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The Ethos of Agency: Exploring Questions of Communication and Categorization in Greece's Refugee Crisis

Caroline R. Barnes
cbarnes@bates.edu

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The Ethos of Agency: Exploring Questions of Communication and Categorization in Greece's
Refugee Crisis

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

Bates College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Caroline R. Barnes

Lewiston, Maine

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Finally, to my family, thank you for your unconditional love. To Dad, thank you for teaching me that it is not about finding the right answers, it is about asking the right questions. To Bryson, Priyanka, Andrew, and Alex, thank you for being the best big brothers and sisters I could ask for. To Orion and my niece on the way, I feel so blessed to be your aunt. And last, but certainly not least, to Mom. Thank you for always being a model of resilience and compassion, for teaching me to always stand up for what is right, and for endlessly encouraging me to learn and to explore. And thank you for taking me with you to Greece, even when I protested. I dedicate this thesis to you.

Preface

This thesis really started in July 2015, I just did not know it then. I remember when my mom told me that we were going to Greece; I remember exactly where I was standing in her office, immediately excited, anxious, annoyed. My mom, a Spanish professor at Skidmore College, also concentrates on US-Mexico border studies. She had signed up for the University of the Aegean's July 2015 course on migration in Lesbos, Greece in the interest of gaining an international and comparative understanding of migration studies, and I was coming along. Like anything my mom tended to do when I was in high school, I found a reason to be bothered by it. "Mom!" I cried, "It's my last summer home before college. I don't want to go to Greece!" Famous last words.

I now look back at the way I protested and I blush, humored and embarrassed. While in Greece, I did not attend many classes with my mom, nor did I realize I had any particular interest in what she was studying. But I now understand that trip as a turning point, one that paved the course of my academic career and personal interests. One class I did attend with my mom was focused on the topic of agency. I distinctly remember being confused by the discussion. Truthfully, I still find the topic confusing, and even at the onset of writing this thesis, it was not something I had considered writing about. It was not until it naturally arose as a point of discussion in this project that I even remembered that class in Lesbos, realizing that the unanswered questions I had then have actually not left me at all.

Among the professors on the summer program was Heath Cabot, who serves as one of the evaluators on the committee for this thesis. In Lesbos, I told Professor Cabot that I would be attending Bates College in the fall, and she told me that she knew an anthropology professor

there by the name of Danny Danforth. Arriving to Bates, I met Danny, who has been my advisor for the past four years and is someone with whom I have found a shared passion for Greece. In one of the first meetings I had with Danny as a freshman, I recounted my summer experience. Afterward, he said something along the lines of “Maybe you will write your senior thesis on refugees and Greece.” In my head I was thinking, *Maybe, but probably not.*

My travels to Greece continued, somewhat serendipitously, over the next four years of college. As a classics major, I spent the summer after my freshman year on an archaeological program that traveled around Greece, inspired by mysteries of the ancient Aegean. The summer after my sophomore year, the opportunity arose again to return to Greece. This time, it was for a short summer course at the European Cultural Centre of Delphi. I arrived in mid-June, the youngest of the bunch and one of only two Americans. Amongst a cohort of Greek graduate and PhD students, we engaged in seminars on philosophy, political science, and history, centered on understanding crisis. During my time there, I learned many things, but one of the most important lessons was that I needed to go back.

The following year, I lived in Athens for seven months. For the winter semester of my junior year, I lived with Mima and Lucas, two people whose love and laughter I still think about every day. During this time, I volunteered with a humanitarian co-operative foundation that offers daily meals, classes, services, and communal space to asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants. For the summer, I lived by myself while developing and teaching an English language curriculum at a local NGO for unaccompanied refugee minors. These experiences entirely changed my perspective on the process of learning and the power of human connection.

Returning to Bates this past fall, I did not know exactly on what I would write my thesis, only that maybe Danny, those years ago, had been spot-on. I still have more theory to read, more Greek to learn (σιγά-σιγά), more understanding to undertake. Looking back over the course of the last four years, I am still blushing, humored, embarrassed; but I am also excited for what other lessons lie ahead. Most of all, I am grateful for the people who have guided me along the way. This thesis is not only a culmination of my academic career at Bates College, but a product of personal reflection, and could not have been done without the people that have supported me since the beginning.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the historical, social, and political constructions of the category of the refugee, specifically focusing on the recent “refugee crisis” in Greece. In the nearly seventy years since the UNHCR’s 1951 Convention, the historically determined definition of the refugee has yet to change in accordance with the political and geographic landscapes of the world. As a result, the lack of parallel between legal frameworks and the increased global flow of refugees have catalyzed protracted refugee situations. In the wake of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, one such protracted situation has emerged in Greece. As of Winter 2019, nearly 15,000 thousand individuals seeking asylum are being held on the Greek “hotspot” islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos due to the country’s “containment policy.” The response to the migration “crisis,” in addition to the neoliberal management of the country’s economic depression, contextualize the space for communication and agency in the public sphere. Employing critical and anthropological theory, this thesis explores the permissible forms of communication and existing actors included in the public sphere, and how this in turn affects the agency and representation of asylum-seekers, migrants, and refugees in Greece. In particular, this thesis focuses on how solidarity initiatives which seek to dismantle traditional hierarchical dynamics of humanitarian aid not only work to bolster the agency of those they aid, but also renegotiate the realms of the “social” and the “political.”

Introduction

Lesvos, Greece

July 15 2015

“They do this every day at this time,” the woman said, turning back to the group. The clanging on the metal fence was growing louder between the din of chants and yells. We were standing in the shade of a building, higher up on a hill than the source of the clamor below. She told us that they do it as a protest, but that their claims can’t be processed any faster. There are too many people, coming too fast. Looking down at Moria Refugee Camp, I saw bundles of black mesh fabric folding like the tops of tents. Is that what they use for olive trees? I thought. After a few minutes, the group moved down away from the building and into a cleared space. The sun glared bright off the white, dusty ground. I turned to see two boys, about my age, speaking to a woman in our group. What were they speaking? Not Greek. Arabic? Farsi? One of them extended his hand; they were offering us watermelon.

When we arrived in July 2015, the spotlight of international attention was on Greece. While playing a significant role in the world financial “crisis” that began in 2008, the first days of July 2015 in Greece were marked by anticipation of the country’s monumental referendum vote on whether to accept another bailout program. At the same time, an unprecedented number of people fleeing violence, persecution, and poverty were navigating the Mediterranean, reaching the shores of Greek islands. One of those islands, Lesvos, has since become one of the “hotspots” of the “refugee crisis.” In particular, the Moria Refugee Camp on the island of Lesvos has become known as one of the world’s most overcrowded, unsafe, and unsanitary refugee camps. Moria has also become a visible representation of debate in the wake of the “refugee crisis” in Europe: hardening stances on immigration countered by the moral and political responsibility of protecting human rights. In the nearly four years since I visited Moria with a group of anthropology students at the University of the Aegean, the camp’s conditions have

increasingly deteriorated. This has been exacerbated by the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, the consequences of which have stranded some 15,000 people on various Greek islands providing the closest landing point in the EU for migrants and asylum-seekers arriving from Turkey. As I write in 2019, Greece remains in the midst of two “crises;” though the last round of EU-enforced austerity measures were implemented in August 2018, the country continues to move toward economic recovery while responding to the “refugee crisis.”

In this thesis, I do not use quotes around “crisis” in every instance of its usage, but I do want to emphasize the particular meaning of the word. Though the word “crisis” in English implies an isolated instance of emergency, the lived experience of crisis extends beyond the temporal limitations implied by a saying such as “a moment of crisis.” As argued by Peter Redfield (2005) and further articulated by Heath Cabot (2014), crisis is a significant rupture that not only demands response, but invokes a particular narrative. Today in Greece, this narrative conveys that crisis is no longer conceived as a liminal space between normalcy and disorder catalyzed by a singular breach in the system. Rather, crisis contours a new normal. The overlapping economic and refugee crises (see Cabot 2018) have contextualized the lives of individuals beyond a singular instance evoked by the English word “crisis,” and into lived experiences that constitute the everyday.

Further, I do not so much present a linear argument of how the “refugee crisis” in Greece can be understood, but rather, I endeavor to present an open space for a critical discussion. In other words, I wrote this thesis with the intention to present a certain perspective of “crisis” in Greece from my understanding as an undergraduate American student. From this vantage—a young white woman who has spent time in Greece over the past four years—I want to offer a discussion of the refugee “crisis” through the lenses of anthropological and critical theory. I also

want to also address the sensitive subject matter of writing a thesis on refugees. From the onset of the thesis process, I have been aware of the potential pitfalls, both academic and ethical, of writing about refugees. The word “refugee,” which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1, comes with a certain meaning, especially in the context of a global refugee crisis. The “refugee” is a product of the nation-state system, a category into which an individual is recognized if they fall within the parameters of the UNHCR’s 1951 definition. Not only does essentializing or conceiving “refugees” in a categorical sense undermine the individual identities and lives of those who fall under its definition, but also implies a set of potential issues regarding predisposed assumptions on their behalf. In this thesis, I do not undertake a role of presenting on behalf of “refugees.” Instead, I approach the discussion of the “refugee crisis” using theoretical lenses to consider agency and communication in the public sphere.

In terms of ethnography, I was conscious of what was both ethical and appropriate to share. I did not engage in extended formal field work in Greece and because of this, I included only my personal experiences. A majority of the ethnographic material in this thesis comes from published newspaper articles and information available online, and I make reference to the proper sources. In terms of personal accounts, I include a first-person narrative that is either woven into the body of the text or condensed in short paragraphs at the start of certain sections. In this way, I intended to acknowledge my reflexivity and emphasize the subjectivity of my accounts in order to speak only from my behalf the truths that I have learned and that I have experienced. In instances of translating or transliterating Greek, I have followed the guidelines presented by the Modern Greek Studies Association, and the advice of my advisor, Danny Danforth, a speaker of Greek.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the International Refugee Regime and the historical development of the category of the refugee alongside the advent of the nation-state. In addition, I situate the global “refugee crisis” in the context of Europe before focusing more specifically on Greece in Chapter 2, providing an overview of recent history and events of both the economic and refugee crises. I have, however, excluded a detailed discussion on the role of Europeanization in Greece in the body of this thesis. Before the emergence of recent “crises” in Greece, the country experienced rapid change; in 2000 the Athens metro began operation and in 2001 a new airport was constructed, both as precursors to the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens (Rozakou 2016: 80). Additionally, Greece joined the Eurozone in 2002, replacing the drachma with the euro. Considering Europeanization as it pertains to the “asylum crisis” in 2014, Heath Cabot raises questions that are still pertinent in a discussion of the refugee crisis in Greece today. She writes, “The crisi of asylum makes visible a number of underlying and perhaps irresolvable tensions in Europeanization and rights politics more broadly: how to reconcile humanitarian and security concerns, how to distinguish refugees from other kinds of migrants, how to rearticulate the insides and outsides of the Greek nation-state, and the question of what kind of polities Greece and Europe are becoming” (2014:6).

In Chapter 3, I turn to a review of scholarship on refugee studies using Giorgio Agamben’s theoretical approach as an axis of discussion. Agamben’s (1998) theory of *bare life*, an extension of Michel Foucault’s (1990, 2003) discussion of *biopolitics*, also draws from Hannah Arendt’s (1958) discussion on the Aristotelean concepts of the *bios* and the *zoe*, the separate realms of political and biological life. Before detailing these approaches, I briefly survey scholarship on liminality and disorder (van Gennep 1960, Douglas 1966, Turner 1967) in

order to discuss the liminal category of the refugee and its place in Lissa Mallki's (1995a) "national order of things."

Toward the end of Chapter 3, I apply these theoretical frameworks to the refugee crisis in Greece, specifically looking at the Moria Refugee Camp on the island of Lesbos, as well as Greece's containment policy that inhibits asylum-seekers and migrants on the islands from traveling to the mainland. Additionally, I turn the discussion to how the public sphere in Greece is contextualized by the neoliberal management of crises. In Chapter 4, I focus on this discussion in more depth, as well, I bring into the fold questions about agency, agonism, and communicative ability for marginalized voices into the fold in the wake of overlapping crises. Pointing out polarized voices in the public, from the neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn, to solidarity movements that work to dismantle hierarchical relationships of reciprocity, I focus on how debate in the public sphere includes or excludes the voices of refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers in Greece. I conclude by looking at solidarity initiatives as spaces that allow for a renegotiation of the "social" and the "political," drawing links between Agamben and Arendt's theories. I end by posing questions for further analysis on the relationship between recognition and agency.

Chapter 1: The International Refugee Regime

The term “refugee” shall apply to any person who... Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

UNHCR 1951, Article 1(A)(2)

The International Refugee Regime has developed alongside the modern nation-state and the movement of people across international borders. Over many iterations, the regime has been characterized by the state of the international community. Since the Westphalian state’s inception in 1648, the international status of refugees and states’ obligations towards them have shifted in responses to globalization. In 2019, the regime’s lynchpin remains the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There are a reported 68.5 million displaced peoples in the world today, 25.4 million of whom are refugees, more than half of them are children (UNHCR 2018).

In the nearly seventy years since the Convention, the historically determined definition of the refugee has yet to change in accordance with political and geographic landscape of the world. As a result, the lack of parallel between legal frameworks and the increased global flow of refugees has catalyzed protracted refugee situations. Defined as a circumstance “in which refugees find themselves in a long - standing and intractable state of limbo” (UNHCR 2007), the current refugee regime is characterized by an absence of durable solutions, exacerbated by ineffective responsibility-sharing of states on a global level (Aleinikoff 2017).

In the wake of World War II, the victorious Allied powers mediated the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in order to negotiate the internationally recognized status of the millions of displaced people. Initially, the Convention's framework for refugees was restricted to Europe, designed to protect the millions of displaced peoples from WWII. The temporal and geographic restrictions on the 1951 definition were lifted in the 1967 Protocol (FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 390). Additionally, the Protocol established the principle of non-refoulement, preventing states from returning refugees to the countries in which they were persecuted. Both the Convention and the Protocol establish the fundamental guidelines for defining international refugee status.

The category of the refugee is distinguished from other migrants in that it applies to those crossing an international border due to a fear of persecution. The 1951 definition of a refugee stipulates that a person must possess a well-founded fear of persecution that is based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. This definition does not include migrants crossing international borders in search of refuge from poverty, global warming, or development. In such cases, the term "irregular migration" is most often used to describe the movement of migrants that does not fall within the purview of the 1951 refugee definition. The definition also fails to include protection for Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), persons uprooted and moving within a country's borders. Further, when parsing the 1951 definition more closely, persons fleeing from conflict or violence are not explicitly covered by the Convention. However, in the current regime, states have recognized and accepted this as a credible reason to claim asylum.

The category of the refugee is also distinguished from that of the asylum-seeker. According to the UNHCR (2016), "the terms asylum seeker and refugee are often confused: an

asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.” All asylum-seekers are not refugees, yet all refugees were at some point asylum-seekers (Amnesty International 2018). In situations of mass migration, it is not always procedurally possible to conduct individual interviews. Thus, asylum-seekers are often referred to as “prima facie,” meaning at first appearance, refugees (UNHCR 2019). While the UNHCR primarily targets aid to asylum-seekers and refugees, stateless peoples and internally displaced peoples safeguards often fall within the frameworks of individual states. IDPs, the people whom the UNHCR defines as “on the run at home” (UNHCR 2018), were not defined as refugees in an attempt by the Convention to maintain the Westphalian nation-state system (FitzGerald and Arar 2018).

The 1648 Peace of Westphalia is considered the beginning of the modern nation-state system. Outlining the exclusive sovereignty of individual states, the implications of the treaty hardened international borders, enmeshing the movement of people with the politicization of territorial boundaries (Barnett 2002). After Westphalia, eighteenth century scholars such as Emer de Vattel studied the legal frameworks outlining the status of people moving between recently drafted international boundaries (Chetail 2016). The legal responses to migration were outlined by normative conceptions formulated on de Vattel’s legal and political philosophy. Yet, from its beginnings, the International Refugee Regime has been politically entrenched in *ad hoc* responses (Barnett 2002). Without an international protocol to leverage refugee rights from the beginning of the nation-state system, countries were left to react to people who came across their borders at their own discretion. Further, as the category of a refugee in the modern sense had yet to be created, examples of refugees from pre-1951 are defined within a post-1951 understanding. One such case is that of the Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France in the seventeenth

century. While the English word for “refugee” was first used in response to the Huguenots arriving in England (FitzGerald and Arar 2018), it had yet to embody the social and political meaning it inherently does today.

In the early twentieth century, *ad hoc* measures continued and the label of refugee was applied to various groups who evoked a need for protection (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). In the wake of the World Wars and the mass migration that it incited, it became clear that a comprehensive standard for refugee protection was necessary. In response to World War I, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established in 1921, serving as the precursor for the later established UNHCR. When the League of Nations dissolved at the end of World War II and the United Nations (UN) took its place, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was created in 1948 to manage “victims of Nazi, fascist, or similar regimes” (Barnett 2002). Although Europe-oriented, the framework of the IRO provided a clear basis for a refugee identity, working with the specific parameters of the problem. In 1951, with many of the displaced peoples in Europe since the WWII remaining unsettled, the UNHCR was created to take over the IRO. Though broadening the scope from the IRO’s specific definition, the Convention took into account the failure of the Allied powers to prevent the Holocaust, and thus prioritizes persecution over environmental or economic factors. Further, the Convention’s definition against political regimes fit within the aims of the Cold War, as communist governments could often be cited as violating human rights.

As an independent agency working within the United Nations, the UNHCR serves as a supervisor on the application of international treaties and is the caretaker of the 1951 Convention. Though the Convention is the only international legal charter that specifically protects refugees, the implementation of UNHCR policy is contingent upon the cooperation of

signatory states to recognize asylum and provide protection for refugees (Betts 2009). Consequently, the UNHCR is left at a crossroads of respecting state sovereignty and assuming full international responsibility.

In addition to abolishing the temporal and geographic limitations of the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol reaffirmed the fundamental principles of the right to seek asylum and non-refoulement. Outlined in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention, the principle of non-refoulement states that:

No Contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his [or her] life or freedom would be threatened on account of his [or her] race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

UNHCR 1951, Article 33(1)

Therefore, signatory states are left with three other ‘durable solutions’ for managing refugees: repatriation, resettlement, or local integration (Betts & Collier 2017). The path of repatriation when conflict ends in a person’s home country is almost entirely restricted in the current geopolitical climate, and as states do not often bear the burden of providing a path to citizenship and integration for refugees, the route of local integration is selectively limited. The third option of resettlement requires refugees to be placed in a “safe third country.” The safety of a third party country is not only predicated on respecting the principle of non-refoulement, but meeting additional standards outlined in the Convention, such as ensuring refugees access to economic and educational opportunities. Though the principle of non-refoulement is enshrined as a positive legal concept for the protection for refugees, it is also now considered a *jus cogens* norm of international law (Farmer 2008). In other words, non-refoulement has become an unconditional legal custom, foundational to the way in which states operate. The UNHCR also encourages this,

stressing that the principle of a “safe third country” is a common function between states, and not only a contract of higher international law (Christophersen 2016). Resettlement into a third country has been most recently highlighted by the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, but with a lack of international responsibility sharing and inherent pitfalls in “safe third countries,” refugees are often left without access to any of the three solutions. Exhausting these conventional pathways, protracted situations have increased, and refugees are faced with residing long-term in camps or living in cities where they are often prevented from entering the local economic system. As a result, the effective enforcement of the current refugee regime relies heavily on longstanding efforts of humanitarian aid supported by International Government Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Betts & Collier 2018: 8).

The three solutions of repatriation, resettlement, and local integration are designed to ensure that refugees have the right to asylum in a timely manner, granting them a durable solution to an otherwise indefinite interim between states (Betts 2009). This has been entirely undermined by protracted situations in which refugees are marginalized in camps and cities for years. As of 2015, fewer than 300,000 refugees worldwide accessed one of the three durable solutions, and the UNHCR recognized thirty-two separate protracted refugee situations globally (Betts & Collier 2018: 54). In the most substantial case, Kenya’s Dadaab refugee camp is home to a third generation of refugees (Marshall 2016). Now in its twenty-seventh year, there are grandchildren of refugees who arrived in Dadaab nearly thirty years ago (Ibid.). This limbo in which refugees are suspended between state hood is described by political scientist Alex Aleinikoff as a “second exile,” wherein refugees are excluded from the right to work or move freely within the host country (Aleinikoff & Zamore 2018).

Since the 1980s, the model of the camp has been the principle tool in refugee assistance, often obstructing refugee integration and perpetuating long-term residence (FitzGerald and Arar 2018, Betts & Collier 2017, Malkki 1995a). The camp acts a method by which host countries can more easily marginalize refugees, isolating them both physically and socially from urban, economic centers (Ibid.). Currently, most refugees live in urban areas outside of camps, which provides its own set of integration challenges. The priority of the UNHCR, as of a 2009 policy on urban refugees, is to forge a path towards self reliance (UNHCR 2009). Yet, urban refugees are often not provided with access to the formal economy and subsequently subjected to labor exploitation (Jacobson 2006). Even special economic zones (SEZs), such as those in Jordan that incentivize investment through special economic regulations, are not a substantial solution to integrating refugees into local economies. While scholars Alexander Betts and Paul Collier see SEZs as a model towards a solution for refugee integration (Betts & Collier 2017), these alone fail to remedy the complex realities of economic exploitation (Crawley 2017). While SEZs serve as a means to establish livelihood in some instances, these zones still restrict refugees from accessible education and more skilled labor markets. While failing to mend to heart of the problem of economic integration (Staton 2016), protracted situations and the unattainability of durable solutions leaves gaps in securities for refugees when arriving in host countries.

The Current Regime

In the initial drafting of the 1951 Convention, protections for refugees were oriented to their rights once in host countries (Aleinikoff 2017). Initially framed within a Euro-centric paradigm, the Convention's procedure—albeit the 1967 Protocol's expansion—has not changed with respect to the increased global migrant flows. The regime is faltering, failing to ensure the basic rights defined in the Convention such as a right to work, education, and movement within a

host country. Moreover, states have acquired responsibility for refugees by proximity, leaving host countries who are unable to provide stability even for their own citizens unable to deliver on sustainable refugee solutions (Aleinikoff 2017). In many of these situations, the rights guaranteed by the Convention to refugees are routinely violated. For example, Greece's economic depression is coinciding with the European refugee crisis. The overlap of a financial collapse and a surge of migrants at the edges of the Aegean have contributed to an unresolved protracted refugee situation. In effect, "secondary movements" have increasingly become an alternative to residing in cities and camps in Greece. These continued journeys, embarked on with the help of smugglers through Balkan countries to Northern and Western Europe, are "impelled by the inadequacies of the global protection system" (Betts & Collier 2017: 55). The current refugee regime neglects the intended protection of rights by the Convention for refugees in host states, and is instead characterized by suspended protections and state interests.

The definition of a refugee provided by the UNHCR gives leeway for particular political interests to determine the "well-founded fear" of people seeking asylum. The term "regime" is itself indicative of the collective incentive states have in their participation (Betts 2009). The Convention leaves the status of a refugee at a state's discretion, rather than the individual's. This therefore allows for states to select who falls within these criteria, which, at the time of its conception and still arguably today, is "deeply embedded in the economic and ethnoracial preferences of existing laws" (FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 389). The use of the word "persecution" in the 1951 definition implies subjugation of an individual that occurs within the public sphere, as opposed to the private (Barnett 2002). In other words, the 1951 measure of persecution assumes a form of public persecution, rather than an offense against someone in their private life. Additionally, though states have come to adopt persons fleeing from violence or

conflict as a credible basis of asylum, it is not technically included in the 1951 Convention. This “war-flaw” does not offer explicit responses to those fleeing armed conflict and other forms of widespread violence (Storey 2012). Though urged by the UNHCR for “people fleeing war to be considered refugees,” governments are not bound by a unilateral clause in the Convention that obliges them to do so. These narrowing factors are barriers to those suffering persecution and violence at the hands of non-governing political bodies, as well as those faced with life-threatening economic or environmental insecurities. Furthermore, the UNHCR 2011 handbook explaining the category of the refugee states:

“A person is a refugee within the meaning of the 1951 Convention as soon as he fulfils the criteria contained in the definition. This would necessarily occur prior to the time at which his refugee status is formally determined. Recognition of his refugee status does not therefore make him a refugee but declares him to be one. He does not become a refugee because of recognition, but is recognized because he is a refugee.”

UNHCR 2011, Ch. 1, paragraph 28

This posits the “refugee” as an “an ontologically given category existing in the real world, waiting to be seen for who they are” (FitzGerald and Arar 2018: 392). Bringing into the fold broader questions of human rights, it questions whether they exist *a priori* or as a socially constructed contract between citizen and sovereign. The tension between human rights as inalienable or constructed illuminates the paradoxical nature of the UNHCR as an apolitical body. Article 2 of the 1951 Convention reads “The work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees” (UNHCR 1951).

By declaring themselves as such, the UNHCR implies that their services are provided not on the basis of having an affiliation with a certain state or side of a conflict. While this point is

evident, the UNHCR maneuvers within the nation-state system, as opposed to above it. In providing humanitarian aid, the UNHCR is still forced to rely on the cooperation of its delegates and thus is inherently bound to their interests. For example, a large part of its funding comes from state government contributions and the European Union; of the \$3.338 billion it received in 2014, less than \$120 million came from the funding of the United Nations (Maley 2016). With this, in tandem with the concept of human rights as malleable and administered at the hand of governing bodies (Frezzo 2015), it becomes evident that the UNHCR is involved in the inherent political schematization of the International Refugee Regime.

Though narrowly defined, the term refugee is complicatedly complex in both social and political realms. In the legal sphere, people who have lost the protection that their initial nationality ensured become recognized as a type of non-citizen. The UNHCR, therefore, becomes a proxy by which the human rights of these people are transferred. When the social contract between state and citizen is broken and the rights of citizens are no longer ensured, the inter-state or state-less status of persons is protected by their inclusion in the category of refugee. As articulated in the 2011 UNHCR handbook, the conferring of this category on someone does not make them a refugee; it recognizes the category in which they already are located. This approach presents the refugee as a category naturally existent within the Westphalian system, within which one is included after crossing an international boundary in fear of persecution. Thus, being a refugee is a liminal category, suspended between state hoods and the options of resettlement, repatriation, and local integration. With increasingly protracted situations, the current refugee regime has shifted the category of the refugee towards a more permanent status, within which people spend years in marginalized limbo. In the midst of the recent regime and

lack of international burden-sharing to provide adequate solutions, being a refugee has extended beyond a temporary category and into a prolonged social identity.

While the responsibility of the UNHCR extends internationally, it becomes entangled in the politics of region to region and country to country in the “changing nature of displacement” (Feller 2001). The UNHCR serves as the guardian of the obligations to which states are expected to adhere, giving space for states to renegotiate their standards. With a rise of xenophobia and populist leaders in European countries, some states are drawing a harder line on immigration. The implications of this are seen legally and politically, as fewer people seeking asylum are granted it, and socially as public anti-immigration sentiments increase.

The European Refugee Crisis

In September 2015, the image of Alan Kurdi brought international attention and an outpouring of public concern for the European refugee crisis. Washed up on a sandy Turkish shore, the three-year-old boy drowned after a rubber boat carrying Syrian refugees capsized near the Greek island, Kos (Cole 2017). The week that the heart-breaking photo was released, donations to charitable organizations around the world swelled; one study calculated that donations to the Swedish Red Cross campaign for Syrian refugees increased fifty-five times (Ibid.). The visceral reality of a child who died in an attempt to reach safe shores elicited a global response, putting the face of innocence to the growing crisis (Ticktin 2016).

Yet, since 2015, immigration remains a divisive and complicated issue throughout Europe. New asylum claims have been cut in half since 2015, with some 645,000 claims filed by the end of 2017 and seekers primarily coming from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (UNHCR). Despite a drastic reduction in immigration over the past three years, there has been a recent surge

of anti-immigrant and Far Right parties gaining political footholds in Europe. In December 2018, more than five thousand anti-immigrant protestors clashed with police in Brussel outside the EU headquarters just two days before the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, by the UN Assembly (Paris 2018). A long negotiated document designed to share migration responsibilities, the Compact is committed to “our common understanding, shared responsibilities and unity of purpose regarding migration, making it work for all” (UN 2018). With some European states voting against it, as well as a lack of confidence in its substantive effect from political commentators, the Compact raises questions about how Europe will proceed towards a cohesive immigration policy in the coming years.

In 2015 and the first months of 2016, nearly 1.2 million migrants arrived in Europe (UNHCR 2019). Though migration to Europe is not a new phenomenon, the recent “European refugee crisis” can be traced back to violence in Syria beginning 2011. Though this conflict initiated the surge of migration from Syria, and many fleeing this conflict constitute a large number of the asylum-seekers and refugees in Europe today, the overwhelming migration to Europe in recent years has also come from other countries in the Middle East and Africa.

The large scale numbers of refugees fleeing to Europe has been met with disparate responses. The structure of the European Union and the Schengen Zone presented a complex set of challenges for a standardized response to the crises. In 1999, the Schengen Agreement was incorporated into the legal framework of the European Union, removing border controls between member countries and allowing freedom of movement within a large part of the continent. While this proved advantageous for proponents of a more unified Europe, it presented immediate problems in terms of regulating immigration and refugee responses. Even with the drafting of the 2000 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights including the right to asylum in accordance with the

1951 Convention (Article 18), the EU lacked a consistent governing framework on refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants. To mitigate these issues and prevent a ‘race to the bottom’ within Europe, the Dublin Regulation was adapted in 2003 and 2013 (Betts & Collier 2017: 64). Dublin III, the current iteration of the regulation implemented in 2014, defines which state has the obligation to process asylum claims, requiring that an asylum-seeker be processed in the first country to which they arrive (Ammirati 2015).

In 2014, when Dublin III was implemented, the number of refugees coming from Syria to Europe had yet to rise to unprecedented levels. Over the next years as the crisis peaked, frontline countries such as Italy and Greece had to accept a disproportionately higher number of refugees compared to more inland states. Though under the auspices of the Frontex, the EU’s border and coast guard agency is reliant upon member countries to provide its own equipment and border guards. With the Mediterranean Sea as a primary, and dangerous, entry point to Europe, Italy and Greece were automatically bound to register asylum claims from rescues at-sea. Those arriving in Europe are also required to register in Eurodac, the central European data bank. The system is designed to record fingerprints of all persons entering Europe and requesting asylum, and thus keep track of first-entry points (Ibid.). Under the guidelines of Dublin III, if a person is apprehended elsewhere in the European Union, he or she can be sent back to his or her country of entry. Even with Dublin Regulations in place, the reliance on member countries’ own facilitation of Frontex personnel and equipment, in addition to a sometimes faulty Eurodac system, the European Union’s response to migration lacks consistency.

From 2011 until 2015, nearly ten million people had already fled their homes due to the violence in Syria (Betts & Collier 2017: 73). Compounded by ethnic and interregional rivalries, extremist groups, and foreign involvement, the Syrian war is currently approaching its ninth

year, having already taken the lives of nearly 500,000 Syrians and displacing more than half of the country's population (Aljazeera 2018). Initially, Syrians fled mostly to nearby Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. As the war escalated, more than one million refugees and migrants arrived on the shores of Greece in 2015, inundating the islands of Lesbos and Kos. (UNHCR 2015). As an overwhelming number of migrants landed on European shores, the cracks in the EU's immigration system began to widen. Even as non-Schengen members, Balkan countries provided a route to the rest of Europe, and smuggling rapidly increased (Betts & Collier 2017: 82). Meanwhile, Hungary's Far Right President Viktor Orbán reacted to the large arrival of refugees to his country by building a border fence, diverting refugees to Austria and eventually to Germany. Though not their initial port of entry—breaking with Dublin III—Germany began accepting asylum claims, aware of both the staggering influx on an economically fragile Greece and also Germany's own close history of a narrative that associates the country with extreme xenophobia in World War II. With Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to open the door to refugees in Germany, other EU member-states did not share the same stance nor agree to the resettlement of refugees within their borders. During the second half of 2015, the European Resettlement Scheme was implemented in an attempt to relocate refugees to different European countries. The scheme was ultimately ineffective at relieving pressure, especially from hotspot countries such as Greece and Italy (Niemann & Zaun 2018).

With an inconsistent enforcement of the Dublin Agreement, an internal solution in the EU to reinstate border regulations came instead from outsourcing border controls (Ibid., 90). Initially attempting to persuade Balkan countries like the Republic of North Macedonia to prevent passage to the rest of Europe from Greece, the EU's search for an external solution came in the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. Turkish President Erdoğan, favorable to political incentives

such as “visa liberalization” and a €6 billion stipend, agreed to the deal implemented on March 20, 2016. Still in affect, the key provisions of the deal states that any new “irregular migrants” will be sent back to Turkey, including those who have not applied for asylum or whose claims have been denied (Ibid., 8). Further, for every one Syrian resettled to Turkey from a Greek island, one Syrian from Turkey will be resettled in the EU, with the maximum number allowed resettlement set at 72,000. Turkey also agreed to cooperate in preventing any new sea or land routes for illegal migration into the EU.

This deal is both controversial and precarious. Turkey, although signing the 1951 Convention, has not signed the 1967 Protocol. This means that it is not a signatory state obliged to the expansion of the Convention beyond Europe. Consequently, as reports from Amnesty International demonstrate, Turkey has moved Syrians back to Syria, breaking with the principle of non-refoulement (Amnesty International 2016). Moreover, a failed attempt to overthrow the government in 2016 provokes questions as to the nature of Turkey as a “safe third country.” The leveraging power between President Erdogan and the EU in the unregulated deal is also cause for alarm. Since 2016, the EU has withheld €3 billion from Turkey as a means of insurance, and President Erdogan is threatening to pull out of the deal if the money is not secured (Niemann & Zaun 2018). With refugees on Greek islands before March 20, 2016 excluded from the deal, there are now nearly 15,000 people trapped without the ability to travel to the mainland. The result is overcrowded camps on these islands, condemned as human rights violations, and riddled with dangerous conditions (New York Times 2018).

Notwithstanding the problematic consequences, the EU-Turkey deal has worked to reduce the number of migrants coming into Europe. Since 2015, the number has dropped ninety percent (NPR 2018). Even though there has been a reduction of migration to Europe, the global

flows of refugees have increased in recent years (UNHCR 2017). In response, the UN drafted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in July of 2018. It passed the following December, despite seven countries not signing to document, including the EU states of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. With their hard line anti-immigration stance, their vote against the Compact at the UN Assembly Meeting was unsurprising.

Predicated on multilateral cooperation, the Compact outlines twenty-three objectives and ten guiding principles over the course of its thirty-four pages. Even as a non-binding agreement, critics of the Compact question its potential effectiveness and argue that it threatens state sovereignty (NPR 2018). This concern stems from the document's commitment to "fulfil the human rights of all migrants, regardless of their migration status" (UN 2018). This concerns opponents who fear it will jeopardize state's discretion of who is allowed to enter its borders. Conversely, Lousie Arbour, a UN specialist for intentional migration says that it is not a legally binding document, but rather, "it's a framework for cooperation" (Risse 2018). Under the auspices of the Compact, there are no new obligations on states. Instead, it echoes existing protocol with an emphasis on international cooperation. Even as a non-binding agreement, its effective implementation will be contingent on state regulation. While this component may seem like the weak link of the agreement considering the binding 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, not only have many UN member states yet to sign both of those treaties, but even these 'hard laws' have not been unilaterally implemented without serving specific political interests.



The limits of the International Refugee Regime are highlighted by the current level of protracted situations, exemplary of the selectivity and lack of burden sharing between states. Dealing with the aftermath of World War II, the 1951 Convention drafted a definition of the

refugee that was crafted with specific and Euro-centric challenges in mind. In the almost seventy years since the UNHCR's inception, heightened globalization, widespread regional conflict, and the realities of global warming expose widening gaps in the Convention. Even with the recent passage of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, states in Europe, and across the world, have no cohesive obligation or protocol for asylum and migration. The category of the refugee, though once intended to serve as a temporal status, has become a prolonged social identity that brings into question the nation-state system that defines it.

Chapter 2: Crisis in “Hotspot” Greece

Athens, Greece

July 4, 2015

*It was my very first night in Athens. After a day of exploring the Acropolis, my mom and I found ourselves at a reading of Plato’s *Apology*, nestled in the back courtyard of an old house in Anafiotika. Tucked under the Acropolis’ northeastern slope, we were stumbling down the steps of the neighborhood’s narrow streets when we saw the sign and the open gate. Beneath the shadow of marble and moonlight, we watched the animated actor’s solo performance. Afterwards, he broke character, asking the audience to remain for some wine and a Socratic discussion. “We,” he paused, a genuine dramatic affect, “are experiencing history.” Silence hung still in the warm air. The seminar began and a microphone was passed around to anyone who wanted to speak about the impending referendum vote or the surge of refugees. At one point in the conversation, it became the turn of a man whose face I could not see. He cleared his throat. “It is the same question that Socrates had to answer: Shall he acquiesce to hegemony?... He did not.”*

Though it has fallen from widespread international media attention since the monumental 2015 referendum vote, the economic crisis in Greece has been described in a recent Washington Post headline as: “over only if you don’t live there” (O’Brien 2018). As a word, crisis implies the rupture of normal order and it demands critical response. As a lived experience, the break between normalcy and chaos, and the response to return to order, becomes more complicated. One of the things I remember most about my first night in Athens—besides Plato’s *Apology*—was passing through the Syntagma metro station on our way home. Peering out of the car’s open doors, I could see that the entire station was packed full of people. They were making their way out of the platform and up the stairs to the city’s central square, mobilizing and demonstrating in response to the next day’s vote. Three years later, I recalled that memory one night at dinner with my host-family in Greece, remembering how little I knew about the nuances of the situation, and

how little I understood its importance. Both of my host parents nodded, perhaps also recalling where they were on that night, or contemplating what has happened since. My association with Greece's economic crisis is flashing back to the moment of looking out the open metro doors, a somewhat instantaneous recollection. On the other hand, crisis is anything but—the years that have followed 2015 have been riddled with strict austerity measures, the loss of jobs, a shift in the way of life for many.

While in the midst of financial collapse in 2015, Greece also became a “hotspot” in the European refugee crisis. With an already deteriorating economy and an existing asylum crisis (see Cabot 2014), Greece was inevitably unequipped to manage an unprecedented influx of refugees, let alone become an indefinite waiting zone for migrants and asylum seekers. Though the numbers of refugees arriving to Greece have dwindled since 2015, there remains an active overlap of crises (Cabot 2018). In order to better understand the how this came to be, I will sketch out the recent history of Greece's economic breakdown.

In the wake of the 2008 global financial recession, Greece became the epicenter of the European debt crisis. Since, Greece has yet to climb entirely out its financial depression, despite referendum votes, tax hikes, and an onslaught of austerity measures administered by the EU over the past ten years. Even though Greece's official bailout program ended in August 2018, many aspects of the economy remain problematic. While no new austerity packages are set to be imposed, previous measures are still in place and unemployment rates are hovering near twenty percent. Evident in the aftermath of the 2008 collapse, the seeds of the current crisis were planted over a decade ago. Chastised by Northern European countries like Germany for overspending and avoiding taxes, stereotypes of the lazy Southern Europeans who lacked proper financial management skills were perpetuated. When in 2009 Greece announced its budget deficit was

nearly four times the EU's limit, it became evident that Greece had been understating its debt for years, warding off investors and becoming the economic encumbrance of Europe. Having adopted the Euro in 2002, Greece lacked the ability to print more of its own currency as a means of inflating the country out of a crisis. As a result, it became beholden to the pressure of more economically dominant EU countries such as Germany.

The first round of loans to support the Greek government came in 2010 from the International Monetary Fund—one third of the European troika—alongside the European Central Bank (ECB). With austerity measures and tax increases as stipulations of the bailouts, the economic instability in Greece came to a head in the summer of 2015. The then-newly elected Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of the leftist SYRIZA party had run on a popular platform of fighting the strict austerity terms. He eventually called a referendum vote in July 2015 to either accept or reject the latest fiscal demands of the EU. While the ballot options were either “yes” or “no,” the underlying issues at hand were much more complex. The outcome of the vote held the potential of a “Grexit”—Greece exiting the Eurozone—which would have had a rippling effect on the world economy. Ultimately Greeks voted “no,” rejecting further austerity measures from the EU. Yet the problem was far from over, and despite the “no” vote, another austerity package was implemented just weeks later as a part of another financial-assistance program. Tsipras, who was reelected in September of 2015, is still in office, but political unrest continues. There is talk of early elections in May 2019, prompted by a voting public's dislike of the Prime Minister (Amaro 2019). Over the course of the past four years, Tsipras' had been accused of repeatedly folding to EU demands, which has made him widely unpopular. SYRIZA is likely to be replaced with the conservative New Democracy party come the next round of elections.

Riddled with political corruption, the great financial crisis of Europe hit Greece the hardest. The alternative to the Greek government's capitulation in 2015 may have been forcing Greece out of the Eurozone and perhaps even the EU. Even though the latest memorandum ended in August 2018, the austerity measures remain, and Greece's debt is far from being paid off. The current livelihood of Greeks is not so much a relic of a foregone crisis, but a new reality. In tandem with Greece's economic meltdown, it has become a central hotspot of the European Refugee Crisis. While its geographic location provides a pathway to Europe from the Middle East and Central Asia, the EU has strategically mediated Greece as a main reception center, or "hotspot" of the crisis (Fassin 2016). Exemplary of the lack of burden-sharing in the modern refugee regime, economically insolvent countries such as Greece and Italy have become forced to bear the weight of European border control.

Prosfiges

Lesvos, Greece

July 10 2015

The bus wound its way from the village of Plomari to the port in Mytilene, teetering on narrow roads between mountain and valley. When we finally made it to the ferry, I ran to the top deck, eager to feel the fresh morning air and salty wind off the sea. As we pulled away from shore toward Ayvalik, Turkey, another boat came in towards us in the distance. "Look," someone said, maybe it was my mom. I gazed out over the water. There was a small boat, its crowded deck dotted with black and orange. It was towing a rubber dinghy behind it. The group gathered to the boat's railing and watched with attention. That afternoon, returning back from our day trip, three of the same rubber boats were laid out on the concrete wharf. The group stood over them, looking inside at life jackets, inflatable floats, a single sock. Someone said something in Greek. "No photos, please."

The Greek word for refugees (*prosfiges*) was first used in the vernacular with particular significance in the 1920s (Green 2018). As a result of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, Greece

and Turkey agreed to what is known as the Population Exchange, uprooting nearly two million people in the removal Orthodox Christians from Turkey and Muslims from Greece. Though Turkish speakers who had lived all their lives in Asia Minor, nearly 1.5 million Orthodox Christians were classified as Greek and forcibly relocated and “returned.” At the same time, half a million Greek-speaking Muslims were deemed Turks and sent to Turkey (Shields 2013). As articulated by Sarah Green, this was the first time in modern Greek history that questions arose surrounding an influx of newcomers in a uniquely new social context (Green 2018). Through the rest of the twentieth century, various migrations in and from Greece continued, particularly surrounding the Greek Civil War in the 1940s (see Danforth and van Boeschoten 2011). Up until the 1990s, and even through the military junta (1967-74), government policy and legal guidelines were inconsistently concerned with foreigners in Greece (Green 2018). It was not until the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the political fragmentation in the Balkans in the 1990s that Greece began to implement major immigration laws (Cabot 2014, Green 2018). Migrants, primarily from Albania, became part of a large informal labor market and Greek immigration policy became predicated on reactive integration (Skleparis 2017).

Into the 2000s and up until today, armed conflict in the Middle East has resulted in refugee and migrant flows into Greece. Specifically, a shift occurred after 9/11, when foreign involvement in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan become drivers of forced migration. Before this, migration to Europe was primarily from African countries via Italy and Spain (Cabot 2016). While Mediterranean countries in general still serve as the transit points for migration into Europe, Greece became a prominent port of entry in the early 2000s.

The international lens has primarily focused on the recent wave of refugees from Syria since 2015. Though the scale of this refugee crisis is unprecedented and warrants critical

response, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants have been coming to Europe by means of Greece for almost the past two decades. Discussed by Heath Cabot (2014), the flaws in the framework of Greece's asylum system, which have been exacerbated by the EU's migration mismanagement, have existed well before the arrival of Syrian refugees. In addition to administrative failures, anti-immigration sentiments began to rise before the "peak" of 2015.

Notably, the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn (*Xrisi Avgi*.) won eighteen seats in Parliament in the 2012 elections. In August of the same year, the government launched Operation Xenios Zeus, somewhat ironically named after the ancient god of strangers and guests. The program was systematically geared at curbing irregular migration but was widely criticized for its abuse of police power, racial profiling, and long-term detention. Though SYRIZA pledged to end the program in 2015, it became clear that government's response to migration could not keep up with rapid increase of migrants and asylum seekers, as the number of people arriving to Greek shores began to spike that spring (Speri 2015).

In 2015, the number of concentrated arrivals on Greek island of Lesbos accounted for fifty-seven percent of the total refugees and migrants to arrive in Greece (UNHCR 2015). In the same year, the UNHCR (2015) reported that Lesbos was receiving approximately 3,300 people per day. Most of these arrivals were coming due to armed conflict in their home countries, with seventy-five percent of people coming from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Clayton & Holland 2015). The Aegean Sea's choppy waters and its dangerous smuggling routes have proven deadly; over ten thousand people have died in their attempt in traveling from Turkey to islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos since the beginning of 2015 (UNHCR 2019). Although they are on the geographic periphery of Greece—and Europe—these islands have become the forefront of the refugee crisis.

Along the mainland's northeastern border, the Evros River provides an alternative route for those crossing into Greece from Turkey. Running for most of its two hundred kilometer breadth along the Evros river, there is small corridor in which the border veers west away from the river, leaving a land area around twelve and a half kilometers long (Skleparis 2017). Along this stretch, Greece began constructing a fence in order to prevent migrants from crossing in December 2012. With this pathway closed, people have since been diverted to crossing the Evros river directly, which like the Aegean, has proven a dangerous and deadly journey (Lee 2017).

Back before it was elected, the SYRIZA party ran on a platform that pledged to remove the fence at Evros, expedite the asylum process, and strengthen migration policy in general (Katsiaficas 2015, Skleparis 2017). Yet many of these promises never came to fruition. While the then newly-elected government did close the Xenios Zeus operated detention centers, they instead opened "hospitality centers," or more formally an Open Refugee Hospitality Center [Ανοιχτή Δομή Φιλοξενίας Προσφύγων.] The first of these centers on the mainland, Eleonas, was opened in August 2015. A fifteen-minute metro ride away from the city center, Eleonas was set to host primarily Afghans and Iranians whose claims are processed more slowly than Syrians. Also during this period, a law was passed that stated all refugees were to be hosted at "hospitality centers," and those whose claims had been denied must return to the countries of origin (Skleparis 2017). However, these "hospitality centers," which are in fact refugee camps, are far from an effective solution.

As 2015 progressed and the influx of migrants and refugees continued, those who arrived on the islands were eager to travel to the mainland of Greece, and then the rest of Europe. The hot July day when I visited Moria Refugee Camp with a group of anthropologists, people were waiting within concentric circles of the camp, the fringes being the newest arrivals and the center

those whose claims were closest to being processed. Driving that summer along the coastal roads close to the capital of the island, Mytilene, I saw clusters of tents and make-shift shelters beyond the confines of the camp. I do not know the number of people that were in the camp the day I was there. Today, however, the camp is nearing nine thousand occupants, almost three times its capacity (Kingsley 2018).

As 2015 progressed and more people arrived on Lesbos and other islands, the lack of space in the camps and on the islands resulted in the lack of adequate living conditions. While Syrians and vulnerable people were fast tracked to the mainland, the claims of others, particularly Afghans, were not expedited. While the camps on the islands grew, so too did makeshift accommodations on the Greek mainland set up by those who made it there. Often, these individuals had not been properly registered on the islands and lacked proper documentation in part due to the inconsistency of Eurodac finger printing. Arriving in Athens, informal camps were set up at the port of Piraeus and the old airport, Elliniko. These makeshift settlements were unassisted by the government, reliant on third party organizations and aid workers to provide many needed services. After the construction of Eleftherios Venizelos in 2001, Athens' current airport, Elliniko was no longer used. That is, until the refugee crisis. At one point, nearly four thousand people inhabited an informal camp at Elliniko before the government began bringing people to official centers where they could apply for asylum in 2016 (Frej and Marans 2016). Camps such as those at Elliniko and in Piraeus existed elsewhere, too. In Athens, some of the abandoned 2004 Olympic complexes became occupied. Outside of the capital city, there was a large camp the northern village of Idomeni near the Macedonian border. Additionally, "squats" in empty buildings of Athens' anarchist neighborhood, Exarchia, began to emerge as living spaces for many migrants and refugees in Athens. In particular, the City Plaza

Hotel, which became abandoned and in disrepair in the wake of the economic crisis, is not only a place of lodging, but has become a community center and self-declared space for providing “hope and dignity to those fleeing war and poverty” (City Plaza).

The EU-Turkey Statement

For many, what was an intended stopping point on their journey to Northern Europe has become an indefinite waiting zone. In March 2016, the EU-Turkey Statement went into effect, closing the Greek-Macedonian border and implementing a “containment policy” that prohibits people on the islands from traveling to the mainland. With limited ability to travel in or out of Greece, the number of people in these makeshift camps was exacerbated. As a result, the Greek government implemented two programs that catered to people who had arrived before March 20, 2016 and those who arrived afterward.

Funded by the European Commission and operated by the Greek Asylum Service and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the initiative was aimed at accelerating the applications of close to 57,000 people residing in temporary accommodation sites in Greece between January 1, 2015 and March 20, 2016 (Frej and Marans 2016). Implemented in June 2016 and ending two months later in August, the program offered “third country nationals” the option to apply for asylum in Greece, for family reunification, or relocation to another EU member state (EASO). Additionally, the government began busing people en masse to government operated centers, clearing out makeshift camps like Elliniko and Idomeni. Application through the pre-registration procedure did not necessarily grant asylum; rather, it supplied a card stating that an asylum application was being processed. It allowed for people to stay in Greece for up to a year, pending a decision on their claim. Not unlike “pink cards” (see

Cabot 2014), holders of pre-registration cards could access public education and public healthcare. However, these pre-registration cards did not grant holders the right to work, and thus, economic independence and integration fell aside to a system of reliance on third party organizations and aid services. Additionally, the rights that were granted under pre-registration cards, like “pink cards,” are precariously ensured and often rely on the asylum seeker’s knowledge of their rights (Cabot 2014).

For those arriving after March 20, 2016, the Greek government signed into law the Fast-Track Border Procedure for the eastern Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samros, Leros, Rhodes, and Kos (Greek Council for Refugees). Within its parameters, individuals who were identified as vulnerable—for example, pregnant women, unaccompanied minors, or victims of torture—or those who qualified for family reunification would be expedited to the mainland or other EU countries (Oxfam 2019). The Fast-Track Procedure is characteristically complicated, having variant tiers of qualifications for who can be sent to Turkey and who remains on the island in detention. In 2017, for example, asylum seekers coming from countries with an average recognition rate of twenty-five percent or more were judged on an individual basis against admissibility factors that determine if Turkey was a “safe third country” (Amnesty International 2017). This constituted primarily Syrian refugees, who received a “negative” decision against these factors and were therefore kept on the islands. Asylum seekers that had average recognition rates under twenty-five percent were not subject to these admissibility factors. This included people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia whose claims were directly addressed on the island where they arrived (Ibid.).

The intricate parameters of the EU-Turkey deal in tandem with the Fast-Track Procedure have had a double sided effect; while statistically the number of arrivals in Greece has dropped

dramatically since its implementation, the policy has aggravated protracted refugee situations on the islands with increasingly insufficient conditions. While people arriving before March 20, 2016 were granted access to move freely within Greece upon obtaining an asylum seekers card, those arriving after March 20, 2016 on Greek islands, who are not deemed vulnerable, do not have ability to leave until their claims are assessed. Because of the slow and even stalled assessment process, the reception centers have become inhospitably overcrowded. In turn, NGOs and other humanitarian aid organizations have appealed directly to the Greek government and the EU to help several times since 2015. In October 2017, nineteen international and local groups wrote a letter to Prime Minister Tsipras, saying, “We urge you to put an end to the ongoing 'containment policy' of trapping asylum seekers on the islands if they arrived after the entry into force of the EU-Turkey deal” (IRC 2017). The letter indicated that some people have been trapped on the islands for nineteen months and that camps on Lesbos and Samos intended for three thousand are hosting more than 8,300 (Ibid.). The following month the General Commission of Administrative Courts of Greece recommended that claims should become accelerated, but this response was not tangibly enforced (OCHA 2018).

Over the course of the 2017, conditions in the camps continued to deteriorate. In particular, Moria Refugee Camp in Lesbos has become notorious for its overcrowding and poor conditions. Since 2015, multiple people have died in the camp; a woman and her grandchild in November 2016 died after an explosion in their tent, and three asylum seekers in January 2017 died in their sleep trying to stay warm from winter’s heavy snowfall (Ibid.). The mental health of those in the camp is also under close watch. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) reported that from September 2018, thirty percent of people at its mental health support center have attempted suicide, and sixty percent reported have considered attempting suicide (IRC 2019,

Oxfam 2019). Additionally, few people in the camp feel safe. A recent study by Refugee Rights Europe, cited in a January 2019 Oxfam report, states that two in three migrants in the camp “never feel safe” (Ibid.). Also included in the Oxfam report were accounts from women who feel so unsafe at night, that they have resorted to wearing diapers while they sleep to avoid going out the bathroom in the dark (Ibid.). The squalid conditions at Moria are putting the health of asylum seekers at serious risk and third party organizations continue to urge the government to move people off the island and to the mainland. The Greek government has responded by ferrying people to the mainland, but NGOs, like Oxfam, argue that it is not enough to keep up with new arrivals to the islands (Oxfam 2019). Instead, they recommend that the Greek government remove the “containment policy” that restricts asylum seekers from moving to the mainland at their own accord. This would release some of the pressure of the overcrowding on the islands. In April 2018, Greece’s highest administrative court ruled that the “containment policy” held no legitimate legal basis and ordered the ban on travel from the islands to be lifted. However, just days later, the government reinstated the policy, and it is still in effect today.

Chapter 3: The “Figure of the Refugee”: Thinking with Agamben and Arendt

July 2018

Athens, Greece

I liked to walk home from work, the bus was always late anyway. I would take my time, sometimes meandering into Exarchia or staying straight, walking past Omonia Square to Syntagma. Months earlier, when I was at my study abroad orientation, the program had shown us a list of places in the city that were either in a “green” or “red” zone. “Green” meant go. Syntagma. “Red” meant don’t. Omonia. These zones were contrived by the program, and though students were not restricted from these places during the semester, we were warned about traveling to these parts of the city. Inexplicitly, the colors cautioned venturing into the predominately immigrant neighborhoods of the city and emphasized spending time in the more touristy, more stereotypically “Greek” parts of Athens. Most students I knew followed this protocol, staying in and around the quaint neighborhood of Pangrati, only seeing Omonia if they had to pass through it on a visit to the National Archaeological Museum. During the summer, my walks home from work were from the “red” zone to the “green” zone. On these walks, I liked to notice the changes in the cityscape, reflecting on the contrived divisions of space; colors, lines, names. I thought about the gradient of red to green. In the transitions of faces and buildings around me, what served as the boundary between “go” and “don’t”? These zones, whatever color, became blurred in the July heat, as I would sometimes stop for a freddo espresso, or wander off to explore another neighborhood. To me, the city was shaping itself by a leisurely walk, its boundaries chromatically indistinct.

In his essay *Beyond Human Rights*, Giorgio Agamben writes, “the refugee should be considered for what it is, namely, nothing less than a limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the nation-state and clears the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed” (2010: 23). Within the current refugee crisis along Agamben’s arguments, the category of the refugee as a subversion to the nation-state system can be contextualized. In particular, a discussion beginning with the anthropological scholarship pertaining to

classifications and liminality (van Gennep 1960, Douglas 1966, Turner 1967) will help set the groundwork for a theoretical turn towards Agamben.

The concept of liminality, Agamben's "limit-concept," precedes a discussion of the category of the refugee. Originally outlined by Arnold van Gennep (1960), his foundational theory argues that rites are composed of three phases: separation, margin, and aggregation. Building on van Gennep, Viktor Turner suggests that "transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere" (Turner 1967:97). This liminal phase produces a marginalization which can be discussed in terms of the category of the refugee. In between states of citizenship, the refugee occupies a distinct set of classifications as a result of the Westphalian nation-state system. This contemporary system has generated the ways in which identity is mediated between person and place. The members of states within this system are subject to its power in not only their production and reproduction of the system itself, but in their relationship with the way the state orders knowledge. The exertion of state power in terms of ideologies (Althusser 1971) has become so potent that it becomes disguised in its existence. In other words, the order of things is reconsecrated in the reciprocal relationship between state and subject. Particularly, this relationship is predicated on economic conditions, which substantiate ideologies within a particular economic context. For Althusser, a neo-Marxist, the sustaining of the state is deeply dependent on its economic milieu. Althusser argues that these justifications are inherently subtle; it is imbued in education and in the media which standardize social practices (Althusser 1971; see Allison 1991). This experience thus confines the subject within a set of expectations, (re)shaping identities and both the level of both the individual and the polity.

While spatially bounded by the extent of certain state apparatuses, identity is not only characterized by ideologies like nationalism, but also, “the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being” (Anderson 1991:19; cited by Malkki 1995a: 5). In particular, Liisa Malkki also suggests that the social life produced within the nation-state system should be discussed in terms of the “national order of things” (1995a: 5). This ordering works to classify and categorize at variant dimensions; the categorization that occurs on the global level of nation-states trickles down to the daily lives of its subjects, who in turn, reconfirm it. Moreover, it is not without consideration that the economic environment of the nation-state system serves as a factor of influence in the production of the system and its ideologies. Many of the countries from which refugees are coming around the world were colonized by dominating states in the Westphalian system. This “national order of things” stems from a hegemony that was rooted in colonizing practices, motivated by pecuniary gain. To expand on the point that Malkki makes, the subversion of the “national order of things” is highlighted by the category of the refugee (1995a:6). This is because the refugee not only undermines the relationship of subject and state, under which the subject is a protected citizen, but also because statehood itself is rooted in a system that cannot be disconnected from its colonial past. Moreover, looking at Turner’s ideas of liminality, the refugee occupies the marginal space between statehood, excluded from categories of citizenship and thus included within the category which has been essentialized as the “refugee.” This category, according to Agamben, which should markedly evocate human rights discourse more than any other figure, instead is a “disquieting element in the order of the nation-state...by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and that between nativity and nationality, it brings the originary fiction of sovereignty to crisis” (Agamben 2000).

Turner's concept of the liminal draws from Mary Douglas (1966) who discusses "matter out of place" as a challenge to the systematic order of things. Douglas argues that "danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable" (97). The danger, in the case of Malkki's "national order of things," is to defy the system's categorization mechanisms which are otherwise seen as legitimate. In *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951:286), Hannah Arendt generated a discussion of the "stateless" person as a stubborn threat to the nation-state system. She writes:

"Much worse than what statelessness did to the time-honored and necessary distinctions between nationals and foreigners, and to the sovereign right of states in matters of nationality and expulsion, was the damage suffered by the very structure of legal national institution when a growing number of residents had to live outside the jurisdiction of these laws and without being protected by any other."

Though writing about the aftermath of the World Wars, Arendt's discussion has fostered more contemporary scholarship on the subject on statehood and subjectivity. The stateless person, paralleled with the refugee, lacks a sort of political visibility. This follows Turner's model of liminality in that "the structural 'invisibility' of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner 1967:95-6). As cited in Malkki (1995a: 7), this passage illustrates that the refugee is included through their exclusion, gaining a sort of markedness within certain arenas (i.e. humanitarian aid organizations where refugees become a center of focus) while becoming invisible in others (i.e. the realm of political protection as citizens). The marginalization of persons between statehoods therefore constructs a new category into which they are included nonetheless.

Recalling the 2011 UNHCR Handbook, the category of the refugee is one which the nation-state and international refugee regime distinguish within a set of their own parameters.

“Recognition of his refugee status does not therefore make him a refugee but declares him to be one. He does not become a refugee because of recognition, but is recognized because he is a refugee” (Ch 1. Paragraph 28). This passage articulates that when one comes into the liminal space between statehoods, a type of definitive action, only then can one become entangled within a recognized category. Beyond the definition of the “refugee” provided by the 1951 Convention, a product of historically determined policy, the recognition of the “refugee” happens within the space of social discourse. The “refugee” as “matter out of place” (Douglass 1966) is thus fundamentally outside the realm of order. Extrapolating this to the context of normalcy, the “refugee” is read as a universalized anomaly (Malkki 1995a: 8). Essentializing the “refugee” posits persons between statehoods as victims in need of saving. Yet, the fact that refugees are outside the order of normalcy remains evident; the ideology of such is internalized but the subjects of the state and thus the “refugee” is seen again as two fold. The innocent and uprooted victim, who should by nature evocate human rights discourse (Agamben 2000), is juxtaposed by its position as a threat to societal order.

The “refugee” is also seen, following Malkki’s discussion, as someone “uprooted” from not only a space, but from a culture. This uprooting translates to a sense of loss of one’s place among order, identity, and the relationship between the two. This uprootedness and sense of loss can be put into discussion with the concepts of *biopower* (also *biopolitics*) (Foucault 1990, 2003) and *bare life* (Agamben 1998). Foucault describes biopower as a form of power concerned with the regulation of life into the affairs of the state. In other words, “biopower thus refers to a situation which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself” (Hardt & Negri 2000:24). Thus, the individual control over one’s body becomes subject to the domain of the state. Foucault regards this as the “threshold of modernity,” insofar as society has

reached this threshold “when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies” (Foucault 1990: 143). Wherein pre-modern states, the sovereign possessed more deductive power, operating on the administration of death, the modern era is characterized by shift toward the axis of life and the emergence of biopolitics. Agamben draws on Foucault’s analysis of biopower and departs from it in arguing that it is not characteristic of the modern era; and rather, “biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception” (Agamben 1998:6). To “correct or, at least, complete” the Foucauldian thesis on biopolitics, Agamben (1998:9) writes:

In a sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of the *zoe* in the *polis*—which is, in itself, absolutely ancient—nor simply the fact that life as such becomes a principle object of the projections and calculations of State power. Instead the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoe*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.

The passage highlights the key components of Agamben’s claim on the power of the contemporary state. This ‘sovereign exception’ refers to anti-liberal German philosopher Carl Schmitt’s theory outlined in *The Concept of the Political* (2007) and *Political Theology: Four Chapter on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1985) concerning the *state of exception*. Schmitt argues that the sovereign’s power to suspend the law in the interest of the state transcends it. The state has the power to define the normal status of legal order, and in its decision to suspend the normal order, it therefore creates its basis; the normal is defined by the exception, which is decided by the state. This concept follows from Thomas Hobbes, who argued that in the state of nature, subjects were obedient to the sovereign in exchange for their protection (cited by Owens 2009: 570). Yet, even then, the sovereign could kill its subjects, and the potential for chaos, or *tanquam dissolute*, would emerge anytime from the normal order. It was thus at the decision, and the

power, of the sovereign to protect its subjects, to maintain order, or to suspend it. For Agamben (2003:23), this state of exception is an “integral part of positive law because the necessity that grounds it is an autonomous source of law” as well as “essentially extrajudicial,” meaning it extends beyond the law in order to restore it. Inherently for Agamben, “the state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, in so far as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law’s threshold or limit concept” (2003:4). Looking back to Walter Benjamin and his argument that “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (2003:392), Agamben asserts that the state of exception is indeed the new normal.

“A Disquieting Element”

To discuss the state of exception which has paradoxically become the rule, Agamben draws on the model of the concentration camp, a metonym of the modern state, produced from a “zone of irreducible indistinction.” To argue this, he expands on Arendt’s distinction between the *zoe* and the *bios* (Arendt 1958; Agamben 1998). Agamben, following Arendt, borrows the Aristotelian concepts of *bios* and *zoe* (Agamben 1998). These terms are adopted from the ancient Greek words *zoe*, life shared by all beings, and *bios*, the political life of humans. Thus, life was recognized in two ways: defined by one’s social existence in community, and by one’s living existence with biological needs, devoid of political function. Wherein ancient Greece these notions were entirely separate, relegated into private and public spheres, Agamben argues that in the contemporary West these concepts have collapsed. In other words, the government’s protection of life and its processes have made it central to its politics, blurring the distinction between the *zoe* and the *bios*. Articulated by Arendt: “we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a

gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping” (Arendt 1958: 28). While this inclusion of life into politics was at first intended in order to protect it, the result is a focus so much on biological life that it strips it of its human qualities. Thus, life becomes bare and easily regulated, becoming unprotected through its intended protection. Agamben’s archetypal example for this is the *homo sacer*, a Roman figure whose life could be killed but not sacrificed (Agamben 1998: 83). This expelled the *homo sacer* from life defined by political existence, *bios*, and reduced his life to that of *zoe*, or biological existence. The *homo sacer* is banned from society and can be killed without consequence; yet, it cannot be sacrificed, or in other words, meaning cannot be prescribed to the death of the *homo sacer*. This does not so much exemplify the existence of *zoe*, but the forced reduction of one from *bios* to *zoe*. It is this reduction, and this exclusion from the political and legal sphere of life, that thereby includes the *homo sacer* within the system of the state. Further, he writes (Agamben 1998: 87):

The same bare life that in the ancien regime was politically neutral and belonged to God as creaturely life and in the classical world was (at least apparently) clearly distinguished as *zoe* from political life (*bios*) now fully enters into the structure of the state and even becomes the earthly foundation of the state’s legitimacy and sovereignty

In terms of a discussion of refugee studies, refugees exemplify the existence of bare life in that their state-less status has excluded them from the realm of the *bios* and protection of the state. This exclusion from the law thereby includes them. Further, the “discursive and institutional domains” produce a “figure of the refugee” that work within the framework of the “national order of things” (Malkki 1995b: 498). This order of things works not only at the level of the sovereign, but in the everyday practices which sustain its power. Looking back to Althusser’s (1966) notions of the ideological state apparatus, the disciplinary power of the state is no longer

rooted solely in repressive police force, but (re)generated by the internalization of ideologies which justify state power. Foucault emphasizes this point as well when he says: “the old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (Foucault 1987: 139-40). Whereas Foucault is less concerned with the economic foreground of ideologies than Althusser, both are concerned with the power of the state as a productive force, instead of a repressive one (Owens 2009: 570).

Therefore, insofar that the power of the state is productive, it can be argued that the refugee is an identifiable category produced by the nation-state system. The power of the state to construct this category lies not only within the direct sovereign’s malleability of the law, but within the social (re)production of particular ideologies. While citizens are ensured protection by their sovereign, an analogous framework exists for protecting refugee in the International Refugee Regime. The consequences of the 1951 Convention and the UNHCR are protracted situations in which refugees are left in indefinite limbo, without access to one of the three durable solutions. While the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations provide aid to refugees and migrants, acting as a type of sovereign themselves, they still function within the broader nation-state system. Thus, though “protected” by humanitarian organizations, the “refugee” is nonetheless exposed not only as a marginal figure in a liminal zone curated by the sovereign, but by traditional humanitarian frameworks whose primary goal of service relies on a precarious liminality.

Agamben articulates this as a “zone of indistinction,” which becomes operative when the state of exception is enforced, and which paradoxically, perpetually exists. It is not so much the suspension of law by the state that determines the state of exception, but the state’s potential to suspend the rule of law at any time. When refugees are excluded from the state in terms of

citizenship and certain rights, they are re-included in the political sphere in a way which undermines its integrity. The relationship between ‘man and citizen’ has been a central component of the nation-state system, predicating the protection of rights within this dualism. However, the category of the refugee highlights these ‘sacred and inalienable’ rights of man “only to the degree which he is... the *citizen*” (Agamben 1995: 4; see Ramadan 2012: 68). Though not citizens of the state, refugees are individuals that are in need of protection nonetheless, invoking discourse of human rights. While not analogous to the *homo sacer*, the category of the refugee is for an instant a reminder of the *homo sacer*, a figure entirely disposable and outcast from the state. The marginal figure of the refugee is both included by the sovereign, and by the nation-state system in its recognition and construction of this category, but is also excluded from the realm of citizenship. Thus, for Agamben, the figure of the refugee is a “disquieting element in the order of the nation-state...by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and that between nativity and nationality, it brings the originary fiction of sovereignty to crisis” (Agamben 2000).

The suspension of the rule of law which was once exercised in the capacity of martial law is now “increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics” (Agamben 2005:2). For Agamben, this ‘dominant paradigm’ is manifest in the model of the camp. While a philosophical motif, the camp as a spatial arraignment can be physically exemplified. Notably, Agamben and Arendt, uses concentration camps in Nazi Germany as the primary example of a zone of indistinction where bare life has materialized. Within concentration camps, the state suspended the rule of law and reduced its citizens to bare life. Subsequently, the ability to kill those within the camp without consequence demonstrate a form of violence that, for Agamben, is increasing in contemporary society. He writes, “today it is not

the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm for the West” (Agamben 1998:181).

The camp and the zone of indistinction have philosophical frameworks that can be grounded in the tangible reality of refugee crises. The ambiguous space of disorder, dangerous and marginal, has paradoxically become the rule. This mode of crisis is not so much about returning order, but rather, reshaping and readapting to new normals. Crisis, in this sense, extends beyond the “moments of truth” (2012 1971, Redfield 2005) and, instead of seeking an old equilibrium, contours new narratives (Redfield 2005, Cabot 2014). These narratives are often dictated by the media, whose can construct a particular perspective to a crisis (Redfield 2005: 336). Yet, even international media coverage of crisis relies on an audience’s willingness to react. The narratives of crisis, in one form expressed through the currents of media, traverse the fabric of every day lives, navigating the ebbing marginalization that is dictated by certain internalized ideologies. This is particularly important when considering the case of Greece’s overlap of economic and refugee crises. Not only because the “refugee” is for Agamben a reminder of bare life, but also because the ideologies by which crisis is internalized, and further responded to, are contextualized within an economic depression.

Addressing Agamben’s camp motif in comparison to contemporary refugee camps, certain parallels between theory and practice can be drawn. While the intention of concentration camps was genocide, exemplifying the state’s power over death, a properly functioning refugee camp is intended to sustain life (Redfield 2005). Nonetheless, the mechanisms on which the state operates to ensure either life or death are eerily similar. Life, its survival or its loss, is the praxis of control within the camp. Though many refugees around the world live within cities, outside of traditional camps, spatial arrangements that exclude refugees from the economic and social

systems of the state work in a paradigmatically similar way to the camp. In the case of the refugee crisis in Greece, the discussion of refugee camps, such as Moria, are situated within Agamben's arguments. As asylum seekers are denied the ability to move off of the island, trapped within deteriorating conditions, the application of Agamben's argument is articulated by Redfield (2005): "life is exposed beneath the language of rights invoked to defend it and the protest against conditions that produced the camp in the first place" (342). Moria, though a camp grounded in sustaining life, is not held responsible before the law if life has been taken away. The deaths of asylum seekers at Moria highlight this; the government is not held accountable as the perpetrator. Further, the lives of asylum seekers have become reliant on a system where third party actors such humanitarian organizations or the UNHCR are responsible for fundamentals of life. This was similarly seen in cases of makeshift campus in Piraeus and at Ellinko. These sites operated without government regulation, dependent on humanitarian agencies to help provide services. Yet, while it appeared as if the Greek government was removed from these camps, not offering regulation at the time of their function, they were able to clear them out in summer 2016. Ultimately, the sovereign holds the overarching ability to regulate law and life; the crisis is not so much an outside force affecting the state, but an internal expression of state power in its response.

Many third party agencies, such as the UNHCR, humanitarian groups, or other NGOs, have declared themselves apolitical. Yet, they often assume the same role that sovereign would within the camp. The apparent neutrality of these organizations questions the role of responsibility in humanitarianism when it comes to preserving life within the camp. While those that provide aid are intended to be temporarily operational, their response is predicated on the existence of the camp, something that itself has become a paradoxical rule of the state of

exception. Further, these humanitarian organizations are defending life in a way that “both recognizes and refuses politics” (Redfield 2005: 343). Because the entire existence of the camp is predicated on the nation-state model, the UNHCR and third party organizations work within its frameworks to reciprocally reconstruct not only the category of the refugee, but also reconstitute states of exception. Observed by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2002), humanitarian organizations perform state-like functions themselves by creating their own type of sovereignty within the larger system (Redfield 2005). Though this is the case, the sovereignty of the state and the sovereignty-like power created by third-party organizations are not entirely analogous. The difference lies within the effect each has on physical, social, and political agency.

Contextualizing Crisis

The Greek economic crisis has elicited particular response to the refugee crisis. This response is not so much a direct correlation with the refugee crisis; rather, the economic collapse was an impetus for a certain context into which an unprecedented amount of refugees and migrants came to Greek shores. Reflecting on the concept of power and its role in the state/subject relationship, the collapse of the Greek economy affected power within state and social praxes. This affected the way in which the Greece, in terms of both the state and its citizens, responded to asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees even before the 2015 “peak.” In 2012, Xenios Zeus Operation was in effect, targeting individuals in order to remove them from certain spaces and detain them in others. The objective, as articulated by the police, was to make Athens a “lawful” city (Kallianos 2018: 48). This rhetoric is reminiscent of the state’s ability to exercise legal control beyond the scope of normal order in the name of public good; to invoke a state of exception. This public or common good allows for the state to (re)configure particular aspects of its authority over its subjects, as well as groups that it may recast to bare life. This

discursive framework justifies state interventions (Kallianos 2018: 49), and in turn produces certain ideological expectations. This is to say, the state is seeking to normalize disorder in the name of public good, avoiding and escaping times of crisis.

Crisis, not only an external disruption to the normal order, can appear as internal modality by which the state's power is tested. While the sovereign can decide a state of exception as means of exerting its power, crisis can also evoke a need for government legitimization. The legitimacy of the Greek state has been tested by the economic crisis: the welfare system is faltering, there is a rise in homelessness, an increase in suicide rates. This "legitimacy" refers to the state's obligation to protect the life of its citizens, the fundamental biopolitical framework that defines the modern state. It also questions the measures which the state takes to ensure this contract; argued by Habermas (1976: 48) and cited by Kallianos (2018:46): "Legitimation crises result from a need for legitimation that arises from changes in the political system... and that cannot be met by existing supply of legitimation." In the case of Greece, the state's mentality is focused on overcoming the crises in the name of the public good. This, ideally, would manifest in ways such as the stabilization of the economy, the reduction of the country's debt, a decrease in unemployment rates, an end to the protracted refugee situations on the islands. Yet, the economic underpinnings of the ideological apparatus posit a certain paradox; while the government's response to the crises renders it in need of legitimization, the crises in of itself works to legitimize the government. According the Agamben (2013), "today crisis has become an instrument of rule. It serves to legitimize political and economic decisions that in fact disposes citizens and deprive them of any possibility of decision." The government acting in the name of the public good legitimizes itself; it has the power to suspend the normal

legal order which is in itself a crisis, in the name of ending the crisis. This both calls into question and reaffirms the state's power.

Within the parameters of the capitalist nation-state system, the way in which the state remains stable is sustained through continuous and successful economic practices, motivated by particular ideologies. When this is disrupted, so too is the nation-state system. As articulated by Athena Athanasiou (2018), economic crises highlight the conceptualizations of the “liberal-capitalist spirit of the ‘good life’ and the neoliberal management of crisis” (20). This ‘good life’ offers a vitality predicated on economic stability, which is inherently related to the stability of the state. When it falters, considering the state's biopolitical control, the regulation of vitality extends beyond economic life, but to life itself. The livability of subjects becomes an interplay between labor and life, agency and vulnerability. The government's neoliberal management of crisis results in strict austerity measures and the diminishing social programs, and thus cannot protect economic vitality or general livelihood. Heath Cabot sheds light to the effects of this in Greece today, as “citizens themselves are increasingly facing the radical precaritization of rights, belonging, and *life*—a struggle that has often been ascribed to the domain of alienage” (Cabot 2018: 6). From the trends towards neoliberalization, a “precarity continuum” has emerged on which both the subjectivity of citizens and refugees are resituated (Cabot 2018: 7). This reconfigures discourse concerning the relationship between subjectivity and individual agency.



Considering the neoliberal management of crisis in Greece not only presents questions about the vulnerability, precarity, and subjectivity, but also makes room for a discussion about agency and agonism in the public sphere. The divide between the public and the private, the social and the political, the included and the excluded, becomes blurred as the agenda for public debate is no

longer set by easily marked boundaries. In the wake of severe austerity measures and a reduction of social welfare programs, debate and demonstration can be analyzed in the public sphere through the lenses of anthropological and critical theory. By assessing the normative frameworks that arose from neoliberal crisis management, space that is open for excluded bodies to break through into the public is found amongst existing and permissible channels of communication.

Chapter 4: Considering Agency, Communication, and Solidarity in the Public Sphere

Summer, 2017: a group of thirty-five migrants, primarily from Africa, were arrested after they staged a protest inside the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos. The charges included the use or threat of violence against public officials, dangerous bodily harm, arson with intent to endanger life, and property damage (Legal Centre Lesbos). Following the event, videos surfaced on social media showing state police entering the “African section” of Moria, shooting tear gas and beating people, including a pregnant woman (Musaferat 2017). News of the ordeal incited reaction not only in Greece, but drew attention from around the world. The individuals arrested acquired the nickname the “Moria 35,” and “Free the Moria 35” became a slogan for advocates on their behalf. In a statement, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles wrote, “We believe this prosecution is part of an ongoing policy to criminalize and silence those who question their hostile containment” (Orjuela & Leete 2018).

The Legal Centre Lesbos, a group of international volunteers providing legal assistance to asylum-seekers and migrants, reported that as a result of a trial in April 2018, thirty-two of the thirty-five were found guilty of one offense and given a short sentence. In October, 2018, a year and three months after the July protest, the last of the Moria 35 arrested was released. While eventually charges were dropped, and those convicted finished serving jail time, the legal advocacy group reported that there were “flagrant breaches of the defendants’ basic rights to a fair trial during the whole process, including the lack of translation and the unjustified and prolonged pre-trial detention” (Legal Centre Lesbos).

The long-drawn-out case of the Moria 35 exemplifies the way in which reaction to migration in Greece plays out at both the public and the political level. Solidarity campaigns and support for those convicted spotlighted the arrests of the Moria 35, as well as the conditions on the hotspot islands, and the state's criminalization of migrants. On the other hand, Far Right groups have responded to migrants in Greece with violence. Around the time of the Moria 35 hearings in April 2018, clashes broke out between nearly two hundred Far Right protestors and a group of asylum seekers and migrants in Mytilene's main square (Strickland 2018b). Moreover, racially motivated hate-crimes on the whole in Greece have escalated. The latest 2017 report shows that hate crimes motivated by race, national origin, or skin color nearly tripled since 2016 (Strickland 2018a). Not only on the streets, but in the courts as well, there is a demonstration of intolerance toward migrants in Greece.

Illustrated by a series of court cases taking place at the end of February 2019 and into March, the criminalization of forms of protests is an example of the continued attempt to exclude refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants from public discourse. The Legal Centre Lesvos reports that these trials address a range of protests, from peaceful occupation of Lesvos' central Sapphos Square in November 2017, to the demonstration that escalated to a violent attack by Right-wing nationalists in late April 2018 (Legal Centre Lesvos 2019). The arrests of individuals involved highlight the procedures in place that regulate participation in the public sphere. Taking to the streets and demonstrating is a physical way of exercising agency, of breaking through into the public. Yet, in a public that is contextualized in Greece's overlapping crises, the room for discourse and agency is contoured by a normative framework of neoliberal crisis management.

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey outlines the trademark of neoliberalism as the "deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of

social provision” (Harvey 2005:23). Harvey also acknowledges that the trends away from liberal economic policies toward newer neoliberal ones reconfigure the role of the individual as an agent. As the praxis of state and economic environments shift, so too must the ideologies that support them. Thus, the action and material, the agent and the product, must also shift along these lines (Gershon 2011: 538). The behaviors that bolster a neoliberal system are articulated by Foucault, who writes, “In this view, like the market, competition, too, is not a natural fact always already part of parcel of the economic domain. Instead, this fundamental economic mechanism can function only if support is forthcoming to bolster a series of conditions, and adherence to the latter must consistently be guaranteed by legal measures” (Lemke 2001: 193). This is to say, the competitive nature incentivized by neoliberalism, a fundamental mechanism of the system, is conditioned by the enforcement of a particular legality. In turn, these legal measures are implemented and sustained by internalized ideologies of those it affects. The system works because those within it continually propagate it. For Foucault, “the only appropriate social policies supporting the entrepreneurial form of rationality could ensure that the right form of capitalism would dominate” (Lemke 2001:195, cited in Gershon 2011:538). While this manifests itself in political policy, it bears social implications on the role of the individual. Holding individuals to certain agentive expectations, neoliberal policies lead to questioning the space between expectation and ability.

While a liberal stance emphasizes a right to one’s property in correlation to the capacity for labor, a more neoliberal vantage posits that one’s skills ought to be nurtured and developed beyond a singular capacity (Martin 200; see Gershon 2011). This turn towards an investment in one’s skills extrapolates expectations for one’s agency. Neoliberal ideologies focus not only on ability to work, but the continual improvement of one’s labor, further inciting a sense of self

which requires “participants to be reflexive managers of their abilities and alliances” (Gershon 2011: 539). Individuals are not seen so much for their capacity to generate products. Instead, it is the skills of their production that have become marketable. This fosters a kind of social relationship between employer and employee, government and subject, because it promotes a new sense of obligation towards continuously improving procedure. One’s agentic ability is now something to be invested in, not only to be utilized in the here and now. Summarized by Ilana Gershon (2001: 542-43),

A neoliberal perspective assumes that the actors who create and are created by the most ideal social order are those who reflexively and flexibly manage themselves as one owns and manages a business, tending to one’s own qualities and traits as owned and even improvable assets... a neoliberal perspective of agency depends on transforming liberalism’s possessive individualism (Macpherson 1962) into corporate individualism, viewing all agents as commensurate corporate entities so that social organization or differences in scale can be ignored.

Moreover, agency is also something that is culturally mediated (Hernandez and Iyengar 2001). In other words, how and why individuals act can be characterized by particular ideological influences. Agency from an ideologically Western perspective emphasizes motivation and the establishment of a distinctiveness in action. This Western, personal agency is set apart from understandings of collective agency. Elucidated by Elizabeth Povinelli (2009: 98) “bodies and values are stakes in individual games of chance and that any collective agency (other than the corporation) is an impediment to the production of value” (cited in Besteman 2016: 199). In the broader context of neoliberalism, the relationship between the individual and the collective is connected to the enhancement or reduction of equality (Heron 2008).

Because a neoliberal state is predisposed to favor policies that promote its own capitalist gain, access to agency is not always equitable. Neoliberal politics promote privatization and

restricted social welfare programs. In the case of crisis, this sort of management does not facilitate individual agency for those whose livelihoods would otherwise be dependent on state welfare programs. Instead, neoliberal policies incentivize agency for those who start with economic advantage and diminish it for those who are already encumbered. The policies that stress economic growth are prioritized by the state while social development programs fall aside. As a result, the economic class becomes more pronounced and the tensions that arise “reduce human beings to living a life of insecurity and tension, resorting to survivalist strategies... in such instances, the neoliberal policy environment saps human agency” (Heron 2008: 10). If this is the case, what avenues remain for individuals who are resorting to these so called “survivalist strategies” to express agency? While political and economic agency may be diminished, is agency entirely lost? Furthermore, in the case of refugees, who are “living a life of insecurity and tension”, how is agency expressed? The interplay between neoliberal policy and the state’s biopolitical control poses interesting questions around agentic ability. In particular application to the refugee crisis in Greece, the means by which agency is expressed in a system of neoliberal crisis management can be discussed in terms of the public sphere.

Neoliberal Norms

The reconfiguration of subjectivity in the neoliberal management of crisis can be analyzed through the Foucauldian lens of biopolitics. The trajectory of Foucault’s discussions of governmentality and the state’s regulation of bodily function emerge in the modern context of crisis normalization. In crises, the government’s self-legitimization through protecting the public good finds roots in capitalist frameworks that favor upward mobility. The well-being of those who benefit from neoliberal governmentality comes at the expense of vulnerable bodies below. The dispensing of these bodies manifests itself through destructive modes of power and is

oriented toward ensuring the public good. Yet in this framework the public good includes a particular public whose vitality has become economized. The capitalism that prevails in the modern market-system also pervades in the construction of social norms and values. In other words, the economic precedent set by the neoliberal system in turn imbues the social and political dialogue with an amenability towards ones' productivity. The vitality of individuals as a concern of the state becomes economized as it is relegated into the public social and political sphere. The result is an uneven distribution of resources primarily between the normative groups that the system favors and the racialized and gendered bodies of those which it abjects (Athanasίου 2018, 21). Moreover, neoliberalism is not only an economic system, but a type of governmentality whose power is exercised through biopolitical management and competitive individualization, reconfiguring the relationship between the state and the citizen, the public and the private (Athanasίου 2018, 21).

In crisis, neoliberalism's production of morality that favors self incentivized mobility and the potential of productive labor falsely protects more vulnerable persons. Further, as articulated by Athena Athanasίου, the neoliberal state uses crises as a means to legitimize itself (2018: 16). In the case of Greece, the government's claim to secure the common or public good from external crises becomes apparent in the state's ability to contour new normals. Simply put, "Crisis necessitates the realism of constant management- both preemptive and reparative" (Athanasίου 2018: 16). Athanasίου also looks to Wendy Brown's (2015) recent scholarship on neoliberalism in order to explain the idea that "neoliberal governance eviscerates, or swallows, the very democratic space in which people assemble to articulate common claims of freedom, equality, and justice" (Athanasίου 2018: 17). Moreover, the values of democracy become destabilized as the normative mode of reason emphasizes the economic vitality of the subject. In

this environment, the democratic values of freedom and equality give way to more inequitable capitalist subjugation.

The state's legitimization of itself in neoliberal management of crisis attempts to stabilize the public good through securitization of particular persons. As an exclusionary force, the state produces enemies from whom the public needs protecting. These enemies are often those who are dependent on would-be social welfare programs and are therefore posited as undermining the economic provisions which the state does possess. Anthropologist Catherine Besteman describes this scenario as one "that scapegoat foreigners and the poor as economically unproductive and dependent, exacerbating xenophobia and narrowing the boundaries of who qualifies as worthy citizens" (Besteman 2016: 198). In this sense, abjected groups become a foil to the public good, in order to distinguish from what "worthy citizens" need protecting.

In the case of Greece's overlapping crises, refugees and immigrants are easily abjected as threats to the system on both a level of political policy as well as normative, social values. As articulated by Alexander Aleinikoff (1995: 263), in neoliberal management of global refugee crises, "refugee law has become immigration law, emphasizing protection of borders rather than protection of persons" (cited in Besteman 2016: 64). Instead of resettling refugees or facilitating integration into host or third-party countries, protracted situations increase as camps become overcrowded and stays become prolonged. Even with the protocol of EU-Turkey deal in place, there is a continuous instability of crisis management. In place of concern for individual protections of a person recognized as an asylum seeker or refugee, the management of the refugee crises has focused on the safeguard of Greece's, and Europe's, borders. With Greece's containment policy that prevents people from moving off of the islands and to the mainland at their own volition, the overcrowding at Moria and other camps has resulted in dangerous living

conditions. The biopolitical power of the state that regulates the life and death of individuals overlaps with neoliberal policies that deincestivize welfare systems.

In this way, the Greek state holds the power to “define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (Mbembe 2003: 27, cited by Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 20). For Achille Mbembe in his theory of *necropolitics*, the sovereign’s power to determine disposability incorporates but extends beyond Foucault’s argument of biopolitics, highlighting the systemized abjection of particular bodies (Mbembe 2003). Migrants and refugees who are relegated to the hotspot islands in Greece or are kept into protracted limbo on the mainland are confined on physical, social, and political levels. In 2015, the media coverage and global news reports of people coming to Greece’s shores was headline news, whereas today, nearly four years later, reports have dwindled. A recent report by the Guardian at the end of February 2019 referred to situation in Greece as being “increasingly viewed as a forgotten refugee crisis” (Smith 2019). Though the numbers of individuals arriving to Greece has decreased, the flow of people coming to Greece in search of asylum and refuge has not stopped. As public visibility of the refugee crisis falls, the disposability of migrants and refugees through a lens of necropolitics increases. Lives that are unaccounted for or the neglected number of people who have drowned on the dangerous journey to Greece exposes the vitality of refugees and migrants as not only economically precarious and socially vulnerable, but politically dispensable. And, “as long as bodies are deemed disposable, found discarded, and remain uncounted, the notion of disposability will be associated with the concepts and practices of dehumanization and necropower” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 147).

The securitization of the physical borders of Greece and the EU that takes political precedence also extends to the abstract boundaries of Greek and European culture. The identity

politics which take place within the public sphere manifest themselves on both sides of the political spectrum. Bodies on the Left and the Right, and even the Far Right, have taken to the public arena of debate in contestation of both the economic and the refugee crisis. Demonstrations in Greece, and in Athens in particular, occur often, be it in the city's central Syntagma Square or the anarchist neighborhood of Exarchia. The mobilization of bodies across the political spectrum has increasingly clear visibility within the public sphere. Living in Athens, I noticed an agonistic space of debate in Greece, both in the social and political realm of discursive frameworks, and also in the physical space of the city. The collective movement of people towards the city's streets and central squares demonstrate the space of protest and debate within the broader public.

The economic crisis, which took hold before 2015 and the beginning of the refugee crisis, opened the door for the emergence of protest and resistance. Though educated, young middle class participants were some of the most common bodies in protests and assemblies, a "plural embodied space of discontent" was still representative of a general Greek population that was affected by crisis (Athanasidou 2018: 22-3). The development of spaces opened for contestation, in addition to the neoliberal European economic and social formations, shaped the space for agonism in the public sphere. In the wake of the recent refugee crisis, the public response to the migrants and asylum seekers that arrived in Greece varied across the political and social spectrum. The already existing procedure of debate in the public sphere stemmed from a neoliberal management of the economic crisis and an austerity-ridden Greece. Discussing the ability for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees to enter into this debate, and to express agency on more general terms, can begin by turning to the preexisting elements of both the response to

the economic crisis in Greece, an existing asylum crisis (see Cabot 2014), and the social dynamics of Greek hospitality culture.

Publics Right and Left

Within the broader umbrella of the public are overlapping and varying strains of publics that are integrated both into and by normative frameworks. These frameworks include bodies that fall along a Right-to-Left political and social spectrum. On the Left, solidarity and socialist movements counter those on the conservative and even the Far Right. The rise of neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn (*Xrisi Avgi*), over the last ten years has encouraged anti-immigrant sentiments in Greece, and has even resulted in violent attacks against migrants, immigrants, and other abjected bodies. The group propagates white-supremacy ideologies, targeting immigrants, LBGTQ+ communities, and religious and ethnic minorities. Its public campaign platform in the 2012 elections was “So we can rid this land of filth” (Elgot 2014).

Since its political visibility began to rise since the economic collapse, the Greek government has attempted to limit Golden Dawn’s activities. As of 2019, the group is currently involved in an on-going trial to determine whether many of its members belong to a criminal organization and if Golden Dawn can be classified as such. Despite the mounting pressure to crackdown on the group, in 2019 Golden Dawn held seventeen of the three-hundred parliament seats in Greece. The radical Right, neo-Nazi agenda within the public sphere is reaffirmed by their political representation. Golden Dawn is able to perform both socially in demonstrations or public in spaces, and politically, as a voting party represented in parliament. In particular, the premise of Golden Dawn’s agenda is one that “converging with the neoliberal market economy, hinges upon a biopolitical logi(sti)cs of human disposability” (Athanasίου 2018: 24).

Emphasizing that vulnerable and abjected bodies are problematic and even dangerous, while simultaneously undermining the neoliberal neglect of social-welfare programs, Golden Dawn hosted a “Greeks only” soup kitchen in Spring 2013. Even though this effort was condemned by the mayor of Athens, Golden Dawn’s foothold in public and political discourse highlights the way in which narratives, across the spectrum, have emerged in the wake of crisis.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, solidarity initiatives have taken hold as a predominant mechanism that undergirds traditional, institutionalized frameworks for providing assistance to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Katerina Rozakou has written extensively on the landscape of Greece’s refugee crisis, and in particular, the emergence of the “solidarian” (*allileggyos*) as opposed to the neoliberal production of the volunteer (*ethelontis*) (Rozakou 2016, 2017, 2018). Contextualized in Greece’s history of Europeanization, and in particular over the last two decades with its induction into the EU, the bureaucratic and neoliberal agenda of the EU is reflected in the institutionalization of volunteerism (Rozakou 2016). Within the milieu of Greece’s culture and the hierarchal dynamic of hospitality (see Herzfeld 1980, 1987, 1992) is neoliberalism’s moral production of the citizen (Rozakou 2016:82).

In the case of volunteerism in Greece, Rozakou (2016) argues that the disinterested citizen works voluntarily in the interest of the common good and is an example of a subjectivity that is vested in a neoliberal project. Contrasted to the volunteer is the emergence of solidarity networks, centered on the social community and working toward more lateral and egalitarian relationships. Rozakou writes that in their work solidarians, “more than providing aid through material goods or services, their intention was to engage in social relationships with the refugees they met and to subvert the dominant hierarchical schemata of humanitarianism” (Rozakou 2018:100). This sentiment was echoed by a social worker I met in Athens, who told me that

solidarity movements have a “purer cause” than types of volunteerism and that “solidarity is about being human and help another human because this is what makes us what we are.” On the other hand, volunteerism is more about having some previous work experience and wanting to continue to build that experience. Speaking to the connection Rozakou draws with neoliberalism, volunteerism emphasizes more neoliberal values of incentivizing personal skill and experience, rather than the experience of connecting with others on a lateral level.

In the recent years since the economic crisis, the word *allilegyos* (solidarian) that has integrated into the Greek vernacular exemplifies the “reconfiguration of the conceptions of the notions of ‘social’” (Rozakou 2018: 189). Springing from anti-austerity solidarity organizations, the notion has expanded to solidarity with refugees, migrants, and immigrant groups in Greece. Solidarity with migrants in Greece began before the current refugee crisis. There was a standing asylum crisis in Greece (Cabot 2014) and policies such as “Operation Xenios Zeus” in 2012 highlighted the government’s detention and deportation of immigrants (Rozakou 2012, 2018). The role of *filoksenia*, literally “love of the stranger,” implies a power dynamic between host and guest not always realized in the English word “hospitality.” As Rozakou (2018:193) points out, “the stranger is socially acceptable as long as his/her difference does not threaten the host in a setting where the ‘other’ is perceived as a threat to the principle of ethno-culture similarity (Papataxiarchis 2006:33-39). The host himself/herself holds the monopoly of agency and power.” She further highlights Papataxiarchis’ argument that the rise of austerity measures and economic instability opened the door for groups like Golden Dawn and other forms of hate and violence against migrants (2018:194). The rejection of the ‘other’ (Papataxiarchis 2014) and the pronounced hold on power of the host/hostess over the stranger is exacerbated by prolonged modes of crises.

Counteracting this, however, are groups of solidararians that emerge to dismantle the exclusionary and hierarchal power dynamics of Greece's "crisis of hospitality" (Papataxiarchia 2014, cited in Rozakou 2018). Instead of the "host himself/herself holding the monopoly of agency and power," solidarity focuses on lateral relationships, not only addressing but also including those with which they stand in their demonstrations and messages. These messages, be in the space of public protest, on signage, or in the community centers and squats in Exarchia, are often not only in Greek and English, but in Farsi, Arabic, or Urdu. The community center where I spent time in Athens in 2018 was built on values of solidarity. It stressed non-hierarchal operations of the building that included more than just food and shelter services, but community-oriented classes and shared spaces. The emphasis on localized support and community opens a space of inclusive visibility, where the individual wants and needs of members-- be it refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, citizens, or bodies from abroad that come to work in these solidarity spaces—are registered.

These solidarity initiatives differentiate themselves from the type of humanitarian work by NGOs, which "many assumed to be institutionalized, well-funded, well-resourced organizations" (Cabot 2018: 15). Yet, as Heath Cabot points out in her recent work focusing on "solidarity clinics/pharmacies" in Greece, these initiatives have had to collaborate with NGOs and other humanitarian organizations, and thus, reluctantly, "participated in instantiating hierarchies of 'deserving' or 'needy' persons and populations" (2018: 16). While refugees are often recipients of the services provided by "solidararians," Cabot points out that the overlapping crises in Greece has produced a precaritization of both the citizen and the "other," and the "emergence of new categories of needy subjects amid the entwinement of humanitarian and neoliberal logics under austerity" (2018: 18). Cabot's scholarship highlights two facets of a

discussion on agency and the public sphere in Greece. The first is the distinction that solidarity groups define themselves against traditional humanitarian organizations in order to emphasize and resituate the power relationship between giver and receiver. The second is the way in which neoliberal crises management posits both citizens and non-citizens on a spectrum of precarity, from which vulnerabilities and struggle can become a shared experience. Within the public sphere, a space is opened for the mobilization of these groups.

The Social and the Political

The type of debate that exists within the public space is, to an extent, an illustration of the overlap of the “political” and the “social.” The distinction of the bios and the zoe which Arendt outlines in *The Human Condition* (1958), and which Agamben (2005) draws on for his argument about the state of exception (see Schmitt 1985), is relevant to the discussion of agonism in Greece’s public sphere. Arendt and Agamben aptly acknowledge the collapse of the bios and the zoe, looking at the biopolitical power of the state and its inclusion of private life functions within the political, public realm. Yet, as the current Greek crises demonstrate, the agendas of conversation in the public are not so easily demarcated by the categories of public and private. The consequences of strict austerity measures and the reduction of social welfare programs blur the boundaries between what is rendered private and what is seen as public. As Seyla Benhabib makes clear, what sets the agenda for debate in the public sphere is not just a sorting of public and private matters, finding clarity between the two, but primarily “a struggle for freedom and justice” (Benhabib 1992: 94). Contestation of practices and policies in a democratic public sphere is a struggle not only for stable livelihoods, but also a struggle of access to these livelihoods. Arendt’s understanding of the public as a political space of contestation is connected to the relationship of power and people. An Arendtian understanding of agonistic agency to

contest within the public sphere does not entirely account for the power discrepancies of bodies within the public sphere and political arena. While contestation is a crucial procedure to be held within the public, the capacity of agonistic agency is a conditional one; not every body is an equally singular one. In other words, various intersubjectivities within the public sphere affect access to the procedural ability of struggle itself.

In a certain sense, democratic space is emboldened by those who contest it. Yet, in another, the agonistic space that emerges from the emergency is still somewhat exclusionary. This is to say, that even amidst the pluralities present in public discourse, the voices that resonate within the public are those that are already recognized by it. The racialized and scapegoated bodies that are abjected from normative discourse form counterpublics, dissecting the broader understanding of the public sphere into overlapping domains of included and excluded voices. The totality of the public sphere is broken down by Michael Warner (2002) into publics (singular, *a* public) and counterpublics. *The* public is constituted by the continual reinscription and interpellation of subjects to iterative, normative frameworks. A vital underpinning of both publics and counterpublics is that there is a sense of relations among strangers, a bond of belonging with others whom one has not met and may never meet, but are participating within the same public; it can be the shared sense of struggle and precarity that emerges in the wake of crisis.

The common visibility and common action shared by bodies within *a* public is predicated on an application of Althusser's notion of interpellation (Warner 2002: 58). Because Althusser's concept applies to individuals, not necessarily publics, a modified rendition of his theory can be applied. People are always already subjects of state discourse (Althusser 1971); those whom are included within particular publics are always already subjects of normative discourse. Neoliberal

governmentality interpellates subjects as competitors for (economized) vitality and stability, while at the same time abjecting precarized bodies to violence and injustice (Athanasίου 2018: 27).

Variant publics emerge from this abjection that negotiate the economization of politics and morals. Groups that run counter to these publics, aptly called counterpublics, are exposed as frictional forces against the dominate public, opening shared spaces that diverge from the banality of normative narratives. Counterpublics are inherently oppositional in the sense that they resist the interpellation of subjects into the existing ideological apparatus. Further, counterpublics “challenge modernity’s social hierarchy of faculties [do so] by projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity” (Warner 2002: 87). In other words, the various networks that are negotiated through counterpublics emerge from normative crisis frameworks, socializing strangers that share precarized vulnerabilities, and giving rise to debate and protest in contested public spaces. Bodies that share vulnerability and precarity, “performativity unsettle the gendered, classed, and racialized norms of admissibility through which the neoliberal and neoconservative nation-in-crisis constitutes itself” (Athanasίου 2018: 27).

The narratives and publics which materialize and mobilize are often attributed with a sense of agency (Warner 2002: 89). In other words, publics can be thought of as agentive, ideological bodies that negotiate their goals within the public sphere. Golden Dawn as *a* public, in this sense, engages with *the* public to criticize immigration and reject vulnerable bodies that it sees as undermining a Greek way of life. Yet, it is important to note that this attribution of agency to publics can result in reductive reification. It is not so much that participation of *a* public in *the* public where attention should be drawn to agency, but rather, to the participation of

individuals within *a* public. This distinguishes the difference between ideological forces that result in particular action, versus the individuals within a group that participate in particular ways. The emphasis and accountability should be on the latter. In that sense, the network of strangers who constitute a public participate through their own choice actions. Collective agency is a result of strangers working in concert, not only action through unified public ideology.

This notion is particularly important when examining the agency of refugees in Greece. Essentializing refugees as a group that acts neglects the agency of individuals or collectives within an ascribed category. Further, the interests of refugees and migrants that are represented by those within the public, particularly groups on the Left, speak not only to the existence of agency, but the process of its expression. Refugees and migrants themselves are most often excluded from the dialogue of the public sphere socially, politically, and physically. The public not only works to edge out the voices that would rattle its normative system, it does not register them as viable participants in the public dialogue. There are, however, instances where these counterpublics break through. Moreover, groups that advocate for refugees, like NGOs that write to the Greek government or solidarity organizations that organize public protests, are representatives of the interests of those excluded from the dialogue. While many migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants live on the mainland, the government's containment policy has stranded almost 15,000 people on the islands. This measure inhibits not only physical mobility, but social and political visibility. Moreover, the discourse that exists within the public sphere communicates via normative speech, an integrated vernacular that allows those within it to understand each other. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, though excluded from this normative language, are still speaking. It is not so much about giving a voice to the voiceless, or even amplifying these voices; it is about reconfiguring the speech which is already integrated

into the public's vocabulary to include the voices which is currently excludes. Judith Butler (2011) aptly asks a question relevant to this argument: "How do we make sense of those who can never be part of that concerted action, who remain outside the plurality that acts...what political language do we have in reserve for describing that exclusion?" (cited in Athanasiou 2017, 301).

Those who do speak in terms of normative frameworks are included as participants in the public. In fall 2017, when nineteen human rights and humanitarian NGOs wrote an open letter to the Greek government insisting on better conditions and policy changes on the hotspot islands, the conversation that took place between the government and the non-governmental organizations was held within the normative framework of the public. Although the government's response in terms of policy change was limited in scope and did not meet all of the requests of the NGOs, the procedure itself is a reminder of the types of conversations that are able to take place. In this case, the interests of the NGOs expressed in the open letter were to better the conditions for the asylum seekers and migrants which they serve. The ability of the NGOs to converse and contest in the public sphere by the means of writing fell within the parameters of the public's discourse. NGOs as organizations fall within the framework of traditional humanitarian operations— formal, and funded, groups from whom self-identifying solidarity groups differentiate. The ability of the NGOs open-letter to resonate within the public sphere speaks to their already institutionalized means of communication.

If refugees and migrants, as individuals or a group, had written a letter to the Greek government in the same manner, what would the result have been? To a degree, the practice of open-letter writing and access to public forums, particularly on the internet, is indicative of a normative procedure in itself. Therefore, are excluded voices relegated to a realm of public participation only insofar as existing normative procedures allow? The letter itself acknowledged

“the efforts of the Greek Government and the solidarity of the Greek people towards asylum seekers and migrants in the past years” (IRC 2017). It went on to say, “However, the disappointing lack of real solidarity and commitment to responsibility sharing by many EU member states is no justification for the current state of asylum seekers on the Greek islands.” The signatories on the letter included prominent international aid organizations such as Amnesty International and Oxfam, as well as more local groups that ground their work more toward the end of solidarity, such as Lesvos Legal Center and Solidarity Now. The groups oriented toward solidarity efforts, while echoing the sentiment of realizing lateral relationships as opposed to hierarchical dynamics of charity and volunteerism, collaborate with traditional humanitarian organizations in order to break through into the public dialogue.

There is a particular part of my discussion that I have presupposed so far in this chapter. I have posited agency as embedded in a framework that is reliant on the breakthrough of counterpublics and dissident voices that find pathways to emerge in the public. In the case of refugees and migrants in Greece, I do not mean to speculate that agency has a teleological end that assumes collectively conceived wants and needs. The necessities of safety, security, and stability are sought after not only by refugees and migrants, but by general subjects of humanity. The particular fabrication of these wants or needs is, however, a subjective one insofar as different individuals, collectives, publics, and counterpublics, overlap and seek variant embodiments of these fundamentals. People leaving their homes and crossing international boundaries do so for a myriad of reasons— asylum claims vary, self-presentation and identities are not identical, and not all sensibilities correspond in concert. At the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, religious affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, and other contrived markers of identity and self, a discussion of agency must remember the way in which power dynamics

transform, produce, reduce, and operate. Dualisms that have appeared in this discussion such as public and private, life and death, can entangle a discussion of agency in a similar kind of binary. Recognizing this, it is important to note that agonism and agency are not homogeneous assemblages or harmonized performances that either exist or do not exist. Instead, the public sphere and participation in it is a subjective experience, and even when agency is at times elusive, it cannot be phenomenologically essentialized as a force to either be possessed or not possessed.

Breaking through into the public is possible by simultaneous actions of presenting both as a frictional force to the public and by accessing its permissible channels. As in the case of the Moria 35 and other protests of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees; agency is expressed through existing mechanism of debate in the public sphere. The criminalization of individual protest conveys the message that the state is attempting to lessen the vocalization of protest from bodies it is attempting to exclude. In January 2019, the Guardian reported that a group of migrants in Samos marched into the island's capital chanting, "Samos is no good" (Smith 2019). The following sentence in the article reads, "The protest added mounting pressure on the leftist government in Athens to move them [refugees] to the mainland." From the perspective of the media outlet, the protest is a recognized as a force that has an effect on the public. By entering into the agonistic practices in the public sphere, aided by the visibility of the media and other groups that stand in solidarity with them, excluded bodies and counterpublics are working to break through into the public.



Unlike the frameworks of traditional humanitarian organizations or the vertical power dynamic embedded in the conventional understandings of hospitality, solidarity initiatives

attempt to resituate relationships between giver and receiver. This lateral relationship bolsters the agency of the recipient because it not only acts as a means of giving, but rather, works to dismantle a dependent relationship on the provider. Not only addressing but including migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in dialogue addressed at the public, solidarians help to take hold of the elusive agency that is diminished from the result of neoliberal crises management. Though solidarity measures are a step in the direction of enhancing agency, their efforts are not entirely removed from the frameworks of power and hierarchy. Though within counterpublics of solidarity spaces these relationships are restructured, when entering into the public discourse, often times it is through always already channels of normative discourse that the counterpublics and excluded bodies must present and communicate. In other words, though solidarity encourages the agency of asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees in Greece, it does not entirely root out or reestablish public discourse. Nonetheless, it gives room for the reimagining of inclusion and agency in the public sphere (see Cabot 2018).

Furthermore, solidarity brings into question the boundary of the “social” and the “political,” again blurring the agenda for encompassed debate in the public sphere. The emphasis on locality and community is evident spatially. For example, many solidarity initiatives and collectives have cropped up in the Athenian neighborhood of Exarchia. This idea of shared-ness and sociality is also evident as a subversion to the politicalized state. As Rozakou (2018: 199, also 2016:82) writes, “it seems that the ‘social’ has become the alternative all-encompassing notion that replaces the disdained political.” What is at stake in public discourse is not, as Benhabib writes, just the sorting of public and private, but “a struggle for freedom and justice” (Benhabib 1992: 94). In the context of solidarity movements in Greece, forms of solidarity negotiate within the public arena of debate to resituate previous understandings of the political—

disinterested, institutionalized forms of humanitarian aid such as volunteerism—to advocate for the lateral, egalitarian levels of justice and freedom in everyday life.

Conclusion

In a statement released on the third anniversary of the signing of the EU-Turkey Statement, the head of the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) mission in Greece, Emmanuel Goué, said, “Greece has become a dumping ground for the men, women and children that the European Union has failed to protect...What was once touted as a ‘refugee emergency’ has given way to inexcusable levels of human suffering across the Greek islands and on mainland Greece” (Médecins Sans Frontières 2019). Though the number of people arriving in Greece over the past three years has decreased, the EU-Turkey deal has trapped nearly 15,000 on the hotspot islands. The unsafe and unsanitary conditions of the overcrowded camps prompt questions of the competency and the role of the state to solve this “refugee emergency.” The situation has eclipsed the meaning of the word “crisis,” which, like “emergency,” implies a temporality of disorder. Instead, a new normal has taken hold in the form of a worsening protracted situation that not only leaves thousands without alternative pathways to safety, but sheds light on the issues present in the current International Refugee Regime.

In this thesis, I have attempted to open a discussion into various aspects of the current refugee “crisis” in Greece by first addressing the construction of the category of the refugee. Though a self-declared apolitical body, the UNHCR operates amongst the framework of the nation-state system and is reliant on the obligation of signatory states to adhere to its 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Moreover, the category of the refugee that is both defined by the 1951 Convention and constructed by the nation-state system paradoxically undermines the the “national order of things” (Malkki 1995a:6). The relationship between citizen and state upon which the nation-state system is predicated is called into question by the “refugee,” a figure that subverts the bond between nativity and nationality, and man and citizenship (Arden 1951,

Agamben 1994). In this sense, the category of the refugee defines what the citizen is by highlighting what it is not. While citizenship invokes the recognition of certain protections, the marginalized figure of the refugee brings to light the construction of human rights as something inherent in a relationship between citizen and state. As Agamben points out, the category of the refugee should evoke discourse that is directly geared at protecting human rights, yet it also reminds us of the state's ability to control the administration of these rights, an inclusion under and exclusion from the sovereign's protection (Agamben 2000).

Agamben brings into questions the concept of bare life and the state's power to reduce one to their basic biological function, stripping them of all political life and even social meaning. He argues that the premiere example of this is highlighted in concentration camps, where citizens were exposed to the condition of bare life. Agamben discusses the model of the camp, the spatial arrangement in which the state has total power, as the paradigm for the modern West. Agamben's theory of bare life and his model of the camp can be examined in a discussion on refugees, but not because refugees assume the essence of bare life, nor because the refugee camp is entirely analogous to the concentration camp. Instead, the category of the refugee reveals the reality of the potential of the state to reduce one to bare life and to physically confine individuals within either a spatial and societal marginalization. The "refugee" as a liminal figure is situated between the citizen and the *homo sacer*; while the rights of the citizen are not granted to the "refugee," individuals in this category are not reduced to a body without any social meaning.

The "refugee" reveals the limits of both citizenship and human rights, as well as the limits of an entirely philosophical discussion on its categorical construction. In other words, discussing solely the category of the "refugee" can neglect the lived realities of individuals who flee across international boundaries, facing dangerous conditions and hostile receptions. Though

looking toward a discussion on refugees in a philosophical sense may lead to an ideological understanding of the pitfalls of the nation-state system, it also may lead to essentialization and to the assumption that all refugees have analogous struggles. Reducing refugees to the status of Agamben's bare life in a philosophical sense perpetuates the construction of a liminal category as well as automatically restricts discussion of agency or expression. In the realm of bare life, there is an inherent inability to be rendered meaningful, both political and socially.

Though the growing protracted situation and worsening conditions of overcrowded camps such as Moria are reminiscent of the model of the camp and the realm of bare life, the lives of refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants are not analogous to the *homo sacer*. It is important to balance a concern for providing better conditions and greater access to basic rights with the acknowledgment that refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants possess agency. Additionally, refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants are not entirely reduced to bare life—if they were, their disposability would be so great that they held no meaning. While these bodies are seen as increasingly disposable, and concerningly so, they are not entirely out of the realm of discourse or acknowledgment. The situation at Moria and the containment policy on the islands is an important reminder of the state's ability to reduce one to bare life, and raises a call to better attend to the needs of these individuals, but to classify refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers as embodiments of the *homo sacer* would be to confirm a sense of powerlessness. To do so would be to entirely exclude them from any recognition of the state at all, when in fact, the refugee crisis is in need of the utmost attention.

For Agamben, who in large part extrapolates from Hannah Ardent, bare life posits "life" as the fundamental operational force of the state. While through a Foucauldian lens of biopolitics the state's regulation of life is apparent, it is also important to critically look at the results of

“life” itself as the highest good of a state’s political agenda (Owens 2009: 579). In *We Refugees*, Arendt writes, “Brought up in the conviction that life is the highest good and death the greatest dismay, we became witnesses and victims of worse terrors than death without having been able to discover a higher ideal than life” (Arendt 1961: 266). The “worse terrors than death” to which Arendt refers remind the reader of the realm of bare life, a marginalized space in which no meaning can be rendered. So what then can be seen as having “a higher ideal than life”? By relegating “life” to the principle mechanism on which the state has the power to operate, the actions which register in the realm of the “political”—life beyond just biological function, imbued with inherent meaning—are limited to the recognition of the state itself.

While Agamben focuses on this type of power as inclusion through exclusion, turning to Arendt can resituate a discussion of the political as it pertains to refugee studies. She writes, “politics is not so much about human beings as it is about the world that comes into being between them and endured beyond them” (Arendt 2005:175; cited in Owens 2009:578). Perhaps, then, we can ask if what is “endured beyond them” is a “transcendence of bare life” (Owens 2009:578). Is the shared world that is produced through the interactions of groups of individuals, even marginalized figures and those outside the purview of the “political,” some kind of politics itself? In renegotiating the boundary between the “social” and the “political,” can a “higher ideal than life” be found that rests on the shared space and sociality between individuals? Instead of focusing so much on “life” as the praxis of the “political,” perhaps the ability to create a common world—something that all humans have the ability to do amongst each other—is the point of reconfiguration for the “political.” Turning to an approach that emphasizes agency both in and out of the public sphere allows for a more layered picture to emerge that highlights on ability, action, and sociality.

In terms of agency, questions remain unanswered here that are in need of further consideration. How is agency itself as the capacity to act related to recognition of action? In other words, does recognizing agency give a greater capacity to act? The door towards investigating the relationship between agency and recognition is left open and can perhaps be further explored through Judith Butler's critical look at the conditions of recognition, apprehension, and intelligibility (Butler 2009). For Butler, recognizing a life is framed within particular conditions and facilitated by a set of existing norms. From this understanding, she writes, "The problem is not merely how to include more people within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differently... What might be done to produce a more egalitarian set of conditions for recognizability?" (Butler 2009: 6).

Looking at various responses to the refugee crisis in Greece can lend insight into framing the conditions of recognizability. Traditional humanitarian organizations that operate on hierarchical dynamics are reimagined through solidarity initiatives that are predicated on more lateral and egalitarian relationships. Solidarity movements and individual "solidarians" (Rozakou 2016) give more recognition to agency of refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers, and these initiatives construct greater capacity for agency. On the other hand, parties such as Golden Dawn propagate anti-immigration sentiments that capitalize on the idea of disposability, rendering refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers towards an agency-less end as bodies that can be rid from society. To answer Butler's question— "What might be done to produce a more egalitarian set of conditions for recognizability?" —perhaps the answer lies within looking more toward initiatives of solidarity.

Discussing agency in terms of political intelligibility, breaking into normative discourse can occur through existing and permissible channels. For example, the Moria 35 and other

protests that occur utilize the open agonistic space in the public sphere. The demonstrations themselves, as well as the subsequent arrest of the people involved bring to light the breakthrough of these actions into the public. This incites reaction and response from those already included in the public and place mounting pressure on the government to react. Further, solidarity initiatives work to renegotiate the hierarchical relationships embedded in more traditional humanitarian and volunteer frameworks, in turn bolstering the agency of those with whom they work. Solidarity movements work to reorient the relationship between the “social” and the “political” by resisting institutionalized frameworks of traditional humanitarianism that are embedded in neoliberal management styles and create vertical power relations between giver and receiver. Instead, solidarity calls upon mobilization of the social, highlighting the notion of the collective. Though the “horizontal essence” of solidarity movements are not entirely unconditional (see Rozakou 2018:199-200) this approach offers a space of sociality unlike traditional humanitarian organizations. Though questions remain pertaining to exactly how the spheres of the “social” and the “political” can be renegotiated, solidarity initiatives give a glimpse into the way in which sociality and egalitarian frameworks can highlight and bolster agency.

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