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

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In the aftermath of Europe's 2015 so-called refugee 'crisis', tens of thousands of border crossers remain stuck in Greece aided by an array of humanitarian workers, government employees, and volunteers. Drawing on previous scholarship about street-level bureaucracy, I discuss the work of informal volunteers in Athens and Lesvos, where they continue to aid border crossers attain entitlements and rights. Based on 10 months of ethnographic research conducted from 2017 to 2018, this article explores how volunteers within the humanitarian landscape of Greece sought to enact their ethical principles within governance regimes that categorized border crossers in restrictive and at times harmful ways. I show how the struggle to assist border crossers in effect transformed volunteers into informal street-level bureaucrats, who drew on a range of tactics that simultaneously reproduced and subverted the policy categories of refugee or vulnerable person. This article argues that rather than facilitating administrative care of border crossers, these categories were in fact a political battleground upon which volunteers struggled to pursue their moral rationalities despite an exclusionary governance regime.

Keywords: volunteer, Greece, informal street-level bureaucrat, refugee, vulnerable

Introduction

'Everyone is vulnerable. Every single migrant has had a nightmare of a trip and is in a city and country where they are struggling', Amanda, a legal aid volunteer from Spain, told me emphatically. Amanda was struggling to work within the Greek asylum system, which, after the implementation of the 2016 EU–Turkey Agreement, separated border crossers into varying categories of vulnerability.

These categorizations placed some border crossers into a 'less vulnerable' group, in which they were considered less deserving of specific forms of aid.

This article explores how international informal volunteers in Greece struggled to enact their ethical principles within governance regimes that categorized people in ways that contradicted the volunteers' moral rationalities. Broadly, these rationalities were two-fold: first, that those fleeing economic and political insecurities should be granted access to the European Union (EU) (and beyond); and second, that the asylum regime was unjust and consequently must be subverted. These rationalities compelled volunteers to use their positionalities as educated, mostly European citizens to help border crossers access certain resources that they would not otherwise qualify for and to help them access equitable and lawful treatment when dealing with the Greek Asylum Service (GAS), a Greek governmental authority tasked with deciding the outcomes of asylum claims. These volunteers acted as 'informal street-level bureaucrats', which, building on Lipsky (1980) and Partridge (2008), I define as non-governmental persons who have the ability to affect residence and fulfilment of rights through employing forms of discretionary power. International volunteers, acting as informal street-level bureaucrats, contributed to two, diametrically polar processes: on the one hand, they expanded the categories of 'refugee' and 'vulnerable person' by opening them up to include border crossers who would have otherwise been deemed 'undeserving' by the governance regime; yet on the other hand, they also reproduced those very same categories by producing more refugees and vulnerable subjects. These informal volunteers viewed the asylum and migration regimes as inherently violent, and their attendant policy categories as discriminatory and harmful. Nonetheless, volunteers had to negotiate the double face of categorization: it was necessary to distribute finite resources yet exclusionary of those who did not fit into increasingly narrow definitions of 'in need' or 'deserving' (Fassin 2013).

Scholars have problematized the refugee category for its emphasis on victimhood (Fassin 2013; Cabot 2016; Ticktin 2017); its role in apoliticizing border crossers' root causes of suffering (Malkki 1996); its transformation, politicization, and calculated employment as a label by government actors (Zetter 1991, 2007); for the hierarchy of deservingness that places refugees above 'economic migrants' (Ticktin 2011; Holmes and Castañeda 2016); and for its epistemological challenges (Bakewell 2008; Polzer 2008). The vulnerability category has likewise been problematized for obfuscating agency (Cunniff Gilson 2016); producing women and children as quintessential victims (Cunniff Gilson 2016; Ticktin 2017), to the neglect of men and boys (Sözer 2019); and obscuring the intersubjective processes that create and perpetuate it (Butler 2016). Yet how these *legal* categories—rather than analytical or descriptive categories—have been conceptualized and navigated on the ground by *international volunteers* within the humanitarian landscape has been largely absent from the literature. As my work came to find, without the actions of volunteers, many border crossers would have had their asylum claims rejected, been deported, cast onto the streets, and gone without basic services such as housing, medical care, and access to food. Clearly,

volunteers within the humanitarian landscape of Greece hold considerable power that deserves closer inspection.

The aim of this article is two-fold: first, I showcase how ordinary citizens (volunteers), largely without political capital, have the power to affect the lives of border crossers and to challenge state bureaucracy, thereby interfering in state sovereignty; and second, I show that volunteers face ethical quandaries inherent in the desire to help *all* border crossers. This finding is important because it exposes the ambiguity and tension inherent in trying to 'do good'. Although fieldwork was carried out in Greece, these findings can likely be applied globally.

Volunteers as Informal Street-Level Bureaucrats: Theoretical Background

In Lipsky's (1980) seminal work, government bureaucrats (social workers, police officers, judges, teachers, etc.) hold a certain amount of discretionary power to implement (or not) state policies on the ground. Categorizing clients is a way of making the workload manageable, yet can be misused, as some 'street-level bureaucrats' rely on pre-set categories rather than listening and responding to each case anew. Discretionary power allows street-level bureaucrats to use categories grossly and, at times, arbitrarily. These routines and daily implementation techniques 'become the public policies they implement', thus shaping policy-in-practice yet can also lead to 'inequitable results' (Adami 2010: 5). Government actors responding to asylum claims—case workers at GAS, for example—can be thought of as street-level bureaucrats, as they use their discretionary power to either grant or deny refugee status. Two near-identical cases can often have divergent outcomes: one asylum seeker may be deemed a refugee while the other denied, exposing the discretionary power held by individual GAS workers, a phenomenon obviously not isolated to Greece. Other government actors and aid workers can also be considered street-level bureaucrats through their work managing housing and other official services. However, this article focuses on the informal volunteers who do not work within a state bureaucracy in any official capacity and are thus *informal* street-level bureaucrats.

Partridge reworks Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy to describe how white, German women used their citizenship as a form of power to help non-citizens gain rights and residence, calling these women 'informal street-level bureaucrats' (2008). I build on Partridge's term of informal street-level bureaucrats to describe the volunteers who worked mainly within informal associations, to help border crossers attain refugee status, housing, and other entitlements. Whereas Lipsky's work analyses street-level bureaucrats through their discretionary power as holding 'the keys to a dimension of citizenship' (1980: 4), Partridge's informal street-level bureaucrats 'hold the keys to the *possibility* of citizenship or legal residency' (Partridge 2008: 667). International volunteers in the Greek context have tried to leverage their power as EU (and sometimes North American) citizens to include, rather than exclude, border crossers into the polity.

My analysis of informal street-level bureaucrats diverges from Lipsky in important ways: first, the volunteers did not work within state bureaucracies but

often within non-government organizations (NGOs) and associations that essentially filled in for the state or even directly opposed state actors; second, whereas street-level bureaucrats 'implicitly mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of *citizens* to the state' (Lipsky 1980: 4, my italics), their informal counterparts helped *non-citizens* negotiate policies to gain entitlements and residence; finally, Lipsky's bureaucrats most often used their discretionary power to exclude clients, whereas the informal street-level bureaucrats described here sought to include them. My work also departs from Partridge because, here, the volunteers in Greece did not usually hold the possibility to citizenship, nor did they desire a certain type of border crosser. A commonality, however, between my work and that of Lipsky and Partridge is the use of discretionary power, in this case wielded by volunteers in Greece who sometimes subverted state-sanctioned categorizations of refugee and vulnerable person. In their pursuit of enacting their own moral rationalities that considered *all* border crossers as deserving of the right to travel and settle, the volunteers became intermediaries between the state and the border crossers, and in many cases, determined residence (sometimes only temporarily) and fulfilment of basic rights, including the right to shelter, food, and a fair asylum determination.

Both types of bureaucracy can be thought of as 'rationality in context' [Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2019: 4, as quoted in Gillies (1988)], where the bureaucrat is expected to behave rationally based on the particular context: the practices of a bureaucrat, even when 'non-compliant, or [. . .] outright illegal [. . .] correspond to certain social logics and moral economies' (Ibid: 6). I analyse my findings through the lens of informal street-level bureaucracy and aim to show that the overwhelming rationality for these volunteers was that of open borders and a desire for universal rights, which affected both their conceptions of certain regimes (asylum, humanitarian, border, etc.) and their actions as volunteers. These volunteers generally rationalized that people fleeing political and economic instability should be free to travel and settle in any country. Many, although not all, government street-level bureaucrats, by comparison, worked within a rational framework that aimed to *keep out* border crossers who could be deemed a threat to the economic and cultural fabric of the EU. Thus, the latter implemented restrictive and exclusionary policies while the former countered them, aiming to open up access to Greece (and therefore the EU).

Through the framework of informal street-level bureaucracy, this article aims to answer the following questions: in which ways do the actions of informal volunteers relate to their conceptions of the border and asylum regimes? And how do these volunteers interact with, act upon, and (re)produce categories of deservingness?

Informal Volunteering in Greece

During my 10 months of fieldwork in Athens and Lesvos from 2017 to 2018, the aid landscape in Greece was comprised of local, national, international, and supranational government organizations and NGOs, grassroots and solidarity

associations, and individuals. The volunteers presented in this research were mainly international; they arrived from other parts of Europe in or after 2015 with the desire to 'do something of value', 'counter the border regime', and 'help in any way possible'. I further observed three main characteristics that these volunteers shared: first, they were involved mainly in informal organizations, which operated much like Greek solidarity initiatives. They, furthermore, believed their work to be necessary due to the failings of state and NGO actors to adequately care for all border crossers. Finally, these volunteers acted in ways that subverted state-sanctioned forms of aid. This section lays out the context of the informal aid landscape in Greece and Europe and positions these volunteers within this landscape.

The Greek state has presented itself as hospitable for centuries and considers hospitality, or *filoksenia*, to be a part of the national culture (Rozakou 2012). Furthermore, the population exchange of Greece and Turkey in 1922, known as the 'Asia Minor Catastrophe' brought roughly 1.5 million refugees to Greece. This has been cited as an important historical element in many Greek people's initial welcoming reactions to border crossers, especially those on Lesvos, where the majority of these 1922 refugees landed (Papataxiarchis 2016; Cabot 2019). However, this hospitality has often turned towards hostility, especially in official forms of reception (Rozakou 2012). For example, in 2012, the implementation of the ironically named Operation *Xenios Zeus*—the god of hospitality—was a police project that stopped perceived border crossers on the streets and detained them until they could prove their lawful right to be in Greece (Rozakou 2018).

In addition to local forms of hospitality, Greek people have for decades engaged in citizen's associations. These associations were wary of external funding and commercialized volunteer work. They generally took on a political character in which they opposed certain state actions, such as violence towards border crossers. In the early 2000s, the Greek state and EU attempted to 'craft the volunteer' towards becoming a 'new moral citizen' (Rozakou 2016: 82). Volunteering was encouraged, and this new role was to be professionalized and expanded to offer various services. Some of the existing associations, therefore, aimed to employ a new version of volunteering, which was more hierarchical and professional (Ibid).

Within the next 10 years, the economic collapse and subsequent 2011 austerity crisis dissolved the middle class, and with it, the professionalism of volunteering. What emerged in its place were solidarity associations, which began with local people helping each other in the form of soup kitchens and social pharmacies (Cabot 2014; Rozakou 2016). Solidarity in the Greek context is considered as anti-hierarchical, egalitarian community engagement. It is furthermore, anti-institutional and anti-NGO, due to its' members mistrust of government and of institutionalized charity (see Cabot 2014; Rakopoulos 2015; Rozakou 2016). When border crossers began passing through Greece in large numbers in the 2010s, many of these solidarity associations began to help them with accommodation, subsistence, and other services. Border crossers were invited into the

decision-making and management of many of the shared spaces of solidarity, such as in squatted settlements and soup kitchens.

In addition to local Greek citizen's initiatives and solidarity associations, the informal aid landscape is also comprised of international volunteers, who largely came to Greece in or after 2015 (Tsoni 2016). Recent literature about informal volunteering has shown how individual volunteers can subvert and challenge state-sanctioned aid by being inclusive of undocumented migrants. For example, writing about volunteer medical personnel in Germany, Castañeda describes how 'citizen allies' distributed medical aid to non-citizens—often undocumented migrants who would not qualify for state medical aid or who were in danger of deportation if discovered by authorities (2013). Other scholars have likewise brought attention to the subversive quality of volunteering which offers aid and solidarity to border crossers whom the state or large organizations may deem ineligible, such as undocumented migrants and those who are to be deported. Stock describes some of these volunteers, especially in the latter case, as practicing, 'a certain kind of civil disobedience' (2019: 129), while Vandevoordt and Verschraegen term the volunteer action as 'subversive humanitarianism' (2019: 105). The latter is defined as a 'morally motivated set of actions which acquires a political character not through the form in which these actions manifest themselves, but through their *implicit opposition* to the ruling socio-political climate' (Ibid 2019: 105 my italics).

The volunteers' implicit opposition to the status quo can be seen, for example in political activism in Greece and throughout Europe, such as the *No Borders* campaign of which many of the volunteers in this research were a part. This campaign 'is a network of groups and individuals who fight against borders and immigration controls' (No Borders UK 2019). Volunteers do this through protests, social media campaigns, and small acts of defiance, such as offering hospitality to border crossers whom the state excluded. Haaland and Wallevik (2019) have conceptualized these informal volunteers as reshaping power relations within the aid landscape, as they act as 'watchdogs' by ensuring that governments follow legal international and national protocols. The informal volunteers described here can be conceptualized as 'watchdogs' as they used their discretionary power to help ensure that border crossers were given their proper legal rights with regard to asylum law. However, these volunteers, as I will show, also enacted a form of subversive humanitarianism (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019: 105) as they countered the categorizations, which dominated state-sanctioned forms of aid.

Complicating matters, the informal aid categorizations are rather fluid. Informal volunteers and solidarians may take advantage of opportunities to become professional volunteers in large organizations or professional paid humanitarians. As explained by Papataxiarchis, the political ideology of the volunteer-turned-aid worker is now subsumed in organizational politics in which the mission 'is inextricably linked to the reproduction of the humanitarian organization itself' (2016: 8). This contrasts the ideology of many informal volunteers, one of whom

eloquently explained, 'the goal of all organizations should be their own demise. That means they have solved the problem'.

Methods

Broadly, the research objective was to explore the aid landscape and the tensions produced through varying practices of care. Gradually, my research narrowed to how volunteers conceptualized their roles within the aid landscape. At the same time, I was personally motivated to go beyond a purely academic role and engage more directly with aid work. While not having any formal legal or humanitarian training, I facilitated contact between border crossers, legal experts, medical practitioners, and a range of other service providers as a volunteer within NGOs at each study site. This volunteering allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the informal landscape that volunteers inhabited, as well as facilitated backstage access to ethical issues that volunteers (including myself) encountered. I conducted 70 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with paid aid workers, government employees and volunteers from a range of organizations and associations. The volunteers were mainly at one informal organization in Athens, explained below, at an informal camp on Lesvos, and in various informal associations in Athens and Lesvos which offered services and search and rescue. All names are pseudonyms and certain identifying features have been changed to preserve anonymity. The selection of interlocutors corresponds to a trend in volunteerism in Greece: most were young (twenties and thirties), educated, and from industrialized countries of the Global North. Furthermore, it deserves mention that border crossers themselves volunteered in a number of informal and formal organizations, but most often occupied positions with less decision-making power.

I refer to the legal aid organization in Athens within which I volunteered as the Center for Solidarity (CfS). The CfS was part of a larger organization, which was forced to register in Greece as an association, with the threat of being closed otherwise. However, it was run by much like a solidarity space and espoused group decision-making, non-hierarchy, and community engagement. Unlike some solidarity initiatives, it often collaborated with NGO actors, running workshops, and programmes with a number of aid organizations. Ages among my key informants at CfS ranged from mid-twenties to over fifty and experience working on international refugee and asylum cases ranged from extensive to none at all prior to their time in Greece. In addition, many of the lawyers could only devote anywhere between 2 weeks to 2 months at a time, which created gaps in continuity, typically filled by legal aid volunteers, themselves not lawyers. On Lesvos, I worked alongside volunteers at a camp designated for vulnerable *asylum seekers* (a term simply denoting a border crosser who has submitted an asylum claim) and with an informal association that self-tasked with border monitoring. Volunteers I met there ranged in age from mid-twenties to over eighty and hailed from countries throughout the EU and North America (US, Canada). Some held broad international humanitarian experience with NGOs while others had never before been involved in such contexts.

The choice of conducting research in both Athens and Lesvos was based on the differently applied policies in the aftermath of the EU–Turkey agreement of 2016. This agreement mandated the return of asylum seekers to Turkey from Greece, as the EU declared Turkey a 'safe third-country'. In effect, the agreement produced an 'island restriction', in which asylum seekers who arrived to one of the five islands with asylum centres (Lesvos, Kos, Chios, Leros, and Samos) on or after 20 March 2016 were not legally allowed to leave the island except in situations of extreme 'vulnerability', an elusive term whose qualifications constantly changed (European Commission 2016a,b). Mainland Greece, furthermore, had a different asylum system that required asylum applicants to first call a Skype, creating a whole set of challenges.

The next section explores how volunteers struggled with the policy category of refugee, defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention as an individual who has a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, UNHCR). This categorization effectively discriminated against 'undeserving' or 'economic' migrants, leaving the volunteers and border crossers in precarious positions.

Volunteers as (Informal) Street-Level Bureaucrats

Part I: Making a Refugee

Volunteers at the CfS in Athens comprised mainly law and social science students and career lawyers, coming mostly from Northern Europe. The volunteers were the first point of contact for border crossers in Athens who sought legal assistance at CfS (which occupied a large building in downtown Athens, offering many other services in addition to legal aid). Typically, two volunteers worked in the reception area and received border crossers on a first-come, first-serve basis. They heard complaints and either gave direct assistance and information or made appointments with lawyers. If needed, translators arrived within minutes. Border crossers were mainly from Middle Eastern and Central African countries and came with various and complicated complaints, the most frequent being lack of accommodation, followed by issues regarding the asylum procedure, preparation for the asylum interview(s) or for family reunification, and access to medical care for physical and mental distress as well as documentation of illness or torture.

One of my first observations was that the majority of the volunteers rarely used the word 'refugee' in their daily work. When I asked Jarred, an activist and legal scholar about this, he responded:

> Because it is so politically loaded, and it evokes an image of vulnerability. It also evokes this distinction—like deserving, non-deserving, economic migrant, and refugee. I do fundamentally believe in everyone's right to travel.

Most volunteers at CfS, as well as those I spoke with on Lesvos shared similar sentiments—that categories of 'illegal', 'economic migrant', and even 'refugee'

were unhelpful or even damaging, because such categories demarcated people who deserved access to opportunity from those who did not, often simply due to their birthplace. For example, Ingrid, a volunteer-turned-aid worker at a health NGO on Lesvos stated:

> I don't know where we got the nerve to say, 'You don't have the right to what I have'. Like. . .saying 'Oh but they come here illegally'; have you tried having a Congolese passport and getting a visa for Holland? No! And you have no clue what it takes. I don't know why we think that we have the right to tell anyone that they cannot come here, that they cannot try to work here, that they cannot try to make anything for themselves.

This moral rationality, which disproved of rigid distinctions between refugees and other migrants, was widely shared among volunteers at CfS as well as in many informal spaces and camps on Lesvos. Many volunteers felt that those fleeing poverty should be afforded some form of visa, or at the very least, should not be barred from international travel. This rationality became embedded in wider debates among volunteers about nationality and asylum. Many of the volunteers at CfS stated that there was an assumption among GAS employees and many aid workers that all border crossers from certain countries were 'economic migrants'. Julia, a volunteer on the legal aid team, explained:

> There is a categorization in international protection. Because the media says 'Syrians—protection, protection'. . .there are Syrians who are criminals and they will get international protection and there are people persecuted from Pakistan, and they won't get this international protection because of the labelling.

The EU's Asylum Procedures Directive (recast in 2013) laid the groundwork for EU member states to reject asylum claims on the basis of 'admissibility', a concept that incorporated nationality, residence, or the countries transited (Directive 2013/32/EU OJ2013 L180/60; Mouzourakis et al. 2016). The stance of human rights groups was that this opposed international law; it denied a case to be reviewed on its merits and risked sending someone back into harm's way because they were from a country, which was considered safe or had transited through a safe third-country, such as Turkey (Amnesty International 2018). Kristine, a German volunteer at CfS, expressed concern over the way GAS case workers sometimes denied asylum seekers who she believed to fit the definition of a refugee. She had worked on the case of a Pakistani asylum seeker whom she and the others on the legal team believed would be given asylum based on his background:

> His asylum claim had been rejected and he told me: 'I'll just go back to my country and put a piece of paper in my pocket, so if the people who are persecuting me kill me, they will find [the paper] saying I was rejected for asylum in Europe because they didn't believe I was in danger'.

Kristine believed that everyone should be free to travel across borders and try to make a life in a new country, yet she was also angered that a 'real refugee' such as this individual would be rejected. The majority of volunteers at CfS faced similar issues. Their moral rationalities in this case were 2-fold: first, they believed everyone deserved freedom to move not just to Greece but beyond. However, the asylum and immigration regime prevented these border crossers from doing so. Therefore, volunteers at CfS still used the asylum-seeking process to help border crossers gain authorized status and freedom of movement, regardless of satisfying any official criteria. Second, and somewhat conversely, many volunteers also believed strongly that persecuted individuals—i.e. 'real refugees'—should still be prioritized.

Of course, government bureaucrats followed their own rationalities to use their discretionary power to include or exclude asylum seekers. It was common knowledge among volunteers at CfS that GAS staff were overburdened and understaffed, in part leading to unequal asylum results: 'For two similar cases, two different results. It has to do with the case counsellors of course; they are not very well trained. It is not the job they would love to do'. These words, spoken by a Greek lawyer at CfS with more than 30 years of experience, help explain the tension that many volunteers felt with the asylum regime. Other research has shown that asylum personnel use discretionary power to decide cases: in her work with the asylum service in France, Ticktin, found that 'the Refugee Appeals Commission judges did not look for truth—[they] looked for a *good, plausible story*' (2005: 362). Furthermore, as pointed out by Betts and Collier (2017: 207–209), states are increasingly non-compliant with refugee law, 'so if the system is not fair', Ali, a French legal aid volunteer at CfS, expressed, 'you just have to lie'. This was echoed by many volunteers and even some aid workers: when asked if she thought asylum seekers should tell the truth, Ingrid said, 'I don't think they should tell the truth, [. . .] to me the system is so unfair [that] if you get through by lying, go ahead'. For Ingrid and others, subverting an unfair system through tactics of allowing, or sometimes encouraging, the falsification of one's history was morally justifiable.

Preparing for an asylum interview was done at most legal organizations and helped asylum seekers prepare to answer difficult questions posed by GAS case workers, who aimed to discern whether the claimant's story fit the UN Convention's definition of a refugee. Interview preparation was usually done in consultation with a volunteer lawyer and a legal aid volunteer (acting as a sort of paralegal) and helped the asylum seeker understand what type of questions would be asked. Crucially, the interview preparation sought to uncover aspects of an individual's personal history that would qualify for asylum. Though the majority of asylum seekers had experienced suffering, they often did not know which experiences were considered valuable in the eyes of GAS. Sometimes, they avoided certain topics (such as legal troubles in their home countries) because discussing them opposed their cultural norms (see also Cabot 2014). In interviews, many volunteers mentioned that asylum seekers were ashamed to say that they had been imprisoned by their state regimes, thinking the Greek state would see this as a sign

of criminality. Of course, the opposite was true: undue imprisonment by state officials, torture and physical harm inflicted by state authorities, and persecution based on personal characteristics would *facilitate* asylum. Thus, deservingness had to be teased out by the volunteers preparing them for their interview:

> When the Afghan is telling his story, you know he will not be granted international protection. But this [asylum claim] is due to the war in his country... And [the majority of the hospitals] are not accessible, and so... yes, he says he is here [for medical reasons], [the asylum service] will say, 'Go back to your country'. But it's due to the war...so you must help him to say it this way. – Julia, legal aid volunteer at CfS

Julia's words point to an asylum regime that aims to keep out migrants by employing a narrow interpretation of asylum law. It is common across the EU to send Afghans back to parts of Afghanistan that are considered safe regions. Between 2016 and 2017, the EU member states returned more than 15000 Afghans (Eurostat 2018), regardless of the fact that thousands of civilians continue to be killed (Amnesty International 2018). Furthermore, as Julia's quote elucidates, the war has destroyed infrastructure, making it near-impossible for certain medical conditions to be treated.

Many of the volunteers at CfS became disillusioned with the asylum system and with large international protection organizations that were seemingly incapable—whether due to earmarked funds, bureaucratic hurdles, or otherwise—of helping borders crossers sufficiently. For example, unaccompanied minors from certain countries (specifically Pakistan and Bangladesh) found it very hard to access housing in Athens, and hundreds of them slept on the streets at night, even resorting to prostitution in one of the city's squares (personal observations). It was common for informal volunteers to help border crossers (temporarily) fit into the refugee category by helping them access the asylum system, as the following brief narrative illustrates.

CfS volunteers met unaccompanied minors once a week to bring them to the Regional Asylum Office to preregister for asylum seeking. Sometimes these minors reported past experiences of persecution and thus were eligible for asylum, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention. Yet in most cases, they did not precisely meet the convention's definition of a refugee—something the volunteers could usually discern through repeated interaction with the youth. Without any formal papers, these young, (mostly) boys remained illegal, could not access decent housing, and continued to be exploited in the sex trade and labour market. The volunteers knew that many of these boys had little chance of attaining refugee status, but that was not necessarily the goal. The average time in mainland Greece, in my experience, for a Pakistani or Bangladeshi asylum seeker to receive an answer to their asylum claim was over 2 years. In addition, the state did not return unaccompanied minors to their home country or Turkey—they waited until the minor legally became an adult (age 18). During this time, once registered as an asylum seeker, they had legal access to the labour market and could be eligible for state housing. The minor may never become a refugee, but as an asylum seeker, they

would have the entitlements that undocumented migrants did not have. Hence, the moral rationalities of volunteers argued that young boys in search of a better life should not be homeless and exploited and that those fleeing economic and political insecurities should be granted access to the EU (and beyond), regardless of whether one satisfied existing legal criteria. This compelled volunteers at the CfS to help these youth access certain resources for which they would not otherwise qualify. Volunteers' positionality as mostly white citizens of the Global North allowed them access to certain spaces that were harder for border crosser to access. For example, the line at the main government asylum office in Athens was typically hours long and often required multiple visits to gain entrance. Volunteers, however, easily accessed this asylum office and were able to skip the queue, usually stating that they worked for a legal organization. While doing so, they often brought certain border crossers along inside, such as these unaccompanied minors, where the boys could then apply for asylum (if they met the requirements of the office).

Part II: Making Vulnerability

Being declared vulnerable by official state actors opened access to entitlements, yet criteria for vulnerable status constantly changed within institutions and broader policy frameworks, such that border crossers and those trying to assist them struggled to gain a foothold on this shifting political terrain. This section explores the changing definitions of vulnerability, how this impacted border crossers, and how volunteers as informal street-level bureaucrats helped border crossers attain vulnerability status so that they could obtain entitlements.

The recast Asylum Procedures Directive (of the Common European Asylum System) of 2013 provides guidelines of what vulnerable conditions warrant special protection. Such specific traits or conditions specified below should theoretically allow states to grant vulnerable status under their national laws. Yet there remains no legally-binding definition for EU asylum law. That means that each EU member state is free to interpret the guidelines of the Asylum Procedures Directive as they so choose (Mouzourakis et al. 2018: 14).

In full, article 14(8) of Greek Law 4375 defines vulnerable persons as:

> a) Unaccompanied minors, b) Persons who have a disability or suffering from an incurable or serious illness, c) The elderly, d) Women in pregnancy or having recently given birth, e) Single parents with minor children, f) Victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation, persons with a post-traumatic disorder, in particularly survivors and relatives of victims of ship-wrecks, g) Victims of trafficking in human beings.

As the number of people experiencing such aforementioned vulnerabilities increased—due to, for example the ongoing arrival of more border crossers—but the number of health, legal aid, and case workers remained the same, the categorization of vulnerability necessarily became more narrow. For example, Ingrid described the difficulties in applying official categories of vulnerability to

qualify for psychosocial counselling on Lesvos, saying 'if you don't have actual, concrete plans [for suicide] in hand, we don't even accept you as our patient-there are just too many people'. The difficulty in accessing services was ubiquitous in Greece and created situations whereby border crossers actively sought to qualify as vulnerable so as to gain access to services. A medical worker in Moria camp explained that the line-ups for medical aid were so long that '[she didn't] remember all of the people who ha[d] cut themselves outside of the clinic anymore' in desperate attempts to see a doctor. Furthermore, young men who did not have any sign of physical vulnerability, such as a severe medical condition, disability, or poorly healed traumatic injuries, did not have access to as many services as women, including space in shelters. In effect, official 'vulnerability categories have almost [*de facto*] created a category of vulnerable young men', one volunteer lamented.

Unless considered by GAS to be vulnerable, access to the asylum service in mainland Greece began with a Skype call to GAS. At the time of my fieldwork, the Skype system contained different lines for 15 languages, each language allotted two hours per week to handle claims, with only two case workers operating the lines (see 'Asylum Service | Ministry of Migration Policy' 2018). To put this in perspective, there have been nearly 16000 border crosser arrivals in Greece in the first half of 2019 alone, with 5000 arriving to mainland Greece (UNHCR Statistics 2019). Due to the volume of people calling, and the fact that Skype was not set up as a call centre, the system could not accommodate so many calls at once, leading to frequent system crashes. Furthermore, no computer work area with Skype connections was provided for the thousands trying to use the system; each had to find a good Internet connection, smartphone, or computer with video capabilities for identity purposes on his or her own. A few organizations offered computers that supposedly had better access, but even then, it could take months of repeated calls to reach an administrator (Greek Forum of Refugees 2017; Mouzourakis et al. 2018: 36–37). When one got through via Skype, the individual spoke to a GAS service agent through a translator and quickly explained their asylum request, complete with some very basic demographic information. After some months, they were called back to pick up their trifold document which served as valid identification. Until pre-registration through the initial Skype call, the individual remained undocumented, risking arrest and detention if stopped by the police (a common occurrence).

A successful Skype call could take months—if not up to a year—for certain nationalities (depending on language translation capabilities at GAS). The only option to seek asylum in person was through one of the Regional Asylum Offices. However, to gain entrance to the office, one had to already be considered 'vulnerable' by authorities. But as Amanda, the legal aid volunteer at CfS recalled, 'I've gone [to the Attica office] with pregnant women, and if the women were not within the 8th or 9th month of pregnancy, [the officials] won't consider [the women] vulnerable, and so vulnerabilities have been really defined within this refugee crisis; it's a shame'.

Butler contends that 'vulnerability emerges as a part of social relations' in which vulnerable people are produced (2016: 4). We see this in the way that the *a priori* categories of vulnerability above—imagined as static, self-contained and easily communicated through sterile, legal language—are enacted through multiple actors. For example, a victim of torture or rape had to 'prove' their hardship or past traumas through interactions with doctors, psychologists, social workers, and/or lawyers, before being 'granted' this vulnerability category. Further complicating matters, in early 2018, the European Asylum Support Office narrowed the legal definition of vulnerability by reducing the categories as either A (medium) or B (high). Before this change, a border crosser was categorized as either vulnerable or not vulnerable, with those categorized as vulnerable being granted (although not always enacted), a lifting of their island restriction. 'Now, medium vulnerability is not even vulnerability... it will not change your legal position' to obtain entitlements or protective services, Carlos, a volunteer lawyer on Lesvos said. This political manoeuvring was simply done 'to reduce the number of vulnerable people', Jaqueline, an aid worker on Lesvos, lamented.

During the first meeting with CfS, the interaction between border crosser and volunteer legal assistant would begin by asking the border crosser of the date and location of arrival in Greece. Those arriving to the islands on or after the implementation of the EU–Turkey agreement on 20 March 2016 were not permitted to leave the island unless transferred officially, while those who were considered as having 'high vulnerability' could possibly have this island restriction lifted. This did not mean they could seek asylum in another EU member state, but for those living in Moria camp on Lesvos, lifting the island restriction was a major step in escaping the deplorable conditions in which they lived. If a border crosser chose to leave an island clandestinely, they were unable to access resources on the mainland, such as camp shelter, food, or the UNHCR-led cash card program, and were forced to return to the island through GAS or aid organizations acting as intermediaries.

The next question by the legal volunteers was why the border crosser was seeking legal assistance. Answers varied, but there were common reasons that could be helped with proof that one qualified for vulnerable status: inability to access the Regional Asylum Office in person nor access GAS via Skype; having left one of the Greek islands clandestinely or without official transfer; and lacking access to state housing. One of the main activities of the volunteers at CfS was helping border crossers attain notes of poor health or proofs of torture attested by medical doctors—forms of documentation that I call 'vulnerability papers'. Amanda, a legal aid volunteer at CfS, explained, 'there is always this question, when you were talking about someone's case and situations, asking, "do you have any medical issue, any kind of vulnerability?"' Ticktin uncovered a similar situation in France in health clinics that served migrants in the early 2000s. Initial questions by social workers were usually, '"are you sick?" and if an individual answered yes, they would ask, almost too eagerly, "how sick?"'—so that this illness could effectively justify legal status (2006: 34). Clearly, vulnerability papers

that facilitate access to rights and/or citizenship are neither isolated to Greece nor to this specific 'migration crisis'. They in fact respond to, and perpetuate, migration regimes in which hierarchies of deservingness and perceived severity of suffering are used in the allocation of material and symbolic resources, whether shelter or food or authorized entry into the body politic.

A brief narrative helps to further illustrate these dynamics. Marlies, a Dutch doctor and volunteer at CfS, was put into contact with an Afghan family who had been transferred from Lesvos to Athens because their young child had a deadly disease that could not be treated on the island. The disease required expensive medication unobtainable in Greece. Marlies contacted a humanitarian NGO in the UK, and through fundraising, requesting free medicine from the pharmaceutical company, and appealing for unused medication from families with the disease, the small group of volunteers was able to supply the child with monthly medications. Marlies then asked the Greek doctors to write letters, which she brought to GAS, explaining the gravity of the young boy's illness: without this medication his disease would be debilitating. The family's asylum application was nonetheless denied. GAS's reasoning drew on a larger current in European asylum discourse, which held that Afghanistan had safe regions and, furthermore, that there was one hospital in the country that could offer the proper services. However, this hospital was in one of the most dangerous areas of the country, and when the legal aid team contacted the hospital, administration there replied that they could not supply the required medication. Marlies returned to the Greek doctors, while the CfS team simultaneously reached out to both a doctor and a paediatrician in Afghanistan, all of whom wrote letters explaining the difficulties of the disease, while the latter two described the dearth of available resources in Afghanistan. At the time of this writing, a volunteer lawyer at CfS is currently in the appeals process, and the family's asylum claim remains in limbo.

Thus, without Marlies and the other volunteers at CfS, the family would likely face a more precarious situation. These informal volunteers continue to be instrumental for the son's health and the family's ongoing asylum case. The son's physical vulnerability has more or less been proven, yet this still does not correspond directly with the UN Convention's definition of 'refugee'. Consequently, government bureaucrats can use their discretionary power to deny this family's appeal. This case shows that volunteers as informal street-level bureaucrats have some power to bridge entitlements to border crossers, but only up to a point. The final decisions remain with state-sanctioned, government bureaucrats.

The Making and Unmaking of Refugees and Vulnerable Subjects

This article explored ways in which volunteers' moral rationalities affected their conceptions of the 'refugee' and 'vulnerable person' categories and, in turn, how volunteers acted as informal street-level bureaucrats to aid border crossers. Volunteers struggled within regimes that categorized people into deserving and undeserving groups. In response, volunteers leveraged their discretionary power as citizens of the Global North and as actors within associations and NGOs, to

help facilitate the inclusion of border crossers into those categories, which would then bestow rights and recognition. These actions both subverted and perpetuated those policy categories by allowing previously 'unqualified' border crossers to qualify, thereby increasing the number of people within those categories and in turn implicating the responsibility of the state or EU. In sum, the various actors involved—whether state bureaucrats or volunteers—carried their own moral rationalities for undertaking their actions, responding to and further shaping a complicated humanitarian landscape in Greece.

The 'fear of being persecuted', part of the UN Convention's refugee declaration, says nothing of the physical body and yet asylum seekers are increasingly asked to prove this fear of persecution with physical evidence (Fassin 2013). Volunteers helped border crossers attain these vulnerability papers, yet this value of suffering marks border crossers as 'sick, as disabled, as violated' (Ticktin 2011: 24). Volunteers were therefore 'implicated in the policing of bodies' (Fassin 2013: 122), as they were often the ones to inform border crossers about the possibilities of vulnerability papers and were instrumental in connecting doctors to their new 'patients'. These findings further both Fassin and Ticktin's claims that humanitarian actions can reproduce inequalities. Rather than outwardly challenging these categories, by aiding border crossers to fulfil them, volunteers legitimized aspects of the refugee regime they protested. At the same time, however, through continually challenging the categorizations as harmful, volunteers helped to discursively renegotiate and reframe the hierarchy that placed some border crossers as more deserving than others.

Many volunteers, the majority from outside Greece, found themselves within solidarity groups that challenged viewpoints and actions of state actors. Whether knowingly or not, they became informal street-level bureaucrats, doing the work of the state but often contradicting Greek and EU policies through such actions as helping a border crosser modify his or her personal history to better fit the official definition of a refugee or vulnerable person, or in other instances, offering housing in illegal squats. This leads to slippery ethical quandaries regarding responsibility, legality, and assistance. As I have written about elsewhere, some volunteers at the CfS decided to house homeless unaccompanied minors in their personal apartments, while others on the same legal aid team lamented this approach for its presumed illegality and possible introduction of risk to the minor or volunteer (Anonymous, forthcoming). This hosting sheds light on the difficult position in which the use of discretionary power could entail; should the volunteers help all border crossers attain rights and accommodation that could create risk, or should they allow government actors and state-sanctioned humanitarian organizations to continue with a form of exclusive aid which clearly entailed its own risks to border crossers? A similar ethical question can be raised through the ethnographic material presented here, and indeed there was disagreement between volunteers about their roles. Should the volunteers help all border crossers perform vulnerability or refugeeness because they inherently believed border crossers to be vulnerable? Or should the volunteers leave border crossers to be categorized as they were because the creation of more vulnerable subjects and refugees increased the

threshold of the categories, thereby decreasing the likelihood that everyone in the category could be helped?

As the above ethical quandaries highlight, the rationalities of the informal street-level bureaucrats were often in tension with those employed by government actors. The volunteers were frustrated that even unaccompanied minors could be left to sleep on the street, and that border crossers with clear vulnerabilities were not granted resources, which were supposedly available for vulnerable persons. They were also sometimes in tension with larger, formal NGOs, whose representatives lamented the slow asylum system and blamed it, in part, on the overwhelming numbers of 'bogus asylum seekers', these very same border crossers that volunteers helped access the asylum system, such as the unaccompanied minors from countries considered safe. Another tension was with EU governance; the volunteers understood that Greece was in a difficult position financially, but that the Dublin (III) Regulation required border crossers to seek asylum in the first country they entered. Therefore, many of these same volunteers were part of protests in Brussels within the *No Borders* campaign that I explained above.

Against the backdrop of a failed state and European system, it became easy for volunteers to rationalize actions that may have been illegal on their face but framed as morally justified—such as housing border crossers in personal apartments or squats or tweaking personal narratives to qualify for services. Volunteers regularly lamented that their assistance would not be necessary if the Greek state and EU were to do their jobs, yet they assumed responsibility when it was either clear that no institution would or when there was confusion over who the responsible institution or agency was or should be. These instances of confusion and tension produced more conflict between 'the state' and informal volunteers. For instance, a number of volunteers have been criminalized for search and rescue operations and housing assistance (Anonymous, Forthcoming). But these tensions also produced 'new tactics and modalities for ethical engagement'—tactics such as opening up categories to those who would not otherwise be considered deserving, and creating solidarity groups that cut out middlemen and focused on collective decision-making and community engagement (Cabot 2014: 99).

By analysing the volunteers as informal street-level bureaucrats, the struggle between government actors and informal volunteers comes into greater relief: at play is sovereign power of the state or EU and the discretionary power of informal volunteers, who draw on their own moral rationalities and power as citizens of the Global North to open up access to resources and residence. This work builds on Lipsky's consideration of street-level bureaucrats. First, and following Partridge, it expands the idea that discretionary power is not contained to government bureaucrats but extends to civil society (non-governmental) actors. And second, it shows that this power can be used to oppose exclusionary regimes, a phenomenon not isolated to Greece. That these volunteers employed discretionary power is not exceptional in and of itself. What I want to highlight about this discretionary power is its novel response to unjust and outdated policies—if the Geneva Convention excludes a subset of society, use the policy's own rationale, vis-a-vis legal procedures, to include *all* border crossers. If we consider the right to choose

who is included and who is excluded into the polity as a defining characteristic of sovereignty, then it becomes clear that certain forms of subversive humanitarianism challenge state-sanctioned aid and interfere with state sovereignty. However, in many cases, volunteers' actions could only go so far, and the final decisions remained with government bureaucrats. In other words, volunteers engaged in a sort of dance with government actors, where both were employing their own rationalities to further their motivations.

This work comes at a time when the EU and its member states are renegotiating their roles with each other and with other states in relation to migration, asylum, and ethical and legal obligations towards asylum seekers. Many countries around the globe are furthermore engaged in critical reflections in which regular citizens are demanding justice—in the form of protests for the Black Lives Matter campaign—and equality. The analysis presented here can extend beyond the context of Greece; it speaks to the broader themes of equality, moral rationality, and ethical obligations of states. Through challenging legal categories, volunteers help to reframe and question rationales of deservingness. Ordinary people all over the globe can use discretionary power in novel ways to be inclusive and fight for the rights of non-citizens and marginalized peoples. Furthermore, these new forms of subversive humanitarianism show us that collective action can challenge state sovereignty and hegemonic humanitarianism.

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