and a long wait for institutionalized aid.

Next I explore how the criminalization of volunteers was inexorably linked to notions of sovereignty; the offer of hospitality by volunteers impeded state forms of hostile hospitality and furthermore challenged notions of "guest" and "host" because the majority of these volunteers were from outside Greece. Volunteers were harassed and criminalized for their alliance with, and defense of, irregularized migrants who were increasingly being categorized as criminals. For example, I show how SAR volunteers monitored the border and reported instances of *refoulement* to Turkey. The presence of volunteers likely forced border guards, Frontex, and others operating at the borders to follow international (maritime and asylum) law. This phenomenon of volunteers acting as watchdogs is likely not confined to Greece or the EU. This exploration offers a new lens through which to analyze the myriad informal civil society actions throughout Europe and beyond. Not only do these actions challenge sovereignty, but they also confront long-held power asymmetries in which government actors are assumed to wield the majority of the power to decide who is included and excluded into the polity.

In all of the chapters I show how, for border crossers, Greece was a place of severe pain, uncertainty, and despair. There were multiple occasions that border crossers expressed the wish to have stayed in their home countries and faced death or whatever fate would have befallen them. Lives lived in camps were dismal: most camps had rules that prohibited border crossers from cooking for themselves; there were hours-long line-ups for food, showers, healthcare centers, and bureaucratic procedures; and they were overall unhygienic and dangerous. I argue that the precarious living conditions in Greece actually inscribed vulnerabilities onto border crossers' bodies and minds, whether or not these vulnerabilities were recognized by state actors and NGOs. That these vulnerabilities then had to be on display so that border crossers could attain certain amenities furthered their subjugation and created division between border crossers, as they struggled to show how their vulnerability was more severe than another's.

Informal volunteers fought for border crossers in various ways. They were embedded in the humanitarian arena, but contested many of the hegemonic forms of aid offered. Their approach to aid was generally that of solidarity rather than of humanitarianism; it was unconditional hospitality as opposed to conditional—that is, hostile—hospitality; and it aimed to be egalitarian rather than hierarchical. In practice, informal volunteers were unable to fulfill all these principles all the time, and their struggles within the bureaucratized systems are laid bare in this thesis. I show that volunteers often conceptualized the state as a monolithic entity engaged in violence and saw large organizations as handmaidens to the state's actions. State actors also framed informal volunteers in a negative light. This, among other discursive framings, seemed to exacerbate tensions and fuel more exclusion to the detriment of border crossers.

Throughout the thesis I try to conceptualize the work of informal volunteers as a potential "site of sovereign power" (Tickin 2006, 44). Through their often subversive forms of humanitarianism, informal volunteers became gatekeepers to Greece—and the EU. They challenged power asymmetries between government, aid organizations, and ordinary citizens, proving that ordinary citizens can leverage discretionary power to aid border crossers to attain entitlements and rights. The informal volunteers who made up this research are a prime example of subversive collective action and they lay the groundwork for a future in which solidarity and equality are aspired to, valued, and worked toward.

SAMENVATTING

Griekenland wordt algemeen beschouwd als de "drempel naar Europa" vanuit het Midden-Oosten. In 2015 vormde het land een doorgang voor bijna een miljoen grensovergangers, een categorisering die onder meer asielzoekers, vluchtelingen en ongedocumenteerde migranten omvat die overwegend conflict, vervolging, economische instabiliteit en geweld ontvluchten. Het afbakenen van bepaalde plekken op de route naar West-Europa en de verwezenlijking van de in 2016 overeengekomen EU-Turkije Verklaring zorgden ervoor dat grensovergangers vast kwamen te zitten in Griekenland. Eerder konden zij nog westwaarts reizen, met voornaamste bestemmingen Duitsland en Engeland (Zaragoza-Cristiani 2017; Oikonomakis 2018). Vastgezeten in Griekenland, hadden zij behoefte aan juridische en medische hulp, onderdak en verscheidene (levens) middelen en diensten. Lokale initiatieven die waren opgericht tijdens de economische crisis van 2008 en de daaruit voortvloeiende bezuinigingscrisis in 2011, toonden nu solidariteit aan gestrande reizigers en boden diverse diensten aan ter ondersteuning van deze groep. Lokale en internationale hulporganisaties boden specialistische zorg en ondersteuning, terwijl de Griekse overheidsorganisaties te hulp schoten met specifieke zaken, zoals huisvesting. Tenslotte arriveerden burger vrijwilligers uit andere Europese landen om te helpen met de distributie van middelen en dienstverlening.

In 2017 begon ik met veldwerk in Athene en Lesbos met de intentie het humanitaire veld in al haar diversiteit te onderzoeken. Ik wilde begrijpen hoe het leven van grensovergangers werd getroffen door beleidsvoering en optreden van de overheid en Europese Unie (EU), maar ook van zorgverleners. Ik ben begonnen met vrijwilligerswerk bij een informele organisatie gespecialiseerd in juridische hulpverlening in Athene die voornamelijk bestond uit internationale vrijwilligers. Ik vernam dat het veld van hulpverleners geen samenhangend systeem vormde welke een gezamenlijk doel nastreefde, namelijk, het bijstaan van grensovergangers. Echter, ik zag hoe uiteenlopende motieven en loyaliteiten verschillende en verdeelde groepen creëerden die grensovergangers op diverse en soms tegenstrijdige wijzen probeerden bij te staan. Met name merkte ik op hoe burger vrijwilligers pleitten voor de rechten van grensovergangers, en dit doorgaans deden in strijd met het asielregime, een beleid dat precaire posities en gezondheidsproblemen van grensovergangers in de hand leek te werken.

Mijn onderzoeksvraag luidt: *hoe vormt de relatie tussen burger vrijwilligers en de door de staat gesanctioneerde instellingen het hulpverleningsveld, en wat is haar invloed op het traject van grensovergangers?* In het beantwoorden van deze vraag heb ik tijdens de periode

2017-2018 tien maanden kwalitatief etnografisch veldwerk uitgevoerd in Athene en op Lesbos met personen in de hulpverlening en betrokken in beleidswerk. Om het humanitaire landschap in al haar complexiteit te bestudeerden was een methodologie nodig die meerdere perspectieven toestond om het zo te kunnen "bestuderen van boven naar beneden en zijwaarts" (Nader 2008). Zodoende onderzocht ik een wijd spectrum van betrokkenen die ik heb onderverdeeld in drie groepen: burger vrijwilligers, hulpverleners, en overheidsmedewerkers. Naast interviews heb ik talloze informele gesprekken gevoerd met betrokkenen, ik heb participerend geobserveerd en juridische documenten, beleidsvoering en informatieve pamfletten geanalyseerd die gedistribueerd werden door NGOs en organisaties in het veld. Ik heb tijd doorgebracht in kampen, juridische en medische NGOs, ziekenhuizen, veldkeukens en informele organisaties die verschillende diensten aanboden, waaronder het verschaffen van huisvesting, educatieve- en beroepscursussen, juridische hulp en distributie van middelen. Door systematisch een trans disciplinaire methodologie toe te passen, waaronder het incorporeren van suggesties van informanten om mijn vraag- en doelstelling aan te scherpen, ben ik meer gaan focussen op burger vrijwilligers en specifieke aspecten van hun interactie met grensovergangers, hulpverleners en overheidsmedewerkers. Mijn eigen ervaring als vrijwilliger hielp mij inzicht te krijgen in de voornaamste thema's; in Athene werkte ik op vrijwillige basis in een juridisch hulpverleners team, en op Lesbos werkte ik zowel in een kamp voor kwetsbare grensovergangers als met de grensbewaking en noodhulp.

Om een beter beeld te krijgen van de complexiteit van dit onderzoek, licht ik een aantal termen toe en leg ik de voornaamste beleidsregels uit die de bewegingsvrijheid van grensovergangers beperken en controleren. Ik heb ervoor gekozen mijn groep informanten "informele burger vrijwilligers" te noemen, in navolging van Castañeda's "*acts of citizenship*" (2013) en Fechter en Schwittay's "burgerhulp" (2019). Castañeda verklaart dat "burgers blijk geven van saamhorigheid met migranten buiten de grenzen van hun politieke gemeenschap" wanneer zij van mening verschillen met de overheid over het bieden van hulp aan niet-burgers (2013, 228). Dit geeft het voornaamste kenmerk weer van "burgerhulp" (Fechter en Schwittay 2019), waar burgers begunstigden ondersteunen buiten NGO en staatsorganisaties om; persoonlijke keuzevrijheid en persoonlijke ethische besluitvorming zijn de belangrijkste kenmerken in dit type onofficiële hulpverlening.

Ik beschouw alle mensen die Griekenland zijn binnengekomen via alternatieve routes, zoals de landsgrenzen of de zee, of het land zijn binnengekomen met valse papieren, als

"grensovergangers", om zo eventuele oordelen te voorkomen die gepaard kunnen gaan met uitdrukkingen als "vluchteling" of "economische migrant".

In de introductie leg ik de voornaamste aspecten van het asielsysteem in Griekenland uit. Ik introduceer de definitie van "vluchteling" zoals gedefinieerd in de Vluchtelingen Conventie door de UNHCR in 1951. Deze definitie is van belang vanwege haar uitoefening op grensovergangers en hoe zij het asielbeleid ervaren; zij worden geacht bewijzen aan te leveren aan de Griekse Asiel Service (GAS)—een Griekse overheidsinstantie belast met de besluitvorming over asielaanvragen—opdat zij in aanmerking komen voor asiel op basis van "een gegronde angst om vervolgd te worden om redenen gebaseerd op herkomst, religie, nationaliteit, behoren tot een bepaalde sociale groep of politieke opinie."[27] Hoewel een grensoverganger extreme economische onzekerheid of geweld heeft kunnen ervaren, is dit niet automatisch een acceptabele reden om asiel aan te vragen volgens het huidige systeem.

Het tweede kernbeleid dat alle aspecten van dit humanitaire veld doordringt is de EU-Turkije Verklaring van 2016. Het verplicht alle asielzoekers wiens asielverzoek is afgewezen terug te keren naar Turkije, met gevolg dat het aantal asielzoekers in Griekenland dramatisch afneemt. Als gevolg van dit beleid heeft Griekenland de "eilandbeperking" ingevoerd, waar grensovergangers gelimiteerde bewegingsvrijheid ervaren en niet in staat zijn te reizen buiten het eiland waar zij zijn aangekomen. Zij moeten daardoor op Lesbos verblijven tot hun asielaanvaarding of asielafwijzing en deportatie. Naarmate meer grensovergangers op Lesbos arriveerden, en maar weinigen het eiland mochten verlaten, ontstond er een situatie waar kampen overbevolkt raakten en mentale instabiliteit en zelfverwonding aanzienlijk toenamen (MSF 2017, 2019). Om de toenemende spanning te temperen, begon de regering met het categoriseren van grensovergangers aan de hand van de mate van kwetsbaarheid, waarbij slechts de meest kwetsbaren naar het vastenland werden getransporteerd.

Dit proefschrift zet twee hoofdthema's uiteen: de eerste is insluiting en uitsluiting. Ik laat zien hoe grensovergangers insluiting ofwel uitsluiting ervaren in het asielsysteem, accommodatie mogelijkheden en de kampen, door geconstrueerde categorieën van vluchtelingen en mate van kwetsbaarheid, en breder genomen, door de Griekse staat en de EU. Vrijwilligers zijn ingebed in dit systeem van insluiting en uitsluiting wanneer zij hun keuzevrijheid inzetten om grensovergangers te accepteren die de staat wil uitsluiten (zoals ongedocumenteerde migranten, zij die niet als kwetsbaar worden beschouwd, of

[27] Conventie en Protocol aangaande de Status van Vluchtelingen. UNHCR. Tekst uit de Conventie aangaande de Status van Vluchtelingen van 1951. Tekst uit Protocol aangaande de Status van Vluchtelingen. Resolutie 2198 (XXI) aangenomen door de United Nations General Assembly. https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.

grensovergangers die gedeporteerd worden). Echter, vrijwilligers werden actief buitengesloten in de hulpverlening van bepaalde door de overheid gesanctioneerde diensten zoals huisvesting en noodhulp en konden in de problemen komen wanneer zij een rol probeerden te spelen in hulpprogramma's vanuit de overheid. In navolging van Hilhorst en Jansen (2010), conceptualiseer ik de grensregio als "humanitaire arena" waar verschillende hulpverlenende organisaties en partijen concurreren. In deze arena heeft de Griekse staat een vorm van "vijandige gastvrijheid" (Derrida 1999) aangewend jegens grensovergangers, die in de Foucaultiaanse zin zowel zorgzaam als controlerend werkte, zowel insluitend als uitsluitend. De staat heeft zich gastvrij—insluitend— opgesteld door grensovergangers toe te staan om binnen te komen, zich te registreren en hen basisbehoeften toe te delen. Echter, de staat is tegelijkertijd vijandig—uitsluitend—op de manier waarop het de grenzen controleerde, en in wezen asielzoekers overliet aan Turkije.

Ik stel dat burger vrijwilligers moeite hadden zich aan hun eigen ethische principes te behouden binnen bestuur regimes die mensen categoriseerden op manieren die niet strookten met hun eigen moreel gedachtegoed. Over het algemeen was dit gedachtegoed tweeledig: ten eerste, zij die vluchten van economische en politieke onzekerheid zouden moeten worden toegelaten tot de EU (en verder); en ten tweede, het asielbeleid is onrechtvaardig en zou moeten worden ondermijnd. Dit gedachtegoed spoorde vrijwilligers aan om hun posities als goed opgeleide burgers, veelal Europeanen, te gebruiken om grensovergangers te helpen middelen te bemachtigen die anders buiten hun bereik zouden liggen en te ondersteunen in het krijgen van eerlijke en rechtmatige behandeling van GAS.

Ik laat zien hoe vrijwilligers grensovergangers helpen in het verkrijgen van de gewilde status van "vluchteling" of "kwetsbaar persoon" door hulp te bieden met juridische zaken en belangenbehartiging. Vrijwilligers in het juridische team in Athene hielpen bijvoorbeeld met het accentueren van episodes in de persoonlijke geschiedenis van grensovergangers die gunstig zouden kunnen zijn in het verkrijgen van de vluchtelingenstatus en uiteindelijk asiel. Ook hielpen zij met het verkrijgen van wat ik "kwetsbaarheids documenten" noem, documentatie ter bewijs van lichamelijke of geestelijke gezondheidsproblemen. Deze documenten konden grensovergangers helpen om van Lesbos naar het Regionaal Asiel Centrum in Athene te worden overgedragen, waar voornamelijk personen met een kwetsbaarheidsstatus worden opgenomen. Ik laat in dit proefschrift herhaaldelijk zien hoe gewone burgers (vrijwilligers), grotendeels zonder politiek kapitaal,

impact hebben op de levens van grensovergangers en hierbij de bureaucratie ondermijnen en de staatsoevereiniteit betwisten.

Een tweede thema dat als rode draad door dit proefschrift loopt is het verdeelde en dubbelzinnige ethische landschap. Een veelgehoorde verklaring voor de aanwezigheid van burger vrijwilligers op bepaalde posities was dat zij behoeftes vervulden die werden nagelaten door de Griekse staat en grote humanitaire organisaties. Het ontbreken van bepaalde zorg resulteerde in enorme aantallen grensovergangers in precaire leefomstandigheden. Duizenden waren dakloos, voor anderen ontbraken juridische en medische hulp, en voor de meesten was er een tekort aan middelen voor een gegoede levensstijl. Burger vrijwilligers meenden dat deze tekorten hen forceerden om in te grijpen, ongeacht hun capaciteiten of middelen om het systeem te navigeren. Vrijwilligers voelden bijvoorbeeld vaak de behoefte intieme vormen van solidariteit aan te bieden, zoals het uitwisselen van telefoonnummers, spontane bijeenkomsten te organiseren ongeacht het uur om te helpen bij serieuze omstandigheden, en het ontvangen van grensovergangers in hun eigen appartementen. In het laatste geval werden vrijwilligers voor de keuze gezet om grensovergangers op straat te laten slapen, wetende dat zij geen onmiddellijke hulp zouden ontvangen van overheids- of humanitaire organisaties, of om hen persoonlijk te hosten, wat risico's voor beide partijen met zich mee brengt. Ik beargumenteer dat de ambiguïteit die vrijwilligers ervaarden lag in de informele setting waarin hulp werd geboden; enerzijds betekende deze informaliteit dat zij haast onmiddellijk konden handelen, in tegenstelling tot overheids- en grote organisaties. Anderzijds kon een informele aanpak hen in lastige situaties brengen, bijvoorbeeld wanneer de consequenties om grensovergangers niet in huis te nemen waren om hen op straat te laten staan, bloot te stellen aan geweld of aan lange wachttijden voor georganiseerde hulp.

Vervolgens onderzoek ik hoe de criminalisering van vrijwilligers onlosmakelijk verbonden is aan opvattingen van soevereiniteit; vrijwilligers die zich gastvrij opstelde ten opzichte van grensovergangers belemmerden vormen van vijandige gastvrijheid en omdat de meerderheid van vrijwilligers niet uit Griekenland kwam, werden de definities van "gast" en "gastheer" vertroebeld. Vrijwilligers die opkwamen voor migranten of relaties met hen aangingen werden in een kwaad daglicht gesteld, en migranten werden op hun beurt in toenemende mate gecategoriseerd als delinquenten. Ik laat bijvoorbeeld zien hoe vrijwilligers werkzaam aan de grens bij de noodhulp melding maken van gevallen van refoulement naar Turkije. In alle waarschijnlijkheid dwong de aanwezigheid van vrijwilligers grensbewakers,

Frontex, en andere grenswerk organisaties, om internationale (maritieme en juridische) wetten te volgen. Het fenomeen van vrijwilligers die optreden als handhavers is zeer waarschijnlijk niet beperkt tot Griekenland of de EU. Deze invalshoek biedt een nieuwe lens waarmee de rol van burgers kan worden onderzocht in Europa en daarbuiten. Dit fenomeen trekt niet alleen de soevereine staat in twijfel, maar het legt ook langdurige scheve machtsverhoudingen bloot, waar er wordt aangenomen dat de staat de meerderheid van de macht in handen heeft en beslist wie in- en uitgesloten wordt.

In alle hoofdstukken laat ik zien hoe Griekenland een plek van extreme pijn, onzekerheid en wanhoop was voor grensovergangers. Op meerdere gelegenheden lieten grensovergangers weten dat zij wensten dat zij in hun thuisland waren gebleven, en het lot hadden ondergaan wat hen daar te wachten stond. Het leven in de kampen was somber: de meeste kampen hadden regels die grensovergangers verboden om voor zichzelf te koken; er waren urenlange rijen voor voedsel, douches, medische zorg en bureaucratische procedures; en de kampen waren over het algemeen onhygiënisch en gevaarlijk. Ik beargumenteer dat de precaire leef condities wezenlijke littekens achterlieten op lichaam en geest, of deze nou wel of niet werden erkent als kwetsbaarheden door autoriteiten. Dat deze kwetsbaarheden publiekelijk moesten worden blootgegeven om bepaalde voorzieningen te bemachtigen bevorderde verdere onderwerping en creëerde verdeeldheid onder grensovergangers in hun poging te laten zien hoe zij meer kwetsbaar zouden zijn dan anderen.

Burger vrijwilligers vochten op verschillende manieren voor grensovergangers. Zij waren actief in het humanitaire veld, maar betwistten hegemonische manieren van hulpverlening. Hun aanpak in hulpverlenen lag over het algemeen meer in het bieden van solidariteit dan humanitarisme; het was onvoorwaardelijke gastvrijheid in plaats van voorwaardelijk—of, vijandige—gastvrijheid; en het had als doel gelijkheid in tegenstelling tot hiërarchie. In de praktijk bleek dat vrijwilligers moeite hadden al deze principes toe te passen, en dit proefschrift laat hun worsteling met bureaucratische systemen zien. Vrijwilligers zagen de staat vaak als monolithische entiteit die betrokken is in geweld, en grote organisaties werden gezien als handlangers van de overheid. Op hun beurt zetten overheidsmedewerkers vrijwilligers met regelmaat in een kwaad daglicht. Deze dynamieken verhoogden spanningen en bevorderden uitsluiting, vaak ten nadele van grensovergangers.

In dit proefschrift probeer ik het werk van burger vrijwilligers te conceptualiseren als potentiele “plek van soevereine macht” (Ticktin 2006, 44). Door hun ondermijnende vormen van humanitaire hulp waren vrijwilligers vaak actief als poortwachter naar Griekenland—en

de EU. Gewone burgers oefenden hun invloed uit om grensovergangers te helpen bepaalde middelen te bemachtigen en lieten daarbij de scheve machtsverhoudingen zien tussen de staat, hulporganisaties en burgers. De vrijwilligers in dit onderzoek vormen een voorbeeld bij uitstek hoe een collectieve subversieve beweging de fundatie kan leggen voor een toekomst waarin men streeft naar solidariteit en gelijkheid en tracht deze waarden in stand te houden.

This thesis explores the relationship between international informal volunteers, aid workers, and government actors engaging with border crossers in Greece. It sheds light on the failings of large organizations and government bodies, whose bureaucratic structures are slow to respond to border crosser's needs and which largely follow an exclusionary asylum regime that implements a hierarchy of deservingness. The ethnographic research and analysis exposes tensions within the humanitarian landscape of Greece; it also shows that there is space for informal volunteers to enact solidarity and new forms of humanitarianism that subvert state-sanctioned aid and challenge the status quo of the border regime. This research also contributes to new ways of engaging with cross-sector collaborations; importantly, it highlights that actors in the informal sector in Greece are major players in providing aid, advocating for rights, and bearing witness to human rights abuses and unlawful treatment of border crossers.