

**Documenting Immigration Detention in Greece: A Continuum of Extreme  
Violence and Complicity**

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## Abstract

While all eyes are fixed on the humanitarian emergency at Greece's numerous border locations and refugee camps, the thousands who are administratively detained have been, for many years, largely overlooked. Despite the scale and inhumanity of detention practices, immigration detention in Greece has rarely been subjected to close scrutiny. This is the first comprehensive study of the Greek immigration detention system. As such, it provides a picture of immigration detention across time and space, dating back to the beginning of 90s. Furthermore, as it builds on in-depth research of the system since 2011, as well as my involvement in the field of detention in a range of roles, this thesis is a rare ethnography of sites, which have never been researched before.

It draws together a large amount of empirical data, including: more than 950 informal conversations with detainees and staff, 5 in-depth unstructured interviews with ex-detainees (including life-histories); more than 70 semi-structured interviews with detainees and a number of actors (e.g., detention staff, NGO workers, policy-makers, charitable and volunteer workers, political activists and journalists); and detailed fieldnotes. It seeks to understand why and how Greece ended up creating and nurturing such a monstrous institution by exploring in detail the mechanisms through which the detention system in Greece has been insulated against any possible threats to its survival and thriving; thus, deliberately allowing for a continuum of institutional racism and harmful practices. Yet, in attempting to find hope in bleakness, it engages with the issue of resistance and its effects on the shape of detention facilities, building an abolitionist reading of these spaces.

To conclude, the thesis argues that immigration detention centres, as presently constituted, are not inevitable, insisting that the only moral response to mobility, must always be cage free.

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I declare that the thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. Any sections of the thesis which have been published, or submitted for a higher degree elsewhere, are clearly identified.



Figure 1: A map of Greece and its borders

## Introduction

*'What didn't you do to bury me...but you forgot I was a seed' [και τι δεν κάνατε για να με θάψετε  
όμως ξεχάσατε πως ήμουν σπόρος],*

Ntinos Christianopoulos (1978), Greek poet



Figure 2: The view from one the wings at the Petrou Ralli pre-removal detention centre

Athens, 2018

In December 2018, together with two colleagues, I accompanied the Greek National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) on a monitoring visit to the Petrou Ralli pre-removal detention centre in Athens.<sup>1</sup> When we walked onto one of the wings on the men's section, we were quickly surrounded by the men. The corridor became blocked and we walked no more than three metres before we were unable to go any further because of the number of people wanting to tell the monitors about their cases. The discussions with the detained

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<sup>1</sup> In the next chapter I explore in detail all the different roles that I have witnessed immigration detention in Greece in.

men were loud, chaotic and disorganised. A detention officer stood close-by and could hear all of what was said. We would later understand that he had assumed the role of a security buffer between the NPM and the men (Bhui et al., 2019).

The floor was dirty and strewn with empty bottles and crumpled papers. On the walls, there was a line of old-fashioned pay phones, some of which were broken.<sup>2</sup> On the other side of the cells, there were two barred windows, so there was some natural light but with hardly anyone interested in the view. I was looking through the windows to avoid peering into the cells, where some men were idly laying on their beds. It was, unusually for Greece, a grey and gloomy day, but past the large bus depot and rows of houses, I could see the ancient Acropolis hill with majestic Parthenon on its top (see figure 2 above). One of the detention officers approached me and beaming with nationalistic pride, he said: '*At least, they have a nice view from here, heh?*', pointing to the familiar monument.

#### *Makronisos, 1948*

The island of Makronisos is a small, uninhabited piece of land not far off the Attica coast, synonymous with persecution and exile during the Greek Civil War (1944-1949).<sup>3</sup> The official rhetoric about Makronisos deployed language more appropriate for a medical institution that could cure 'polluted individuals' and to a school that could 'rehabilitate its prisoners by teaching them their true destiny, identity and history' (Hamilakis, 1996: 56). As part of their re-education, prisoners were forced to build replicas of classical buildings, such as the Erechtheion, found on Acropolis and open-air theaters to resemble the ancient Greek ones. In this context, they erected a replica of the Parthenon on a scale of 20:1, remnants of which can still be found on the island (Hamilakis, 1996). As the magazine of Makronisos, Skapaneus, described it 'All soldiers admire it and the visitors understand that, in a place where soldiers create such wonderful works, the most advanced morale-building and character-reshaping work must be taking place' (in Hamilakis, 2002).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Several detainees complained about broken phones and the manager of the centre later said that this was a result of detainees damaging them every week.

<sup>3</sup> For an exploration of political prisoners during the Greek Civil War see Voglis (2002) and Daliani-Karamatzaki (2009). There have also been many memoirs from former political prisoners in which they describe their experiences inside the camps. See for example, Sideri (1981) and Apostolopoulou (1984).

<sup>4</sup> The Makronisos digital museum offers a unique insight into the experience of exile on the island. For the link to the website, see Makronisos digital museum (n.d.).

I begin the thesis with these two examples not because I am trying to compare the treatment of communists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and migrants today, although there are similarities in their fates on Greek soil, including mass detention in poor conditions and the use of physical and psychological violence against them. The imprisonment of those deemed unworthy of the polis has been a longstanding strategy of successive Greek governments. Nor am I trying to enter the debate about how the antiquities have been used as symbolic and cultural capital to construct national mythologies. This has already been skillfully done by archeologists and anthropologists (see Hamilakis and Yalouri, 1996; Hamilakis, 2007).

It is, however, in the context of the ‘ancient glorious past’ that this thesis traces the Greek nation’s rich reserves of racism, which have been the foundation upon which the detention system in the country has been built. Racism is historical. Drawing on Hortense Spillers (2003), Imogen Tyler (2020, p. 125) argues in her work on the stigma machine of the border, that racism “draws its ‘narrative energies’ from existing grids of associations, from ‘semantic and iconic folds’ that are deeply etched in the collective memories of people and places”. In this case, the Acropolis, a monument 2400 years old, provides a sense of continuity, permanence, historicity, and authenticity. In Greek consciousness, the ‘ancient glorious past’ is incorporated into the conception of the nation as its genealogical and cultural cradle; with Acropolis being its sacred rock. In the same way, therefore, that building Acropolis was seen as an important symbolic resource to rehabilitate communists, the polluted Greek citizens, the provision of a shelter for immigrants with a view of the Acropolis, is considered by the authorities as a marker of a civilised state in which Greeks (us) were pitted against uncivilised masses (them) (Bosworth et al., 2018).

The history of immigration detention in Greece is largely untold. The amount of national and European resources, sustained media attention and political emphasis on building border-enforcement strategies in Greece remain curiously detached from an exploration into how and why the immigration detention system in the country has ballooned and taken such a violent turn. The work of Jenna Loyd and Alison Mountz (2018) in unveiling the racialised history of migration detention in the United States is critical in understanding this sharp contrast. As they explain in their context, ‘political crises over migration and the nation-state repeatedly invoke “the border’s” porosity, absence, or lawlessness to rationalize further fortification. Thus, there exists a strategic relationship between knowing

and not knowing, between rendering bordering practices visible and strategically erasing them from public knowledge.' (Loyd and Mountz, 2018, p. 2).

As a result of this paradox, attention, in the Greek context, has been focused along the politically charged Greek-Turkish land and sea borders, naturalising deterrence and military defense practices, at the same time as related histories of the disturbing accounts of violence and neglect from inside the country's detention centres are obscured. The few accounts from inside detention that are available to the public are often eradicated by processes of official rationalization, denial and whitewash; what Mona Oikawa (2000: 41) characterizes as deliberate, systematic 'hegemonic ideologies of forgetting'. Yet these violent histories cannot be forgotten not only because they underpin the very origins, experience and administration of confinement for marginalised peoples in contemporary Greece, but also because they have fundamentally shaped the contemporary Greek nation-state. This thesis is, therefore, motivated by a desire to bring back to life the experience of immigrants inside Greek detention facilities in order to document past injustices and explain how the proliferation of harm and violence producing the detention estate in the present have been so effectively normalised.

Above all, the central objective of this thesis is to document the Greek immigration detention industry. I am writing this because I have seen and witnessed the horror and I want to expose it; to unveil officially obfuscated and unresolved accounts of power from within detention facilities, institutions that are traditionally sealed from public view. To this end, this thesis presents material from 10 years of research and work inside a number of different detention sites. It draws on a large amount of empirical data, including more than 950 informal conversations with detainees and staff; more than 70 semi-structured interviews with detainees and other actors (e.g., detention staff, NGO workers, policy-makers, charitable and volunteer workers, political activists and journalists); detailed fieldnotes; participant observation inside the central detention centre in Athens; 14 months of working as an NGO practitioner in the airport detention facility; shadow monitoring visits of the Greek National Preventive Mechanism; and nearly four years of collaborating with practitioners and activists on projects that aim to inform public understanding and debate at a time when the numbers confined are growing and conditions of their detention are worsening.

This account presents more than just a description of the conditions of life behind bars. Instead, it shows how the xenophobic logics of a frontier EU state and the historical depths of ultra-right intrusion in Greek authorities established the legal and institutional basis for today's immigration detention regime. However, this alone does not explain the resilience of the Greek detention system over more than three decades, i.e., its ability to expand, grow and thrive despite harsh criticism of the way foreigners have been treated in its facilities but also continuous challenges from the hundreds of thousands of people whom Greek governments have detained since 1990s. Although my fieldwork took place in Greece, and neither can, nor should be disconnected from that context, my argument finds obvious analogues in other countries. Detention without an end, a clear legal basis and a degrading treatment are not exclusive to Greece, nor is the claim that a country's detention system reinforces its racialised history of inequality. Accounts from the UK, the US and Australia echo these observations (Bhui, 2016; Bosworth, 2014; Briskman, 2013; Fiske, 2016; Hiemstra, 2019; Valdez, 2016).

Yet, as I will argue in the chapters that follow, the documented level of violence against detainees in Greece, the conspicuous silence over these practices, the complicity of a wide range of key actors, including independent institutions and the judicial system, and the number of tactical legitimisation exercises used by the authorities to explain their policy choices, make Greece an fascinating case study in the European and global migration politics. But first, I address why I focus on immigration detention instead of refugee camps and other forms of confinement.

## **Why immigration detention?**

On 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, Pope Francis visited the island of Lesvos, 'a place that has been identified with the drama of refugees', as Katerina Sakellaropoulou, the President of the Hellenic Republic stated in her welcoming speech (efsyn.gr, 2021). She added, by way of reassurance to the gathered dignitaries and international media, that the situation had in every respect significantly improved since the Pontifex's prior visit to the Island in 2016.<sup>5</sup> The Pope was received warmly by the Christian Catholic refugee community. "Today's visit by the Pope gladdens all us migrants," said an 18-year-old from the Republic of Congo

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<sup>5</sup> See Rozakou (2019) for a description of the Pope's first visit to the island.

who had been at the camp for more than a year (Magra, 2021). Pope Francis also met with the Migration and Asylum Minister, the Prime Minister, the leader of the main opposition party and the Archbishop of Athens, who all made special reference to his initiatives on the migration and refugee crisis, noting that his presence testified to the importance of the problems on the island. ‘The Pope’s visit had a very positive result, because it highlighted the important and positive way in which our country is handling the migration - refugee issue,’ foreign minister, Nikos Dendias, said in a statement (amna.gr, 2021).

Since 2015, when Lesvos became the main locus of irregular arrivals to the EU, the island has become a ‘theme park’ (Sarantidis, 2021: 199) for journalists, researchers, NGO staff visiting the island, state and EU officials and thousands of volunteers, who wanted to be part of the humanitarian response to the disaster unfolding before their eyes. By January 2016, the local authorities in Lesvos reported that over 80 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were running operations throughout the island, aided by several thousand volunteers (Franck, 2018; see also Nianias, 2016). Even celebrities, such as Angelina Jolie, Susan Sarandon, Mandy Patinkin, and a group of actors from the popular series ‘Game of Thrones’ visited the island hoping to bring attention to what was happening in that corner of the world (Galanis, 2018). Tons of ink has been spent on Moria, the island’s refugee camp and the situation refugees have to endure inside it<sup>6</sup> (Are you Syrious?, n.d.; BBC news, 2018; Dimitriadi, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2018; 2019; McElvaney, 2018; Lucas et al., 2018; Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; National Geographic, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2020; Rozakou, 2017a; Shamshiri, 2020; Tazzioli, 2018; Vradis, et al., 2019).<sup>7</sup>

While undeniably Lesvos and the camps have been deeply traumatising for all those affected, a separate building within the Moria camp was hidden away from the areas where celebrities flocked, with cameras in tow, and practitioners and volunteers visited every day. The pre-removal detention centre inside the Moria camp was the blind spot in the mediatized ‘border spectacle’ (De Genova, 2013) full of suffering, misery, and death of

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<sup>6</sup> Indicative of the amount of information produced about Moria is that the Greek Council for Refugees, together with Oxfam produce a bimonthly bulletin on the situation on site. For their latest update see (GCR & Oxfam, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Here, I am not trying to evaluate the knowledge produced. As Rozakou (2019) claims despite the abundance of knowledge, access to Moria for a lot of those writing about it has been partial, so ‘the knowledge produced around the Moria camp enhances its opacity instead of eradicating it’ (Rozakou, 2019: 79). However, I want to show the sheer plethora of accounts about a particular site.

refugees only (Deportation Monitoring Aegean, 2018; Rozakou, 2019). From 2017 until 2020, when the fire that broke in Moria destroyed the camp and forced the authorities to evacuate the pre-removal detention centre too (Hamilakis, 2022; Papailias, 2022), nearly 3,000 people had been detained inside the centre, which had an official capacity of 420.<sup>8</sup> These would have been either failed asylum seekers, people who were registered in the camp but decided to leave the island and thus were arrested somewhere else in Greece for having violated the geographical restriction imposed to all new arrivals,<sup>9</sup> or those who are detained automatically when identified as a national of a country with a low refugee recognition rate.<sup>10</sup> With a 2016 police circular, offensive behaviour or law-breaking conduct in the reception centre of Moria could further be used as grounds for detention (Deportation Monitoring Aegean, 2018).<sup>11</sup>

While all eyes have been fixed on the emergency at Greece's numerous border locations and refugee camps, those who were inside pre-removal detention centres and those who were touched by the violence and suffering in these facilities in the past were overlooked. The focus on 'real refugees', their abhorrent living conditions inside tent camps, and dramatic scenes on the beaches of the frontline Greek islands served to further obliterate the experiences of 'unwanted migrants' beneath the significance and urgency of refugee plights. In doing so, I tease out neglected textual nuances and foreground the widely overlooked experiences of those living and working inside these institutions. Crossing borders for whatever reason is a human right. Responding to this right through detention

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<sup>8</sup> This number does not take into account the number of people who have been detained in the island's police stations because the police do not publish such statistics.

<sup>9</sup> Asylum seekers subject to the EU-Turkey statement are issued a geographical restriction, ordering them not to leave the respective island until the end of the asylum procedure. See more Asylum Information Database (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Following the EU-Turkey statement in 2016, a pilot project, which was later rebranded as a 'low-profile scheme' provided that newly arrived persons belonging to nationalities with low refugee recognition rates, like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, would be detained upon arrival and channelled through rapid identification procedures for the purpose of deportation. The list of countries was expanded to 28 in March 2017. See more about this nationality-based detention in Kriona Saranti (2019). More recently, in June 2021, with a Joint Ministerial Decision, which is the continuation of the EU-Turkey deal, the Greek authorities designated Turkey as a "safe third country" for applicants belonging to five nationalities, including applicants from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia, which form more than half of the asylum applicants currently in Greece (65.8%, 26.715 applicants out of 40.559 applications submitted in 2020) (MD 42799– Gov. Gazette 2425/B/7-6-2021). The Application of the decision, is expected to increase systematic and prolonged detention, as well as readmissions to Turkey, as thousands of applications may be rejected on the basis of the safe third country concept. See more about this in Asylum Information Database (2021).

<sup>11</sup> This population exchange between the reception and detention centre of an island has been documented elsewhere too. During a visit at the reception centre on the island of Kos, together with the Greek NPM, the Director of the centre told us that due to overcrowding, some people had been 'hosted' by the adjacent detention centre. See more in Fili (2019).

is seen by states as a sovereign right. Yet, as Loyd and Mountz (2018, p. 231) explicitly state ‘the legality (if not legitimacy) of these practices within the nation-state system does not compensate for or erase the violence they inflict thought migration policing and detention’. By focusing on immigration detention this thesis aims to break the trend of the racialised distinction between good refugees and bad migrants and bring to light significant omissions and structural decisions that contributed to covering up the reality behind bars in the first place.

### **Locating and documenting immigration detention in Greece**

There is little official clarity over how many people are actually detained and the sites they are placed. So, too, it is difficult to demarcate the detention estate. There are seven active pre-removal detention centres in Greece. Six centres on the mainland (Amygdaleza, Petrou Ralli, Corinth, Xanthi, Paranesti, Fylakio) and one on the islands in Kos (Figure 3 below). The Lesvos pre-removal detention center has suspended its operation due to damages after the fire in Moria in September 2020 (Cossé, 2020). The total pre-removal detention capacity was 2,900 places at the end of 2021. The estimated budget for the functioning of pre-removal detention centres for the period between 2018 and 2022 is €80,799,488 (Asylum Information Database, 2021).

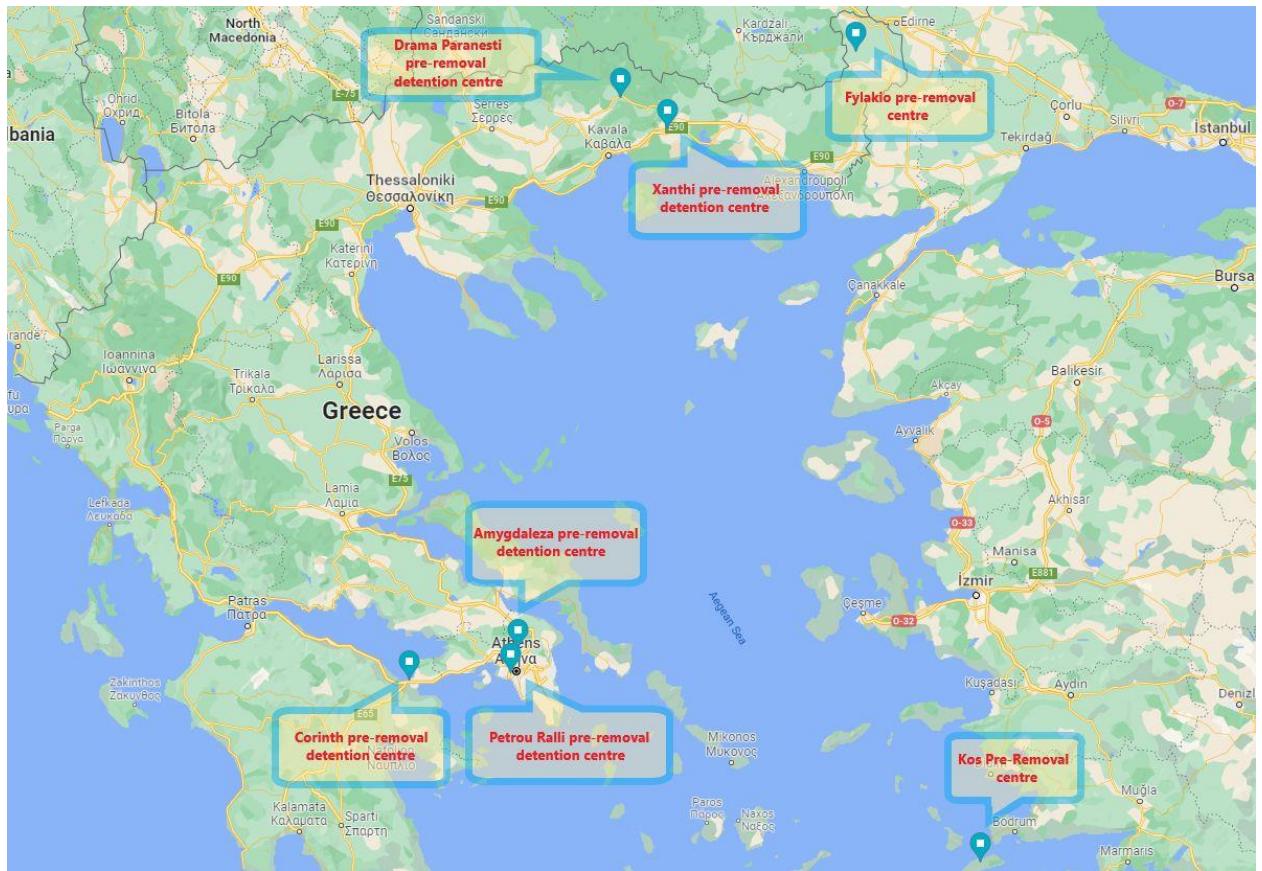


Figure 3: Pre-removal detention centres in Greece

Since 2019, the Greek government has been working on its operational plan to address migration and ‘decongest’ the Aegean islands, following a post-election commitment. This strategy culminated in the announcement that the existing ‘hotspot’ camps on the Greek islands would be gradually turned into “closed” centres in order to reduce the flows of people (L. 4636/2019). The plan, backed by €276 million of funding from the European Union, is to create two zones of fencing inside every camp, six metres apart, and to introduce biometric cards to control entry and exit, CCTV monitoring, airport-like bag screening and a secure detention facility (Monroy, 2021). The first such facilities on the islands of Samos, Leros and Kos are already operational. The situation unfolding in the closed controlled centre of Samos has exceeded even the bleakest scenario. Just three months after its inauguration, it has been described as a high-tech modern prison and a panopticon for refugees (Greek Council for Refugees, 2021; Molnar, 2021; Monroy, 2021; Tazzioli, 2021). What is more, there is already a legal precedent that proves the use of illegal de facto detention in the centre (Amnesty International, 2021).

Foreign citizens are further detained in numerous police stations and other police buildings, like border guard stations. Throughout 2021, 12,020 people were detained in official facilities and at the end of the year 2,335 people remained in custody. At the end of 2021, the total number of third-country nationals detained in police stations or other facilities countrywide was 380. Furthermore, throughout the year, the total number of unaccompanied children in administrative detention in pre-removal detention centers and police stations countrywide was 363 (Asylum Information Database, 2022). Yet, there is more. In Evros, ad hoc facilities, mainly repurposed wheat warehouses, have been used over the years as spaces for detention (Iliadi, 2015). Research has also uncovered, semi-official places, like the Poros Facility, which has been employed as unofficial detention prior to pushbacks, given the complete absence of any registration of detention (Forensic Architecture, 2019; Karamanidou and Kasperek, 2020). Testimonial evidence collected by NGOs and research organisations suggests that detention in informal facilities prior to pushbacks is a common practice in the area.<sup>12</sup> People have spoken about fenced yards, portacabins, warehouses, garages, and even animal pens (Karamanidou et al., 2021).

The tangled assemblage of sites, where foreigners may be confined, is evident in the different names these facilities have (legally) acquired. Some are designated as 'pre-removal' centres, others are 'special holding facilities', 'border guard stations' adjacent to police stations, yet others are informal, known only to the police. The institutional uncertainty over those sites that are not pre-removal and the legal vacuum in which they operate, allows for arbitrary practices; people stay in police stations for months on end forgotten even by the authorities. One of the NGO lawyers I interviewed, told me that at an ad hoc visit to a police station in Athens, she discovered a Pakistani man, who had been detained there for 8 months.<sup>13</sup> The confusion over what is detention seems to be affecting Greek monitors too. At a workshop with NGOs, the Greek National Preventive Mechanism, the police and academics in Greece in 2018, I was talking about the airport detention facility, referring to it as a detention centre. During the coffee break, a member of the Greek NPM

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<sup>12</sup> In particular, the work of organisations like the Border Violence Monitoring Network, Forensic Architecture and Human Rights 360 have widely documented the link between detention in informal and formal facilities and pushbacks. See e.g., Border Violence Monitoring Network (2020), HumanRights360 (2022) and Mobile Info Team (n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> Third-country nationals have always been detained for prolonged periods of time in police stations, despite constant criticism from the international community that the facilities are not suitable. Notwithstanding commitments from the Greek authorities to phase out detention in police stations, the practice has never been discontinued. According to Hellenic Police statistics, there were 380 persons in administrative detention at the end of 2021 in facilities other than pre-removal centres, of whom 35 were asylum seekers (Asylum Information Database, 2022).

came up to me and corrected me. *'The site at the airport is a special holding facility, not a detention centre. We should be careful with the terms.'*

Irrespective of the official term used to describe a facility, their essence as spaces, run by the police, where migrants are deprived of their freedom, usually in detrimental conditions, with ill-treatment by the authorities prevailing, remains common among them. By using the term *immigration detention* throughout the thesis, I refer to the complex, often hidden and remote, formal and informal carceral infrastructure that the Greek nation state has developed to restrict mobility across its national borders and to regulate the presence of foreigners within its territory (Loyd and Mountz, 2018). Arguably, the term is quite expansive. The blurred boundaries between reception and detention centres have been widely documented, with *de facto* detention during reception and identification procedures at the borders being the norm, rather than an exception (Asylum Information Database, 2021; Majcher, 2018; Matevžič, 2019). In this context, the term *immigration detention* could include these facilities. However, I have decided not to include them in my analysis because these sites have been over-researched. In doing so, I aim to move the understanding of detention past the spectacle at the border to the interior of the state (Mainwaring and Silverman, 2017, p. 28).

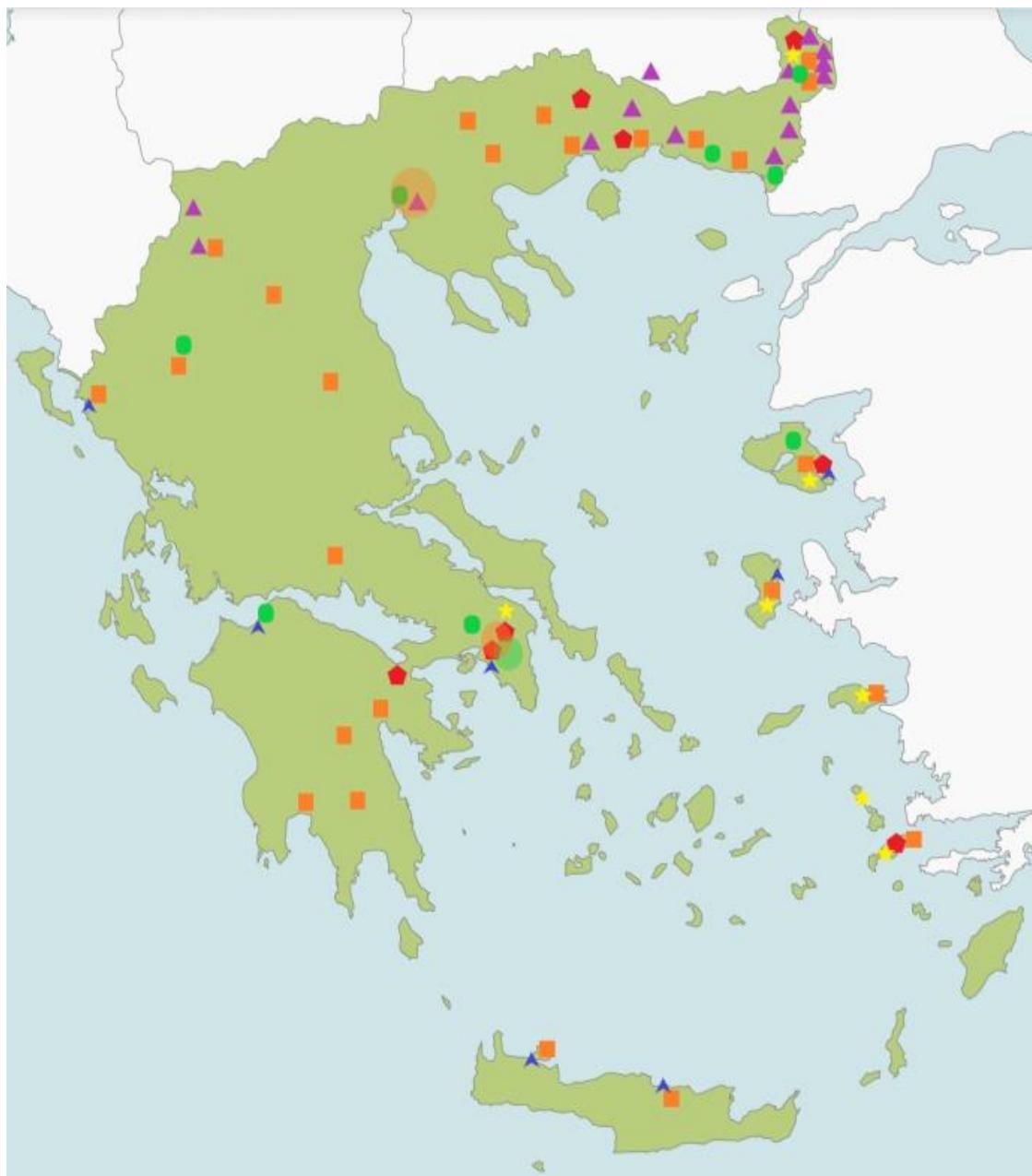


Figure 4: A map of sites where foreigners may be detained across Greece<sup>14</sup>

The ambivalence and confusion over what constitutes immigration detention and the enforced elusiveness of the sites (Aitken, 2018), could partly explain the academic lacuna about the practice in Greece. While there have been varying accounts of successful and

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<sup>14</sup> The map collects immigration detention facilities from a number of sources, including my own research, and investigative work done by Global Detention Project, the CPT and other researchers. Some of the sites on the map have now been closed but I included them to show the proliferation of the use of detention over the years in Greece. I am certain that others may exist too, as some of the unofficial facilities reported by immigrants have not been located by the organisations that spoke to them. So, this cannot be an exhaustive list (see Annex 1).

unsuccessful attempts to get into these centres, it is not always the state actively blocking research (Dimitriadi 2017; Rozakou, 2019). As I explain in the following chapter, I have been both successful and unsuccessful in obtaining official research access and this does not necessarily have to do with an open or a closed approach to research on the part of stakeholders. According to police statistics, in 2018, they granted 225 access requests to detention centres countrywide. These, of course, include all the actors that have visited detention facilities, including multiple visits by NGOs and monitors. Nevertheless, no matter how restricted access to detention is, it is not entirely absent as one would assume, given the lack of information about what goes on behind bars.

Here, I instead suggest that the authorities, mainly the police, have maintained a strategy of ‘closeness’ (Parsanoglou et al. forthcoming as cited in Rozakou, 2019), by which detention spaces resemble inaccessible places, which are open to a limited few. As I will argue later in the thesis, those who have been able to access detention centres may be (inadvertently) complicit in contributing to the expansion of the very sites they seek to monitor, research and scrutinize through their work. Casting light on this, Rosset and Achermann (2019), point out that the seeming or real illegibility of bureaucratic processes shields the legibility of state as a discourse. ‘Indeed’, they further argue, ‘the unequal access to knowledge that results from illegibility prevents outsiders from producing and claiming knowledge about the state, thus reinforcing the state’s narrative about itself’ (Rosset and Achermann, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, through creating confusion around who, why and where people are detained in the country, the authorities have built metaphorical security walls around these facilities that prevent a deep understanding of their operation. But, as Katerina Rozakou (2019), who is one of the few academics who has managed to conduct research inside immigration detention centres, explains, researchers, who ignore a seemingly inaccessible field, risk uncritically reproducing the very violence of the migration regime. Consequently, immigration detention in Greece is hidden in plain sight. Below, I carve out my approach in making sense of the field.

### **Conceptualising immigration detention**

Grounded in long-term ethnography and involvement with the field of immigration detention, this thesis adopts an unconventional structure, whereby the theoretical discussion is embedded separately in each chapter, instead of in a separate literature review

section. While I do not let the data speak for itself, the theoretical discussion does emerge from data collected. To avoid repetition and overlap, below, I frame the contribution of the thesis around a broad international interdisciplinary body of scholarship on immigration confinement but the individual chapters develop and discuss the key concepts I am engaging with. As I will show, my positionalities, research practices and engagement with the literature cross boundaries.

### *Immigration detention in Greek literature*

Back in 2011, I was the first researcher to be able to conduct research inside immigration detention centres in Greece (see Bosworth et al., 2016; 2018). Then I was told, *'There is a literature gap, which is a serious matter in itself. It [Immigration detention] is the definition of black hole. It's the exclusion inside the exclusion [of migration]'* (Interview with a practitioner and independent researcher, 2018). After 2012, when immigration detention attracted more attention from the inside and outside of the country as the locus of severe human rights violations, there has been more academic interest. Against this context, studies relying on secondary data (Cheliotis, 2013; Angeli & Triandafyllidou, 2014; Triandafyllidou, Angeli, & Dimitriadi, 2014; Mantanika, 2014) provide a fruitful picture about the nature and effect of detention centres, but in their predominant theoretical bent and limited or no access to those inside the centres, these studies remain rather limited.

A more comprehensive picture of detention comes from authors who have themselves witnessed immigration detention as NGO practitioners; thus, offering an insider's perspective but also alluding to the challenges that humanitarian actors face inside detention settings (Georgoulas and Sarantidis, 2012; Fili, 2018b; Iliadou, 2012; 2019a; Kotsioni, 2016; Sarantidis, 2018). The investigative research work of Lena Karamanidou and Bernd Kasperek in the Evros region has provided considerable wisdom, insight and data about border control practices, their inherent violence and the link between immigration detention and the practice of pushbacks in the country (Karamanidou and Kasperek, 2020). Moreover, during Karamanidou's long-term fieldwork in Evros, she has produced many images of official and unofficial detention facilities, illustrating how the governance of borders relies on assemblages of both formal and informal practices and infrastructures (Karamanidou and Kasperek, 2018; Karamanidou et al., 2021). Critical

geographers have also explored detention centres as part of what they call the border assemblage (Pillant, 2017; Pillant and Tassin, 2016).

In addition, there is a considerable quantity of reports produced by NGOs and human rights organisations (Amnesty International, 2010a; 2012a; CPT, 1994-2020; Global Detention Project, 2020; 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2008; 2011; Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010; 2014, Pro Asyl, 2007; 2012). In lack of academic scrutiny, I have extensively drawn on these reports, especially in the first chapters, where I address the early years of detention, because they are rich in detailed descriptions of the conditions inside immigration detention centres. In this way, they offer a glimpse into largely hidden and forgotten infrastructures.

Unlike in other countries,<sup>15</sup> there are very few journalistic accounts of the situation inside the country's detention facilities. Those which exist mostly cover riots from the inside, thus reproducing an image of detainees as dangerous, or use information they have gathered from secondary sources about human rights violations. As one journalist told me '*There is no interest in detention. There is a small segment of the public that wants to learn about human rights violations.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). The same person, though, told me that he had never made any attempts to enter a detention centre. In fact, the only way some of these journalists have been able to access three sites of confinement is through covering visits organised by the human rights committee of the left-wing party, Syriza, in the lead-up to the 2015 elections. Media reports from Amygdaleza from that period contribute to what Cetta Mainwaring and Stephanie Silverman (2017, p. 34) term as 'detention as spectacle,' which at the same time 'makes visible and renders invisible, it perpetuates myths and creates distance between people and reality, and between citizens and noncitizens.' Notwithstanding the importance of exposing the situation inside detention centres, the time-sensitive access these journalists had, and the conspicuous silence of the media before and after that period created a short-lived political spectacle that was easily deflated.

What the limited academic scholarship and NGO and media reports share, though, is that to a large extent they focus on border detention sites, entirely overlooking what happens inside other facilities in the mainland. Notable exceptions are a collective brochure by

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<sup>15</sup> In the UK, for example, there has been a number of undercover documentary videos secretly filmed from inside the centres. See Channel4, 2015a; 2015b and BBC Panorama, 2020. See also Silverman (2015).

Ergon Eksivrisi (2007) and the master's dissertation of the architect Ioulia Iliadi (2015), which both include sketches that aim to recreate the detention spaces of facilities in Athens. In so doing, these unconventional pieces are rare mapping documents of spatial storytelling and visual mapping of obscure spaces. Kristiana Kiritzi (2014) also uses the Corinth pre-removal detention centre and the local community as a case study for her exploration of the interaction between spatial and social relationships. Against this context, the in-depth exploration of immigration detention centres, mainly located in Athens, is timely and due. After all, I see these confinement institutions as borders of the Greek state.

### *Casting an interdisciplinary border criminologies perspective*

While my focus has been on the growing body of criminological research into immigration detention (Bosworth, 2012; 2013; 2014; Bosworth, Hasselberg, & Turnbull, 2016; Canning, 2020; Grewcock, 2010; Leerkes and Brodeurs, 2010; Malloch and Stanley, 2005; Miller, 2002; Pratt, 2005; Turnbull, 2016; Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018; Welch, 2002), the thesis also borrows from other disciplines, which have produced captivating accounts of life inside immigration detention centres around the world and located immigration detention in larger debates about border control, like migration studies (Silverman, 2014; Silverman and Massa, 2012; Mainwaring and Silverman, 2017), anthropology and psychology (De Genova, 2016; 2010; Fassin, 2011; Fischer, 2013a; 2013b; 2015; Griffiths, 2012; 2013; Hall, 2010; 2012; Hasselberg, 2016; Kronick, et al., 2018), geography (Coleman and Kocher, 2011; Conlon and Hiemstra, 2016; Gill, 2009; Hiemstra, 2013; 2019; Loyd et al., 2013; Loyd and Mountz, 2018; Moran et al., 2013; Mountz, 2011; Turner and Peters, 2017) and sociology (Barker, 2013; Kreichauff, 2021; Schuster, 2005; Schuster and Bloch, 2005; Schuster and Majidi, 2013; Welch and Schuster, 2005a; 2005b). This diverse body of work has been useful in building the scaffolding of my theoretical arguments and it has also been instrumental in putting the Greek case into a global (Aas and Bosworth, 2013) and transnational (Loyd and Mountz, 2018) perspective. It is in dialogue with border criminology and in debt to the range of insightful work cited above, where this thesis hopes to belong.

A very small portion of the literature produced internationally on immigration detention is based on independent research conducted inside custodial centres. Access to these opaque institutions, is severely constrained by key stakeholders. The lack of empirical

research in immigration detention is, therefore, not merely a Greek characteristic. In fact, this is a matter that defines knowledge production in this field. When Mary Bosworth started her research in 2009 inside UK immigration detention centres, she was the first one to have acquired such open research access.<sup>16</sup> Her study of everyday life inside British immigration removal centres (IRCs), published in 2014, was the first national study of British IRCs. As governments guard these institutions zealously, force researchers into relying on other forms of data to create a base of knowledge around these opaque institutions (Bosworth, 2016). Closer to Greece, in Italy, for example, detention centres are largely inaccessible too by researchers and activists alike (although see work by Campesi, 2014; 2015; 2015 and Esposito et al., 2021; 2020a; 2020b; 2019). As Didier Fassin (2011, p. 219) states 'knowledge of these new detention sites, at the doors of Europe, remains limited.'

Border criminology examines the convergence between criminal justice and immigration control, utilising longstanding ideas and approaches from the field of punishment and society (Bosworth, 2012; Bosworth and Kaufman, 2011; Kaufman, 2015). Crime and migration control are both intrinsically political and contingently politicised. As a result, detention centres are in part political institutions 'through which we formalize and make real the character of democracy' (Lerman and Weaver, 2014, p. 60). In other words, the decision to detain, despite evidence of the harm that these institutions produce, is a political choice (Bosworth, 2021).

Immigration detention centres uncannily resemble prisons. As one of the detention officers I interviewed said to me '*Look, the official name of this place is 'special centre for hosting foreigners'. But in essence it is a prison. The difference is that we are dealing with administrative issues, we don't have any criminals here. But yes, we imprison them.*' Yet, as the quote suggests, in not holding criminals, these facilities become conceptually incoherent. Trying to understand them, academics have turned to the mass of literature on prisons (Carlen, 1983; Bosworth, 1999; Barker, 2009; Crewe, 2009, the pains of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958; Crewe, 2009; Hancock and Jewkes, 2011; Chamberlen, 2016) and its adverse effects (Carlton and Seggrave, 2011; Crawley and Sparks, 2006). Prison sociologists build critical, analytical accounts on detailed empirical fieldwork. Therefore, this scholarship has provided border criminologists with

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<sup>16</sup> Although there was one earlier study by Alexandra Hall (2012) of detention centre staff in one prison-service run establishment.

the methodological perspectives and analytical tools to gain access to and knowledge from custodial institutions.

However, scholars in this field, given the widespread nature of the populist anti-immigrant sentiment, have had to deal with very specific methodological, ethical and conceptual challenges (Fili, et al., 2018). Border criminology is usually qualitative, theoretically engaged and interdisciplinary. Its focus on the intersections between criminal justice and migration control leads to different topics, like justice (Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2015), citizenship (Aliverti, 2013), race (Bosworth, Parmar and Vazquez, 2018), ethnicity (Bhui, 2016), sovereignty (De Genova and Peutz, 2010) and power (Bosworth, 2018). As Katja Aas and Mary Bosworth (2013) remind us, the central concepts of punishment and society need to be adjusted and rethought in the context of mass migration. This thesis, and in particular chapter 1, where I explore issues of positionality and the realities of doing research in a political environment, is further evidence that researchers in the field need to constantly reflect upon the impact of their interpersonal, political and institutional contexts within which their methodological decisions are shaped.

In its predominantly theoretical bent, much of the prison and detention literature draws on Michel Foucault's (1991; 2004) writings on governmentality and biopower, and Giorgio Agamben's (1998; 2004) ideas of the state of exception and the Camp. This approach, though, presents a bleak view, with little space for fighting back. While my earlier writings were influenced by the concept of 'bare life', my choice not to engage with it in this thesis, is not solely motivated by intellectual concerns. The adoption (or not) of particular concepts reflects our personal and academic biographies. In attempting to dream of a reconfigured world, where borders (may exist) but do not define us, and detention centres are obsolete (Davis, 2003), I have looked elsewhere for inspiration.

#### *Abolition: the elephant in detention*

While the body of work described above is important in appreciating the textures and details of custodial institutions, often researchers, including myself, see immigration and detention as a race to the bottom (Canning, 2021). Immigration detention centres across the world are opaque places, entangled in emerging assemblages of bordered forms of penality, with prison-like, overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. Those that live inside them experience high levels of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, while

confined and long after their release. These accounts need to be documented, but to sustain these accounts of immigration detention, it means that we engage in finding ways to reform the system, to make it more humane, it means that we let despair shadow hope. Yet, it is not an easy task. Liat Ben-Moshe (2020) maintains that reform and abolition live side by side, with the former being considered as true knowledge and the latter as belonging to a radical fringe that is illegible to most people. Therefore, we need to ask the right questions. Does the scale of atrocity need to be so (exceptionally) awful as to merit condemnation? If the system were slightly more humane or more in line with human rights norms, would it mean that detention is more legitimate? These questions find their root in abolitionist praxis, to which the thesis turns to explore the physical and political architecture of detention space in Greece. By creating synergies between border criminology and abolition, it opens up new ways of thinking about detention centres.

With regard to abolition, Greece is an interesting case for two reasons. First, access to detention centres is so difficult and inconsistent, as the following chapter will show. While access to a field is crucial for the production of knowledge, researchers may get entangled in constraining relationships with gatekeepers that would prevent them from levelling oppositional narratives, if they want to maintain their access, the argument goes (Skillbrei, 2018; Gundhus, 2018). On the other hand, distance from the field can sometimes feel liberating and lead to critical research that flourishes in the reformulation of the duality between inside and outside. There is not an easy solution, critiques without evidence will easily be demolished by those eager to protect a field. Similarly, research without a critical understanding of the relationship between the researcher and those holding the keys cannot cross the threshold of reflexive social practice. This thesis stands in between, it is informed by rich data and passionately stands against detention centres. Second, abolitionism does not work in silos. As its advocates highlight, it takes a village to bring these institutions down. Greece's civil society can offer many examples of innumerable and unremarkable acts of care and solidarity. It is time for academics and researchers to take an active stance against detention in Greece. The time is ripe for them to work together.

In adopting an abolitionist lens, I was able to identify five key tenets that guided my critique of the Greek immigration detention system. Together, they form what can be termed as the 'detention industrial complex'.

- 1) Violence is ingrained and pervasive in immigration detention.
- 2) Government accounts of what happens inside detention facilities cover up the reality behind bars.
- 3) People with lived experience and immigrant communities are valid knowledge producers.
- 4) Different spokes in the machine work together to produce and resist detention.
- 5) Counter accounts can upend the violence of the system.

The work of leading critical thinkers on the ‘prison industrial complex’, i.e., the convergence of actors and interests that profit from the prison industry has been very influential (Davis, 1995; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 1999). In 2009, Tanya Golash Boza borrowed from the term to define ‘the immigration industrial complex’; namely, “the confluence of public and private sector interests in the criminalization of undocumented migration, immigration law enforcement, and the promotion of ‘anti-illegal’ rhetoric” (Golash-Boza 2009, 295). More recently Deanna Dadusc and Pierpaolo Mudu (2022) wrote about the ‘humanitarian industrial complex’, which describes the humanitarian organisations implicated in the control of migrants cloaked in a charity rhetoric that always responds to a crisis and is there to help.

The way I conceptualise the ‘detention industrial complex’, incorporates elements from all of the above; it is a range of state institutions, NGOs, and international organisations, which have seeped into the disciplinary and repressive system of detention and through their day-to-day work they produce, normalize and legitimize the inherent violence of immigration detention, foreclosing any challenges to the system. In doing so, they actualize the essence of state power against immigration. While, the thesis is in the end a critique of the Greek state, following Micol Seidl (2018) I argue that the state cannot be the focus. ‘It is too big, too amorphous, too ghostly—there really is no there, there, after all.’ (Seidl, 2018, p. 22). This thesis utilises the police, the judiciary system, international organisations, NGOs and activist groups for that guiding role. Only by understanding their conjoined roles in detention can we fully grasp, what detention is really like. And only when we do, can we find the forms, shapes and colours to resist the system. To go back to the introductory quote, I hope this thesis is a seed towards that direction.

The concept of resistance is at the core of the thesis. I explore its meaning in three different contexts. First, I consider *resistance to change*. The chapters that follow set out to explain the historical development of detention, its social and political operational environment and how this form of confinement has become a key technique of control of migrants in Greece. They further seek to explain how the state and the police have managed to insulate immigration detention from any threats to its existence, remaining at the same time publicly unaccountable and able to protect bureaucratically opaque policies. Following Carol Agôcs (1997, p. 918) this institutionalised resistance presupposes ‘the authority to act or to choose not to act, and the power to legitimate or to silence the voices of those who advocate change’. In these processes of legitimisation, institutionalised practices become unquestioned contributing to the stability of organisations. In this case, I aim to show how the authorities have used their power as well as their control over resources and other agencies to resist change when they perceive it as threatening.

Second, I explore what happens when detained men and women in Greece resist the violence of detention. Building upon previous research (Bailey, 2009; Griesbach, 2010; Fiske, 2012; Tyler, 2013; Bosworth, 2014; Puggioni, 2014; Campesi, 2015; Hughes, 2016; Esposito, et al., 2020), I take resistance against the violence of detention for granted. The issue of resistance against immigration enforcement practices worldwide has, indeed, been well documented, borrowing from the literature on resistance inside prisons (Karlene, 1993; Bosworth 1999; Bosworth and Carrabine 2001; Carrabine 2005; Corcoran, 2007). Notwithstanding the caveat of representation in these prison and detention ethnographies, i.e., the fact that these texts often situate agency on one side of the domination/resistance binary (Hoffman 1999), limiting detainees and prisoners to a single text or a normative definition of their identity, this body of literature has been instrumental in understanding power relations from the point of view of those subject to them.

Yet, what happens in the aftermath of these challenges is rarely part of these accounts. Here, I explore resistance as a threat to a system that seeks to immobilise, exclude, and sometimes kill those found inside. In doing so, I chart the strategies of disciplinary power and reactive responses to challenges levelled by detainees and those that support them and explain what they may mean for the future of detention in the country. If resistance can

threaten and weaken a seemingly powerful system, then we should turn to it in order to imagine the path towards abolition. In other words, I argue that resistance can give us the analytical and conceptual tools that work “against the assumptive necessity, integrity, and taken for grantedness of [immigration detention centres] and the normalised state violence they reproduce.” (Rodríguez, 2010). In his paper on the unintended consequences of promoting human rights in detention, Mike Flynn argues that attempts to reform immigration detention without also seeking to restrict use of detention, may lead to ‘kinder and gentler’ regimes, but ultimately extend the harmful outcomes created by immigration detention. Therefore, he advises that any campaign aimed at reforming immigration detention, must also take into account ways that detention can be constricted. In line with this, if abolition is not at the core of our thinking about exiting the abyss of detention, then we end up contributing to its continuing existence (Aiken and Silverman, 2012; García Hernández, 2017).

Finally, I conceptualise *writing as resistance*. As I will argue in the epilogue, I have used writing as a way out of what scared and overwhelmed me when I first entered the field of immigration detention. In a sense this work came out of my rage and pain about what I experienced and witnessed as a researcher and practitioner in the Greek detention infrastructure but also as an outcome of my anxiety to get it right. Alana Lentin beautifully captures this anxiety about her work on race. ‘It should make us anxious to write about a force that makes people “vulnerable to premature death” (Gilmore 2007, 28). It should scare us to death to get it wrong because, while on the one hand, who cares what academics have to say, on the other, what they have had and continue to have to say impinges on whose bodies and souls harm lands (Smith 2021)’ in (Lentin, 2022, p. 485). By documenting the Greek detention system, I thereby resist the institutional silence about what happens behind bars.

## Thesis outline

The thesis is organised first chronologically and then thematically. Chapters 2 and 3 situate current practice in a longer historical context of immigration and border control policies in Greece and Europe. While I divide them into specific time periods, marked by legislation changes, the shifting of entry points to the country, and other socio-legal developments I am not interested in providing a comparison between the different eras I have identified

but rather I want to show the continuity of harmful policies across time and space (Fili, 2016).

Having examined the underlying principles of the Greek detention system and having established that the culture of violence nurtured inside it, is endemic, chapters 4 and 5, explain how these extreme forms of violence have been normalised. By connecting detention centres to the world outside them, I highlight the role of other actors in keeping the detention system knitted together; thus, contributing to the fortification of a detention industrial complex. The final chapter engages with the theme of resistance and seeks to show how police practices are shaped in response to resistance inside and outside detention centres.

Chapter 1 '*Witnessing Immigration Detention*', offers a reflexive account of my experiences as a researcher and NGO practitioner in the field of immigration detention in Greece. It sums up my ethnographic journey over a decade, alluding to challenges I have faced in accessing obscure facilities and state institutions and also reflecting on my positionalities and the effect they have had in the production of knowledge. In doing so, it serves as a roadmap for reading and understanding the range of data presented throughout the thesis and my approach to analysis.

Chapter 2 '*The Hidden History of Immigration Detention in Greece (1990-2010)*', traces the roots of the Greek immigration detention system. The few accounts of detention in Greece take the years after 2010 as a starting point, when the policy of detaining foreigners acquired key meaning in border control in the country. The period before has been largely overlooked in the literature. This chapter breaks this narrative and draws out hidden accounts of the practices and actors that laid the foundations upon which the immigration detention system of today has been built. In doing so, it will situate current practice in a longer historical context of immigration and border control policies in Greece and Europe. Given the lack of available information about this era, I draw extensively on reports by human rights organisations and the CPT, which contain rich information about life inside detention facilities. Interweaved in the analysis are interviews I have conducted with police officers that have served at the border during those early years. My main argument is that nationalism in Greek political culture, or the historical depths of the ultra-right's intrusion into the Greek state established the legal and institutional basis for today's detention regime.

Chapter 3 '*Building the Modern Greek Detention System (2010-2017)*', engages with a paradox; Greece's mandate to secure EU's borders at a time of severe economic crisis and the concurrent condemnation of the authorities' practices while doing so. It shows how insistent appeals for more efficient border control have backfired as they have provided supportive cues to the authorities for more repressive measures. This, in turn, has created a humanitarian crisis inside the Greek detention system. The chapter takes us through to an almost abolitionist break in 2015, when the government announced the closure of detention facilities and then to the violent return to confinement practices in the aftermath of the humanitarian crisis of 2015. To explain how the modern Greek detention estate was built and the implication of the EU, through personnel, bordering technologies and significant funding, I use EU policy documents, national policy papers and interviews with a range of key actors, including border and detention officers, NGO personnel, lawyers and members of human rights organisations.

Chapter 4 '*Guarding and Monitoring Immigration Detention Facilities*', explores three key processes through which immigration detention in the country has been normalised and legitimised. The first is making an understaffed, underpaid, and racist police force the key stakeholder inside detention. The second process I refer to is diverting scrutiny away from responsibility and liability. Through this, the authorities have managed to create a parallel reality, where consistent condemning criticism against inhumane detention practices are discredited as untrue and attempts to hurt Greek sovereignty. The final process draws on a critique of the National Preventive Mechanism, whose role is to monitor detention facilities and prevent human rights abuses. I argue that by relying more on their affinities with the police, rather than their institutional mandate and ethics, they have unintentionally become complicit with the exclusionary qualities of the Greek detention system.

Chapter 5 '*Secrets, Silences and Complicities Between State and Non-State Actors Inside Detention*', is the most personal chapter of the thesis, drawing on my experiences as an NGO professional both inside detention and in the community. Combining my first-hand experience in the field with in-depth interviews with a number of NGO practitioners, the chapter examines the role of non-state actors in shaping the practice of immigration detention, the challenges they face, in a largely exploitative sector, and the strategies they adopt to navigate detention. In doing so, it argues that non-state actors have uncritically

legitimised the status quo inside detention and may have lost the opportunity to provide alternatives to detention.

Chapter 6 “*Searching for Azadi’ Resisting the detention system from the inside and outside*” documents the forms and limits of resistance inside detention centres. While previous research documented how immigrants and protest movements react to detention policies, less is known about how states and the authorities, faced with such protests, legitimise their efforts to exclude animalised immigrants from Greek society. This chapter takes resistance from detainees as granted and seeks to explore its nature as well as the forms, with which it has been stifled by the authorities as another way to understand the violence of the detention system. In doing so, it shows how resistance shapes border control; thus, documenting its power to change the status quo inside detention. I also address the issue of solidarian resistance from the outside to understand its contours and its limits to having an impact in how detention practices are implemented.

The *epilogue* draws together the theoretical and conceptual contributions of the thesis and the value of empirical research in providing new understandings of immigration detention locally but also globally.

As evident in most of the accounts I collected from detained migrant women in Greece, despite a brutal law enforcement regime at the country’s borders and a life often at risk of destitution and homelessness, migratory movement is an untamable force that exceeds the politics of control (Mezzadra, 2011). Stierl (2019, p. 62) enquires into the idea of migration ‘as an excessive force’ and explores how people are able to subvert borders. Nino, a migrant woman detained at the Petrou Ralli detention facility in Athens, describes the ‘stubbornness’ of migration better than any other academic attempt.

*I came here because I have a 4-year-old kid, my parents are old, 65 and 75, and I wanted to come, sort out my papers and bring my kid here. And I look after my parents from here.*

*They told me I was going to hide in a bus for two hours. You know where I was? Under the chairs and above the wheels...like...what is that? Like a coffin. And in reality, I was there 24 hours. Many times I didn’t understand what was going on. I was unconscious and I didn’t realise the time passing. You know what it is? When we got to Athens the bus stopped. It was the police. And they had told me that if the bus stopped, I shouldn’t do anything...I mean I wasn’t allowed to move. And I couldn’t anyway. I was like this (she shows she was cramped), above me there was steel and the engine was on. When the bus stopped, they didn’t turn the engine off because they were afraid, I would scream. And the exhaust gas was all in my face and I couldn’t breathe... it was a miracle I survived.*

*Then I worked. I went to Kalamata, I was without a job for 2 months. Then a family took me for...they had a grandpa and grandma and I looked after them. I had a health problem I couldn't handle it, I mean I didn't sleep at night and I was getting worse there. So, I decided to come to Athens. Then I looked for a job but I didn't have papers. Then I made a fake Romanian document and worked in the hospital. Then I went to another house, they had twins, but it was very hard there. The lady was very strict. From the hospital I left because I had my papers stolen. A Georgian woman did it again.*

*When I left the house, I went to a cafeteria. I worked there. And there I had problems with my papers again. Once the police came and I hid. Then my boss told me to sort my papers out or leave, do something because we were in trouble. I left and I went to a bar. I worked at 2 bars. From 2 in the afternoon until 10 at one and from 12 until the next morning at the other one. And there they caught me. I was working there for 2 weeks.*

*There is no point in keeping us here 3, 4 and 5 months and then give me a paper for one month to ask for political asylum. But even if I get a red card what can I do? If you don't give me a work permit how I work? Always will have problems. And then you, the government, tells me to go and steal, do something bad to survive in Greece. Why do they keep me here then?*

*I'll look for a job when I go out, something. I have an acquaintance that comes here and he says he can find me a job. Because I don't want to go back where I was arrested. I don't know what's going to happen. I can't tell. I'm not planning anything. I need to get out of here alive first. I am scared. When I was out I was scared when I saw the police, I went crazy. And in here it is hell.*

*Now that I know everything and when they caught me, I thought I was going to be sent back to my country, I was sure that in 2 months I would come back here. I mean I'm talking just about me. I would do it again 100%.*

Nino, Georgian national, detained in the Petrou Ralli detention centre (extracts from an interview in 2011)

While matters look bleak, in Greece and elsewhere, as the politics of the right continues to grow, as the world confronts the economic and social costs of the Covid-19 pandemic, as wars, climate change and poverty are the reality for millions of people around the world, the epilogue pulls the threads of the thesis together, insisting that the only moral response to mobility, must always be cage free.

## Chapter 1: Witnessing immigration detention

I have always been fascinated by confinement. *How do people end up in prison? What happens to them while there? How do they feel?* These were thorny philosophical questions I was trying to answer from a very young age. Yet, a lifelong fascination and a great number of books cannot prepare you for the first time you wait outside the high cement walls of a prison, hearing the heavy metal doors unlocking to let you in. I will never forget the fear, the shock, and the knot in my stomach and throat that practically prevented me from speaking, as if I was realising that what I was doing was a life-defining moment. That first time was when, in my final year as an undergraduate student in Greece in 2004, I volunteered at an NGO art project,<sup>17</sup> which involved visiting the only prison for women in the country weekly.<sup>18</sup> Since then, I have spent almost my entire professional life visiting, studying and working inside custodial facilities in a number of countries, but mainly focusing on my native Greece. In this chapter I outline the methodological trials and challenges of more than ten years of ongoing commitment with the field of immigration detention in Greece in different roles.

Guided by a ‘methodological self-consciousness’ (Finlay, 2002: 210), this chapter is also a reflexive attempt at exploring the impact of my positionality and the research dynamics of a long-term approach. While I refer to many brutal scenes throughout the thesis, this chapter seeks to identify the ways I participated in or witnessed those scenes. To do so, I draw on the work of Emma Kaufman (2015), who framed her ethnography of all-foreign national prisons in England as an act of witnessing. I also draw on work from other authors such as Aleida Assmann (2006) and Annette Wieviorka (2006), who present witnessing as a distinct form of narrative, which privileges a subjective notion of truth. By analysing a decade of involvement with detention issues, I do not claim an insider’s perspective of detention facilities in Greece. Rather, following feminist critique, I seek to show that the way we represent our field depends not so much on what is objectively happening in it but on our relationships in it (Harding, 1993; McAllister Groves and Chang, 1999; Phillips and

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<sup>17</sup> The art project was carried out by the NGO Arsis and it was a handicraft workshop, which aimed to give the opportunity for creative expression. The work created by the women was then exhibited at charity bazaars and the proceeds went to the women’s accounts. NGO Arsis has been implementing this project since 2002.

<sup>18</sup> The location of the only prison for women back then was in Korydallos, a western suburb of Athens. It was opposite the men’s prison, which is the largest prison establishment in the country. The women were transferred to the Eleonas prison for women in 2008. The facility in Korydallos serves for detaining remand prisoners.

Earle, 2010). As Linda Finlay argued in her article trying to make sense of the opportunities and challenges of reflexivity in research practice, the researcher [me] is a ‘central figure who influences, if not actively constructs the collection, selection and interpretation of data’ (2002: 212).

My ethnography of immigration detention in Greece draws on return visits (Baldassar, 2022). This is, however, not a longitudinal study *per se*; it was not designed as such from the beginning and it did not have a specific focus on time and change. After I had conducted my first piece of research inside a detention facility in Athens in 2011, nothing in my life, then, signalled that I would come back as a researcher five years later. Still, this longitudinal perspective remains informed by a rich and ongoing contextualisation. I have stepped in and out of the field, being back and forth between different capacities and created meaningful collaboration with other actors as part of my journey.

In order to make my ethnographic trajectory clearer for the reader, I first explain the long-term aspect of the research drawing on the concept of ‘ethnographic returning’ (O’ Reilley, 2012) to describe the tools I used to form, shape and revisit older interviews and observations with new knowledge. I then move on to discuss the research questions that drove this project to justify the approach I took before turning to the methods, data collection and analysis I conducted. The next section focuses on positionality and the ethical implications and personal ambiguities of speaking for others. I have no doubt that some of the issues highlighted in this chapter reflect the naivety of being a novice researcher, a young practitioner and a white woman, so they are specific to my positionality(ies) and should not be regarded as generalised observations. Nevertheless, I hope that my experiences will be useful for other researchers grappling with similar questions. I conclude by putting this diverse long-term experience under one umbrella, that of telling a story about the horror of immigration detention in Greece through an abolitionist lens and what this means for knowledge production in the field of immigration detention.

## Locating the data across time

Having had previous experiences in the Greek immigration detention sector, both as an NGO practitioner and a researcher, my PhD application tapped into those in order to build a research proposal. My initial proposal sought to illuminate the ongoing struggles of women detained in Greece to resist bare life, as well as their constant dialogue with the detention system and those enmeshed within it. My idea was to do a restudy of the Petrou Ralli detention centre, with an emphasis on how the situation had changed, but more importantly, to point out what had not changed and why. Yet, while I had included my experience as an asset to the project, particularly in terms of acquiring access to detention, I initially did not think of including my previous work into any part of the process, e.g. the design, collection of data and the analysis. It was only after I had the first meeting with my supervisors, who strongly encouraged me to bring both my academic involvement and my work on the ground as sources that would be analysed along with new research I was about to begin for the PhD. Therefore, I started thinking about the different ways that these diverse sources could inform my understanding of the field and what this would mean for the production of knowledge.

The result of bringing diverse experiences together spanning many years certainly includes the qualities of a longitudinal perspective but since the design I came up with did not include the same cohort of people (apart from one detention manager whom I interviewed three times) or any repeat interviews, nor was it designed as longitudinal from the outset, it needed another conceptual and methodological framework. Following the work of Karen O'Reilly (2012a), who described her ongoing work with British migration to Spain as 'ethnographic returning', I argue that the empirical chapters that follow present an ethnography of the Greek immigration detention system drawing on a number of return visits to the field and a lasting involvement with the field of confinement that I have always been fascinated by as I mention in the beginning of this chapter. As O'Reilly, beautifully writes 'this is not simply 'walking alongside' nor is it immersion; it is engaging, as people engage in anything, with part of who they are' (2012a: 521). In paraphrasing Leanne Weber (2018), who writes about her exploratory project on globalization and the policing of internal borders, in this long-term research project, I am 'taking the immigration detention system for a walk'.<sup>19</sup> This approach links my private and academic life and it springs from

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<sup>19</sup> In her chapter for the book 'Criminal justice research in an era of mass mobility', Leanne Weber, writes about 'taking the border for walk', taking from artist Paul Klee, who famously described drawing as 'taking a line for a walk'.

a desire to understand better an institution that I simply want to learn more about. By bringing together a decade of involvement with immigration detention from multiple positions, this chapter addresses the advantages and pitfalls of starting out an extensive research journey with a deliberately unfinished roadmap.

Below I briefly list the different research projects that are included in this piece of work, and in the following sections I address the practicalities and ethical challenges of my methods in action.<sup>20</sup> This dissertation draws on four distinct pieces of work and research. These include fieldwork inside the central detention facility in Athens with staff, detained people, and other stakeholders, two periods of work with Greek NGOs, ongoing research with colleagues at the University of Oxford on monitoring and safeguarding human rights in immigration detention, and interviews and observations with a wide range of actors in the community, including (former) NGO workers, activists, lawyers and academics. These pieces of work and research correspond to around 120 hours of fieldwork and observation inside detention, 70 semi-structured interviews with detained women, detention staff and managers, NGO workers, policy-makers, charitable and volunteer workers, activists and journalists, 14 months as a social scientist inside a Greek detention centre, more than 950 informal conversations with detainees and staff, and detailed fieldnotes.

This trajectory goes back to 2011, when I first entered the immigration detention field. As a research assistant for a project supported by the Oxford University Research Support Fund at the Faculty of Law as well as by the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship (led by Mary Bosworth and Sharon Pickering), I spent two months inside the central detention facility in Athens doing interviews with detained women, detention guards and other administrative officials and participant observation in the social and medical services section of the centre. This piece of research is weaved in throughout the empirical chapters. I particularly draw on the interviews I had with detention officers and other officials in trying to understand how staff make sense of the environment they work in.

In March 2012, I began working at the only NGO that offered psychosocial and medical care to detained people. Over 14 months I was mainly based at the airport detention facility

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<sup>20</sup> In view of good housekeeping and to avoid confusion about data originating from different periods, whenever I use quotes or fieldnotes, I put in brackets the year the interview was conducted or the year I took the fieldnotes and the location. When a quote or observation is signposted as 'diary', it means that I was not in a research capacity when I heard it or made the observation. Parts of previously (co)published articles that are reproduced are clearly identified.

but I had the opportunity to visit and work at all the detention establishments in the region of Attica. Continuing my role as an NGO practitioner at a different organisation and setting for another two years, further unmasked the inhumanity that is obscured in humanitarian assistance programmes for immigrants and refugees (Barbara Harrell-Bond, 2002). This rich experience has deeply informed my analysis and has been at the core of chapter 5, where I engage with the role of non-state actors in forming and nurturing immigration detention.

In 2016, I began as a research assistant at the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford, working inside the structures of the nascent research group, Border Criminologies, founded by Mary Bosworth.<sup>21</sup> From 2016 until 2019, I was involved with a wider project, led by Mary Bosworth and Hindpal Bhui, that focused on the issue of monitoring immigration detention in countries particularly affected by high levels of migration.<sup>22</sup> This project had three phases; the first was exploratory, trying to understand the political and migration policy context in each country visited, the way detention was used and the structure and history of detention monitoring. The later phases aimed to investigate the conditions in detention and the nature of human-rights based monitoring within detention centres through shadowing monitoring visits.<sup>23</sup> In doing so, this project involved multiple detention visits across Greece and following the work of Greek monitors. At the end of each project, all members of the team shared our fieldnotes with each other as a means to build conversations around each other's observations and reflections (Cury, 2015). The end result of this collaborative practice were the reports that have been published (Bhui et al, 2018; 2019). Insights from these projects inform chapter 4 that aims to explore the role of independent monitoring and its effects in safeguarding human rights inside immigration detention.

In October 2017, I started my PhD at Lancaster University. Under this role, and reflecting my unsuccessful attempt to acquire access to detention sites, which I will discuss later in the chapter, I had interviews with a wide range of actors in the community, including

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<sup>21</sup> I later became the managing editor of the Border Criminologies blog and also the manager of the network's website content and social media channels.

<sup>22</sup> The individual schemes, part of this general project, were funded by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account at the University of Oxford and the Open Society Foundations. The projects had ethical clearance from the University of Oxford's Research Ethics Committee.

<sup>23</sup> During the first phase, we visited Turkey, Greece, Italy and Hungary. The second phase focused on Greece and Turkey and the third included visits to Greece and Italy.

(former) NGO workers, activists, lawyers and other academics. Chapter 5 about the third sector in Greece and chapter 6 about resistance and activism around detention are the products of these methodological labours.

In her groundbreaking book 'Inside Immigration Detention', Mary Bosworth, wonders about what an interior view can contribute to our understanding of the institutions we are researching and writing about. Going inside, she says, 'illuminates parts of detention that we simply cannot otherwise see, filling in gaps in our knowledge. It challenges easy assumptions about the exercise of power, its effect, effectiveness and legitimacy, by considering how such matters are made concrete in everyday interactions and experiences' (2014: 53). The Greek immigration detention system is an opaque and confusing institution. Furthermore, it has rarely been academically explored. By considering this diverse body of knowledge as research, this thesis makes a unique contribution to the literature of immigration detention in Greece and abroad. Like Bosworth, I wished to understand from within, to explain not only what happens in this form of custody but what immigration detention means and how it is perceived. It is not surprising that incorporating many different participants, at various points in time, as well as merging in my experience as a practitioner has created a polyvocal result (Aitken, 2019). As a qualitative researcher I had to make sense of this labyrinth. My own approach has been to construct meaningful, insightful arguments about the persistence of immigration detention in Greece and situate them within a broad social and political framework. I have managed to do so, by adopting the perspective of ethnographic returning (O'Reilly, 2012a). As the thesis is based on a wide range of rich data, developed over time, and through many return visits, I was able reflexively to tell a story about the continuity of immigration detention in the country.

Far more importantly, though, these diverse experiences have not only made a PhD, but they have also inspired me to take direct action against the injustices I witnessed and am writing about here. Building upon this work and reflecting my ongoing involvement in the field I have been engaged with activist work that aimed to build counter narratives around immigration in general and detention more specifically. These several projects have as shared aims, to visualise the world of detention, make it legible to a lay audience, and work as tools with which detention can be challenged. More recently, working together with people on the ground and other researchers we have been building a database of human

rights violations occurring inside detention centres throughout Greece. More than 10 years, since I first entered the field, very little has changed in the way that people are treated inside the country's detention facilities. The analysis in this thesis is the culmination of my previous experiences. Yet, as I mention above, this is an unfinished roadmap and, below, I reflect upon the space that I hope this thesis can open, that of imagining a radical alternative.

### **Thinking about the research**

Saidiya Hartman (1997) opens her groundbreaking book 'Scenes of Subjection' by referring to the 'terrible spectacle' that introduced Frederick Douglass to slavery. This was the beating of his aunt, which he vividly recounts in his book 'Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American slave'. When I read this, it made me wonder about the 'terrible spectacle' that introduced me to immigration detention. Was it the first time I entered the field in 2011? Or the first time the airport door cells opened and I saw 12 men lying on top of each other? Or the first time I witnessed ill-treatment? While in this thesis I refer to many brutal scenes I experienced or saw, that could act as my introduction to the horror of immigration detention in my country, in reality, my moment of the terrible spectacle did not come until much later in the PhD process. Looking back on my project, it is striking how different the final product is compared to the original plan.

Although researchers strive for rigour and accuracy, research projects are rarely linear and straightforward. Indeed, ethnography is a practice that evolves in design as the research progresses. Similar to the PhD experience of Dominic Aitken (2019), who describes the path from his initial questions to the final write up as winding and diversionary, and much in line with most qualitative research that is characterised as emergent (Mason 2002) or iterative and inductive (O'Reilly, 2012b), the research questions that guided my writing were developed largely through speaking to people and observing them, as well as informal conversations about the research project that I could have included in the initial research proposal. As O'Reilly writes, 'one of the beauties of ethnographic research is that as you learn you ask more questions, and as you ask more questions you learn different things that send you off in different directions' (2012b: 183-184). This continual reflexivity and flexibility about my experiences in the field caused me to rethink my approach, my attitudes

and my understandings (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2010). Gonzalez-Lopez uses the term ‘epistemologies of the wound’ (2010: 569) as a way of theorising both her own lived experience, her experience of the interviews, and the ways in which her participants understand and share their experiences. This is how I strived to make sense of it all.

What seemed significant to me, as I was in the process of interviewing and having read a great deal of reports about the state of immigration detention facilities in the country, was the fact that there was such an agreement among different actors about the unfairness of the Greek immigration detention system. Yet, there seemed to be no tools available to try to understand better the inner workings of the system or willingness to change the status quo. In other words, if everyone thought detention sites were institutions marred by despair and dysfunction, then how could we explain their persistence and continuity through time? Drawing on my experiences I often wondered about the level of suffering I was exposed to. How can all this have been real? How can all this suffering have gone undocumented? Why is there not a public outcry about the life-threatening conditions that the authorities willingly put foreigners in Greece through? How can we account for state violence in a system that is constantly being monitored? It was with these questions that I began my research in earnest. As Ariana Markowitz argues in her article on methodology literature on emotion and trauma in social science research, ‘encounters with trauma can be edifying, fortifying us as researchers and as people as we strive to disrupt and dismantle violence’ (2021: 95).

Engaging with trauma in research and the broader set of violences that compose the Greek detention system have been instrumental in thinking about change. Moving away from a reformist approach, the final question that I grapple with throughout the thesis is ‘Can this type of research allow for the capacity to imagine and enact a radical future in immigration detention?’. This is also the question that I ended all my interviews with. Inspired by the conception of abolition as method that shapes and informs the thinking and practice of people struggling for an equal and just society (Gilmore, 2022), as I wrote in the introduction, I was able to explore detention outside a methodological and analytical conservatism, as well as write about it with a sense of hope. bell hooks writes of hope as a process ‘To live by hope is to believe that it is worth taking the next step.’ (hooks, 2003). Critical border studies as abolitionist methodology have the potential to foster transformation of harmful border control practices. However, in line with Ruth Wilson

Gilmore in her collection of her lifelong work on abolition (2022), abolition is a process, it cannot tell us what we have to do, but it can help us more towards envisioning and building a future that does not yet exist. As Mariame Kaba (2021) reminds us, abolition is as much about asking the right questions as having the right answers. In critically engaging with the Greek detention system, I hope I have asked the right questions.

## **Methods, data collection and analysis**

Below I set out the sources and methods I used for my research, describe the process of doing fieldwork inside and outside detention and how all this has informed my analysis.

### *Sources*

The stakeholders I interviewed did not just focus in the present but more than often spoke about their long-term experiences in the field, referring even to the beginning of the detention system. However, it seemed at a very early point in my PhD that if I wanted to understand the continuity of detention policies and practices, I had to find alternative sources of information. Yet, as I show in the introduction, the Greek academic literature on the issue has a very short time-span and does not contain ethnographic work. Therefore, in order to lengthen the time-span of the project I sought to review and analyse other materials too (Morawska, 2011). In addition to finding sources in academic libraries, I read the entire archive of the reports on visits by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture to police stations, border guard stations and detention centres, which date back to 1991. I also read voraciously publications by third sector organisations and large numbers of relevant policy documents and legislations.

As I was wading through all of this material exhaustively, I took notes, which I categorised in an excel spreadsheet. I divided this sheet by detention facilities and by region, e.g. borders, islands, inland. This categorization helped my analysis as it allowed me to identify patterns, commonalities and differences across the detention estate, but also typologies between the facilities that have been used in Greece over time. This exercise was also useful because I was able to classify changes over time, which led to a genealogical reconstruction of the history of immigration detention in the country (Campesi, 2020). The aim was to look at the evolution of the detention system not simply as the aggregate of practices but also as institutional segments governed according to different underlying philosophies and pursuing different objectives. In doing so, I have identified four distinct eras of

immigration detention in the country from its conception up to 2015. The collection, codification and analysis of this extensive material form the basis of chapters 2 and 3.

### **Fieldwork phases**

I undertook fieldwork in two phases. The first phase started in 2011 and included a set of interviews with detained women in the Petrou Ralli detention facility, detention officers, the manager of the centre, the social services at the detention centre and other administrative migration officers, as well as one month of participant observation. The second phase started in 2016 and it includes mainly a set of elite interviews with key stakeholders inside detention, detention managers, and interviews with (former) NGO practitioners. It further draws on a thorough examination of how human rights inside detention are monitored by official bodies.

At both phases, before I spoke to any interviewee or entered detention, the projects were approved by the Oxford and Lancaster Research Ethics Committees. To receive ethics clearance, I was required to summarise my research, indicate my prospective sample, and provide various draft research materials (e.g. interview invitations, proposed interview schedule, consent form, debrief form). As my research projects involved interviews with (potentially) vulnerable individuals, the main concerns were to ensure that all participants would give informed consent, that they would know their testimonies were confidential and anonymous, and that I would collect, store and use the data I gathered responsibly. Yet, as I will discuss later in the chapter, many of the ethical issues I faced when putting this project together and writing this thesis are beyond the scope of institutional review board procedures and protocols (Blee and Currier, 2011).

#### *Fieldwork in Petrou Ralli*

The first piece of research that the thesis draws on began in 2011 when I was employed as a research assistant for the Greek part of an international project that sought to examine women's decision making in relation to border policing, based on their testimonies. That project aimed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of unauthorised border crossing and its policing. Having had very little knowledge of the specifics of immigration detention and given the lack of academic research inside the country's detention facilities, I did not know how to 'get in'.

The central role of the police was clear to me from the outset. Through an NGO contact, I managed to reach the then secretary of the Minister of Public Order, under whose jurisdiction the detention centres lay. We discussed about the research and she was very enthusiastic about assisting me in obtaining research access, because as she put it, her “heart was aching for refugees”. Despite the focus of the research on border crossing and policing, she recommended that I should not ask to do research inside one of the border centres because the police were reluctant in opening these facilities to outsiders given the bad reputation of the centres at the time (Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010; 2014; Pro Asyl, 2007; 2012). Aware that an official denial would hinder my attempts, I followed her advice and asked to visit and research the Petrou Ralli detention centre in Athens. As she pointed out, Petrou Ralli was the largest detention facility in Athens, it was the only centre that accommodated women in the area and a large number of its detention officers had served at the border too. Finding high-rank officials who can ‘let you in’ seems crucial in research in such closed environments, especially when there is little information available about them. Rozakou (2019) describes a similar process when she was negotiating access to the Moria camp in 2015. As in her experience, official permission did come.

In the beginning of December 2011, I was crossing the gate of the Petrou Ralli facility in Athens, which was open since 2005. At the first meeting with the director of all detention centres in Greece, I explained my background and previous research experience, the purpose of my project. and stated how I would ideally spend my time in the centre. As Emma Wincup explains, ‘researchers should be explicit about the implications of the research for the setting and those who work within it’ (2017: 63). He seemed relatively comfortable with the prospect of me doing research inside the centre. However, this may not have been due to the plausibility of the accounts offered, but rather that he knew little about academic research. Access was granted on the loose understanding that I would do research for some time in the centre and I was afforded a significant degree of freedom to interview both staff and detained women. Thinking of this as a big opportunity and being a novice researcher, I hastily wanted to start interviewing people. Therefore, at the time I did not lay out how I would ideally spend my time or discuss any requirements I might have had. This meant that unlike most prison and detention research, my fieldwork started with interviews rather than participant observation. Together I formally interviewed 40

detained women, police officers and administrative staff and spend nearly two months doing participant observation.

After that first meeting, I was chaperoned by a police officer who gave me a tour of the centre. I was initially intimidated by the enormity of the building and its labyrinthine interior. *'This is a very different kind of place'* clarified the officer. *'This is not a detention centre'* he continued, *'it is a special holding facility for migrants. That's the official name and that's what we offer here'* (Fieldnotes, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). When we reached the second floor, where the detention part is situated (the women's section is on the third floor connected through an internal staircase), the officer stopped and asked me hesitantly whether I was ready for the experience. I nodded and he knocked on the metal door. The light green and yellow colour on the walls, the dirty floors, the stench of urine on the men's floor, the noise of doors banging or as officers shouted orders, and the stares of the women behind bars when I was walking through their area, made me feel extremely uncomfortable about my presence there as an uninvited observer.



Figure 5: The visiting area in the Petrou Ralli pre-removal detention centre

The following day I was feeling nervous. Fieldworkers often describe the shock of entering a new environment and their struggles to get to grips with ways of being that are unfamiliar or unsettling. I knew no one in Petrou Ralli, and as an outsider I expected to encounter some suspicion or hostility towards me. The sense of confusion, though, that detention researchers feel when they first arrive is not just a reflection of the difficulties of stepping into a new environment populated by strangers. Rather, it is an indication that these are important characteristics of the immigration detention estate itself (Bosworth 2014). In this case, the staff were polite and generally appeared eager to help. A young female detention officer, who seemed quite senior in rank, quickly assumed the role of my facilitator. As I would later find out, during my interview with her, she was well-known among migrants, even outside the centre, for being ‘one of the good ones’. As others who have done research inside detention have explained, being friendly with detention officers caused me anxiety as I worried the women would be less trusting of me (Bosworth, 2014; Gerlach, 2018).

Once inside, I was afforded a significant degree of freedom to conduct my research. Yet, unsurprisingly, there were many restrictions. Unlike UK researchers with access to detention centres, who were given keys to facilitate their movement around the centre (Bosworth, 2014; Gerlach, 2018; Aitken, 2019), I had to go through three different levels of security and multiple identity checks. In addition, in search of a private room to conduct interviews with the women, the officers on duty said that, for security reasons, I had two options; either the visiting area or the staff’s operation control office. As the former was out of the question for me because it would require speaking to the women through a stained glass (see figure 5 above), the latter was an uncomfortable and inevitable choice. It was a spacious office with no windows, with a couple of large tables, lockers where staff would deposit their staff and a CCTV system, from where the police could monitor what was happening in the detention wings.

The next issue that had to be dealt with was recruitment. To advertise the project, in accordance with my ethics clearance, I had information flyers with me and asked the police to distribute them to the women. They willingly did so, but Xenia, my self-proclaimed facilitator, assured me that no one would come forward. First, because they might not be able to read Greek or English (the languages of the information sheets) and second,

because they would be afraid to speak to an outsider. She proposed that I started with one of the women, who was on friendly terms with the other women and who also spoke Greek. This way she would go back to the cells and vouch for me after leaving the interview. While I was hesitant, Xenia was correct, and my discussion with this first woman indeed had a snowballing effect; an effect that an ethics protocol would not have accepted. As Alice Gerlach (2018) describes in her thesis about her research inside a women's detention centre in the UK, after the first day of interviews, women were asking to participate voluntarily. Some of the women also asked to bring their friends too so in some cases I interviewed them together. It quickly became apparent that many women were interested in participating in the project.

While the police's office might have distressed the women (at first at least), for the police officers this was a relaxing environment. In contrast to the detained women, the officers were open about their views from the start, the time they served at the border and their roles as detention officers in the Petrou Ralli detention centre. In fact, at times I wished they had not been so direct. Having to listen to their comments about the dangerousness of immigrants, failing cultures and even explicit stories about violence against those detained, was emotionally very difficult.

Interviews were semi-structured but often the shocking stories of women's journeys on their way to Greece, as the one described in the introduction guided the discussion. I concluded interviews by giving women a debrief form that included contact details for mental health organisations. I sought to build a representative sample of sorts, by speaking to women from different countries. However, in the absence of an interpreter, my discussions with Iraqi women, for example, who did not speak much Greek or English, were very short. Some women brought a friend with them, who could translate. I even put my language skills to use as I had some interviews with women from the Dominican Republic in Spanish. They were digitally recorded and then fully transcribed, along with my fieldwork diaries, and translated into English. In cases where our discussions were not recorded (two detention officers did not want to be recorded), I took written notes during the meeting and afterwards recorded my recollections of the person's testimony as fully as possible. I attributed pseudonyms to participants and created an excel file with basic demographic characteristics, where applicable.

### *Participant observation*

After I had completed the round of interviews, my supervisors advised me to explore the opportunity of doing participant observation in the centre. At a meeting with the manager of the centre, he declined for security reasons. However, he offered the alternative to spend time at the NGO social services. As I had interviewed them for the research, they were amenable to the idea. Yet, neither them, nor me knew how to go about it. The NGO Arogos, whose work inside detention centres is explored in detail in chapter 6, had at the time locally established teams in three detention centres, Petrou Ralli, Elliniko and Aspropyrgos. These teams were comprised by social workers, psychologists and doctors. In Petrou Ralli, there was one doctor, two social workers and a psychologist, assisted by a Farsi speaking interpreter. They had been offered two rooms by the police on the second floor of the centre, the men's section. The more spacious room contained two hospital beds, two desks and three large metal cabinets/closets, where medicine and NGO files were kept. The other room was much smaller and had a small desk and three or four chairs, where social workers would meet with detainees to talk about their cases. It also included a wooden bookcase with books and some children's toys as women were detained together with their children. On the floor lay a large pile of clothes, which had been donated to the NGO and from which detainees could pick what they needed. Outside the rooms was a small waiting area with cement benches where detainees, accompanied always by one or two detention officers, would wait for their turn to visit either the doctor or the psychosocial services.

I was there almost every day for two months (January-February 2012), observing the work of the NGO and their interactions with the detainees and the police. The sheer dedication of being there, hour after hour, day after day, is an important part of fieldwork. Researchers must prove themselves to research subjects in order to be accepted as an outsider-insider. Presence and persistence facilitate this hybrid status. So long as the researcher has a keen eye and is a shrewd observer of human behaviour, there ought to be a correspondence between the duration of fieldwork and the reliability of research findings.

During that time, I spoke to many detained people while they were waiting to see the doctor, police officers and had many conversations with the practitioners during their breaks. When the NGO staff were too busy, I volunteered to answer phones, help detainees choose clothes or even liaise with the police officers. However, I tried to remain

as distant as possible to avoid confusion about my role there. This became more pertinent when I would meet women or officers I had interviewed before, who questioned my presence there. To the officers, it meant that I had taken sides, against them. To the women that had participated in the study, it was unclear why I was still there and what the purpose of participant observation was. Nothing I observed was strictly speaking relevant to the theme of the research. Some days I was unsure what I was witnessing. Nevertheless, I spent my days taking notes of the silences, conversations, the relationships, the smells and the routines. I took notes while I was there but since it was not always easy, I often sat outside the detention centre or on the bus on the way home and reflected upon the day.

#### *Ethical considerations of fieldwork inside immigration detention*

Once inside, my identity as ‘the girl from the university’, was a mixed blessing. By emphasising my academic background, I leant authority to myself and projected a professional image, which were both very much needed in a male-dominated setting (Gurney, 1991). As Joan Gurney (1991) has written, to be a young female graduate student definitely affected my research experience in a male dominated setting (see also Bosworth and Slade, 2014). I was overtly exposed to sexism and experienced subtle forms of harassment, with some of the detention officers I interviewed suggesting we met for a coffee after their shift to discuss more about the theme of the research. I declined politely every time.

Being an outsider ‘expert’ positioned me in the field as a ‘phenomenological stranger’ with license to ask ‘dumb questions’ (Sparkes, 1994). However, my positionality also raised expectations that I would provide answers. On many occasions, detention officers would ask my opinion about the financial crisis and the migration situation in the country. In other instances, participants appeared to want answers about whether I thought their overtly racist ideas were ‘right.’ Bosworth and Kellezi (2016) and Gerlach (2018) found they were questioned in a similar way during their time studying immigration detention. As I have explained elsewhere (Fili, 2018), afraid that an honest response would taint their trust and hamper my access to detainees, I remained most of the times silent, nodding along, as I listened to them.

Over time, my silence, though became a great source of anxiety. I soon realised that my reactions in the field would be the lens through which the data would be generated (Woodthorpe, 2009) and through which my supervisors' interpretation of border control and immigration detention in the country would come. Reflections by research assistants are rarely found in social science literature and the impact the research may have on their lives is hardly acknowledged (Carretta, 2015; Caretta and Cheptum - Area, 2017). As the interviews were coming to a close, I wondered what implications instances like the ones mentioned above would have in terms of me succeeding further in academia. Would I live up to my supervisors' expectations? Was I being careful enough in the interview process? More importantly, if I did not speak up to defend detained women, why was I there? In raising these questions, I confronted my limitations as a research assistant and saw my own powerlessness to speak for those I interviewed.<sup>24</sup>

Interviewing women migrants inside the police control office, a theatre of state power (Hasselberg, 2016), was ethically challenging. Women seemed very suspicious of my presence at first. 'I don't want to be deported' they would say to me, implying that either I was police or that I had the powers to get them out of there. Issues of informed consent arose here. As Christine Halse and Anne Honey reveal about their research with anorexic teenage girls in a clinical setting, what is written in ethics applications about the voluntarism in consent is often an 'illusion of certainty' that cannot always be guaranteed (2005; 2148). To what extent could detained women exercise their agency when asked to participate in a project by the police? Could they perceive the space where interviews took place as coercive? And more importantly, could they speak freely about their experiences in close proximity to the police? While all women gave their consent (either verbal or written) and, thus, satisfied the ethics committees' requirements, this cannot be considered a panacea for the ethical difficulties of consent with vulnerable individuals (Halse and Honey, 2005).

It seemed that throughout my time in detention, the most important thing was to clarify who I was not (Aitken, 2019). In response to their fears, I would explain my role and repeat several times that I was not a police officer. This, though, often seemed sharply disjointed from their fear of police and deportation. When police officers entered the room, I stopped the interview and recording, until they left. This meant that in some cases our conversations were interrupted multiple times. To my surprise, the police never actively

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<sup>24</sup> For more on my reflections upon the issue of representation in criminal justice research see Fili (2019).

interfered with the interviewing process and at times I even forgot they were around (barring the loud voices and shouting at times). As I was there every day and made sure I dealt with issues of informed consent and confidentiality consistently, they eased to my presence and even volunteered to participate in the research after the first couple of days. My youthful appearance further made women more relaxed and more open towards me. Caring for my participants and being attendant to avoiding harm was an ongoing process. Thinking of research ethics as a continual process of collaboration opens up opportunities to dissolve the (mis)conception that ethics approval means ethical research (Halse and Honey, 2005).

While I sought not to retraumatize my research participants (Sikweyiya and Jewkes, 2012), the emotive stories of women and continued reflection upon the ethical implication of research in detention had rippling effects to my mental health. Given the lack of information about it and my lack of experience, I was rapidly overwhelmed. At the end of each day, I was exhausted. The lack of natural light for many hours on consecutive days affected my physical health. As soon as I could leave the field, I rushed with feelings of relief and excitement to the analytical phase of the project.<sup>25</sup> Somewhat optimistically, I assumed that committing women's words on paper would matter (i.e., make an impact) and make up for my silences while in the field. Yet as I sat in front of my computer screen re-reading my interview transcripts and fieldnotes about life inside a Greek detention centre, I had the nagging suspicion that the research and articles which would be produced drawing on it would be irrelevant to the women I interviewed. They would never read them, nor would the questions we asked and sought to answer be likely to affect their living conditions drastically. In line with other researchers who describe the transcription process as emotionally draining (Darlington and Scott, 2002; Warr, 2004), I too had strong emotional responses to some of the interviews that were challenging. Therefore, I often did my transcription in public places, mostly cafes, to avoid being alone. Compounding matters, most of my interviews had to be translated in English for my supervisors. This means that I had to listen and reread them numerous times.

The research may have been over, yet, it marked a turning point in my life. Working as a research assistant allowed me to save money, introduced me to a new field of confinement

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<sup>25</sup> Two articles have been produced drawing on this piece of research (see Bosworth et al., 2016; 2018). However, data from this has been used in my later work too (see Fili, 2018a; 2018b).

and reawakened a desire to become a scholar myself. However, after a traumatic previous experience in academia that left me with severe panic attacks in 2010, I could not make that step back to the academic world. At the same time, I could not leave the field. The ethnographic literature focuses so much on entering the field, replete with accounts of access, either giving prescriptive advice or describing the processes reflexively (Delamont, 2016). Leaving the field has received much less attention, both from an emotional perspective and a life course point of view (Caretta and Cheptum - Area, 2017). For me uncertainty prevailed.

In an era of mass mobility that entails so much human suffering, academic work often seems self-indulgent and somewhat removed from the immediate problems facing participants. Arthur Frank (2001) questions whether we can research suffering because it is not a concept but a lived reality that resists articulation. He writes, 'suffering is the unspeakable, as opposed to what can be spoken; it is what remains concealed, impossible to reveal; it remains in darkness, eluding illumination; and it is dread, beyond what is tangible even if hurtful.' (Frank, 2001, p. 355). As Mary Bosworth and Blerina Kellezi (2016b) have reported about their research inside detention centres in the UK, I, too, found it hard to reconcile myself to the aspirations of research participants for the research to make things better for them; their suffering I could not come to grips with. The guilt at being unable to help research participants is not uncommon (Dickson-Swift, et al., 2007; Lofland, 2016; Oakley, 1981). In the final throes of interviews one of the women said to me, '*I am happy to speak to you. You are very gentle. You help me forget my problem*' (Chioma, Nigeria). That some women felt better after discussing their experiences with me helped alleviate the guilt (Gerlach, 2018).

The growing methodology literature on emotion and trauma agrees that the emotional consequences of research are rarely discussed. However, hiding our emotions can constrain our ability of truly understanding what we are witnessing. As Markowitz eloquently argues, 'our fear, doubt, grief, rage, horror, and detachment, our shivers and shakes, and our paralysis and frenzy lay bare our humanity when we are confronted with the cruelty, despair, and suffering that humans can inflict on each other.' (2021: 95). In drawing back the veil on the emotional process of research, I demonstrate how the interpersonal and institutional contexts of research, as well as ontological and

epistemological assumptions embedded within analysis methods, can deeply influence research processes and outcomes.

#### *Fieldwork in the community*

My initial PhD plan was to do a restudy of the research I had conducted in 2011, i.e., interviews with detained immigrants and officers, and more importantly fieldwork inside detention facilities, with a focus on resistance.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as others have argued, my field emerged from the locations I was able to access and those I could not (Hasselberg, 2016). Unlike in 2011, when I was eased into the Greek detention estate, this time was different. My ethics application at Lancaster was reviewed and approved quickly, which allowed me to begin my empirical research nearly six months after I started. I emailed the Greek police with all the supporting material requesting to do fieldwork inside detention centres, including interviews with detained people and staff. I did not even receive a reply. I tried to peruse further into this through telephone calls but each person I spoke to directed me to someone else.

In analysing her access to migration governance sites in Greece, Rozakou (2019, p. 69) claims that reflections upon research access reveals ‘the ways in which sovereign power unfolds in its encounters with researchers who attempt to gain insight to the workings of oppressive and obscure migration regimes.’ In other words, our encounters with key stakeholders when ‘trying to get in’ (Rozakou, 2019), should be part and parcel of our analysis of state institutions. In this case, the denial of access to closed detention centres comes after a period, during which sites like open reception centres, camps and shelters were over-researched. The humanitarian crisis of 2015 transformed Greece and especially its borders into a topical and popular research field. In particular, Lesvos Island and the Moria camp became a ‘hotspot’ both as a new EU site of migration governance and as a hot research topic (Rozakou, 2019), as well as fed the media with many headlines that outlined the inhumanity of the camp. Under this context, I interpret this failed attempt, first, as a result of the research fatigue the authorities may have been experiencing. More importantly, this is another form of what the thesis describes as techniques through which immigration detention is insulated from outside threats. Rozakou (2019, p. 79) adds another angle to this by arguing that the visitor-researcher may not only be seen as a threat

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<sup>26</sup> I have been interested in the concept of resistance for a number of years and have written about it (see Fili, 2013).

that will expose the violence of institutions but ‘as a burden and somebody who merely uses valuable resources as she requires camp personnel to show her around.’

As other ethnographers urge, we need to normalize the productive place of failure in our fieldwork and within the neoliberal institutions most researchers operate in (Halberstam 2011; Harrowell et al., 2018). Rather than taking this failure as a block that could impede the research practice, I sought to engage with it and find ways to overcome it. Therefore, I shifted my focus to the outside world of detention (which was already part of my initial plan but not the focus). In the early stages of my PhD, I began compiling a list of potential interviewees in an excel spreadsheet, noting their relevance to the topic under study. In total, I sent out over 40 invitations to interview to policy makers, NGO staff, lawyers, activists, academics and journalists. My sampling was purposive because these particular individuals all had a spread of experience and expertise in the field of detention. As a result, my interviewees could shed light on different issues and offer multiple perspectives on a single question. In total I completed 21 interviews.

Unlike fieldwork inside detention, interviews in the community were more straightforward ethically. Apart from two interviewees that I knew from before, all participants were invited by email, which included information about me and the project. Interviews were simpler because I did not experience language and cultural barriers. Most took place in cafes and did not leave me repleted. Both my interlocutors and I seemed legible to one another. All interviews were semi-structured and recorded. While I had divided the interview schedule into certain themes, I also tailored the interviews to the expertise of each person.

As expected, though, in a highly politicised environment around migration and with a limited number of people working around detention issues, some of those I interviewed had concerns about being involved and repeatedly asked me to remove any identifiers. Aware of the effect this could have on their professional lives, when transcribing interviews, I took extra care to remove all identifying information. I gave each participant a pseudonym and although they did not have an issue with this, I decided not to mention the organisations they work(ed) at. As Aitken (2019) describes about his elite interviews, I also use generic titles for people (‘NGO practitioner, lawyer, etc).

Being let in the activist world was particularly challenging. Solidarity groups in Greece and anarchist groups operate in an aggressive political environment, where at best they are considered pariahs and at worst are persecuted for their beliefs. They are particularly wary of all media and most of them would not engage with them, at least openly. Approaching them for my research was not dissimilar to strategies used towards closed institutions. Again, contacts here were valuable. Through one of my good friends, who is involved with a number of open assemblies I got the email of one of her acquaintances. Following months after the first email and consequent message texts, we met at a squat building in Athens. In the beginning she was very cautious and suspicious. She explained to me their precarious position as a group and the number of dangers they would face if she openly spoke to me. As my friend had advised, I did not bring with me any of the consent forms but instead explained to her the scope of the project, offered my reassurances about confidentiality and anonymity and also expressed my allegiances to their struggles. Following verbal consent, we started the interview. She gradually felt more relaxed and at the end of the 3-hour interview she seemed satisfied with my approach and said she would speak about me and the project to her comrades. I ended up interviewing her another couple of times and further interviewed one of her good friends.

Fieldwork in the community offered me a distance from previous feelings of being too close to the field, as related above, and a chance to do ethnography ‘from nearby’ but not from the inside (Papataxiarchis, 2010). Through interviewing actors that they themselves kept a distance from detention by not having regular presence inside the centres, I was able to put to test my pre-conceived assumptions and observations about the detention system. In other words, I went into the interviews, clean, having made the already familiar ‘strange’, asking simple questions about the purpose of the detention system for example. What is more, by interviewing people I had worked with, I navigated the ethical slippery slope of basing my analysis entirely on my experiences, for I had the chance to triangulate the occurrence of incidents I was a witness of. In other words, I put into practice what Pierre Bourdieu (2003) calls ‘participant objectivation’, i.e., the process of questioning my own unconscious biases or prejudices. Furthermore, as research proceeded, I developed questions based on previous discussion or something another interviewee had mentioned. As with any research project, I thought I could have interviewed more people and was hesitant to stop fieldwork. My supervisors advised me to stop because they thought I had enough data to start analysing.

*Practitioner research or researching practice?*

The above may not have been straightforward ethically, but it is ethnographic research, most researchers who want to understand the social world engage with. What I explore below, is at once one of the elements that make this thesis unique, but also an ethical and methodological puzzle. For how can you define and analyse something that you did not know was researching at the time of practice? Practitioner research usually refers to research within ‘a professional field that is carried out by practitioners, who are personally involved with the professional practices, actions and activities of the field’ (Heikkinen et al., 2016: 3). This type of research is particularly popular in education, social work and applied sciences. While there have been some whistleblowers’ account from within immigration detention, especially in the Australian context (Essex, 2020), we know little about the life and work of NGO practitioners in these settings. Literature on the third sector inside detention worldwide is generally rare and it often involves critical accounts of the services offered (Briskman and Zion, 2014; Tyler, et al., 2014). While, due to the lack of access, some ethnographers have managed to enter detention through their usually (voluntary) work with service providers (Griffiths, 2013; Fischer, 2015), the accounts discuss the ethics of this involvement in passing. Autobiographical accounts are even scarcer (Boochani, 2019).

What I am describing below has been neither here nor there. It is not practitioner research because when I was a practitioner, I was not actively a researcher. The ethical concerns, though, are not dissimilar to action research (Heikkinen et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is not an autobiography as my account is more than about myself. Therefore, in trying to bring to life my experience of working inside the Greek detention system for 14 months, I had very little to turn to. First, I describe the experience, alongside the practical difficulties and then discuss the ethical implications of considering this as research.

I was part of a multi-disciplinary team, comprised of myself as a social scientist, a psychologist and a doctor. We visited the airport detention centre 5 days a week and were responsible for offering medical care and psychosocial services to all those detained in the centre. The NGO had been offering similar services to all the detention centres in Athens at the time, so they had a working relationship with the police. My role included completing the intake screening of all new arrivals to the centre. To do so, I used a form, the NGO

had created, that helped me collect information about demographic details, their journey to Greece, details about their arrest and detention, as well as their lives in Greece prior to arrest. It also recorded results from any psychological enquiry and medical screening.<sup>27</sup> During the intake screening, I would also record specific requests, such as any asylum claims.

Apart from the intake screening, though, we were there daily for the detainees. In theory, they could visit our office whenever they wanted. In practice, as this visit would rely on permission from the police, the obstacles were numerous, as I relay in chapter 6. Therefore, our daily communication with the detainees depended on the police shift. If the officers were more sensitive to the detainees' needs, they allowed these visits. If they were bored, tired or indifferent to requests from the people inside, they would leave them inside their cells for the entire 8hr police shift. Other than medical care, which was one of their basic needs, the detainees wanted to come to our office because it was their only way out of their cell. When we started working there, there were more than 120 people inside nine single or double occupancy cells. Going to the toilet, which was outside their cells, or visiting us was their only chance to walk and get some fresh air.

As a young practitioner, I began with humanitarian, albeit contested (Perkowski, 2016), ideals of 'saving' people in detention. As has been shown elsewhere (Slim, 2005, p. p. 2), 'ideals and idealism are frequently associated with excessive optimism, even naivety', to the point where they become unrealistic. Not long after my first days at work, a 'sense of realism' crept in born not only of self-knowledge but also of empirical observation of the world around me which gave few grounds for optimism that my work in detention would make a difference. Being exposed to the daily realities of a detention facility, which had the unenviable – albeit deserved – reputation as one of the worst in Greece, and not being able to help those behind the bars was paralysing. I became more cynical, which, over time, affected my efficiency and productivity. Indeed, no stories of harrowing border crossings, death and loss would shock me anymore. Moreover, I often questioned whether all this suffering was real. Did it honestly affect the person that was in front of me, or had it become the same standardised testimony I heard about every day? How can I tell if what I am listening to is true, I wondered? Such proximity to the field may not always be

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<sup>27</sup> See Annex 2 for a translated version of this form.

beneficial but may also blind to the most obvious and self-evident, yet most important aspects of life in the field (Papataxiarchis, 2010).

Feelings of burnout, disillusionment and compassion fatigue are common among aid workers, who work in distressing contexts and face increasing demands they cannot resolve (Cardozo et al., 2012); qualitative researchers encounter similar issues in the field (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). After a few months I sought to spend as little time in the centre as possible and went home every day feeling exhausted; I found it unbearable to be confronted with my own powerlessness in the face of so much hardship. Elsewhere, I have described detention centres in Greece as mazes which trap those within (Fili, 2013). To return to this metaphor, I want to argue that as mazes they often trap those working inside these institutions too. This trap echoes the anxiety of speaking for others (Alcoff, 1995), as practitioners are also constrained by the everyday realities of detention centres and the policing culture they have internalised (Fili, 2018). Although the impact of border controls on immigrants is well documented, little has been written about the implications of border restrictions on practitioners working with such populations. As Victoria Canning (2021) reports vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue are common among these workers. This, in turn, is reflected in the level of care they are able to offer. Practitioners, Canning (2021) argues, often alluded to a loss of faith in humanitarianism.

During my time at the airport detention facility, I had informal conversations with more than 950 detained immigrants. With some of them, I spoke in-depth about their lives in Greece and their dreams about their future. Most of them were young men searching for a better life in Europe. I also had informal interactions with around 30 detention officers. Although I was not there on a research role, it seems that I did not take my research hat off. When an incident or a remark struck me, I wrote it down in a notebook I always had with me. If I could not do it then, I would try to reconstruct the event or what was said when back at home. My notes cannot be considered fieldnotes in the strict sense. Instead, they were my attempt to navigate the system I was a part of. In a more radical parameter, by using these notes as research data, they honor a different understanding of immigration detention, one that brings diverse stories into the public arena to be acknowledged and witnessed. Relatedly, by including my experiences in the account I provide in this thesis, I see it as another way of resisting the harms of the system. As Dutta (2021) poetically reminds us through understanding the politics of alternative forms of ‘fieldnotes’, we enact

a form of witnessing that contends with and represents difficult questions that are hidden or forgotten.

Acknowledging the importance of my experience as meaningful data, does not resolve the ethical decisions and moral choices I made. These ethical considerations were continually renegotiated and lived beyond the life of my NGO work. As this piece of 'research' was not approved by any ethical review board, I was left with quotes I did not have the consent to use. Does this mean, then, that using them is inevitably unethical? Could I speak about my perceptions of actors, who did not know that they were research participants? While a positivist view of research would easily dismiss this as non-research, this is an ongoing ethical process for I have wrestled with the dilemmas and contradictions that emerge from researching in this manner.

I decided not to name the NGO that I worked at because my purpose here is not to target or expose the action of the employees or the leadership of the organisation. Instead through referring to a range of experiences, including mine, I aim to problematize first and foremost the role of non-state actors in a detention setting. Furthermore, I removed all the identifiers from people I interacted with and I quote as part of this. I have also sought to refer only to events that I was a witness of and not others that were related to me either by detainees and staff or colleagues. To take this further, in order to triangulate events, I wanted to include in my accounts, I actively tried to interview the people, who were involved or were there for me. In all cases but one, I succeeded. To do research where (former) colleagues are participants is to pay attention to the complex power relations inherent in such relationships.

Chapter 5, which heavily draws on these experiences, is not simply a critique of others. It places myself at the centre of the discussion and in no way do I hope to evade the criticism I extend to others. By bringing together the academic, the professional and the personal, I seek to make the project ethically reflexive. Navigating between multiple roles can be challenging both for a research design but also for the analysis, highlighting issues of trust and conflicts that may arise between researcher 'roles' and practitioner 'responsibilities' (Stacey, 1988; Gorman, 2007). As others have shown (Drake and Heath, 2010), as the analysis progressed, my different roles merged so that both research and practice informed each other in the pursuit of new knowledge.

### *Images as method*

Upon permission from the police, I was allowed to take images from two detention centres, the airport facility and Petrou Ralli.<sup>28</sup> This took place under the framework of our monitoring visits together with the Greek NPM, which possibly afforded us, the unknown researchers, some credibility and trust. These two largely obscure centres have never been documented in such a way before, so these images are a rare account of what these facilities look like.<sup>29</sup> After a presentation at a conference in Athens, where I showed some of the pictures, a lawyer, who had long-term experience in immigration detention, came up to me and thanked me because he had never seen the inside of the facilities he was visiting on a weekly basis. Of course, the images do not include the people who are subject to these conditions but I cannot exclude the possibility of them becoming a triggering effect for some readers.<sup>30</sup> Yet, this ‘digital walkthrough’ makes ‘these, often, secret lived realities more ‘real’ and less unknown.’ (Turnbull, 2015). As other academics, who have used visual representations as a form of documentation, argue, images are powerful tools to narrate stories and raise awareness but also serve as an embodied remembering of the spaces the researcher has witnessed (Turnbull, 2015; Esposito, 2015; Gariglio, 2018; Bosworth et al., 2020).<sup>31</sup> In the thesis, I use some of these images to offer a perspective on the interior of these establishments when I think this is appropriate for the reader.

### *Analysing data in hindsight*

While in the first phase of my research, I was barely aware of qualitative data analysis packages, during the second phase, I had heard so many researchers swearing by NVivo that I decided to take a course on it during my PhD. The course was useful and I could definitely see the benefits of using such an approach. However, the peculiarities of this research project made me quickly think that this would be ill-fitted for my purposes for three reasons. First, the volume of the material would make the task extremely time-

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<sup>28</sup> Images were taken either by myself or my colleagues Hindpal Bhui and Gabriella Morris. See Bhui et al. (2019).

<sup>29</sup> Ergon Eksivrisi (2007) and Iliadi (2015) have recreated in drawings the inside of these detention centres based on testimonies by people who have been detained or worked there.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion on ethical questions of visual methods see Carrabine (2012) and Batchen, et al. (2012).

<sup>31</sup> The Immigration Detention Archive, put together by Mary Bosworth and Khadija von Zinnenbrug, is a unique a digital and physical collection, of objects made in detention and documents about these sites of confinement. It currently houses several thousand pages of bureaucratic documents and 30 letters, 3000 photographs, 400 drawings and over 70 other art works and materials gathered during fieldwork and art workshops. More information is available here <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/immigration-detention-archive>. Material from the archive can also be found here, Bosworth, von Zinnenburg and Balzar (2020).

consuming. Second, this was not a linear PhD project but included research that was not even designed by me, and was a decade old, as well as experiences that I was even struggling to make sense of, as I explain above. Third, by putting diverse material and experiences into NVivo categories and boxes felt unnatural. Following Bosworth (2014), who took a similar decision when analysing her research data from immigration detention, I decided to follow a more natural anthropological approach. To begin with, I re-read old interviews, fieldnotes, and diaries from when I was working inside detention. Then I carefully read the new interviews. At that point I created 'loosely called coding strategies' (Bosworth, 2014: 82) and identified broad themes and patterns that included key words, like violence, fear, complicity, monitoring and resistance. As my writing progressed, I re-read all the available material numerous times and cut and pasted quotes and/or descriptions in separate files I had created for each chapter. Evidently, I may have missed important elements. However, this (un)systematic approach to the volume of material at hand, seemed reflective of the messiness of ethnographic research. Without a level of flexibility in the method of analysis, the tension of immigration detention cannot be grasped.

## Conclusion

Burying the messiness of qualitative ethnographic work, crafts an illusion that "good" research is being done by "good researchers." As I have argued, throughout this chapter, though, this is not representative of the life and struggles of a researcher behind the words that readers find on the screen or paper. Although this thesis draws on many sources, I do not claim to present the truth about the detention system in Greece. What is more, despite striving to make ethical decisions and moral choices throughout the PhD, I am aware this project is not ethically perfect. My account of immigration detention is a subjective snapshot of my positionality and the way that I have reflected upon them over the years (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). In bringing together a diverse set of experiences and a large volume of data, this thesis makes an original contribution to the literature on immigration detention, but also on qualitative research inside such environments.

This chapter has been an exercise in reflexivity, one that 'requires subjecting to critical and ongoing scrutiny the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and to consider how – in a variety of ways – this shapes the knowledge produced by the research.' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2020, p. 3). In this sense, this has not been an easy chapter to write, for it entailed openness and honesty about all the stages of the research process. What is more, the longitudinal aspect of this research project meant that I had to draw together

decisions, ethical issues and challenges that span a decade. As Karen O'Reilly (2012b, p. 526) argues this 'involves a reflexive awareness of one's own primary experience and how it might impinge on one's work'. More troublingly, a reflexive honesty accounted also for failings during the research. While I understand that this account might leave my or others' work open to challenge, I prefer to see it as a way of accounting for emotional choices and ethical failures. To imply that challenging encounters such as the ones recounted in this chapter do not happen is to ensure that novice researchers and practitioners are not prepared or equipped to face them. It hides emotionally and intellectually demanding components of our work in the field. I have, thus, taken to writing about my experiences in order to help make sense of them and what they might suggest for the role of academic scholarship and the third sector in places of confinement.

Ethnographically returning to the same field, understood broadly as the immigration detention system in Greece, but often to the same sites too, in this case the Petrou Ralli detention facility, has made it impossible to ignore social change and social processes at work. I have been able to experience immigration detention under four different governments, through numerous legislation changes, and influenced by the role of global developments, such as, *inter alia*, wars, sociopolitical emergencies, and the crisis of 2015. Despite the documented changes, my own ethnographic returning, drawing on a wide range of rich data, developed over time, and through many return visits has finally allowed me to process and document the continuum of immigration detention in Greece over the years (Fili, 2016); namely, the endurance of its extensive use in migration management and its unquestionable violent nature while employed in practice. The alteration of capacities in which I returned every time contributed to a blurring of here and there, attachment and distance, helping me to avoid uncritical and generalised observations (O'Reilly, 2012a). By referring to the roles I have used to approach detention, I do not claim a single vantage point or an authoritative voice but rather show my own implication in knowledge production (Mazzei and Jackson, 2009). This chapter, then, is intended as a roadmap through which the rest of the thesis can be read.

## Chapter 2: The hidden history of immigration detention in Greece (1990-2010)

*'We had them caged because there were no detention centres there yet. We had built a fence around them in order to keep them there. And for a toilet we had dug out some holes because there was nothing else'* (Police officer, 2012).

### Introduction

This chapter asks readers to picture Greece not by its acclaimed physical features, mountains, rivers and scenic islands, or by its ancient glorious past, but by its contemporary experiences in receiving immigrant populations. If we understood the pain, desperation and anxiety suffered by several groups of people as part of a historical cycle of racialised immigration controls, would we still focus our attention on the summer of 2015, when nearly 1 million people entered Europe through Greece, and its consequences? (Clayton and Holland, 2015).<sup>32</sup> While not denying the seismic securitisation that followed the political and humanitarian crisis in Europe in 2015,<sup>33</sup> this chapter seeks to situate current practice in a longer historical context of border control policies in Greece and Europe that had already been well-rehearsed in border enforcement and immigration law, as well as detention and deterrence policies and practices dating back to the beginning of the 1990s (Voutira, 2013; Karamanidou, 2015). As Anna Carastathis et. al (2018, p. 35) pointedly argue 'constructing the "refugee crisis" as a sudden event with a determinate historical beginning—like a natural disaster—enables the histories and trajectories of forced migration over the past three decades to be forgotten, and the precarity to which "illegal immigrants" (as they were castigated in dominant discourses) were subjected in Greece'.

The map of Greece that emerges from this chapter, then, is one of rivers full of dead bodies, mountains where people lose their way to freedom and prison islands where the loss of dignity overpowers hope. This picture may not be in line with the sense of pride

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<sup>32</sup> Michaela Benson and Chantelle Lewis (2019) make a similar point about Brexit and everyday racism in Britain and Europe. They claim that Brexit should not be considered as a rupture but rather just as another case of everyday racism, personal experiences of racialization and racial violence, and longer European histories of racialization and racism

<sup>33</sup> While what occurred in Europe after 2015, when more than 1.25 million refugees arrived at the borders of the European Union, has been broadly termed as a refugee crisis, I agree with authors, like Bojadžijev and Mezzadra (2015) and Afouzenidis et al. (2017), that the frame of a 'refugee crisis' puts the emphasis on people on the move and opens up the space for the production of specific types of subjects, at the same time as it diverts attention from the fact that the events that followed the summer of 2015, were in fact a crisis of European migration policies. See also De Genova and Tazzioli (2016) on the abuse of the term crisis.

that accompanies the idea of Greece as the cultural cradle of the world; yet it is part of the country's history. As a wall inscription in a detention centre on Lesvos seamlessly summarised 'the truth may be bitter, but it must be told' (Pro Asyl, 2007, p. 5).

Modern Greece has been defined with the absence of migration history despite large scales of emigration from the country for nearly 100 years.<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, Greekness is associated with persistence and continuity in space and time; thus, imagining modern Greece as an eternal and immobile space (Hamilakis, 2007; see also Triandafyllidou and Veikou, 2002).<sup>35</sup> While this national narrative 'resonated very well with proliferating nationalistic, xenophobic, and racist sentiments within Greek society', it would be inevitably challenged by immigration and ethnic diversity (Lefkaditou, 2017, p. 335).

The challenge became ever more apparent at the beginning of the 1990s, when immigration from neighbouring countries and the former Soviet Union acquired a more visible presence in Greek social life. Accusations of immigrants being "untrustworthy," "lazy and deceitful by nature," or "lazy and less intelligent than Greeks," quickly gained ground, drawing their justification from both racial and cultural explanations with references to cultural inferiority, poverty and backwardness connected to immigrants' homelands (Lawrence, 2005, p. 328).<sup>36</sup> In fact, the wealth of unapologetic racist discourse in the 1990s was unlimited and came from every aspect of the political spectrum. This was further nurtured by the Greek media, which provided the stories 'used to shape and naturalise Greek nativist racism' (Lawrence, 2005, p. 328). Such xenophobic responses were deeply rooted in absolutist views of the essential purity of the "Greek race", a sense of pride and superiority in the strength of a particular ethno-national culture, religion and language that has allegedly remained unspoiled for more than 2,000 years (Christou and King, 2006).

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<sup>34</sup> Emigration from modern Greece dates back to the beginning of 1900s, when an estimated 420,000 left for overseas destinations, mainly the US (Fakiolas and King, 1996). During the post-war period and largely until the end of the military dictatorship in 1974, there was a more intense exodus, partly due to the socio-economic and political situation of the country. According to available statistics, it is estimated that around 1.4 million people, 1 in 6 of the Greek population then, migrated to countries like Germany and Australia (Christou and King, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> In 'The Nation and its Ruins', Yannis Hamilakis (2007) analyses the complexities of the Greek national imagination and how the key presence of the classical past in Greek national imagination has become naturalised and banal.

<sup>36</sup> See also Lefkaditou (2017) who maps the different ways that race and racism operate in Greece.

Against this context, the pressure of an external threat, lay dormant beneath the veneer of Greek homogeneity and the image of Greek time and space as a continuum, swiftly transforming migration into a security issue against which the country needed to be protected (Karyotis, 2012). The concept of fortification, i.e., a war tactic, which describes the policy design that followed, is also shown by the terminology used. For example, operation ‘Shield’, whose main purpose was to control and deter irregular arrivals by strengthening the physical presence of patrol officers at the Greek-Turkish land border (Angeli et al., 2014). As Georgios Karyotis (2012, p. 397) explains in his work on the securitisation of migration in Greece, ‘the institutional configuration during the 1990s demonstrated a high degree of militarization, through which the police and even the army emerged as key actors in Greek migration policy’ (Karyotis, 2012, p. 397; see also Huysmans, 2006).<sup>37</sup> In stark opposition to these xenophobic logics, this chapter aims to ‘puncture the narcissistic justifications’ (Tyler, 2013, p. 76) of the Greek state and attest to ways in which the relentless dehumanization and invisibilisation of others are central to feeding the Greek ‘deep state’ (O’Niel, 2017); the main apparatuses of which, the military and the police, were central in outlining the contours of the Greek detention regime in the first place.

The following focuses on two main eras of detention policies; first, the period from 1990 to 2000, which rarely is accounted for, and second, the period from 2001 to 2009, during which the detention estate was firmly established. Through providing details about the initial disjointed phase of governing migration in Greece from 1990 to 2010, I explore the underlying foundations upon which the detention estate of today was built at the same time as referring to distinct eras marked by legislation changes, the shifting of entry points, and other socio-legal developments. The few accounts of immigration detention in the country rarely adopt a historical perspective and seem to take as a starting point the period after 2010, when detention undeniably became a key measure for policing migration (Angeli et al., 2014); coinciding with heavier involvement by outside actors, such as human rights organisations and NGOs offering services to detained people and thus more monitoring of the reality behind bars.

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that Greece is still one of the few remaining Western nations to have mandatory military service for men.

This means that the period before 2010 remains somewhat of a mystery, partly because of lower numbers in detention and partly due to the intentional policy of keeping detention spaces ‘unofficial’ and those detained inside them shielded from outside contacts to divert accountability in the face of institutional culpability, complicity and crisis. Therefore, this chapter performs the political task of documenting the long-hidden history of immigration detention in Greece to form the construction of a ‘hypervigilant anti-racist remembering’ (Nayak, 2017, p. 8).

The analysis is based on official documents available on public access. In the absence of research into those early years, I found that monitoring reports by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, whose mandate includes visits to any places within a state’s jurisdiction where persons are deprived of their liberty by a public authority with a view to examine the treatment of such persons and make recommendations, provided a rare window into the hidden workings of Greece’s first detention facilities. The analysis further turns to other reports by human rights organisations, policy analysis and ethnographic material to draw out hidden or forgotten accounts of immigration detention and provide a critical examination of the actions of Greek governments and the authorities, which managed those early detention spaces.

### **Responding to the ‘shock’ of immigration (1990-2000)**

Greece did not transform into a destination country for migrants overnight. As Nikolinakos (1973) observed, from the 1970s’, large-scale emigration and the capitalist restructuring of the country led to the ‘import of Africans’, who were employed in different sectors, soon followed by returning emigrants of previous periods. By 1986, there were also more than 19,000 Asian foreign workers in Greece (Fakiolas and King, 1996). Their small numbers and their low visibility in large city centres, as they were either employed in agriculture or as domestic helpers and nurses, can explain the absence of a public outcry similar to the ones that followed.

The right-wing government, formed after the 1990 election, was particularly concerned with issues of political (in)stability and ethnic conflict in the Balkans fearing large-scale economic migration. More importantly, the ‘Macedonian question’, as has the dispute

about the name of the newly found neighbouring state been termed,<sup>38</sup> led to the rebirth and institutionalism of a wide and aggressive nationalist rhetoric, which presented migrants as an imminent threat to the national cohesion and political stability (including the stability of the borders) of the country (Triandafyllidou, 2009; Christopoulos, 2014). Moreover, as King et al. (1998) observe in their analysis of the circumstances surrounding the mass departures from Albania of the early 1990s, the collapse of local economic structures and social welfare in Albania fed a demand for cheap labour in the agricultural and construction sectors of the Greek economy.

The first large scale immigration from Albania at the beginning of the 90s was represented in the media and anchored in the collective memory, as (yet another) invasion from the barbaric other. Martin Baldwin-Edwards (2004, p. 51) frames the insecurity that the mass exodus from the neighbouring country has produced as 'a fear of Albanians'. The numbers of people who crossed the 280 kilometers long mountainous borderline between Albania and Greece were so high that this has been described as one of Europe's largest contemporary migrations, both in its size and its concentration over a very short period of time. For example, between 1991 and 1993, around 300,000 Albanians migrated to Greece. By 2001, 55.6 per cent of the documented immigrant population in Greece came from Albania, making Greece the only country in the EU with such a large percentage of a single ethnic group (Nikas and Aspasia, 2011).

At the same time as communism in Albania was taking its last breaths, the naïve myth of the absolute national and religious uniformity of the Greek society was collapsing too. While, as research overwhelmingly shows, the public was bombarded by near-hysterical reports in the mass media, which constructed the stereotype of the 'dangerous Albanian' and amplified public feelings of xenophobia, the Greek government was equipped only with an antiquated immigration law, which went back to 1929, to respond to immigration (Antonopoulos, 2006; Baldwin-Edwards, 2004; Lazaridis and Wickens, 1999).

The new legal document 1975/1991 'Entrance-exit, sojourn, employment, expulsion of aliens, determination of refugee status and other provisions' signaled the first phase of

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<sup>38</sup> It was the *Republic of Macedonia* then and following an agreement in 2018, the country's name changed to *Republic of North Macedonia*. For an analysis of the issue of the 'Macedonian question' as well as the response of the Greek government to the neighbouring country's claims to what the Greeks deemed 'their' national heritage, see Roudometof (1996).

modern Greek immigration policy.<sup>39</sup> The law, which was drafted by the Greek police, was predicated upon the belief that ‘illegal immigration’ (λαθαρομετανάστευση), as it was referred to in the text, is a social problem that can be deterred and *must* be controlled. As mass immigration in the 1990s was becoming a phenomenon the Greek state was forced to deal with, the response was the hasty design of a new law as a knee-jerk reaction in willful ignorance about why people migrated in the first place (King et al., 1998).

This approach framed immigration as a matter of public order and (internal) security. Indeed, the new law announced the creation of new special police teams to ‘fight illegal migration’ (article 5).<sup>40</sup> Unlawful entry, residence and employment were criminalised setting the ground for what would later become a longer list of ‘undesirable aliens’ (article 11). As Hindpal Bhui (2016) has argued about a different context, underpinning migration policy in those early years, then, was a moral panic about enemy migrants. By making deterrence the guiding principle of immigration law and policy, the government provided the ideological space in which racism became culturally acceptable. Compounding matters, as Baldwin-Edwards (2004) points out through an outline of policy measures by the Greek state, the absence of a clear political strategy, though, left ample room for arbitrariness and discretion in policy implementation (Liebling, 2000). More specifically, it gave the police carte blanche to manage the ‘migration problem’, in their own terms.

This new legal framework makes little mention of administrative detention measures; yet, it provided for the detention of deportable aliens in cases of risk of absconding and public order (Article 27) and until the completion of the return procedure. The assumed temporariness of the arrivals put the emphasis on arresting and deporting the alien other through the infamous ‘sweep operations’ that would become a prominent feature of border control in forthcoming years. For example, according to an analysis of statistical data on immigrants in Greece, the expulsion of foreigners to neighbouring countries, most predominantly to Albania, has been massive in scale, creating a continuous exchange of populations between the two countries (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2004).<sup>41</sup> The strict legal framework and the ensuing criminalisation of entry, exit and working undocumented

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<sup>39</sup> For the link, see Law N° 1975/1991 [in Greek].

<sup>40</sup> It was not before 1998, however, that the police division of border guards was established, with their role limited to preventing the unlawful entry of foreigners to Greece, their detection and arrest. I address their role in more detail in chapter four.

<sup>41</sup> Baldwin-Edwards (2004) argues that for a large number of these expulsions, which the Ministry of Public Order termed as re-directions, there was no legal basis. Furthermore, in some cases, these expulsions were often a reprisal against Albanian policies towards Greeks in Albanian territory (Baldwin-Edwards and Fakiolas, 1998).

created a group of offenders that would start slowly but steadily filling up the country's criminal justice institutions.

### *Hiding and obscuring migration*

Very little is known about administrative detention practices during this time but it can be safely said that administrative detention of aliens was limited to small numbers. However, this is by no means a period of no significance to the development of the detention estate. By 1999, there were 550 foreign nationals detained in police establishments in the region of Attica alone. What is more, foreign nationals accounted for 47 per cent of the total prison population (CPT, 2001c), demonstrating from very early on how the architecture of legislation and the institutions of criminal justice and border control conspired and coalesced to exclude some people in the country, as has been shown in other contexts (Bosworth, 2019; Aas, 2020). Therefore, while detention was not the main aim of immigration policy during 1990-2000, immigrants were confined in various low-visibility spaces across Greece.

The duration, the place and the conditions of detention are not specified in the 1991 legislation. As a result, detention operated in a default state of secrecy and was rarely subject to external monitoring. There were, likewise, few independent organisations which would deal with issues faced by immigrants, let alone support those in detention. The Greek Ombudsman, for example, was founded in 1998. One of the few sources of information during this first phase of detention is the reports of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) that visited and monitored conditions throughout Greece. The CPT made three visits during the period of 1990-2000, two periodic in 1993 and 1997, and an ad hoc one in 1999 'required by the circumstances' due to disquieting findings concerning the conditions under which foreign nationals were being held during the first two visits and the inadequate nature of follow-up reports by the Ministry of Public Order.<sup>42</sup>

Until 1993, there were no specific establishments for the detention of aliens. Instead, foreign nationals were held for extended periods of time in police stations, sometimes for

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<sup>42</sup> It also made an ad hoc visit in 1996 but it only concerned a mental health institution (CPT, 2001a).

as long as 10 months (CPT, 2001c). Severe overcrowding in police stations is a recurring finding in the Committee's reports. Often the detainees had to sleep in chairs, in corridors or had to fight to get a mattress. Police facilities were in general very dirty, infested with parasites and dilapidated with severe lack of means for enabling persons in police custody to maintain their personal hygiene. None of the places the CPT visited possessed the necessary facilities to enable detainees to take exercise in the open air. Instead, the Greek authorities claimed, 'there is a daily schedule for the detainees to get out and spend time in the spacious corridor of their wards' (CPT, 2001b, p. 18). The situation prevailing in all police establishments were often qualified in CPT reports as inhuman and degrading. For example, during the CPT's first visit to Ellinikon Alien's Holding Centre, the delegation observed people sleeping on mattresses on the floor and that they had no access to outdoor exercise. Three years later, and despite assurances from the Greek authorities that these lacunae would soon be remedied during a second visit to Ellinikon, the CPT delegation discovered that mattresses were still placed on the floor, sanitary facilities were in poor state and hygiene products were not in stock (CPT, 2001c).

The image of the 'primitive Albanian', that was so fervently evoked in media representations and accounts by border guards of uncatchable animal-like creatures, as King et al. (1998) implied in their biographical account of one migrant's journey from Albania to Athens, were used to justify their inhuman treatment. This applies equally to the Greek police intent on expelling them and to Greek employers determined to exploiting their labour, asserted Gabriella Lazaridis (1996) in her attempt to record the experience of Albanian migrant labourers in the country. The below excerpt from CPT's report after a visit in 1997 of the Ioannina Centre for 'Illegal' Immigrants, which was used to detain Albanians before they were transferred back to the other side of the border is particularly telling in revealing how deep-seated was the belief of this particular nationality as an inferior underclass.

*The foreign nationals were kept in an unfurnished room measuring about 16 m<sup>2</sup>, in which they paddled around in several centimetres of murky water containing various forms of rubbish. The water came from the adjacent primitive toilet (consisting of an opening giving directly onto the canalisation system), which had been blocked up with the aid of plastic bottles to prevent rodents from passing through. The smell in the room was quite simply appalling and it swarmed with insects. In addition, there was no access to running or drinking water; the former had apparently*

*been cut off because the bills were too high. Although the room had access to natural light, there was no artificial lighting. Further, there was no glass in the windows and no heating system for the winter.’ (CPT, 2001b, p. 26).*

In a similar fashion in 1999, following a surge of migrant arrivals from the Middle East through the Greece-Turkey land border, two border guard stations, in Alexandroupolis and Orestiada, were set up for arresting and delivering to the relevant police station those irregularly entering Greece. In practice, people arrested crossing the border were detained there for indeterminate periods in facilities resembling ‘human dumps’ (CPT, 2001c, p.15). ‘*We had them caged because there were no detention centres there yet. We had built a fence around them in order to keep them there. And for a toilet we had dug out some holes because there was nothing else*’, a high-ranking police officer, who had served at the border, described to me detention at border locations in those early years.

Most importantly, these facilities can hardly be described as official detention centres. Indeed, people confined there were often not formally registered. As the police officer in charge of the transitional detachments audaciously reassured the CPT delegation, ‘he reported orally all information to the Police Directorate in Alexandroupolis’ (CPT, 2001b, p. 20). A deliberate ‘informality’ which laid the ground for future practices of pushbacks with the blessings of the Ministry of Public Order. As Lena Karamanidou and Bernd Kasparek (2022), highlight in a recent article, the practice of pushbacks is an enduring feature of the Greek border regime that goes back even to the late 1980s.

In his edited collection about xenophobia and racism within the Greek state apparatus, the Greek police admitted that, Dimitris Christopoulos (2014) revealed that when called to manage migrant detention spaces, they were forced to ascertain the responsibilities of the state without the necessary prerequisites and preparation. Therefore, without absolutely any education or training, scant legal or policy frameworks, or institutional structures about how to manage migrant populations and with a latent racist and right-wing extremist ideology in the DNA of the organisation, the police invoked, from its institutional memory, practices which had either ceased to exist or were, up until now, dealt with as isolated incidents; that is the severe abuse of confined populations.

In 1993, the CPT delegation referred to a large number of persons who alleged they had been ill-treated while in police custody, including with the use of wooden sticks, batons, baseball bats and electric shocks; objects which the delegation found in police offices (CPT, 1994). The following two reports reveal that beatings, concerning punches, kicks and slaps, by custodial staff, corroborated by medical evidence consistent with allegations of recent physical abuse, continued (CPT, 2001a and 2001b).

Despite the sheer number of allegations of abuse and their consistency, the Greek authorities were adamant that there was no systematic torture or inhumane treatment of migrants (CPT, 1994). The Ministry of Public Order claimed that the legal framework for the protection of human rights was sufficient in protecting migrant detainees' rights. Further, it was argued that while there might be some isolated cases of abuse by "rogue" police officers, most claims were simply fabricated 'by the detainees in order for their time of detention until deportation to be shortened' (CPT, 2001c, p. 11). According to the official account, there is simply no ill-treatment of detainees by law enforcement officials in Greece. It is impossible. Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that out of 163 complaints of ill-treatment between 1996 and 2000, only 15 per cent resulted in the imposition of disciplinary sanctions following an internal administrative investigation (Amnesty International, 2005). Arguably, the police in detention made real the core of the power of the state. This is what Micol Seigel has termed as 'violence work', a concept which should not imply that police officers are bad people, but simply that their labour is 'undergirded by the premise and the promise of violence' (Seigel, 2018, p. 12). While divesting migrants of human qualities has facilitated the perpetuation of suffering inside detention places, discrediting or hiding the harm caused allowed perpetrators, as well as external observers, to remain physically and temporally remote from suffering and its effects; thus, effectively erasing their existence (Bandura, 2002).

It seems that while the media and political attention had been focusing on the historically charged Greek borders, creating near hysterical responses about migrants as dangerous invaders and ticking health bombs (Dalakoglou, 2013; Karyotis, 2012; Lefkaditou, 2017), a much longer history of abuse by Greek authorities inside these borders had been obscured. The assumed temporariness of the arrivals and the peculiar insularity of police practices and facilities meant that immigrants were simply warehoused in makeshift places, hidden away from the rest of the world.

In line with Bandura (2002) on selective moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency,

By the end of this formative era of Greek immigration detention, the Greek detention regime had formed its defining characteristics of cruelty infused by racist ideas about the migrant other. Near the end of 2000, there would be three operative facilities specifically for aliens and plans were made to construct appropriate facilities at the seat of every Police Directorate, including buying a building of 9,000 m<sup>2</sup> (with a capacity of 468 persons) to house the Aliens and Transfer Centre in Attica (what would later be called the Petrou Ralli detention centre). This facility, the Government claimed, would offer 'a comprehensive solution' of the problems cited by CPT in its reports (CPT, 2001c, p. 17). However, as it would be sorely proven later, the deep political addiction to controlling and confining migration left the fundamental harms of detaining immigrants masked and unresolved. The situation inside detention facilities would soon only become worse.

### **Building the detention estate (2001-2009)**

On 15 March 2011, the CPT made a public statement concerning Greece, due to 'the persistent lack of action to improve the situation in light of the Committee's recommendations, as regards the detention of irregular migrants' (CPT, 2011, p. 2). But what had happened before that? The public statement was preceded by 10 delegation visits (between 1993 and 2011) and subsequent calls for action to protect the human rights of detained non-citizens, as well as a large number of human rights reports documenting the squalid conditions in the country's immigration detention establishments. This section aims to unravel what led to the CPT public statement and cast light on the era during which the Greek authorities started building the detention estate.

#### *A new phase in immigration law?*

On March 6 2001, the European Court of Human Rights convicted Greece for violations of article 3 and 5 of the Convention (Dougoz v Greece, 1998). More specifically, the court considered that 'the conditions of detention of the applicant at the Alexandras police headquarters and the Drapetsona detention centre, in particular the serious overcrowding

and absence of sleeping facilities, combined with the inordinate length of the period during which he was detained in such conditions, amounted to degrading treatment contrary to Article 3' (Council of Europe-European Court of Human Rights, 2001, p. 9). This would not be a unique incident throughout this new era of the Greek detention regime. As has been documented by Sappho Xenakis and Leonidas Cheliotis (2018) in their analysis of Greece's engagement with the European Convention of Human Rights, the state's persistent failure to improve detention conditions would be subject to a long series of convictions, reports and outcries.

In response to these kind of criticisms in May 2001, the Greek parliament adopted its first comprehensive immigration law, 2910/2001 'Entry and Residence of Aliens in the Territory of Greece. Acquisition of Greek citizenship by naturalisation and other provisions' as a means to modernise and harmonise with the European framework. The main change brought by the new legislation was the transfer of immigration management from the Ministry of Public Order to the Ministry of Interior, i.e., from the Police to regional administrative organs. It also foresaw the establishment of a new Directorate of Aliens and Immigration.

Yet, hopes that the rationale of the law would bring a new focus on issues, such as the humanitarian conditions of detention and the legal rights of migrants were short-lived. It was rather concentrated on a 'short sighted regulation of migration' through restrictions, as Anna Triandafyllidou comments (2009, p. 166). Nikolaos Sitaropoulos (2002b) further points out that the prevalence of the Greek police in immigration decision-making has indeed led to a one-sided view of immigration management, that of policing and deterrence at all costs. This, he adds is the 'outcome of the persistent lack of specialised knowledge on the part of the competent decision-making authorities, which is compounded by an administration characterised by chronic centralisation and inefficiency' (Sitaropoulos, 2002b, p. 1; see also Skordas, 2002).

Law 2910/2001 imposed, for the first time, a three-month limit on detention of foreigners awaiting removal. The law also stipulated that detention orders can be the subject of judicial review and that appeals against removal orders entail their suspension. It also provided that foreigners are to be detained in the premises of the local police, until the regional Secretary General establishes special premises for that purpose (art. 48); thus,

pushing for the expansion of the detention infrastructure. The responsibility for detention facilities was divided between the region (health care), the prefecture (buildings, furnishings, hygienic products, etc.) and the police (custodial duties). This splitting of responsibilities created a number of coordination issues, leaving, as a result, most detention centres without any medical staff or the appropriate furniture (CPT, 2006).

Given the ‘delayed and elliptic attempt to move towards a modern immigration policy framework’ (Sitaropoulos, 2002b, p. 2), as early as four years later, in 2005 a new immigration law, 3386/2005 ‘Codification of legislation on the entry, residence and social integration of third-country nationals on Greek territory’ was passed; again, this should not be mistaken as an attempt to overhaul the government of migration but rather responded only to legal requirements needed to incorporate the relevant European law into national law, changing very little for immigrants’ daily struggles.

Law 3386/2005, amended in 2009, increased the maximum detention period to six months with the possibility to detain someone for twelve months in cases of non-compliance to the deportation procedure. Lacking or not showing valid documents, detainees became effectively undeparable. This could also be due to administrative mistakes and for practical and economic reasons. Authorities may be unable to identify the person to be removed or migrants may be lacking proof of identification. A Frontex officer I interviewed in 2011 told me that ‘giving false evidence is a plague’ with which Greek authorities struggle, as foreign diplomatic missions may not collaborate to identify their nationals. Article 81 of Law 3386 foresees the development of special facilities for aliens (Ειδικός Χώρος Παραμονής Άλλοδαπών, ΕΧΠΑ, in Greek) and that all decision making with regard to detention centres, including the terms of operation, would be taken at the national level, i.e., the central government.

Until the end of 2010, however, there would be no minimum operating standards for running any of the detention facilities. As a consequence, the police remained in charge, alone. Most troublingly, evidence from the time, suggests that in practice the period for which individuals were detained varied greatly and was determined by the respective police authority concerned, influenced by a hierarchy of deservingness, that, in turn, reflected the national and political situation in the migrants’ countries of origin (Borrelli and Lindberg, 2018). For example, in 2007 on the island of Samos, the police were detaining all irregular

migrants for three months, apart from Afghanis and Somalis who were detained for two weeks; reflecting their deportability due to the turbulent situation in their countries. A similar practice was observed on Lesvos; Afghans were detained for a couple of days while the rest were held for 30 days (Pro Asyl, 2007).

Many were to be released to seek asylum outside of detention in the community under the shadow of the risk of re-detention and in a challenging legal setting that made seeking asylum a complex process. This often involved waiting in lines outside the Petrou Ralli Central Asylum department in Athens,<sup>43</sup> where 94 per cent of all asylum applications were lodged, often risking their lives.<sup>44</sup> For example, Karl Kopp (2008) explains that in 2007 the Greek police, which was responsible for registering and processing asylum claims, set up a special system, according to which asylum seekers had to queue up on Sundays to get an appointment for the following week. Usually more than 1,000 people would wait, for less than 300 to be randomly selected. Handing the responsibility of the country's asylum system to an inexperienced and untrained police force made arbitrariness the norm rather than the exception. As a lawyer with experience in the police-run asylum system explained to me '*The first police officers, who were transferred to the asylum service had no experience whatsoever, they didn't even know how to write a decision.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018) But even the ones, who wanted to hand positive decisions on asylum claims were not allowed to do so. The same informant confirmed that '*the decisions were checked by higher officials and were changed*'; thus, accounting for Greece's extremely low rates of refugee recognition rates.

Heath Cabot (2014), in her enlightening ethnography of the regime of political asylum in Greece, further documents the 'overwhelming frustrations and delegitimizing effects' of the legal limbo that foreigners found themselves in (2014, p. 58).<sup>45</sup> Drawing on evidence from the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection<sup>46</sup> and the UNHCR, she writes that while Greece, beginning in 2004, had one of the fastest rising rates of asylum application in Europe, the number of positive decisions was 0.3% in 2004 and 0.6% in

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<sup>43</sup> The Petrou Ralli Central Asylum department in Athens where asylum applications were lodged was also the home of the Petrou Ralli detention centre, which opened its gates in 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Heath Cabot (2012; 2014) when researching the asylum system in Greece, she spent a morning outside the Petrou Ralli offices and witnessed the violence of the police officers towards the immigrants waiting to be registered. Kopp (2008) also refers to similar violent incidents, including the death of a Pakistani man (Symmilia Stamatiste ton Polemo, 2008 [in Greek]).

<sup>45</sup> For an analysis of Greece's asylum system until 2010 you can also see Skordas and Sitaropoulos (2004), Amnesty International (2008), Human Rights Watch (2008) and Amnesty International (2010).

<sup>46</sup> For statistics on asylum applications, you can visit the website of the Greek police [http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo\\_content&perform=view&id=2085&Itemid=429&lang=](http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&perform=view&id=2085&Itemid=429&lang=)

2006. Compounding matters, in 2010 Greece was globally the country with the fourth highest number of backlogged asylum cases, 48,201 (UNHCR, 2010a). As she contends, the country's exclusionary and sluggish qualities of the Greek asylum system, are not just a matter of the sheer volume of cases but also a symptom of Greece's bureaucracy and unwillingness to address claims of protection seriously. In practical terms, those who were unable to secure a red card, which certified that their asylum application had been received and was being examined, could be detained again; therefore, connecting the streets outside the Petrou Ralli offices, where migrants waited to be registered, to the detention centre that was waiting those who failed to do so, two floors above.

### *The boundaries of deterrence*

A development, which has influenced the *location* and the *types* of immigration detention facilities, was the 'transfer' of migration routes from Western Greece to the Eastern Aegean.<sup>47</sup> The highest number of apprehensions at Greece's borders during the period under examination in this chapter was recorded in 2008, with 146,337 people being arrested in a 12-month period, exceeding by 30% the previous year's arrests. 'It is the anxiety that I feel every night when they release all the slave ships at the coasts of Greece, without any control from Turkey, all these people that we have to take care of with respect to their rights and their life', said the Minister of Interior, Prokopis Pavlopoulos addressing the Greek Parliament in June 2008 (cited in Düvell et al., 2010). However, contrary to the official narrative, most apprehensions in 2008, 54,245, were, in fact, recorded in the mainland, while only 30,149 were apprehended at the Greek-Turkish sea border and another 14,461 at the Greek-Turkish land border; raising questions about the claims of hordes of people coming from the East.

Yet, the moral panic about the rising numbers crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands, paved the way for Greece to step up efforts to control the country's borders, inviting the involvement of European institutions. In 2006, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, began operating in the Aegean using various operational means (agents, equipment, etc.), aimed at stopping the massive arrival and entry of migrants. From 2008,

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<sup>47</sup> Arrests at the Greek-Albanian border did not cease during this period. In fact, between 2007 and 2010 they accounted for 30 per cent of total apprehensions (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). The difference between Albanians and Middle Eastern migrants, which were the predominant ethnic group arriving through the Greek-Turkish borders, however, was that the former were by that time easily deportable due to the Readmission Agreement signed between the two countries in 2005; thus they did not represent a 'deportation problem' anymore.

Greece started receiving emergency contributions from the European Refugee Fund (7,1 million Euros) in 2008 and 2009 combined and 13,7 million Euros in 2008 from the European Border Fund to reinforce its reception/detention capacities and bolster its border patrols through new technological means (FRA, 2011). In 2009, Frontex established an office in Piraeus as the headquarters for all operations in the Eastern Mediterranean area (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The same year Frontex launched project Attica (Amnesty International and ECRE, 2010), which aimed to provide support to Greek authorities on the removal of migrants: providing experts for ‘screening’ migrants in order to identify correctly their country of origin, organising training on screening and detecting false documents, facilitating cooperation with embassies of third countries, and facilitating coordination of return flights (FIDH, 2014).

These border control policies ran parallel to another system of pre-emptive, improvised measures, which had been the norm for a number of years. As a Greek border police officer told me in an interview back in 2011, *‘in the past we were more effective. The Greek government used to hire fishermen at the border to illegally transfer migrants back to Turkey’*.<sup>48</sup> Now that Europe’s eyes are on us, we cannot keep our country secure by doing the same good quality work, he continued referring to pushbacks. While this strategy may not have been an official one, border authorities did not do much to hide it. Refoulement by the Greek coast guard was occurring on such a systematic scale that border guard officers admitted they were under no obligation to inform persons subject to immediate readmission procedures of their rights and more particularly that such persons did not have the rights of notification of custody and access to lawyer (CPT, 2006).

In a revealing interview with ProAsyl, the coastguard even went on to disclose that they had a policy of deliberately frightening people: *‘We drive very close to the boats and put the headlights on, to see who is there. Of course, they are not going to turn around voluntarily because they want to come here...Simply drive around them, create waves and give the people a fright – as though telling them ‘we decide what goes on here – go away!’* (ProAsyl, 2007, p.14). Amnesty International (2013) also reported that coastguard officials used to puncture or disable the inflatable boats they

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<sup>48</sup> There is evidence of the practice of using fishermen for pushbacks, even from the 1980s. See Proti Strofi Aristera (2009) [in Greek].

intercepted before setting them adrift towards the Turkish coast, so that they would not come back. Over the years, these practices became routine, systematic and brutal.

Such deterrence measures were not the authorities' only 'weapons' to tame irregular migration. In fact, as attested by a number of human rights organisations reports, most of the apprehensions in the border region during that period were not recorded at all; hence, official figures showing only the tip of the iceberg (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Norwegian Helsinki Committee et al., 2009; ProAsyl, 2007). Under 'Poseidon plan', the coastguard, in cooperation with local authorities, would establish temporary holding centres in schools, warehouses or other public buildings, to detain migrants for a period of days without registering them, before summarily expelling them (CPT, 2006). As one of my interviewees explained, registers of new arrivals at border guard stations were often handwritten and during her visits there she had personally seen correction fluid used at the police custody registry books. This is corroborated by CPT findings in 2005, 2007 and 2009, when the delegation found the existing registers 'superficial and on occasion incomplete or inexact' (CPT, 2006, p. 25; see also CPT, 2008 and CPT, 2010). In some stations, staff were not even aware of the exact number of persons detained or even outrightly lied about a centre's capacity. For example, in 2005, the CPT delegation was informed that a certain border guard station was closed but when visited, it contained more than 100 people and according to them it had been operating for quite some time (CPT, 2006).

The secrecy surrounding official practices also extends to the amount of access granted to human rights organisations and the detainees' access to the outside world. With respect to the latter, reports highlight that in some centres there were no pay phones and as a rule, mobile phones were confiscated in all facilities. Amnesty International (2012a) confirms that access to some of the detention centres was denied to them, while in others, officers refused to answer questions or remain outside hearing range. In fact, apart from UNHCR and the Greek Council for Refugees, no other NGO had been able to access detention centres despite repeated requests for permission (see also Schaub, 2013). Access to lawyers was restricted and only with the provision of specific names of detained persons. What is more, Amnesty International's request for information on the number and location of detention centres in the country was left unanswered. Despite the competence of the Greek Ombudsman to carry out monitoring visits, up until 2009 there were few signs of any independent body supervising places of detention.

The invisibilisation process was further grotesquely evident in the ways migrants' dead bodies were treated by the authorities. The *Deaths at the Borders Database* estimated that at least 847 people had lost their lives trying to cross from Turkey to Greece between 1990 and 2013 (Tselepi et al., 2016).<sup>49</sup> Despite there being a clear legal framework outlining the procedures of death management at the borders, the researchers found a vast number of instances of negligence.<sup>50</sup> Border deaths were never investigated, some were not registered at all and when registered they were commonly named as 'unidentified corpse' leaving large sections of death certificates empty. Due to there being no relatives in most cases and with the excuse of the lack of financial resources, burial procedures were rushed with unnamed bodies placed in unlabeled graves; thus, complicating their future traceability. Yet again, migrants' bodies, whether alive or dead, were treated with a diffuse social indifference, raising serious concerns about the visibility (or invisibility) of the context and causes of deaths in these regions (see also Topak, 2014).

#### *Consolidating the detention system*

Those who managed to make it to Greece were arrested and detained at the border. The establishment of the new special holding facilities for aliens (EXIIA) represented an opportunity for Greece to adopt an approach more in line with the norms and standards developed within Europe. The authorities, however, resorted to using makeshift - temporary facilities; former industrial houses or warehouses, outdoor accommodation (camps), containers and hotels (Iliadi, 2015). They are most often found in non-residential areas, outside the urban fabric, while access to them is limited, as they are connected to the main road network through rural roads, or dirt roads. Yet, they are mainly located in specific areas of geopolitical interest (both for Greece and Europe), i.e., close to entry and exit points to European soil; thus, creating specific geographies of containment. Moreover, there are no signs to them, while the spaces near them are usually either abandoned shells and outdoor spaces, or parking spaces, so there is no human activity on them on a daily basis (Ergon Eksivrisi, 2007; Kiritisi, 2014). The slovenliness with which the facilities were prepared to 'host' new arrivals is evident in their squalid state of repair.

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<sup>49</sup> This number is likely to be higher as it refers only to bodies found and registered. To visit the database, see Human Costs of Border Control (n.d.).

<sup>50</sup> For details on the legal framework see Tselepi et al. (2016), where they describe the legal and official procedures that have to be followed after a dead body is found.

Compounding matters, the authorities maintained a carceral approach, often in threadbare conditions, unacceptable even for short periods. For those who had often travelled great distances and already suffered severe privation, these conditions, those within them report, were deplorable and inhumane. Under such conditions, any attempt to offer acceptable social and medical care, was bound to fail. Human rights organisations consistently found dysfunctional or no heating systems, absence of warm water, broken windows, decrepit mattresses, if at all. In the Peplos special holding facility in northern Greece, detainees were forced to sleep on the floor as no beds were available, and for a significant number of detainees there were not even mattresses (CPT, 2006). Similarly, at Isaakio and Neo Himonio border guard stations, too, detainees were provided with dirty blankets and slept on filthy and damp mattresses on the floor, as cells were permanently flooded due to a plumbing defect (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Severe overcrowding was a recurring issue too. Iliadou (2012), drawing on work and research she has been conducting inside the Pagani detention centre since 2005, likens the facility with a landfill, where society's trash is buried. The facts seem to support this statement. For example, Pagani, on the eve of 2005, was holding 588 foreigners at a capacity of 200 (CPT, 2006). During a CPT visit in 2009 '141 women, babies and children [out of a total of 578] were being held together in a room with waste water seeping onto the mattresses, only one small electric water heater available, windows lacking panes, insufficient provision of blankets and a single functioning toilet' (CPT, 2010, p. 32). As a result, the health and well-being of those detained inside such conditions was severely jeopardised. In 2008, 600 residents at Pagani were poisoned because dilapidated drinking water pipes were contaminated. There were indeed serious concerns about the quality of drinking water and food in all the detention centres on the islands of Chios, Samos and Militini (Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010; see also Lauth Bacas, 2010)

Detainees in facilities in the Attica region did not fare any better as in most cases they were found detained in 'cage-like compartments' (CPT, 2006). In fact, a number of ECtHR rulings (Amadou v Greece, 2016; Khuroshvili v Greece, 2013) found that applicants had been subject to inhuman and degrading treatment while detained at the Aspopyrgos detention centre.<sup>51</sup> In addition, those at the Petrou Ralli facility were confined to their cells

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<sup>51</sup> For more details on these cases see Amadou v Greece (2016) and Khurosvili v Greece (2013).

all day, despite provisions for an outdoor area. Human Rights Watch (2008) met an Iraqi Kurd, who had been detained there for three months and had only been outside for 12 hours in total. New arrivals were not provided with clean sheets and blankets and much of the bedding was dirty. Again, here access to toilets at night was problematic, leaving detainees with no choice but to urinate in bottles or defecate in plastic bags. Reports from that period indicate dirty cells infested with cockroaches and a lack of personal care products and clean blankets, night-time access to the toilet, opportunities for physical exercise, and access to an outdoor courtyard in most police facilities even when the facilities had one (Amnesty International, 2010a; CPT, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2008). Even before the centre was inaugurated, the CPT had expressed its concerns about its resemblance to a large police station with a carceral environment. Petrou Ralli, the independent authority claimed, was a missed opportunity to conform to EU standards (CPT, 2006).

When questioned, restrictions on the movement of detained migrants had been attributed to low staff numbers. This is not far from the truth. For example, at one point in 2009 Filakio and Pagani centres had only six officers on duty for 201 and 548 detainees respectively (CPT, 2010). However, this is not the sole reason. Staff assigned to detention centres at the borders were not especially trained, nor did they want to assume this role. What is more, in the event of an escape or serious incident, they would be faced with severe disciplinary punishments or unemployment. As opposed to police officers, who could be suspended or dismissed from service, border guards were fired. Therefore, the direction of increased control and enforcing a warehousing policy is not unanticipated; in fact, it may have been forthcoming.

### *Whitewashing violence*

The above sheds light on one of the main features of the detention system; the scale of the problem of ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty by law enforcement officials. Ill-treatment was allegedly often allowed to settle order during fights between different nationalities and was defiantly underestimated to a few harmless slaps. As the Head of the Coast Guard Police at Piraeus port admitted to a CPT delegation, he would not tolerate severe ill-treatment but consented to slaps (CPT, 2002, p. 13). Unfortunately, there are overwhelming indications that violence by the police did not stop there but instead was routine, systematic and cloaked in a climate of impunity. Over the number of years that

span this era, there have, indeed, been a large number of allegations of ill-treatment. Most of the allegations consisted of slaps, punches, kicks and blows with batons (Amnesty International, 2010; CPT, 2006; 2008; 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2008; Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010; Pro Asyl, 2007).

In Mytilini special holding facility two persons claimed a senior police officer inflicted blows upon them with a wooden baton, following a hunger strike in early July 2005 (CPT, 2006). The CPT delegation found a baton, as described by the detainees, behind a chair in the guard's room, which the guards explained was used only to 'intimidate detainees' (CPT, 2006, p. 31). People detained in police centres at the land border with Turkey, give details about this 'intimidation.' *'The police treated us very badly. They kicked the food, they insulted us. They didn't beat us hard. Sometimes they hit us with a baton. Other guards would watch the hitting, it was the normal thing.'* (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 69). Videos of police staff at the Omonoia police station in the centre of Athens forcefully slapping recently apprehended foreign nationals and beating them with a wooden baton, while others are filming, have also been disseminated.<sup>52</sup>

Law enforcement personnel have further been implicated in serious incidents of torture.<sup>53</sup> In 2001, a Turkish asylum seeker in coastguard detention was forced to undress and was raped with a truncheon by one of the officers present (Zontul v Greece, 2012). Following the initiation of disciplinary proceedings, the victim was not examined by a doctor and the incident was recorded as a 'slight strike on the buttocks.' The naval appeals tribunal imposed a suspended six- and five-months' sentence to the two officers. The case was brought before the Strasbourg court, which found the investigation seriously flawed and punishment totally inappropriate (see more in Sitaropoulos, 2017).

In fact, a reluctance to investigate allegations of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials was more often than not observed. In 2007 on the island of Chios two coast guard officers, tortured a Moroccan migrant by mock execution and 'wet and dry submarino' (simulation of drowning and suffocation) (ProAsyl, 2007). In 2013, the two officers were convicted to

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<sup>52</sup> For the link of the video, see Perseus999 (2008).

<sup>53</sup> According to Sitaropoulos (2017), torture is problematically defined in Greek law. Torture was introduced into the criminal code (Article 137A§2) in 1984 by Law 1500. As defined in there torture is the 'planned' infliction by a state official on a person of severe physical, and other similar forms, of pain. Under the established Greek case law and doctrine in order for the infliction of pain to be considered as 'planned' it must be repeated and have a certain duration. This is clearly at variance with international human rights law standards, such as the Convention Against Torture, which Greece has fully transposed.

suspended three- and six-years' imprisonment. In 2014, they were acquitted by the appeals court. In 2004, at another police station in the centre of Athens, Agios Panteleimonas, police officers allegedly tortured a group of Afghan nationals using falanga (a form of torture where the soles of the feet are beaten)<sup>54</sup> and 'Palestinian hanging' (a form of torture wherein the victim's hands are tied behind their back and suspended by a rope attached to the wrists).<sup>55</sup> In this case, the officers implicated were convicted to 20- and 25-months' imprisonment for inflicting "unintentional" bodily harm, yet the ECtHR established once again the failure by national authorities to conduct a thorough and effective investigation.<sup>56</sup>

Recorded complaints, court proceedings or videos of abuse which have managed to receive media attention do not reveal the extent of the problem. Human rights organisations and monitoring bodies have highlighted that migrants often feared they would be subjected to further ill-treatment if they submitted any complaints. Detainees at the infamous Omonoia police station reported being discouraged by police officers from complaining because "it would not be in their best interests." (CPT, 2006, p. 14) At Omonoia police station, a detainee who claimed he had been ill-treated by the police officers, was threatened with deportation unless he stated that he no longer wished to see a doctor (CPT, 2008). In relation to a case of another detainee who died in custody at Omonoia Police Station, the Commander refused the CPT delegation's request to have access to certain papers and, subsequently, removed them from the file, which the delegation was reviewing (CPT, 2008). The Iranian detainee had apparently been suffering from drug withdrawal symptoms. He had been screaming in pain for hours before he died of peritonitis, without any medical attention.

Hiding and destroying evidence seems to have been common practice. According to testimonies I have heard from people working in the field, there used to be empty and old buildings of police centres in the Evros region, where the police transferred injured people to keep them out of sight and evade responsibility for their actions. In most cases, officers on duty refused requests to arrange for proper medical examination of the people in question, while vehemently denying the possibility of any police involvement in the alleged assaults. This means that many detainees did not receive treatment for their injuries. Even

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<sup>54</sup> Dignity – Danish Institute against Torture (n.d.).

<sup>55</sup> Wikipedia (n.d.).

<sup>56</sup>The case is Sarwari and others v Greece (2019). See also the press release on this case by the Lawyers' Group for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants (Omada Dikigorwn, 2012) and Sitaropoulos (2017).

when they were examined, glaring differences between the conclusions of Greek doctors with those of the medical members of human rights organisations' delegations were noted, raising questions about the complicity of medical professionals with the violation of human rights in detention centres (CPT, 2008).

The conspicuous oversight of human rights violations by medical professionals in the country could be attributed to the pervasive construction of the image of immigrants as a hygienic threat, which had seeped into Greek welfare services. Through a study on the organisational culture and work values of Greek welfare officers, Psimmenos and Kassimati (2003, p. 368) argue that "a mix of personal, financial and managerial incentives seem to motivate officials' behaviour towards implementing discriminatory and quite racist policies which, according to their opinion safeguard Greek society against the incoming 'threat'. Adding to this, the limited administrative and financial capacities of the National Health System (ESY) of Greece, further strained by its bureaucratic nature, and the absence of any culturally sensitive services and interpreters who could act as mediators between the doctors and foreigners in need of medical assistance (Chatzimpyros, 2014; Kotsioni, 2009; Kotsioni and Hatziprokopiou, 2008), we can partly explain how the police have managed to disguise ill-treatment over the years.

When charges of abuse were investigated by the authorities, the procedures were marred by many flaws, including the lack of promptness and expeditiousness in carrying out investigations, compounded by the fact that there was no adequately resourced police inspectorate (CPT, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2010). Nor was there a credible, independent and effective police complaints mechanism, which might enable allegations of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials being investigated thoroughly and, where appropriate, prosecuted rigorously.<sup>57</sup> According to the 2008 Decree on Police Discipline, investigations into allegations of physical ill-treatment were normally initiated and carried out by the same local police force to which the accused police officer belongs, raising questions about the transparency of the procedure (CPT, 2010; see also Amnesty International, 2012β). In a glaring case, the Judicial Council of the Misdemeanours Court of Athens did not refer to trial three police officers who were accused of ill-treating two Pakistani nationals. Despite

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, 2006 Annual Report (The Greek Ombudsman, 2007) and 2007 Annual Report (The Greek Ombudsman, 2008). Sitaropoulos (2017) also includes a wide range of cases where the European Human Rights Court found that the Greek police had not carried out a proper investigation into the basic facts of the incidents.

there being video footage of the abuse, the Prosecution's proposals refer to police officers lightly pushing the two migrants in a police vehicle, kicking without causing any damages and harmful slapping (Amnesty International, 2005).

Similarly, according to a report by the Ombudsman in 2004, between 2000 and 2004, 164 cases of complaints against police officers were lodged. Of these, 25 concerned ill-treatment. A percentage up to 65 per cent of these allegations were dismissed as unfounded despite the existence of medical certificates proving the injuries and in only five cases were disciplinary actions imposed (Takis, 2004; see also Amnesty International, 2005). As Papapantoleon (2014, p. 44) has so eloquently argued in her examination of the relationship between the judiciary and the far-right in Greece, 'the general atmosphere of judicial impunity regarding police officers who commit violent and criminal acts, either in public (e.g., during demonstrations) or in the invisible spaces of holding pens, produces a moral and collective consciousness that puts forth, above and against all else, the restoration of order and discipline: "cleaning up" cities of rioters, foreigners and strikers who interfere with the normal processes of Greek life'.

### *Expanding controls*

By 2009, it was clear that Greece was becoming a main migration getaway to European Union states, from both a conflict-ridden Middle East and Africa. Migration related developments, such as the so-called Greek-Turkish border emergency (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Pro Asyl, 2007), a collapsed asylum system and a de facto ghettoisation of certain areas of downtown Athens had been taking place and were exacerbated by an acute economic crisis (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). European Union member states blamed Greek authorities for the excessive permeability of its borders. The Greek conservative government responded with ever-tighter border controls and massive sweep operations for arresting and removing irregular migrants. Operation 'Areti' (Grace) ordered by Mr Viron Polydoras, Minister of Public Order in 2006, which involved thousands of police officers patrolling the streets of Athens, set the tone for the government's treatment of the 'immeasurable threat of illegal migration'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For more details on the treatment of immigrants by the Greek police, see iospress.gr (2006).

For the first six months of 2009 and more specifically during the summer of 2009, in view of upcoming early elections in September and in fear of the concomitant rise of extreme right-wing parties, the government targeted public places such as metro stations, squares and specific neighbourhoods in the city centre, arresting hundreds of migrants (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). ‘At nights in Agios Panteleimonas, Afghans are injured. The last weeks many have been deported. Legal and illegal. At nights they create checkpoints. Whoever is arrested, is detained, deported...every day they throw them stones, they are mocked’, recounted Zafir Mohamed, an Afghan national residing in the region (Autonome Antifa, 2012, p. 37). In total 45,037 apprehensions were recorded in the mainland in 2009, far exceeding arrests at all Greece’s borders. In July, the police destroyed a makeshift migrant camp in Patras, after having arrested a large number of migrants residing there, including unaccompanied minors (Human Rights Watch, 2009; see also Human Rights Watch, 2008). According to reporting from people in the field, an unknown number of those arrested were transferred to the northern part of the country and expelled to Turkey.

In the meantime, raids in areas where migrants lived or gathered began to be trivialised. In November 2008, after a number of big demonstrations, the so-called ‘indignant residents of Agios Panteleimonas’, with links to Golden Dawn, closed down the playground and blocked migrants or ‘migrant-looking’ people from accessing the square. Around the same time, these residents formed informal groups to patrol the squares of the district, where they used violence to block foreigners from accessing public spaces (Autonome Antifa, 2012).

At the same time as Greece was expected to seal its borders, albeit with dubious measures, all eyes were on the type of treatment irregular migrants and asylum seekers were afforded upon arrival and in detention. In 2007, the European Court of Justice found that Greece had failed to implement the Council Directive with regard to standards for the reception of asylum seekers (Commission v. Greece). In April 2008, the UNHCR leveled a sharp criticism of Greek asylum and detention policies and recommended that other European states not return asylum seekers to Greece (UNHCR, 2008). Indeed, the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board suspended all returns to Greece in early 2008 ‘[o]n the basis of the latest information about the possible violations of the rights of asylum seekers in Greece’ (UNHCR, 2008, p. 7). Similarly, the Swedish Migration Board suspended returns of unaccompanied children to Greece due to the practice of detaining them upon arrival and Finland announced it would suspend all transfers until it received written assurances

that migrants would be fairly processed (Human Rights Watch, 2008).<sup>59</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, while the suspension of all transfers back to Greece from European countries would officially take effect in 2011, these early northern European tactics presented an opportunity for Greek authorities to move from a state of official action, wherein they must ‘care for’ and register the people they find on their soil, to one of effective inaction, which enabled onward migrant movements, hardly monitored or captured in formal statistics (Weber et al., 2019).

What happened to Greece’s detained population? Amid severe condemnation of detention practices, even from within the police force itself,<sup>60</sup> the Greek authorities announced that they would cease employing police stations and border guard spaces for detention purposes. Following the inauguration of the new government in September 2009, a total of 3,200 irregular migrants had been released before the turn of the new year. Following a visit by the deputy minister for Citizen Protection, Spiros Vougas, in November 2009, the first by a politician until then, the infamous centre on the island of Lesvos, Pagani (Iliadou, 2012, 2019a; Sarantidis, 2018), which was associated with extreme violations of human rights, was closed (Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010). ‘Conditions are abhorrent, inhumane and offend the core of human dignity’ said the Minister after its visit committing to change reception conditions in the country.<sup>61</sup> In response to consistent allegations of ill-treatment, certain steps were announced that would improve the quality of the investigations.

Despite promises of change, the use of police stations for the purposes of detaining foreign nationals did not end. In fact, police and border guard stations continue to be used up until today in the most arbitrary manner. The closure of Pagani did not bring a change in the reception of irregular migrants. They continued to be detained upon arrival as a rule at other locations. Soon the new government would announce the construction of new pre-removal centres across the country. What is more, despite the stated intentions of the

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<sup>59</sup> A number of judgments by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have found Greece guilty for violating Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (SD, AA, Tabesh, MSS, Rahimi, RU against Greece) and have called for an end to transfers of asylum seekers back to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation.

<sup>60</sup> In August 2009, the Rodopi Police Union, in Northern Greece, sent a letter to the Rodopi Regional authorities requesting a number of urgent measures to improve the hygiene and material conditions, including regular cleaning of the dormitories, and the provision of medical care. The regional authorities apparently agreed with the requests but were unable to take any action due to a lack of financial means (CPT, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> You can see a video from the visit in spyrosvougas (2009).

Greek authorities to refurbish many of the establishments, by the end of 2009, no significant improvements had been observed, leaving the structural deficiencies of the facilities unaddressed. Unfortunately, the next era of detention politics would paint an even bleaker picture.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I trace the roots of today's destructive detention system back to the beginning of 1990s, when the Greek state established the laws and policies to respond to the first large immigration movement to the country and deter new arrivals. Nationalism in Greek political culture, or the historical depths of the ultra-right's intrusion into the Greek state apparatus, established the legal and institutional basis for today's detention regime. This nationalism is intimately linked to racialised border controls and cannot be decoupled from racism against foreigners in the country (Bhui, 2016). As has been argued by Michaela Benson (2020, p. 504), reasserting a nation state's borders is built upon anti-immigration rhetoric focused on Black and Brown migrant Others' seeking to cross Europe's borders.

Adopting an approach of longer Greek histories of racialisation and racism, unlike later accounts of detention, which claim that it became a key measure for policing migration after 2010, I argue that detention formed the core aspect of border policing in Greece decades earlier, as successive governments have sought to deter irregular migrants and secure the nation's borders. Indeed, the detention system was built across party lines, informed by different political beliefs (Karamanidou, 2014).

The history that I trace in this first chapter also points to the central role that the police have played in building, feeding and protecting the detention estate. Drawing on the discussion above, police practices inside detention centres could be characterised as inconsistent, poorly grounded, arbitrary, corrupt, brutally violent and cloaked in a veil of impunity. Yet, the police could not have produced an atrocious detention regime without conducive social conditions; i.e without drawing on the inertia and/or the consent of the official state. Together with other state authorities and the judiciary, they have managed to obscure the location of those early detention sites, as well as the violence that has been nurtured inside the migration carceral apparatus.

There is a continuous history of systematic corruption and abuse by Greek state officials, in consulates, ministries, the police, and other agencies - this also includes the trafficking

and sexual exploitation of women by state officials (Baldwin-Edwards and Fakiolas, 1998, p. 197-8). Immigration policy in a hasty and abusive environment is no exception to this. Indeed, research shows that the temporary staff employed by the government to deal with immigrants ‘were not only untrained, but themselves started to develop informal networks of personalised contacts and financial corruption, alongside the neo-liberal values of efficiency and competitiveness’ (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004, p. 56).

For example, drawing on the responses of the authorities to allegation of ill-treatment, they ‘appear to be considered either as isolated cases or as fabricated stories, rather than as indicators of a serious problem’ (CPT, 2010, p. 10). As one detention officer at Petrou Ralli detention centre simply put it ‘We get racists who don’t behave’ (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 81). Therefore, the lack of any kind of system which would guarantee that allegations are investigated properly and perpetrators are punished is not unsurprising in this context. The proclaimed independent authority, which would deal with such complaints, only became operational in 2017. Even if allegations of ill-treatment could be regarded as isolated incidents, the regularity of the complaints over the years, the cross-reference and relevance of witnesses’ reports of ill-treatment incidents, as well as the failure of the state to combat xenophobia and racial profiling in the practices of its representatives and to exert the political will to treat foreign nationals on its soil with respect and humanity, document a consistent pattern of human rights violations in detention centres in Greece with the assent of all the involved authorities. In other words, they all knew and did nothing about it.

## Chapter 3: Building the modern Greek detention estate (2010-2017)

*'We have to make their lives unlivable' (Head of Greek Police, 2012)*

### Introduction

*'The [land] border with Turkey is a big and long country road separated by a strip of grass. Basically, this strip is the border. So, when we were there 32 people tried to come in from Turkey. The Greek police stopped them and wouldn't take them in. They asked Turkey to take them back. Turkey didn't accept this because they were claiming they were coming from Greece trying to illegally enter Turkey. To cut a long story short these people ended up staying on the grass strip for 6 hours until the Greek and Turkish police decided what to do. Do you know what happened? 16 people went back to Turkey and 16 people entered Greece. This issue is massive. That's why I'm saying that the fence would be a good idea.'* (Interview with an immigration lawyer, Athens, 2012)

The permeability of the Greek-Turkish land border was and remains evident to all actors in the field. As Jozef Balli, Head of Land Operations at Frontex, explained '*the land border is attractive because it is cheaper and you are immediately on the mainland*' (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, p. 57). However, seemingly porous borders attract robust government responses (Bosworth and Guild, 2008). To that effect, in 2010 the newly appointed Minister of Citizen Protection, Michalis Chrisohoidis, following a meeting with UNHCR Commissioner, Antonio Gutierrez, announced that Greece had closed all points of entry and exit for those who move 'illegally' in order to '*send a clear message to all directions that Greece is not a fenceless yard, which anyone can enter without permission, nor can it serve as a bridge for whoever wishes to travel illegally to Europe*' (Proto Thema, 2010).

Evidently, the response to mass migration was imagined to be threefold; attempting to deter prospective arrivals, pleasing the EU and appeasing public opinion. Required on the one hand to secure its border with Turkey on behalf of all of Europe and Greek citizens and hence effectively deliver a secure external border and a safe country, Greece was asked to do so under conditions of financial privation and surging xenophobia. Castigated, on the other hand, for contravening the human rights standards expected of EU members, Greece seemed unable to do otherwise than fail. And it did.

This chapter engages with this paradox. It will explore the implications of European and national immigration policies, which created the contemporary immigration landscape around Europe and helped to significantly expand Greece's detention industry. In doing so, it will show how insistent official and off-the-record EU appeals for greater border security and, thus, for a Europeanisation of Greek policies and practices (Andreouli et al., 2017; Mavrodi, 2005), have backfired, providing the country, instead, with supportive cues for continuing abusive practices (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2018). As one border officer astutely put it '*Those people, who talk about human rights, forget that this country has borders and we have to protect them.*' (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). In this line of argument, if Europe wants secure borders, then they cannot question the legitimacy of Greek border practices. Against this context, the widespread use of immigration detention from 2010 up until 2015 helped to deflect and appease a range of anxieties and frustrations, to which I will turn in the following sections (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2018).

While the previous chapter demonstrated how successive Greek governments laid the ground for a humanitarian catastrophe, this chapter will show how this catastrophe was effectively materialised throughout the country and behind bars, at what cost and with what kind of support. Taking that into account, the chapter signifies a break from the previous chapter, where Greece is presented as a parochial state at the edges of Europe left alone to deal with migratory pressure, to Greece as the centre of attention and concern. In the words of a detention officer, who had served at the land border '*in the past there was efficiency...they [border police officers] were doing more stuff. Since Europe came into the picture and all the official eyes were on Greece, that stopped*' (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). In this statement, Andreas was referring to 'invisible' pushback practices regularly occurring at the land border with Turkey and related detention practices of the past, which were considered to be more effective in managing migration. However, later hyper-visible accounts of harrowing details from inside detention facilities leading to a wide range of damning critiques seem to have altered the landscape. As Andreas went on to explain, '*when the European boss is looking, we all pretend to be gentlemen.*' However, he continued, '*when he leaves and the door closes behind him, the real fight starts.*' (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2012), implying the struggles of working inside a custodial institution.

Therefore, the narrative here redirects our focus from the border as an ontological object to bordering as a process of reproducing, rationalising and sustaining exclusionary

practices to understand why and how inhumane detention practices have remained resilient to change. Drawing on interviews with a range of key actors, including border and detention officers, NGO personnel, lawyers and members of human rights organisations, as well as a review of relevant policy documents, it will delineate key moments in Greek detention strategy. The account will commence from where the previous chapter naturally stopped, in 2010, and it will take us through to the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and the violently organised changes the EU response brought.

Throughout this chapter, Greece's detention regime is animated by European bordering technologies, significant funding and mechanisms of governance that the country was compelled to invite and accept. My account neither exculpates Greece nor Europe from a continuum of human rights violations that were often the outcome of deliberate state policy backed by significant EU funding. As this chapter will show, immigration detention is morally and operationally void. It not only lies waste to millions of Euros but also, and more importantly, destroys Europe's narratives of itself as an ideal of progress, rationality and humanitarian values to which member states should aspire (Stierl, 2019). The political violence and the human rights violations upon which the Greek detention industry has been expanded, have also been its structural outcome.

### **The scaffolding of a humanitarian crisis (2010-2015)**

'Greek society has surpassed its limits with regard to receiving more illegal immigrants. Greece cannot stand it anymore... The Government of George Papandreou has strong political will.', said Mr. Papoutsis, then Minister of Public Protection (Skai, 2011). Such affirmations shift the focus from the presumed absence of the Greek state to the excess of sovereign power most governments have abused in dealing with migration. The rise of extreme right-wing forces, both at the national level (represented by the extreme right wing party LAOS which obtained 5 percent of the national vote in the November 2009 election) and at the local (the fascist party 'Golden Dawn' for the first time elected 2 local councilors at the municipality of Athens in the local elections of November 2010), played a role in this direction (Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2012). Indeed, against this context, the central-left newly elected government in 2009 had set off early on to leave its own imprint in the way it dealt with migratory pressure, making 2010 the 'turning point in Greece's migration management policy' (Angeli et al. 2014, p. 7).

### *Action plans to deal with a constructed crisis*

In August 2010, the Greek government submitted its 'Action Plan on Asylum Reform and Migration Management' to the European Commission, a plan that would be implemented in three years (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2010). According to the Plan, the state would put forward a number of changes to its problematic asylum and reception systems, to which I referred in the previous chapter. One of the first steps was to pass Law 3907/2011 'Establishment of Asylum Service and First Reception Service, transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2008/115/EC on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, and other provisions' in January 2011, introducing, as the title suggests, two much needed and long overdue agencies, the new independent Asylum Service and the First Reception Service (Law No. 3907/2011).

However, these legislative changes, which were, all the same, not fully realised before 2013, were accompanied with measures targeting the border areas and the irregular population already in the country with a clear securitised approach that prioritised the establishment of new exemplary pre-removal detention centres and the efficiency of returns. To this effect, the Ministry of Citizen Protection concluded the technical specifications for places of detention, on the basis of which detention facilities would be constructed or renovated, especially in the area of Evros and also set up a committee in order to inspect detention facilities with respect to compliance with the terms and conditions of hygiene and safety of detainees. Along this line, in September 2011 a centre within the Aliens' Directorate of Hellenic Police Headquarters was established, having as a primary mission to coordinate operational cooperation against irregular migration and ensure situational awareness, through the drafting of relevant monthly strategic analysis reports (European Migration Network, 2012).

In a centralised system like Greece, such plans, perhaps inevitably, cannot leave its capital, Athens, unaffected. In a letter to the competent Ministries in July 2010, the Ombudsman warned of the main problems that citizens encountered in the city centre. Public health, he stated, had deteriorated and public order and safety, were seriously endangered. The letter went on to list the main factors that had contributed to these problems: a) the

concentration and uncontrollable residence and movement of an excessive number of aliens, mostly without legal documents, b) their daily gathering in hundreds or thousands on the road, which makes traffic difficult or even impossible, which together with the blossoming of the black-market results in affecting business activities and tourism in the area (The Greek Ombudsman, 2010). As I observed in 2012, while I was travelling through the centre of Athens to reach the Petrou Ralli detention centre, foreigners were not hard to find.

*All around the city but especially in the centre you can see immigrants pushing trolleys filled with any metal objects they have found in garbage bins. Poverty has visibly increased on the streets of the capital where immigrants can be seen rummaging through garbage cans for food or scraps of metal or glass to sell to garages for some Euros per kilo. The streets there are downhill and due to the weight of the trolleys, they sometimes are drifted along on the road risking being run over by cars and buses. 'Lucky' ones have very small cars to transfer everything they find. (Fieldnotes, Athens, 2012).*

Nevertheless, as the Ombudsman (2010) stresses in his letter, the deplorable living conditions of newly arrived immigrants without papers and asylum seekers without support networks, with high visibility in public space and polluting practices have affected the quality of everyday life for the citizens of Athens, have discouraged tourism and contributed to the degradation of the area. In this very harsh and polemic rhetoric, the independent authority urged the police to assume the role of dealing with the problem of overconcentration. However, mass arrests of 'illegally resident immigrants' in the city centre should not be considered a panacea, they warn, but rather have to be combined with policies that manage this population more effectively. Still, ascribing too much power to the police without any oversight would not necessarily guarantee the respect of human rights, as research into Greek police abuses of migrants, highlights (Amnesty International, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Following revelations that around 5,000 migrants were living in an estimated 500-abandoned buildings in the city, and that more than 2,000 other properties occupied by migrants were unfit for human habitation, in May 2011 the Cabinet decided to adopt another action plan for the revitalization of the city centre (European Migration Network, 2012; see also Pangalos, 2011 for the link). Warning of a 'public health time bomb,' police officers were indeed asked to control the overconcentration of irregular migrants in the

city centre through daily patrols for registration, verification/identification purposes of third-country nationals and police operations in old/abandoned buildings where third-country nationals mostly live. As Martina Tazzioli and Maurice Stierl (2021) discuss in their work on borders and deterrence during the Covid-19 pandemic, migrants were not seen (only) as subjects 'at risk' nor as 'risky subjects'; rather, they were ousted in the name of safety.

The May 2011 plan also foresaw a new collaboration between the Ministry of Citizen Protection and the Ministry of Defense in order to locate former military camps for the establishment of first reception centres and detention facilities. Together the aspects of the plan were an attempt to ensure the residents and visitors of Athens the right to a safe, viable, attractive and lively city and the inalienable right of citizens to reclaim public space and enhance the city's cultural [Greek] identity, making clear that in this picture undocumented immigrants were considered neither residents nor visitors in the city. The government's holistic approach, then, was designed to form *hygienic-sanitary borders*, bringing into play bordering mechanisms which enact forms of racialised containment predicated upon the doctrine of 'deter and confine to protect' (Tazzioli and Stierl, 2021, p. 78).

However, the means through which these interventions would be achieved were lacking. Therefore, in October 2010 the Greek Government sent an urgent call to Brussels for assistance in the control of its external land border with Turkey due to an 'exceptional mass inflow of irregular immigrants'. In an immediate response, in November 2010, considering the Greek-Turkish border the centre of gravity of its operations (FIDH et al., 2014), FRONTEX deployed the first Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) units to assist Greece in the emergency situation it was facing (Frontex, 2011a). Under this project, around 200 officers and interpreters were deployed to patrol the land borders and collect intelligence information on migratory routes and smuggling activities. The RABIT units were replaced in 2011 by Joint Operations Poseidon Land and Sea, which were more targeted at stemming the flows (Frontex, 2011b). Both operations were renewed in 2012.

The government's strong political will in controlling the country's borders was further translated into the construction of a fence at the Greek-Turkish land border. According to Mr Papoutsis, the fence sent '*a clear message to the international community and the EU too that Greece is capable of securing its borders and that it won't in the future allow immigration flows to pass.*' (Minister of Citizen Protection, 2012a). The political discourse on the fence reveals that, it would not only organize immigration but it would also bear a symbolic character too. As

Ioannis Grigoriadis and Esra Dilek (2018, p. 7), argue the fence disseminated ‘the message that Greece is not an ‘open gate’ to Europe’; thus, it can no longer be considered a liability for ‘fortress Europe’. The fence was constructed in 2012, amid great controversy over its rationale and potential effects (Public Issue, 2011). In addition, given the irony behind European Commission’s rejection of funding such a venture as ‘pointless’ and a ‘short-term measure’, Greece bore the brunt of its erection during the economic crisis that had plagued Greece since 2008 (European Parliament, 2012; Ekathimerini, 2012). The final construction was 10.3 km long, consisting of two cement walls with barbed wire in-between, and run along the north-eastern side of the Greek-Turkish borders, between the villages of Kastanies and Nea Vyssa. It cost 3,16 million euros and was paid for by Greek taxpayers (Angeli et al., 2014).

However, the fence would only secure a very small part of the 290km land border, leaving the river border uncontrolled. According to police data, the rise of ‘illegal migration’ in the area had acquired troubling proportions. The first six months of 2012, apprehensions in Orestiada rose by 151,56%, compared to the same period in 2011 (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2012b). As a former police officer recalled his experience at the border *‘What I noticed, and it’s tragic, has to be heard. I was going to the [border] station at 6 in the morning and by 7:30 we had plenty of immigrants knocking on the doors and surrendering themselves. They came on their own; we didn’t have to go out on patrol...Just consider this. During an 8hour shift, we had not 5 or 10 people but 50 immigrants. If you add all the shifts in all police stations...there are 3 or 4 in every region’* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011)

As the quote above implies, the numbers of new arrivals were so high that the focus could not be just on deterring them with the construction of a fence but also on controlling all irregular arrivals through the tightening of border controls; a realization that was shared along the political spectrum. Yet they were not implemented solely in response to party political ambitions. Partly subsidised by the European Union to the tune of 250 million euros, the origins of the aforementioned plans appear to have come, as with much Greek border control, from further north.

National Operation Aspida (shield), which involved the deployment of more border officers, was launched in the summer of 2012 (Frontex, 2012). ‘The Greek Police have played and continue to play an important part in the implementation of measures for the control of the legality of entry of alien immigrants in Greek territory’, explained the

Minister of Citizen Protection in a Parliamentary reply in August 2012 to justify the transfer of 1,881 border guards along the Greek Turkish land border (See Ministry of Citizen Protection (2012b). They were assigned border management duties, and part of the staff were assigned reception and screening duties, including asylum management and informing irregular immigrants about their rights. The operation was reinforced with other technical means, such as tanker truck vehicles, thermal cameras with night vision, police dogs and boats. Until 2013, the total cost would be 24 million euros co-funded by the EU External Borders Fund and the Greek state (Angeli, et al., 2014).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the government increased passport controls and upgraded technologically the harbours of Patra and Igoumenitsa (in western Greece) targeting transit migrants seeking to leave for Italy by ferryboat.

In this context, most discussions of migration became marked by a toxic combination of securitization and racism (Dalakoglou, 2013). Politicians of all stripes blamed irregular migrants for rising crime, urban degradation, and widespread economic hardship endured by citizens. In the lead-up to the May and June 2012 national elections, immigration detention and border control more generally, became a lightning rod for public opinion, deployed as a cynical political tool to demonstrate the government's determination to salvage Greek national pride (Karamanidou, 2014).

In March 2012, Mr Chrisochoidis, Minister of Citizen Protection, referring to the large sweep operation that was underway in the centre of Athens, which aimed to remove undocumented migrants from squats or unlawfully rented apartments, he claimed that it was an operation that sought to relieve the city centre, bring back order and protect social peace. After all, he went on, 'in the same buildings Greeks and legal aliens, working people who have children, live and that causes issues especially for public health' (Nafemporiki, 2012a). While such operations were generally welcomed, even by the Mayor of Athens, they were criticised as moves to attract voters before the elections. The same day, the President of New Democracy, the party aspiring to become the next government said that 'our cities have been seized by illegal immigrants, and we must take them back'. 'They have filled up spaces in primary schools and Greeks cannot access them. This will stop', he said

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<sup>62</sup> From 2007 to 2013, EUR 250.178,433 were allocated to Greece through the External Borders Fund alone to fence the Greek-Turkish land border i.e., almost 16% of the available EBF grant allocations in Europe. If we include the cost of the Evros fence and the Frontex operational contribution, as well as Greece's return and detention policies the total budget is much higher. For EBF grant allocations see European Court of Auditors (2014).

in June 2012 right before the elections (Nafemporiki, 2012b). In a similar tone, the President of far-right party Laos advocated that the only solution to the problem of ‘illegal migration’ was mass deportations. Some members of his party were even more extreme, mentioning death as a viable option. ‘Migration must be solved in two ways that must be clearly stated. One is safeguarding our borders. And this cannot exist if there are no casualties. To make myself clear, if there are no deaths’, said Mr Plevris, a member of the Greek parliament with the extreme right-wing party, LAOS.<sup>63</sup>

Military-like measures and far-right violence mainstreamed in political discourse appeared to be designed to siphon away voters who might otherwise be attracted to the anti-immigrant sentiments of the far-right ultranationalist party, Golden Dawn. As Karamanidou (2014, p. 456) warned the turn to ‘even more restrictive, control-oriented policies has run parallel with the rise of racist violence against immigrants’. To use expressions favoured by politicians, the issue of immigration is in danger of becoming a fenceless vine run by Chrysi Avgi [Golden Dawn] – a snake’s egg that has already hatched’. Indeed, the Golden Dawn’s programmatic statements included virulent posters promising to ‘get rid of the dirt off the city streets’ and called for ‘Greece only for Greeks’ (Smith (2013).

The continuous arrival of migrants in this period not only sustained a backdrop of a wider social unease and anti-immigrant sentiment within Greece (Triandafyllidou and Kouki, 2014) but led to a widespread critique of Greece from EU member states. The country’s repeated failure to protect its borders had only heightened political tensions as EU states worried that their own political landscapes could not handle the tide of irregular migrants pouring into the rest of Europe via Greece. In June 2012, Greece failed its five-yearly Schengen evaluation due to ‘serious shortcomings’ in its border management, leading to the possibility that member states may reintroduce internal border controls at their own discretion in emergency cases (Council of the European Union, 2012). If this happened, Greece could have been effectively isolated from the rest of the Schengen zone. Irregular migration, then, became crucial for developing rhetoric surrounding the need for stricter border controls and tougher policies that would at the same time satisfy Greece’s EU partners.

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<sup>63</sup> See Taksiki Antepithesi (Omada Anarchikon kai Kommouniston) (2019). At the moment of writing Mr Plevris is the Minister of Health with the New Democracy government.

In the June 2012 national elections, the conservative party, New Democracy, came into power. Fascist Golden Dawn secured 19 seats in the Parliament, for a first time in its history, bringing openly racist and neo-fascistic rhetoric into the public domain of parliamentary politics. Following the steps of its predecessor, shortly after taking power, the new government launched the largest, in terms of both geographic coverage and intensity, sweep operation, Xenios Zeus. In a perverse reference to the ancient Greek God Zeus, symbol of hospitality to and patronage of foreigners, the operation aimed to arrest and detain all irregular migrants in Greek territory, mobilizing around 2,000 police officers for this purpose (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Sweep operations evolved from sporadic, non-orchestrated attempts into an official policy that was institutionalised at a national level, as neighbourhoods were racially cleansed. Dimitra-Dora Teloni and Regina Mantanika (2015, p. 193) summarise it succinctly ‘in all these operations what is at stake is the non-tolerance of the visibility of a certain population in public spaces.’ Indeed, notwithstanding claims from the Minister of Public Order that they did not ‘care about the color, ethnicity, religion of the illegals’ when conducting identity checks (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2012a), police statistics suggest otherwise. Between August 2012 and February 2013 almost 85,000 people of foreign origin had been brought to police stations for verification of their legal status in Greece and 4,811 had been arrested for illegal entry and stay and detained pending deportation. The fact that only 6 per cent of stops led to the identification of undocumented migrants, raised concerns about the police’s use of ethnic profiling in determining whom to stop (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

### **Making migrant lives unlivable**

The practices described above, massive operations aimed to control, deter and arrest all irregular arrivals led directly to the enlargement of the detention population; a connection acknowledged by officials who, in addition to enhanced checks, made frequent announcements about pending reforms aimed at further increasing the detention estate, manage asylum cases more quickly and expand voluntary return programmes.

In 2014, then Minister of Citizen Protection, Mr Chrisochoidis, announced, the state would build 30 new detention centres in 10 Greek prefectures (Naftemporiki, 2012d).

Officially named ‘closed hospitality centres’, the facilities would be based on unused military sites, typically apart from urban centres and concomitant sources of assistance. They were expected to have a capacity for 30,000 people, a total that not only dwarfed previous numbers in detention but also was considerably more than the nation’s prison population. Yet, severe opposition from local communities stalled this development. A more realistic plan, communicated to the European Commission, was to establish pre-removal facilities of a total capacity of 10,000 places by the first semester of 2014. Taking into account available funding and Greece’s capacity to ensure the sustainable management of detention facilities,<sup>64</sup> the EU and Greece agreed that a capacity of 7 000 – 7 500 places in pre-removal centres would be sufficient (European Commission, 2014). Between April and September 2012, four pre-removal facilities were opened with a total capacity of 3,555, in addition to special holding facilities and police and border guard stations.

While these plans were never fully carried out, the idea behind the publicised expansions was straightforward: immigration, could be eradicated through deterrence. In this view, unsubstantiated by any research evidence and willfully blind to the kinds of factors propelling people to move in the first place, ‘faced with the prospect of indefinite stay inside a Greek detention centre –often under deplorable conditions– irregular migrants will opt to return to their homelands. Once there, they will warn others and discourage new arrivals. The size of the migrant population will gradually shrink and Greece will have largely addressed irregular arrivals.’ (Triandafyllidou et al, 2014, p. 7). This simplistic view of detention as a deterrence practice places the safeguarding of Greece’s borders over any consideration of human rights; the inevitable result: a capricious, unpredictable and reactive system with significant collateral damage for individual lives.

The second legitimating basis for detention was deportation. As former Minister of Citizen’s Protection, Nikos Dendias, stated: ‘Our aim is that every illegal migrant, unless the competent authorities decide that he is entitled to international protection, will be detained until he is returned to his home country’ (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2013a). Despite this firm statement, the Greek state has managed neither to curb arrivals nor remove those migrants deemed undesirable. In fact, between 2008 and 2013, Greece issued

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<sup>64</sup> Over the period 2008-2013, Greece was the biggest beneficiary of the Return Fund receiving around EUR 125 M plus almost EUR 5 M in emergency funding. 50% of this allocation was earmarked for the implementation of actual returns and approximately 32 % for costs related to detention facility in order to improve their conditions (Angeli et al., 2014).

491,411 orders to leave, out of which only 24.5 per cent were enforced (on average per year). These orders were rarely enforced with a judicially approved deportation proceeding, because most irregular migrants lacked the travel documents to leave the country legally. In 2014, in the midst of its worst economic crisis and given the extreme costs of forced returns (Ageli et al., 2014), the Greek government ceased all deportations. However, this was not accompanied by a reduction in the number of detainees as one would expect; in fact, the detainee population continued to increase (Asylum Information Database, 2015).

The return procedure did not only apply to 'deportable aliens.' Those who could not be deported within a specific amount of time (usually one year), were released. Upon release, they were issued with a police notice ('white card') insisting they leave the country voluntarily within 30 days (sometimes it is seven days), even though this departure was legally impossible for irregular migrants. This card was usually in Greek and was not accompanied by any information in their language. It was sometimes mistakenly considered an identity card or a travel document. In essence this white card was seen as a ticket from the border to Athens and then to another country. Thus, the majority remained in the country undocumented; released only to be arrested, detained again and issued yet another white card.

Asylum seekers did not escape detention either. In accordance with Presidential Decree 114/2010, asylum seekers could be detained for six months in order to establish their identity and effectively examine their asylum claims (Presidential Decree 114/2010, 2010). Following a mass application for asylum by persons held in the Corinth pre-departure centre, which was considered to be an abuse of the asylum system, the Greek authorities adopted Presidential Decree 116/2012, which provided for the detention of asylum seekers to be extended by an additional period of up to 12 months (Presidential Decree 116/2012, 2012). Consequently, asylum seekers would be detained for up to 18 months. This was further supported by an advisory opinion of the Greek Legal Council that allowed authorities to prolong detention beyond the 18-month limit until the detainee has consented to be returned (Greek Council for Refugees, 2014). The obsession with detention did not escape sick people either. Article 59 of Law 4075/2012 added an additional ground of threat to public health, based on a suspicion of carrying an infectious disease due to, *inter alia*, the country of origin or living conditions, which did not meet the

minimum standards of hygiene, raising questions about its racist and discriminatory nature and use (CPT, 2014).

Indeed, the aim of these controversial decisions was unambiguously clear. ‘If they told me go to a country, you’ll stay in detention for three months and then you’ll be free to steal, rob, do anything I want, I’d say fine. So, we aimed for detention...and then we increased it up to 18 months. For what reason? We have to make their lives unlivable’, the Head of Greek Police Force stated to his officers (Camera Stylo, 2013 [in Greek]). The premise of this statement could helpfully be understood as the “politics of exhaustion”, a new technology of border control, which aims to deter, exclude and control through the mental and physical exhaustion of individuals (Welander, 2021). Unsurprisingly, in line with this harmful set of (micro) practices and methods, mounting evidence showed a humanitarian crisis was brewing across the country’s detention facilities, especially the ones situated at border areas (Amnesty International, 2010a; 2012a; Fili, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2011; Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2014, Pro Asyl, 2012).

In 2011, faced with repeated failures on the part of Greek authorities to improve the conditions of immigration detention, CPT issued a public statement, the first ever addressed to an EU member state, to condemn detention conditions in Greece.<sup>65</sup> As recommendations were continually left unanswered or unaddressed, the CPT concluded that the conditions in which irregular migrants were held would appear to be ‘a deliberate policy by the authorities in order to deliver a clear message that only persons with the necessary identity papers should attempt to enter Greece’ (CPT, 2012, p. 9).

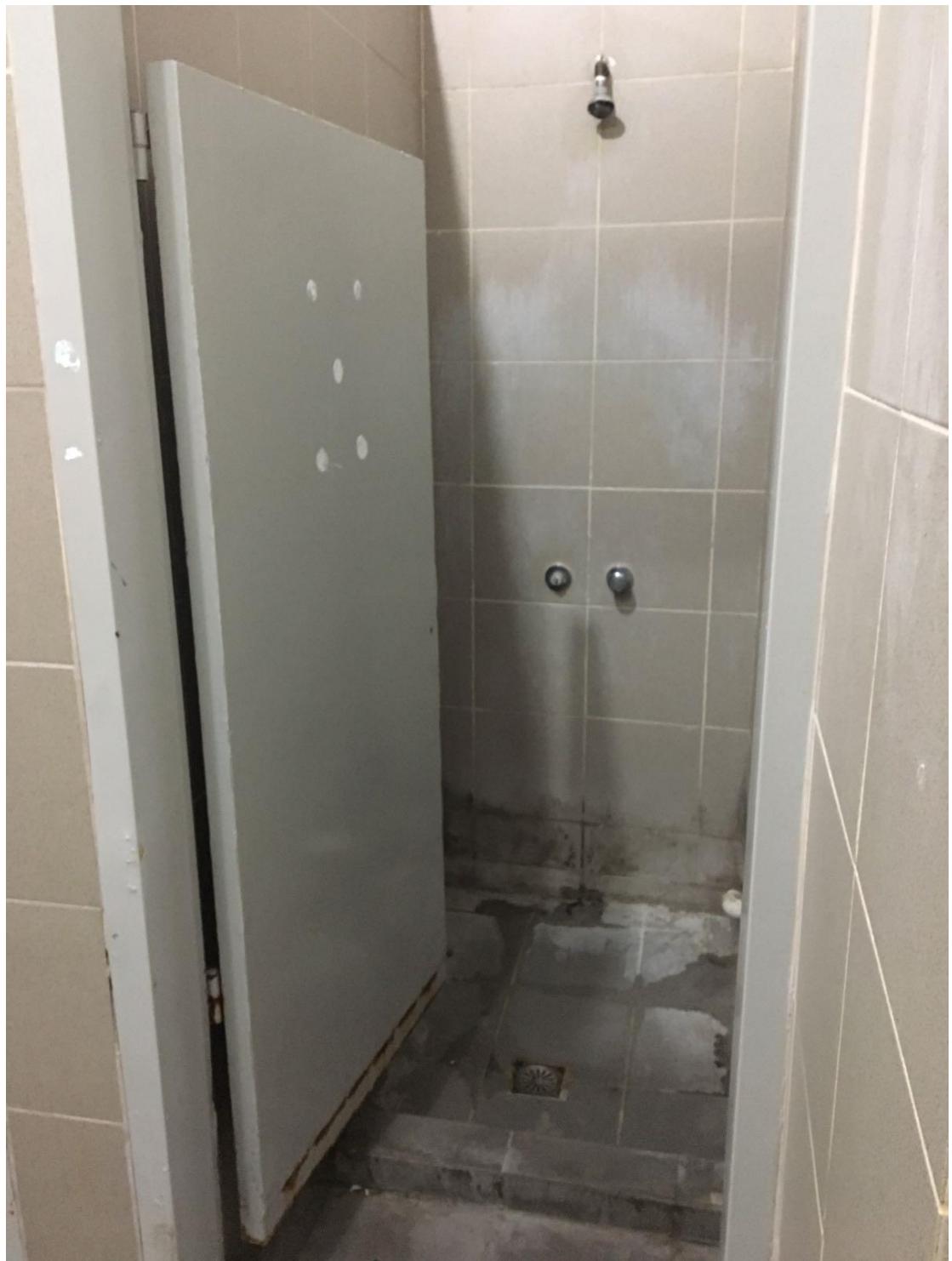
For the period 2010-2015, a snapshot of any detention centre at any time would show overcrowding so high that often detainees had to sleep in shifts. As I have noted elsewhere (Fili, 2013) and also experienced myself as an NGO practitioner working at the airport detention facility, more than 100 people were forced to stay in nine single or double occupancy cells. When it was crowded like this, the men could not all lie down at the same time. In other cases, especially at border locations, men, women, and children were held together. Access to the dormitories in border guard stations in Northern Greece required

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<sup>65</sup> To provide background to this statement, this is the fifth time the CPT has used this exceptional measure against countries; the first time in Turkey in 1992 and then again in 1996 and in Russia in 2001, 2003, 2005 for the situation in Chechnya.

‘walking over bodies as every square centimetre of floor space was occupied. A few detained persons were even sleeping in the space between the ceiling of the shower and the roof structure’ (CPT, 2012, p. 11). In the Fylakio special holding facility, a purpose-built environment, in 2012, 83 minors, some as young as 12 years old, were placed in a cell less than 100m<sup>2</sup>, with many juveniles sleeping on the floor in pools of water or next to leaking sewage. At times, the number went up to 120, when children had to literally hang out from the cell bars, pushing each other all together to get more air (Theodoropoulou, 2012). The situation was even worse during the winter months when the temperature fell below zero and there were no heating facilities.

Lack of ventilation, limited sanitation and poor hygiene were but some of the serious deficiencies the Greek immigration detention facilities were facing. Detained persons often complained about the challenge of keeping themselves clean as soap and shampoo were either not provided or in limited quantities, making conditions in overcrowding situations dirty and malodorous. The absence of hygiene items meant that often detainees had to stay in the same clothes for months. In many facilities, there was only one functioning toilet and one shower, usually for more than 100 people. Due to poor maintenance, toilets were often blocked, and the sanitary facilities were flooded with water, sewage and feces, which were overflowing into the sleeping area of detainees. It is striking that there were no special provisions for babies, families and young children. *‘Everyone was treated the same-like caged animals’* (CPT, 2012, p. 16).



*Figure 6: A toilet in the women's section of the Petrou Ralli detention centre*

Indeed, outdoor access and medical provision were rare. The men housed in the main section of the Athens airport facility were huddled together in spaces designed as single-occupancy cells (each 9 square metres) behind iron doors with very little natural light and no access to an exercise yard. Their only physical movement was limited to going to the toilet for a few minutes in the morning and the evening. At all other times they were locked

inside their cells with nothing to do. At times even, this ‘trip’ to the toilet was not allowed due to severe overcrowding or staff inaction. This was a recurring complaint of detainees at the airport detention facility while I was there as a practitioner. As I observed during my practitioner work, many times, they had to urinate in plastic bottles (Fili, 2013). In a similar pattern, in the absence of permanent medical presence, officers had to filter requests to see an external doctor. All too often, detainees in pain would never see one due to the lack of vehicles or staff to transport them as they were deemed non-urgent cases.



*Figure 7: The outside area of the Petrou Ralli detention centre*

As has been argued above, the operation of the centres was based on a security ideology, which saw detainees treated as criminal suspects. Tracing the genealogy of what she calls global apartheid by examining the anti-black roots of US border and immigration policy, Jenna Loyd (2015, p. 12) states ‘Commonsense understandings of criminality, confinement, and race informed treatment of unwanted asylum seekers, discursively rendering them confineable and punishable. The fact of confinement, in turn, effectively becomes the mark of criminality, regardless of criminal conviction.’ In the words of the manager of the Petrou Ralli detention centre, who I interviewed back in 2011 ‘*Greece is a*

*civilized country and can't have any more criminality. Tell me what we can do with all of them. There is no answer. We do whatever possible here and generally.'* In line with this rhetoric, detention practices, employed in the most capricious and arbitrary manner (Majcher and Flynn, 2014), remained unchallenged.

The criminalisation of migrants was also tied to racist ideas about migrant ethnicity, with migrants from non-European countries deemed more other, alien, inhuman. As Minister of Public Protection, Nikos Dendias declared in 2014, 'the migrant from the ex-Soviet Union that goes to Sweden has some kind of level. Greece gets migrants from Bangladesh, Afghanistan who have a different culture; they belong to a different world. That's our misfortune.' (Ekatihimerini, 2014). In this kind of political discourse, an additional argument slips in, about EU burden sharing. Such populist accounts, both appeases and enflames Greek citizens, building consensus against 'lower quality' immigrants. This is echoed in the literature on border control in Greece. By comparing immigrant women's accounts of their decisions to migrate to Greece and experiences with the views of border and detention officers, in an article I co-authored with Mary Bosworth and Sharon Pickering, we showed that border control articulates and relies on racialised and gendered understandings. Drawing on their participant's testimonies, we further argued that detainees were perceived through a racialised prism as morally and intellectually distinct from and inferior to (Greek) citizens (Bosworth et al., 2018).

For example, a detention officer at Petrou Ralli detention centre claimed in response to a question about women detainees: *'They are not able to freely move around, they can't talk to anyone, they just come to Greece and become slaves. So, in a way in here [detention centre] they have a better life, because we feed them and provide them with accommodation'* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). In this kind of preposterous discourse, 'the provision of 'shelter' to undocumented migrants by the Greek state was considered as a marker of a civilised state (us) pitted against uncivilised masses (them)' (Bosworth et al., 2018, p. 9), a timeless persuasive technique that helps define any issue in security terms (Karyotis, 2012).

The absolute state of necessity most detainees found themselves in, was not lost on officials either. In 2013, a local court in Igoumenitsa dismissed criminal charges against 15 migrants who had escaped from long-term detention in police cells. As the judge ruled, escape was a reasonable act of escaping from humiliation and life-threatening conditions to freedom (Infomobile, 2013). Detention officers, too, found this abject situation difficult to stomach. *'Do you think we like it here?'* (Fieldnotes, airport detention facility, 2012),

Andreas at the airport detention facility demanded angrily. In fact, many officers had confided in me that they did not think guarding immigrant detainees was proper police work; as opposed to being out on the streets fighting crime. It is in this context that police officers rarely engaged in any meaningful contact with detainees, with many spending their shift avoiding contact as much as possible. Rather tellingly, in Fylakio, officers would leave the cardboard box containing breakfast on the floor so women detainees could help themselves.

Yet, despite repeated recommendations by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, no efforts had been made either to assign specially trained and dedicated staff to work with irregular migrants or to increase staff numbers. In the years of financial crisis, major pay cuts in the police and armed forces had contributed to growing levels of dissatisfaction among detention officers. Combined with widespread far-right tendencies in the police force, this helped foment a disparaging mix of neglect and abuse across the country's detention facilities (Antonopoulos, 2006; Christopoulos, 2014; Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2015).

The vast majority of detained persons did not have any information regarding their detention, nor any understanding of their legal situation. The only papers they possessed were in Greek informing them that they could be detained for up to six months. The lack of any information in a language they understood left them in limbo about their future and what would happen at the end of the period of detention. More worryingly, in part due to the lack of training but also due to the sheer state of abuse with which detainees were treated, the CPT in 2013 discovered that detainees who had committed acts of self-harm or repeatedly made requests to receive information about their future would be placed in isolation; in a filthy cell with no toilet (CPT, 2014).

In the course of this era, incidents of maltreatment, including racist insults and excessive use of force, abounded. Several persons alleged that they were punished with slaps, kicks and blows for making complaints or for committing acts of self-harm. The CPT delegation even found bloodstains in a room in the Filakio centre, where the alleged beatings were taking place, which the authorities attributed to self-harm by detainees (CPT, 2012). In one case, a person in Amygdaleza detention centre who had been taken to hospital to treat wounds caused cutting himself with a glass, was punished on his return by being handcuffed to a fence (CPT, 2014). On another occasion, following a disturbance at

Komotini pre-removal centre in November 2012, detainees were made to stand in the corridor outside their dormitories while riot police officers had proceeded to hit them with batons and chains. The beatings continued for two days. As a result, 25 detainees had to be transferred to hospital for treatment for broken limbs. Yet, the police report indicates that prohibited items had been found during the search and criminal charges were brought against the instigators of the unrest. No investigations into allegations of ill treatment by police officers was initiated (CPT, 2014).

Despite the detailed, coherent and consistent allegations of ill treatment, often amounting to torture, few detainees ever filed complaints against the police, fearing retribution or a negative impact on their case. The decision not to file complaints was often supported by the detainees' lawyers, aware of the state of impunity covering the police force. Foreigners who did not have a lawyer were in a worse position, as they were unaware of their rights and possibilities to pursue such a claim. Even those who filed a complaint, a complex procedure, that required legal advice and interpretation services, admitted that there was no follow-up action by a prosecutor or a judge, raising questions about the independence of the investigative authorities and leaving many in doubt about the commitment of the state authorities to combat this phenomenon. In fact, the complete inaction from a political level means that officers could act in the knowledge that they would not be held to account if they physically ill-treated a detained person. Interactions with high officials were revealing for that matter. According to a journalist I interviewed, the General Secretary of the right-wing governing party, when visited by the Greek Committee for Human Rights, blatantly admitted that they were not interested in human rights.

On the eve of 2015, there were nine pre-removal detention centres, two screening centres in Samos and Chios in the Aegean, two first reception centres in Orestiada; one on the land border with Turkey and one on Lesvos at the sea border with Turkey, in addition to a number of border guards and police stations, with a known capacity for around 5,000 (Majcher and Flynn, 2014). The general immigration policy as well as the situation in detention had created an outrage. Humanitarian NGOs, political parties and news media outlets on the left of the political spectrum expressed their concern about what was going on behind iron doors, however, in the context of public xenophobia, they had failed to reach beyond their own circles. One cannot but note a sharp contrast between the amount of resources and political emphasis given to building detention centres in Greece, and the

lack of emphasis placed on how detention centres are run. While the left-wing party, Syriza, was rising and gaining momentum in 2014, it promoted a clear pro-immigration agenda, with references to human rights violations and public denouncements of the practices of previous governments. The question that remained open, however, was whether this stance would lead to the desired change inside the centres.

### **A humanitarian turn (2015)**

While mainstream political discourse in Greece since the 1990s had been ‘imbued with welfare chauvinism, hate speech, nationalist propaganda, mobilising feelings of insecurity and national pride’ (Triandafyllidou and Kouki, 2014, p. 421), the period leading up to the 2015 elections changed the discourse significantly. During its election campaign, Syriza pledged to make a U-turn from the rather restrictive migration and asylum policies of the previous governments, making the closing of detention centres a flagship pre-election announcement. They promised they would replace them with reception centres, fully staffed by healthcare personnel and interpreters in order to meet migrants’ personalised needs.

In the context of Greek immigration politics, their proposals were considered radical. It was the only time that a Greek political party had openly adopted an abolitionist strategy. Syriza formed a human rights committee that visited detention centres to document conditions and make statements about what they described as the ‘modern Dachau of Greece’ in Amygdaleza, where people were stacked in inhumane and degrading conditions.’ (Avgi, 2014).

In February 2015, when they came into power, Syriza assured Greek citizens that immigration detention centres belonged to the past, committing to their election pledge to reverse anti-immigrant policies of the previous right-wing government (ECRE, 2015). To this effect, it formed a new Immigration Policy Ministry under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At a visit to the infamous Amygdaleza pre-removal detention centre,<sup>66</sup> following the suicide of a Pakistani detainee,<sup>67</sup> then Deputy Minister of Citizen’s Protection, Yannis

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<sup>66</sup> For more on the Amygdaleza detention centre and the assessment of widespread detention as a cost-effective tool see Angeli and Triandafyllidou (2014).

<sup>67</sup> The 28-year-old Pakistani man had been held in detention twice for a total of 25 months. See more in ECRE (2015). A few months earlier, in November 2014, another Pakistani national, Muhammad Ashfaq had died in Amygdaleza due to the indifference of the authorities towards his pleas to be taken to the hospital. More on the incident in ThePressProject (2014).

Panousis, said 'I am here to express my embarrassment. We are done with detention centres' (Ekathimerini, 2015). It was a moment much celebrated by NGOs and human rights organisations, as this was the first time a member of a Greek government spoke openly about what was going on inside detention facilities. As a member of a Greek NGO told me with a hint of disaffection, '*We were hoping that Syriza would come and change everything*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Their pre-election moto was 'Hope is on its way' (SYRIZA, 2015).

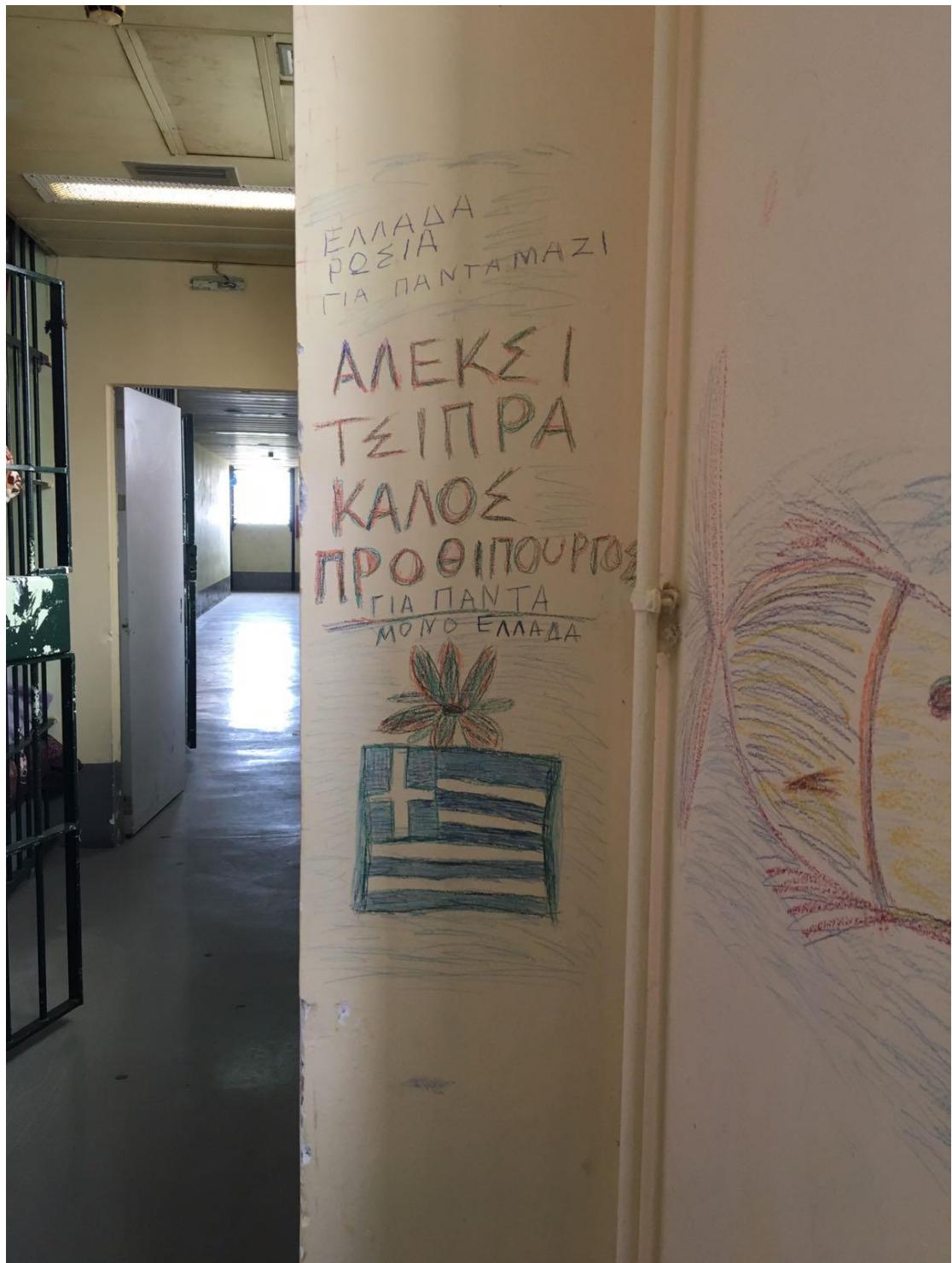


Figure 8: Alexis Tsipras Good Prime Minister [Αλεκοι Τσιπρα Καλος Προθιπουργος] on the wall of the female wing in the Petrou Ralli detention centre.<sup>69</sup>

In March 2015, the government started evacuating Amygdaleza at a rate of 30 migrants per day (Chrysopoulos, 2015), amid great fanfare about the humanitarian face of the new

<sup>69</sup> Alexis Tsipras is the leader of Syriza, the governing party from 2015 to 2019, which was the first political party that adopted an abolitionist strategy, albeit for a limited time.

era and despite fervent opposition not only by other parties but also by local residents. The aim was to close down the centre within 100 days, and other centres as soon as possible. The Greek government's plan was further accompanied by the announcement of a range of measures that presented an important step towards reducing the use of immigration detention in Greece (Ministry of Citizen Protection 2015). The announcement included the revocation of the Ministerial Decision allowing detention beyond 18 months, and the immediate release of persons, who had been detained for more than this time. Furthermore, action would be taken in order to put in place open reception centres instead of detention facilities.

The announcement also noted that alternatives to detention would be implemented for the first time, the maximum period of detention would be limited to six months, and persons belonging to vulnerable groups, including asylum seekers would be immediately released. In the following months, the detained population shrunk from around 7,000 to a few hundred (AITIMA, 2016). Yet, only one year later, in March 2016, pre-removal detention centres were back again reaching their full capacity, and Greece was fast becoming a containing space of the thousands of refugees trapped in its islands and mainland (AITIMA, 2016). How can this turnaround be explained?

### **Immigration detention during a 'refugee crisis'<sup>70</sup>**

In June 2015, at the same time as the government was negotiating a new bail out deal with Europe, there was a general understanding that the boats would not stop coming. Indeed, over the summer of 2015, the numbers escalated most notably as a result of the Syrian war, reaching their peak in October with 210,824 new arrivals (UNHCR, 2015). However, the Greek government did not have the resources to deal with the enormous task of registering and managing the incoming population. As Rozakou (2017, p. 43) reports, 'in late August 2015 there was a backlog of 20,000 unrecorded border crossers on Lesvos'. In an attempt to put more pressure on the EU to pour in more funds, members of the government threatened to unleash a wave 'of millions of economic migrants' on Europe unless the EU helped Greece financially (Waterfield, 2015).

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<sup>70</sup> This section draws on my analysis in Fili (2018a).

Unofficially, though, the wave-through approach had already started.<sup>71</sup> Rozakou's (2017a) ethnographic research on the island of Lesvos during the summer of 2015 is particularly illuminating of non-recording practices on the island. Operating in a state of legal limbo and with an overwhelmed system, due to severe staff shortages, Greek officials neither registered nor fingerprinted most of the new arrivals. Near the end of the summer, the police that were responsible for managing the closed reception centres on the islands opened the gates due to their incapability to provide food to all the detainees.<sup>72</sup>

Rather than trying to impede movement like in the past, the focus was now on speeding up the flow to avoid congestion on the islands. Hence, the number of immigrant and asylum seeker detainees remained very low. The Greek government did not just turn a blind eye to this practice, but was actively involved by chartering ferries to take people from the islands where they land, to Athens or to Kavala (a port in north Greece) so they could continue their journey to northern Europe; turning ferries into, what has Spathopoulou (2016) identified as, mobile hotspots. As Papada et al. (2020, p. 1033) further report, the issuance of removal orders to all new arrivals was employed as a 'governance tool to secure the fastest possible transit of those arriving towards the rest of Europe'.<sup>73</sup>

However, because of a lack of sustainable plan, this wave through policy resulted in refugees and migrants congregating in squares in Athens, where the number of people sleeping rough swelled dramatically. The huge makeshift camp in Idomeni, at Greece's border with Macedonia, which the Greek Interior Minister, Panagiotis Kouroumbis, called 'modern-day Dachau' (Worley and Dearden, 2016), was constructed through humanitarian support to hold those who were waiting to cross the border to continue their journeys through the Balkans to Northern Europe.<sup>74</sup> However, the idea of people being waved through was not welcomed by the countries on the receiving end of the flow (European Commission, 2016), isolating Greece from its neighbouring countries, as evidenced by its exclusion from the Visegrad and Austria summits which were convened to discuss the handling of the 'refugee crisis' (Deutsche Welle, 2016). Tyler (2018) adeptly captures the role of Visegrád states in the dramatic events of 2015. 'Visegrád politicians began to craft

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<sup>71</sup> For more on how Greece has attempted to control outward mobility over the years, compared to other countries, see Weber et al. (2019).

<sup>72</sup> This is mainly based on anecdotal evidence drawn from my experience as an NGO worker at the time.

<sup>73</sup> This excluded Syrian nationals, who received a six-month suspension from removal.

<sup>74</sup> For a chronicle of the events before and after Idomeni turned from a transit hub to a dead end, see Anastasiadou et al. (2017).

a geopolitical role for the region as a buffer zone against which (Western) Europe could be protected against this “incursion” (Tyler, 2018, p. 1787). This, of course, stands in stark opposition to Germany’s open-door policy, which allowed for millions of refugees fleeing from wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to seek refuge there.

Nevertheless, despite the approach EU states took towards migration based on their capacity, as well as their ethnonationalist agenda (Tyler, 2017), they all agreed that Greece was responsible to stop the flow, thus, should be assisted to control or interrupt people’s mobility. Drawing on this, the European Commission developed the idea of the ‘hotspot approach’ (European Commission, n.d.). The aim was to help slow the flow of migrants heading to the north, and mitigate security risks by swiftly identifying, registering, and fingerprinting all arrivals in Italy and Greece, as hotspots were considered key to securing the EU’s external borders (European Commission, 2016c; see also ECRE, 2016 and Papoutsi et al., 2019). Furthermore, in late January, the EU gave Greece yet another ultimatum to stop migrants crossing from Turkey, or else the country would be banned from the borderless Schengen area (European Commission, 2016b). Austria and several Balkan countries were determined to stop migrants passing through by building rows of fences, and FYROM sealed its southern border with Greece. With the end of the wave-through approach, thousands of migrants were stranded in Greece.<sup>75</sup>

Amid EU pressure to deal with mass mobility, and with just few of the resources pledged by the EU actually coming through, the available evidence shows that confinement and detention were once again employed as an ‘accommodation strategy’ for the rising number of refugees and migrants. In the beginning of 2016, the Greek government started detaining nationals of North African countries followed by nationals of Pakistan and Bangladesh, separating once more between bona fide refugees and economic migrants (AITIMA, 2016). Papada et al. (2020) write about this new security regime that popped up on the islands. ‘This regime was based on the assumption that belonging to a nationality with a low rate in the recognition of asylum applications was *prima facie* evidence of an attempt to abuse the asylum system.’ (Papada et al., 2020, p. 1040; see also Benson, 2019) At the same time, the authorities started to arrest nationals of other countries, including Afghans, holding expired police documents. In a just a few months, the number of

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<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that the borders for nationalities other than Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis closed on December 2015 and the borders for Afghans closed on February 2016.

detainees increased significantly (AITIMA, 2016). In February 2016, the five long-delayed 'hotspot' centres opened on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Leros, Samos, and Kos in order to cope with a relentless flow of people landing from Turkey (Antonakaki et al., 2016).

Under the EU-Turkey deal, which came into force on 20 March 2016 (European Council, 2016), people arriving on the Greek islands were immediately detained for 20 days in these hotspots in order to be individually assessed by the Greek authorities. Following the 20 days' period, they were released but had to remain on the island, thus further restricting their movement. Anyone who did not apply for asylum would be sent back to Turkey, as would anyone whose claim is rejected. Implementation of the deal has presented Greece with two challenges: first, the legal challenge of presenting Turkey as a safe third country in order to expedite returns. Second, to separate between those already trapped in Greece and new arrivals, as the fate of the former group is not addressed by the deal.

As for the former, the Greek government amended its asylum legislation in a fast-track legislative procedure to modify the structure of the Asylum Appeals Committees, raising concerns about the independence and impartiality of the new body (for more on this see Gkliati, 2016). The latter challenge was addressed by emptying Greek islands of all those who crossed over from Turkey prior to the deal and transforming the much-vaunted open hotspots into massive police-run detention centres to host newcomers. The amended legal framework of first reception procedures (3907/2011) further clarifies that migrants were subject to restriction of freedom of movement within the premises of these centres.

Within a few months, Greece was transformed from a fast lane to a grim waiting room. An article drawing on an investigation of Greece's humanitarian response after 2015 describes a pattern of inertia, concealment of chaos, external pressure and last-minute actions, when it came to housing those who were stuck in Greece (Howden and Fotiadis, 2017). 'Ask exactly how many refugee camps there are in Greece and no one is certain. Migration ministry bulletins list 39 camps, some of which are empty; others are mothballed and others still are in the planning phase but do not appear on the list. The UNHCR said there were more than 50, but did not give a specific number.' (Howden and Fotiadis, 2017). Yet in addition to these new facilities, Greece continued to use a number of pre-removal detention centres, older dedicated detention facilities, and numerous border guard and police stations. For example, pre-removal detention centres like Amygdaleza and Corinth, the closure of which was celebrated in the presence of the media at the beginning of the government's term of office, were re-opened.

According to a report released in October 2016 by NGO AITIMA, drawing on a project that involved monitoring visits to detention centres in Greece, there were still long-standing systemic problems, no different to what human rights organisations had castigated Greece for in the past. In fact, they arose from a well-known mixture of pleasing the EU, appeasing public opinion, and attempting to deter prospective arrivals. Based on 31 monitoring visits to detention centres conducted over one year, the analysis of 277 individual cases and interviews with competent authorities the research team observed, among others, the use of inappropriate detention areas, lack of outdoor time, recreational activities and interpretation services, inadequate healthcare, social and psychological support, detention of minors and seriously ill persons and the sheer lack of information regarding the case. Furthermore, Amnesty International at a press meeting in October 2016, claimed that detention conditions on the islands were purposefully bad to deter prospective arrivals, alluding to former practices described in this and the previous chapter (Huffington Post Greece, 2016; see also Amnesty International, 2016).

Many refugee camps were also full to capacity and host to a range of problems. Almost half of the new sites were created in under ten days, some in very remote locations with little to no access to legal aid, limited access to services and support, and hardly any information offered about their status. Conditions in most open centres fell below international humanitarian standards, to the point where some had been characterised as even 'unfit for animals' (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Greek army has played a lead role in setting up most of the facilities covering mainly catering services, receiving complaints not just about the quality of the food but also due to rumors of corruption following the deals made with the catering companies. As Daniel Howden and Apostolis Fotiadis (2017) report, \$74 million was added to the defense ministry budget for refugee support.

All the above had long been a source of intense criticism from both domestic and international observers, as well as the subject of numerous cases at the European Court of Human Rights. What was relatively new, however, was intensified confusion on the ground, reflecting improvised nature of reactive (EU) immigration policies and their implementation. Who was detained, where, for what reasons, and for how long, were questions that no one could answer. Your quality of experience depended on where you had been placed, and where you had been placed was down to luck. It was also unclear as to which part of the government was responsible for running open and closed facilities. Even the Action Plan presented by the Greek authorities in the beginning of March 2016

lacked information on the authorities responsible for the implementation of certain actions and for monitoring the implementation of those actions (European Commission, 2016c).

While not all facilities used to confine people in the aftermath of 2015 were detention centres *per se*, the line between open accommodation and confinement often became difficult to draw in practice. The spatial logic of refugee camps was that they were as physically remote as possible. This fact, when combined with severely restricted access to the asylum process in these places, rendered most people inside them invisible and immobilised in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. People were not only stuck inside camps; under the EU-Turkey deal and in view of walls being literally and metaphorically built across Europe they were also physically prevented from leaving Greece.<sup>76</sup>

As a 2016 report by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles argued, there is little official clarity as to what can be presented as detention facilities or reception structures in Greece (Mouzourakis and Taylor, 2016). It is explained that the highly misleading representation of the country's reception capacity, including detention places, can be attributed to the effort to reach the EU target of 30,000 reception places and satisfy other member states. At the same time, the number of detainees was wrongly presented as smaller than the actual one, failing to include the number of people detained in hotspots. This is further reflected in another report by Access Info and the Global Detention Project (2015), which aimed to obtain a true picture of the number of migrants and asylum seekers being held in detention around the world. Greece failed to provide complete information on the names and locations of detention centres and offered invalid answers to questions about the number of (asylum seeker) detainees and the number of minors in detention. Greek authorities, in their beloved tactic, did not include the many police stations, where migrants were known to be detained, thus, invisibilising a great number of detainees and directed the researchers to the Greek police's website that contains limited information in order to avoid directly responding to questions. In effect, Greece's detained migrants were going uncounted and hence unaccounted for.

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<sup>76</sup> In stark opposition to this framing, people on the move across Greece found ways to circumvent containment practices and, albeit in smaller numbers, managed to leave Greece. However, this means that they increasingly depended on smuggling networks and attempted risky journeys (See further Stierl, 2019).

## Conclusion

For a number of years, progressive Greek governments blamed the lack of infrastructure, organisation, capital and the intrinsic pressures of its geographical position for Greece's difficulty in managing borders and effectively dealing with migrant populations. The narratives of crises, which have been employed since 2009, only granted moral legitimacy to Greece's continued political, legal and financial margin within Europe (Mantanika, 2014). Against this context, Greek detention policy has been based on flimsy foundations as the Greek state has managed neither to curb arrivals nor remove those migrants deemed undesirable. As Peter Andreas (2003, p. 3) points out, in the US–Mexico borderlands context, immigration enforcement measures may be 'politically successful policy failures.' Mainwaring and Silverman (2017) make a similar claim about the UK and Malta, arguing that detention has been used as a defense against manufactured crises, which in turn serve a state's interests. In other words, detention in Greece may not have succeeded in its official policy aims, it has, though, been successful in other ways.

First, it reasserted sovereign power and a shared national identity from which migrants are excluded (Bosworth, 2019); thus, appeasing Greek citizens, who were for years exposed to a state discourse about immigration detention as a defensive reaction to the threats posed by migration. At the same time, it reminds non-citizens of their imminent detainability and deportability (Mainwaring and Silverman, 2017). Second, effective containment on Greek soil assuaged anxieties about mass mobility coming from further north. The placards at the entrance of every detention centre in Greece advertising the finance contribution of the EU unfailingly show what is at stake here; protecting (white) Europe as a community.

In the context of yet another migrant crisis, Greece soon became a space of humanitarian intervention where governmental and nongovernmental, security, humanitarian and human rights actors cooperated to respond to humanitarian crises on the ground (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020). In a situation of endless emergency, people on the move were kept apart and out of sight, while the 'care' dispensed was designed to control, filter and confine. With a floundering political leadership, unable to find solutions to anything at all, and with a downward spiralling economy and continuing pressure (and funding) from the EU to employ mechanisms of repressive immigration control, it comes as no surprise that the Syriza-led Greek government (2015-2019) succumbed to models of encampment and abandoned its humanitarian and leftist ideals that were its flagship before they were elected.

As former Minister of Immigration Policy with Syriza, Giannis Mouzalas, asserted, not so long after they came into power, '*there can be no immigration policy without closed hospitality centres*' (Georgiopoulou, 2016). While unavoidably some remodelling has been observed over time, this chapter concludes that containment practices of immobility in Greece are enduring in time and employed by all governing parties. '*This refutes a left-right dichotomy and points to the racialised dynamics of immigration control, informed by dominant and shared discourses of securitization and illegalization of migrants*' (Karamanidou, 2016, p. 14). However, Greek governments have not been alone in building, expanding and feeding the detention estate. The next chapters address the world outside of detention and aim to explain how have extreme forms of violence been normalised. By connecting detention centres to the outside, I aim to explain—and resist—the impulse to detain. In order to understand the meaning of detention politics, we need to look outside its four walls and into the domains of politics, society and culture. Through foregrounding the role of monitors, the police and NGOs, the following documents the different ways that the detention system has been insulated from threats to its existence.

## Chapter 4. Guarding and Monitoring Immigration Detention

*'We can't be very displeasing. We have a gentlemen's agreement with the police'*, Member of the Greek National Preventive Mechanism (Fieldnotes, Athens, 2018)

### Introduction

Working inside a detention centre, where listlessness is patent makes you attuned to the slightest alteration as this may be a cause for alarm for those detained inside (see Bosworth et al., 2016). However, that summer day of 2012 at the airport detention facility everything was different. The walls were painted a bright white colour and there were fresh wet paint signs all over the place. The whole building had been meticulously cleaned and exhumed a strong sense of chlorine. The old man who was responsible for cleaning the police station building and detention facility was moving busily around mopping the floors. The police officers on duty were anxiously observing how everything looked.<sup>77</sup> When we asked what was going on, we learned that an international delegation of a human rights organisation was visiting that day and that we would not be able to see any of the men detained because they wanted them to remain placid, insinuating that their contact with us would upset them. So, they asked us to leave.

The next day we found out that the detention area, to the shock of those locked inside, was thoroughly cleaned too, the toilets had been fixed and the showers unclogged, men were offered shampoo and soap and a toilet roll each and they were allowed to go to the canteen to buy their food and drinks for the first time in a very long time. The police officers, who maintained a better relationship with the detainees, were purposefully on shift that day; thus, keeping those detained calmer and presenting a façade of order. Furthermore, a large number of detainees were released the night before in an effort to decongest the cells, which at the time would hold between 6 and 8 people in single or double occupancy dormitories.

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<sup>77</sup> See Fili (2013) for what the airport detention facility normally looked like.



*Figure 9: The inside of a cell at the airport detention facility.*

As some of these (international) visits were announced or somewhat expected, the coverup of the reality of daily life inside detention centres was not a rare event. In my capacity as an NGO practitioner for nearly two years, I had seen detention centres being emptied of detainees, carefully painted and cleaned, and everything put in order before official visits numerous times. Every time the feeling that conditions may improve was uplifting and

those detained did indeed seem more hopeful. But soon after the delegations were gone, the situation always went back to its normal state of affairs, where dirt, the smell of urine and sweat and severe overcrowding prevailed. The smell of the fresh paint always lingered for days to remind us and those behind bars of the carefully applied deception.

The cover-up has been observed elsewhere too. In 2011, during a mission in Evros, representatives from ProAsyl noticed an ongoing renovation process in the facilities in Evros (Fylakio, Tychero, Soufli and Feres). Similar to the vignette above, ‘the cells were painted, toilet bowls and showers were replaced, new clean blankets were given’, and detainees were transferred to centres in other regions or were released (ProAsyl, 2012, p. 9). A week later a delegation from the European Commission visited the Evros region. However, the veil drawn over the actual conditions that detainees and staff were exposed to at the borders did not go unnoticed. In a press release after the visit in Evros in 2011, the Federation of the Borderguards of Evros stated ‘Very suddenly money was found (for the renovation) and the number of detainees decreased. Within three days the facilities were painted, the plumbing was repaired and release papers were given generously. And all this for what? So that European monitors see a virtual reality? Why did they not leave things as we live them on daily basis?’, they demanded.<sup>78</sup>

The previous chapters have established the extent and frequency of human rights violations inside detention facilities. This has been a bleak story about torture, suffering and neglect. However, the question remains; how did Greece end up creating and nurturing such a monstrous institution? While passing reference has been made as to how the authorities have managed to deflect criticism, this chapter and the next will explain in greater detail the mechanisms through which the detention system in Greece has been insulated against any possible threats to its survival and thriving. In other words, it provides an account of resistance to change.

The first section of this chapter focuses on police as the major stakeholder inside detention and the role they have played in managing detention. In doing so, I aim to explore how detention staff rely on forms of violence in their day-to-day work; thus, further illuminating

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<sup>78</sup> For the link to their statement, see Bloko.gr (2011) [in Greek]. This is not the first time border guards have complained about the situation at the borders. The website of the Federation of Border guards contains all their statements to the press dating back to 2011, see Posyfy (n.d.). A report by CPT (2010) further includes details about the perspective of border guards.

the inherent brutality of border control in Greece. Staff-detainee relations within detention centres in the country seem unencumbered by the usual restraints rooted in accounts of authority and legitimacy. In Greek detention sites, we see clearly how authoritarianism emerges from racist and racializing tropes, and how difficult it is to challenge or eradicate them.

The following section provides a brief critical discussion on the structures of detention monitoring by, mainly, international organisations, in Greece, the primary agents that are responsible for the operation, and the institutional and legal culture within which this operation takes place. It is suggested that the key features of a regime that is based on the exhaustion of others cannot be understood without reference to how successive governments have received and deflected criticism; thus, keeping detention knitted together. The final section of this chapter follows the work of the National Preventive Mechanism in Greece, whose role is to monitor conditions inside confinement institutions and offer recommendations. The analysis draws on shadow visits to detention facilities I did with the NPM team and conversations I have had with their staff. The dilemma between independence and proximity to the government is a puzzling one for the Greek NPM and one in which independence is more often than not compromised. The chapter concludes that the pervasiveness of racism and violence inside immigration detention in Greece is a symbol of an official subculture of tolerance of Greek police's work culture.

### **Police officers as stakeholders in detention**

*'I trust the Greek police. You are the state'* said Prime Minister, Konstantinos Mitsotakis, just before he took power in 1990. So significant was his trust, that the government, either unable or unwilling to deal with the 'migration problem', gave the police carte blanche to manage it in their own terms, setting the foundations for Greek police's influential role in the governance of migration over the years and effectively modelling the later tolerance of human rights violations by law enforcement officials against immigrants. In doing so, the police took an active role in shaping policy implementation and the moral framework of migration management in Greece (Borrelli and Lindberg, 2018).

Over the years, immigration detention has involved numerous social actors; formal and informal; governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental; international and local.

Yet the police, as manager of detention, have remained the indispensable and pivotal actor around which all other entities revolve.<sup>79</sup> Though, this may not have been a problem per se, the institutional characteristics of the police and its close affinities to the state as protectors of state sovereignty under threat, and the far-right in the country, have made the police's central role in detention problematic. Yet, this was not necessarily a role the police wanted to assume. As they have often argued 'they were left all alone to do the dirty work' without the necessary prerequisites and preparation (Christopoulos, 2014, p. 34).<sup>80</sup> And a dirty work they did. This section will not go through the wrongdoings of the police inside immigration detention, because these have been described in detail in the previous chapters. It will rather explain how the culture of violence has been made possible.

To do so, I draw on the growing body of work, from around the world on immigration detention staff. Some of these approaches are familiar as they owe much to similar scholarship on prisons, which has explored the relationship between legitimacy and discretion in prison officer work (see, for example, Liebling, 2000; Crewe, 2011). Luigi Gariglio's ethnography of Italian prison officers is illuminating the lawful, yet problematic and discretionary use of force in confinement institutions. Alexandra Hall (2010; 2012) focused on staff, and how they governed immigration detainees. In her ethnographic account, Hall explores how social life in UK immigration detention centres is characterised by 'antagonism and tensions between the detainees and officers, but could also produce encounters of respect, generosity or solicitude.' (Hall, 2012, p. 19). Other work on staff in the UK explores issues of race and gender (Bosworth and Slade, 2014; Bosworth, 2018; 2019a), setting out the ways in which such factors not only help officers 'make sense' of detainees, but structure all their encounters.

Further north, in the Nordic countries too, scholarship has examined officer behavior. There, accounts primarily explore the affective nature on the job, albeit from quite different perspectives depending, in part, on the disciplinary bent of the author (Puthooppambil et al, 2015; Ugelvik, 2016). For Puthooppambil and colleagues in Sweden, for instance, working within psychology, the emphasis is on the emotional labour of this job (Puthooppambil et al, 2015). Canning (2020) too, albeit from a more critical

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<sup>79</sup> As was mentioned in previous chapters, until 2013, the police were responsible for the asylum procedure too.

<sup>80</sup> Rozakou (2017a) explains that police officers have expressed similar concerns during the summer of 2015, i.e., that they were abandoned by the state to perform their duties.

perspective is also interested in such matters in Denmark. There she contrasts practices of ‘kindness’ like baking with coercion through dynamic security.

In Greece, much like the institutions they work in, detention officers have been overlooked in the literature.<sup>81</sup> Cabot (2018) explores the emergence of the figure of the good police officer in the narratives of advocates for asylum seekers in the Greek asylum system. This perceived ‘goodness’ is associated with a new ethos of accountability and transparency in the governance of asylum, yet, this image might reveal more about the NGO practitioners, who are projecting it, rather than the actual officers, who are synonymous with arbitrary violence. Rozakou (in preparation) is concerned with the moral world of detention officers (see also Borrelli and Lindberg, 2018). While recognising their anti-immigrant attitudes, she explores how they often exhibit care towards immigrants, drawing on the Greek notion of ‘filotimo’ (love of honour). However, as she shows, violence and dehumanisation are not challenged by this exhibit of care but are rather in full compliance as ‘filotimo’ has a strong nationalist content.<sup>82</sup>

What this diverse scholarship shares, though, is that they rarely interrogate the idea of police itself, all the while they denounce police abuses. This approach, Micol Seigel argues, ‘leaves us disputing superficial aspect of police practice, never taking up our assumptions about what police are or what they do, foreclosing challenge to the legitimacy of the police in a democracy’ (Seigel, 2018, p. 6). Borrowing from Seigel (2018), who defines policing as ‘violence work’, I seek to explain how this violence has become so normalised in a detention setting. Detention centres are distinctive institutions marked out by high levels of uncertainty for staff and detainees. These are also sites that are marked out by global, racialised systems of inequalities. Detention centres are simultaneously politically contested and largely hidden and unfamiliar to most citizens. They are by racialised logics that strip the confined of their humanity and permit brutality to occur. The work of a detention officer is quite unclear under these circumstances. I show that rather than authority, rooted in relationships however unequal, all too often staff in detention in Greece draw on an authoritarian logic, in which those confined are owed nothing, perhaps not even food.

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<sup>81</sup> See Pallister-Wilkins (2015) for an exploration of border policing and humanitarianism.

<sup>82</sup> For another reading of the word ‘filotimo’, see Cheliotis (2014), who argues that this concept of Greek honour has been employed in Greek prisons to promote order.

### *Guarding detention*

Staff assigned to detention centres are regular police officers, who have received basic police education.<sup>83</sup> As special policing concerns arose in the late 1990s, i.e., rapidly increasing immigration, a specialised policing body was created. Law 2622/1998 established the police division of border guards, with their role limited to preventing the unlawful entry of foreigners to Greece, their detection and arrest (Law 2622/1998). Unlike police officers, who went through four years of police education, this special body was comprised of just high school graduates with no more than four months of training (Rigakos and Papanikolaou, 2003).

As the new legislation stipulated, this policing force had to be 90 per cent male. The sexist overtone of the law is explained further below in the document: their mission to prevent foreigners from entering, needs particular physical abilities and body structure.<sup>84</sup> While they were uniformed and armed, they could not be promoted and their employment was subject to a five-year renewable contract; thus, in reality they formed a police department with heavy responsibilities but no job security. The lack of security is better exemplified by the fact that in cases of malpractice, whereas police officers could be suspended or dismissed from service, border guards were fired. Before 2009, border guards were a paramilitary force tasked, in particular, with the apprehension and detention of irregular migrants and traffickers. As George Rigakos and Georgios Papanikolaou (2003) point out, their uniform and equipment were closer to that of soldiers. Then they became part of the official police force, with only two weeks extra training. Their gradual incorporation into the police force, created what they called lower status police officers (Christopoulos, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, serving at remote locations as a border guard was not very appealing, a situation that often resulted in low staff numbers at border centres. For example, in 2007, official reports suggested that Filakio and Pagani centres had only six officers on duty for 201 and 548 detainees respectively. In need of staff, the police resorted to seconding officers to the borders for one or two months at a time. This is still the case (Rozakou, in preparation). However, the managers of the centres are not happy with the mobility and temporariness of the police officers. As the Director of the Kos pre-removal centre told

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<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that up until 1994, recruitment of police officers was political and arbitrary. Law 2226/1994 provided for their recruitment through national examinations. For the link, see Law N° 2226/1994.

<sup>84</sup> For further analysis of this special policing body see Rigakos and Papanikolaou (2003), Vidali (2007) and Christopoulos (2014).

us, at a monitoring visit I did together with the Greek NPM, the facility had only 65 police officers, 95 percent of whom stay there only for one month. *'I cannot work with those who have no experience, so I have become a trainer'* (Fieldnotes, Kos detention centre, 2019).

This is not only an issue at border locations. According to detention officers I have spoken with during my time as an NGO practitioner, *'guarding immigrants is not proper police work'* as opposed to fighting crime on the streets of Athens. Therefore, a lot of the staff serving at detention centres in Athens, are not there willingly, they have instead been seconded there from other police departments for limited periods of time. The Director of the Petrou Ralli pre-removal centre put it astutely *'Nobody wants to work with foreigners...I am a coach with constantly new players and I can't win the championship.'*<sup>85</sup>

Despite working with vulnerable populations, detention officers do not receive any training on human rights or how to treat detainees, nor on immigration matters. When I asked the manager of the Petrou Ralli detention centre about the training that his detention officers received he said that *'they get relevant training. I can't say they are untrained'* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2018). But when I asked for specific details, he could not identify any specific details. When for my PhD I reached out to the training department of the Greek police to find out about the alleged extra training that detention officers go through, they denied access to this information, because *'the institutional framework that determines the responsibilities of the service does not foresee the provision of such information to outside individuals.'*<sup>86</sup>

Limited staff numbers, though, created further administrative issues that were reflected in the treatment of those behind bars. As a detention officer at the airport detention facility told me, *'the government puts all these people in here and we suffer too... we are not their servants here. They cannot go to the toilet whenever they want. They are too many, so we will take them only when we can.'* (Fieldnotes, airport detention facility, 2013). This quote reveals the overstretched police force inside detention using a restrictive policy as a means to deal with the challenges they have to face at work, and at the same time avoid responsibility for their actions. This

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<sup>85</sup> It is difficult to know the number of detention officers throughout the country because there are no statistics but according to the manager at Petrou Ralli, for a capacity of around 300 people, there were 96 officers (including administrative staff) at the time of the interview in 2018. This amounts to 15 officers per 8hr shift.

<sup>86</sup> Official letter by the training division, No 1728/ 18/2365713.

is encouraged by *efthinofovia* (fear of responsibility), the stereotypical unwillingness to take any initiative in even the most marginally anomalous situations (Herzfeld, 1992, p. 143).

The fear of responsibility is further evident in the way detention officers deal with a breakdown in order. For example, in the event of an escape or serious incident, detention officers would be faced with severe disciplinary punishments or unemployment. As the director of the Petrou Ralli detention centre admitted to me, when I asked him to comment on an alleged escape attempt that was in the news then, '*in such a case, I would have gone to prison.*' (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2019). In an inherently flawed system, violence work by the police is itself a reflection of the state's inability to protect those inside, including its gatekeepers (Seigel, 2018). Lacking guidance on the measures to be taken in the event of a disturbance; police staff are left to improvise. Therefore, the direction of increased control and enforcing a warehousing policy is not unanticipated; in fact, it may have been forthcoming given the actual working conditions of police and border guards. However, this alone cannot explain the extensive use of illegal force inside immigration detention.

### *I'm not racist. Ok?*

While my colleague, Irene, an NGO employed psychologist at the airport detention centre, was comforting one of the detained men who wanted to speak with her, I was outside the room with the two detention officers who had accompanied the man to the NGO's office. I tried to avoid them as they were clearly irritated that they were there. '*You know*', said one of them as he was approaching me, '*we shouldn't be offering them soaps*,<sup>87</sup> *but turning them [the detainees] into soap instead*', he said laughing cunningly. He was referring to the 'soap myth' (Jewish Virtual Library (n.d.), according to which the Nazis produced soap from the fat of dead bodies in concentration camps (Neander, 2006). This was not the first time I had heard racist comments by detention officers on duty. In fact, allusions to the Nazi holocaust were common. It is hard to tell whether they truly favoured fascist ideas or whether racist slurs were merely an act of macho male provocation against female NGO practitioners, like myself. The connection between ethnonationalist ideas and the police, however, as well as the closely entangled relationship between the police and the fascist

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<sup>87</sup> Due to the absolute lack of hygiene items offered to those detained by the police, the NGO provided them with soap detergent in small plastic cups.

organization, Golden Dawn, suggest that we do not have to dig deep to uncover the racist undercurrents in the Greek police force.

Detention officers do not engage with racist discourse unapologetically. *'I am not racist, ok? I am not racist. And I believe that nobody is.'* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011), a detention officer anxiously tried to justify his comments about Nigerians being extremely violent. But as he went further on to explain *'it's logical and consequential to have some feelings of racism when Greece is full of immigrants.'* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). The denial of racism, that which Lentini (2018) refers to as 'not racism', bears the anxiety to situate itself against two categories of people; the anti-racists, who preach a hegemonic moral orthodoxy that strangles freedom of expression, and the pure racists. In contrast, the 'commonsensical non-racist' majority presents the 'invasion' of migrants and the consequent fear of contaminating the purity of Greek race as the alibi and legitimization for the free expression of racist ideas.

A police officer, who had served at the border, relayed the following incident, somewhat proudly, and in awe of the resilience of immigrants to state violence:

*'There are races that don't understand the meaning of human rights... I can tell you about specific people that if you don't hit them, they won't respect you. Algerians? Georgians? Even if you beat them up, they won't understand. They are very hard people. I was very impressed. A Georgian guy attacked a colleague of mine. We applied the necessary violence (my emphasis) and then tied him up. The guy was bleeding. Afterwards we were mopping the blood from the floor. I strained my ankle and my friend his wrist and the Georgian guy was still provoking us. That says everything. They are very hard people. I've never seen anything like that. Algerians will get their slaps and stay quiet but Georgians no. I don't know maybe they've been through a lot. I think Algerians are softer. But they are scum too. They can tough out some beating.'* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011).

According to these border guards, concerns about Greek border security together with the demonic qualities of those who seek to enter justify the violation of their human rights.

Racism in the Hellenic Police is neither new, nor a symptom of the large numbers of immigrants arriving over the past 30 years. As Christopoulos (2014) claims, 'the intrusion

and infiltration of the ultra-right extreme into the Hellenic police...was systematic and deep-seated.<sup>88</sup> The deep roots connecting the police to the far-right have, likewise, been acknowledged by the political leadership of the Greek police, i.e., the Ministry of Citizen's Protection, numerous times. In 2011, the Minister of Citizen Protection, Christos Papoutsis, admitted that there was a lack of democracy in the security forces (To Vima, 2011). His predecessor in the Ministry, Mr Chrisochoidis, claimed that during his term 40 to 50 police officers were indicted on grounds of collaboration with Golden Dawn (Parapolitiki Blog, 2011).

Other political actors, even those with a very right-wing past, have made similar admissions. In an interview to BBC, Mr. Adonis Georgiadis, Minister of the rightwing government elected in 2012, when asked about the affiliations between Golden Dawn and the police, he responded 'Very unhappy to say that to some point it's true.' (Loggos, 2013) The connections are further corroborated by the fact that nearly 50 per cent of the police force voted for Golden Dawn in the 2012 elections (ThePressProject, 2012). Former Greek Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, Mr. Nikos Dendias, remarked in 2012 that 'ever since the Dorian Invasion 4,000 years ago, never before has the country been subjected to an invasion of these dimensions ... this is a bomb on the foundations of society and the state.'. More recently, Mr. Makis Voridis, current Minister for Agricultural Development and Food, and a long admirer of authoritarian values, recently defended police brutality by saying that violence on the part of the police entails an element of necessity (TRTWORLD, 2019); thereby giving fuel to arbitrary practices and effectively legitimising racist violence.

As police officers have expressed in research conducted by Christopoulos (2014, p. 29) 'the tone is not set by Golden Dawn, but first and foremost by the government itself'. Therefore, what is more important, Christopoulos (2014, p. 36) defiantly notes, is not whether the police favour racist views, for these have always been latent in the force, but rather their 're-legitimisation...as the only ideology that is able to express in the most

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<sup>88</sup> An analysis of the historical development and modern organization of policing in Greece, shows that this goes back to the Axis occupation and the creation of the Security Battalions, whose members were recruited by the country's security forces (Vidali, 2007). Some would even argue that racism has its roots in the ancient Greek world, an entire social system based on enslaving 'ethnic' barbarian others. If the institution of slavery was responsible for generating a discourse on an ideological 'barbaros', this might help to explain why the ideology of Greek cultural superiority was such a prevalent one. Ancient Greek ideas of purity are grounded in early forms of racism, which is partly why the Nazi regime venerated Ancient Greece; thereby, creating indissoluble bonds between Greece and fascism (Hamilakis, 2003; Trubeta, 2010).

successful way the official temperament of the security forces'. The above helps to refute the argument of the authorities that the use of illegal force inside detention can be attributed to individual police officers. Violence against (detained) immigrants is not an aberration but the culmination of a firmly established work culture that has been allowed to persist. The rest of the chapter refers to the impunity granted to Greek police by a number of different institutions.

### **Resilient detention: International human rights organisations' monitoring**

Like many secure establishments, there seems to be something insular about immigration detention centres, an air of defensiveness about what goes on inside them. But if the truth about the daily reality inside detention centres is carefully concealed every time, can monitoring groups peel through the fresh white paint? And if what they are able to 'see' reflects only part of the problems, how can we make sense of the sharp end of Greek immigration control?

Despite their enforced elusiveness,<sup>89</sup> information about detention centres in Greece, is not in short supply. International and national human rights organisations have monitored and reported on detention conditions. In the absence of academic research on immigration detention in the country, they have been the key source of knowledge about these sites through their periodic visits and reports (Amnesty International, 2010a; 2012a; CPT 1994-2020; Greek Ombudsman 2007; 2008; 2010; 2011; 2013 Human Rights Watch, 2008; Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2014; Pro Asyl, 2007; 2012). The severity of the issues uncovered by these monitoring missions cover cannot be brushed aside. In fact, these reports have provided useful evidence for litigation in Greek courts, as attested by lawyers I interviewed in 2018, but also in the European Human Rights Court (ECtHR), which refers to these reports in their judgements. As a lawyer with years of experience in the refugee sector, who has also contributed to key reports about border detention locations, has told me '*Sometimes I think our work is futile. Then our reports are used by the European Human Rights Court and I think that we've created something worthwhile, that could possibly save lives*' (Interview, Athens, 2019).

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<sup>89</sup> Human rights organisations and monitoring bodies have complained about obstacles, such as constrained access to facilities, data and actual detainees or even officers in hearing range (Amnesty International, 2010a; Bhui et al., 2019)

Greece, has indeed, been convicted numerous times by ECtHR for the violation of human rights inside detention. Greece has one of the highest violation rates of states signatory to the European Convention of Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights, n.d.). As Xenakis and Cheliotis (2018) show in their analysis of Greece's engagement with the ECtHR, between 2001 and 2015, Greece received at least 55 convictions under Article 3, which prohibits torture, and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and has, thus, accrued millions in fines. At the same time, though, Greece has one of the poorest records of ECHR signatory states in implementing the judgments of the Court. The rest of this section explains how authorities involved with detention in the country has defended repeated criticisms and sanctions for non-compliant conditions.

Initially, limited funding and, thus, capacity, on the part of NGOs supporting those in detention to pursue legal actions, meant that there has been no strategic dimension to litigation for migrants' rights inside detention, preventing a collective mobilization that could advance human rights claims.<sup>90</sup> What is more, the wide perception of the country's judiciary being guided only by subservience to the prerogatives of the state, and the conditional and bounded ability of judicial decisions to change existing practices and prompt legal and policy change, have further restrained avenues to change (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2018). Sofia, an experienced lawyer, was very clear about judges as conservative agents of social control.

*'But even if cases reach the court another system is in place that covers for them [the police]. There is impunity. The courts cover for them because they have certain beliefs about the state. Political beliefs. Someone comes in court with a black eye. Why don't they ask how this has happened? Some are not interested, some think that it's good that this happened and if the police say that it was an accident, they'll believe it. Others also believe that all this [allegations of ill-treatment] is manufactured so that Greece is slandered.'* (Interview, Athens, 2019)

As she further added later in the discussion in reference to an allegation of torture by the Coast Guard on the island of Chios. *'The prosecutor said that there are dark centres that influence the refugees to say bad things about Greece. Behind this, there is this concept of the nation, the state, that others are going to dominate us. And there is also lack of knowledge about refugee matters, which is a compounding issue.'* (Interview, Athens, 2019). But in the words of another NGO lawyer, 'it's

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<sup>90</sup> See Psychogiopoulou (2014), who examined the growing case law before ECtHR, derived from applications lodged by migrants, and identified a number of shortcomings in the protection of their rights.

*not merely a matter of training. The judiciary is prejudiced against immigrants. They think it's normal for someone to be detained because they are undocumented.*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). According to Cleo Papapantoleon (2014) the general and indiscriminate subjection of foreigners to inhuman and degrading treatment in detention centres is, after all, supported by the refusal of all administrative courts in the country to temporarily grant legal remedies against detention. Yet, even when judges seem to be standing against detention at all costs, as in the case of the local court in Igoumenitsa, which dismissed criminal charges against 15 people who had escaped from long-term detention in police cells because this was interpreted as a reasonable act given the conditions they were exposed to, they are excluded from mainstream circles. As a member of an international human rights organisation revealed to me about the judge in Igoumenitsa, he was unfavourably transferred to a remote location in Greece. For as she concluded ‘*Who would dare to make such a decision?*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). The above leave little room for hope that justice can be brought for those detained.

Indeed, lawyers’ limiting belief in systematic change is deeply-rooted. Evgenia’s statement, who has years of experience in representing immigrants at court, when I asked her about available legal actions, is revealing ‘*I don’t think there is a mechanism that is able to change the way the police work. They are somewhat autonomous and only interventions from very high up can bring change. Whatever the rest do is just beating the air*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). Against this context, litigation against detention conditions and harmful practices at a European level has been employed as a means to document injustices inside detention and to gain leverage in any extrajudicial domestic negotiations as the authoritativeness of the European Court and its judgments provided increased legitimacy to advocates. Successful litigation, in turn, triggered a wave of new applications. Therefore, in line with Dia Anagnostou and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2014), despite this legal work bringing human rights abuses to light and the growing consensus about the need to rectify the situation, the extent to which this has brought tangible results in human rights protection inside detention is not so evident (see also Anagnostou, 2014).

As with litigation at the EU level, the power of international organisations operating at the domestic level, like the MSF and UNHCR, to dictate the direction of legal and structural reform is strained. The relationship between these organisations and the authorities is key in understanding the scope and challenges of monitoring operations and the reports that are published as a result of those. As a member of an international human rights institution

acknowledged '*INGOs have a complex structure, what is raised [as an issue] every time is a matter of choice depending on the circumstances...As an INGO you can't go and say I'm going to do this, because then you substitute the state. This is national sovereignty. The critical point is if the law has been broken. This is the beginning and end of an intervention.*' She then added '*If this is enough, I don't know. The field of detention doesn't allow much room for activism.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018)

Indeed, as another former member of an INGO recounted, when their detention team was preparing a report on the conditions in detention facilities in the Evros region, the extent to which they could denounce the detention system as a whole, rather than simply outlining the degrading treatment inside them, was heavily debated. She went further on to explain, '*it's a governmental policy, it's like going out there and saying that prisons are wrong. You cannot challenge a policy*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). While some of those involved in these monitoring missions are aware that what they see may not be the reality that those detained are exposed to on a daily basis, they recognised that the end justified the means, stoically accepting that '*when we visit them [detention centres], everything looks nice. If this is an excuse to do something, then that's fine.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).

The fatalistic acceptance of the incorrigibility of detention, though, diverted energy and focus away from building oppositional movements for change. In fact, the findings of observations by international human rights organisations are mainly circulated internally and only if there are glaring cases of human rights violations, will they intervene with a public statement or a letter to the authorities and even more rarely with a report. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross has for many years conducted monitoring visits to detention centres in Greece. However, as a policy they do not publish any reports afterwards. They instead focus on advocacy with the government and the authorities.<sup>91</sup>

The relationship between the organizational form of these international bodies, the politics of knowledge production and the micropolitics of their management limits the nature of political space available for more critical or reflexive views, rendering the interventions of these organisations 'timid and undecisive' (Schaub, 2013, p. 10). Frequently disconnected from the struggles of those inside, they emphasise polite reformism and quiet diplomacy. This mechanism of quiet diplomacy, though successful sometimes, has not managed to produce a significant change in the way detention is being implemented in Greece, nor

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<sup>91</sup> At a meeting I held with a member of ICRC in Greece, in 2016, he refused to share any information on their visits and recommendations to authorities.

hold anyone accountable for gross human rights violations perpetrated by Greek authorities. It has further given supportive cues to the authorities to continue with their practices unchallenged. For the limited public visibility of these reports and actions is perceived as favourable to government actions.

Despite numerous convictions and denouncements, members of the government or the police are very quick to dismiss any negative comments. ‘I want to say first and foremost that NGOs and Amnesty International do their job. And their job is to denounce. What we do, is investigate what they say. But I don’t have the sense that the latest report from Amnesty International claims what you are mentioning’, responded then Minister of Public protection, Mr Dendias to a journalist who asked about a report that described inhumane conditions in detention centres and police stations (Bamiatzis, 2013). In a similar vein, the Director of the Petrou Ralli detention centre assured me that there has been no monitoring of the centre whatsoever. *‘For several years there have been no reports on the centre and the previous ones did not make specific claims to any problems. We are ok.’* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2018), he declared as he laid back on this chair.

Caught between upholding human rights guarantees on the one hand and protecting its borders from excessive migration and refugee flows on the other, the Greek state has favoured repressive measures, adopting a dismissive attitude towards human rights protection and the rule of law. As a border police officer uncritically said to me *‘Those people, who talk about human rights, forget that this country has borders and we have to protect them.’* Therefore, the argument goes, if they want us to protect EU borders and prevent onward movements, then Greece should be allowed to do so in its own way. And this involves not only disregarding human rights standards but also those institutions that seek to redeem the Greek state back on to the (human) right path.

### **Preventing human rights violations in detention: ‘A gentlemen’s agreement’**

*September 2018*

This was the first monitoring visit of the Greek National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to the detention facility at the Athens International Airport (Bhui et al. 2018). Three members of the NPM were present. As a delegation from the UK, including myself, was

accompanying them, the visit was formerly announced.<sup>92</sup> When we entered the main cell area where men were detained, the police officers welcomed us and seemed well prepared for the monitoring process. While two NPM members were observing the state of the cells, the third member was standing at the back chatting cheerfully with one of the police officers and agreeing with him that the detainees had gotten themselves into this situation; in other words, accepting the mainstream fallacy that those who ‘choose’ to travel irregularly to another country should be ready to face that country’s law should they get detected.

When the police opened the doors to the cells, the men at first seemed disinterested to the inspectors. ‘We are from the Ombudsman’, the NPM said trying to explain in English who they were, as they were handing out leaflets about the Ombudsman and told detainees that they could write to the Ombudsman in their own languages if they had any complaints; however, the leaflets were in English and the detainees did not have paper or pens, nor access to mobile devices or the internet. The men, most of whom spoke only Arabic, anxiously showed them the papers the police had given them in Greek seeking to understand why they were detained. The information about legal help and detainees’ rights in detention was pinned on a board outside the cells. Everything was in Greek too. In broken English the men complained about being locked up all day and having very little time out of their cell. Some of them added they had not seen a doctor for medical issues they had been reporting to the police.

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<sup>92</sup> The reason for this was that allegedly the police could deny us entry so they had to have our names beforehand to avoid any obstacles to access.



Figure 10: A cell in the women's section of the airport detention facility

There were no interpreters used. This meant that the NPM could not communicate effectively with many detainees and could not ask them to describe their experience in any meaningful way. Most discussions concerned the length of their detention, applying for asylum, their asylum cases and whether they were able to leave their cells. The NPM did not ask the detainees about instances of torture or ill treatment. Police officers were

listening intently and appeared to be part of our group, so in any case it would have been impossible for the men to report any such matters. At no point did the NPM ask the guards to move away so that they could speak to the detainees in private, seemingly unaware of or perhaps simply uninterested in, one of the most basic elements of independent inspecting.

Less than two hours into the inspection of all the residential areas of the detention facility, the NPM met the head of the police at the airport, who had been working there for more than 25 years. As we were taking the lift to his office, one of the NPM members felt the need to reassure us that they had good cooperation with the police. We sat at a large conference table where we were cordially offered coffee. In a relaxing atmosphere, the director asked what the NPM's impression was of the centre and one of the members confirmed the biggest issue was the lack of outdoor space.

The director took a different view. He mentioned that the threat of terrorism and understaffing at the airport were what bothered him most. The head complained about the administrative staff at the Petrou Ralli Directorate and said that detainees were being held longer at the airport detention facility because the administrative procedures there were too slow. He also said that they did not need interpreters because there were police officers who speak 2 or 3 languages who they can use. No further questions were asked by the NPM about interpretation. He also mentioned that they did not need a doctor at the centre because they could use the emergency medical services at the airport and transfer people to hospitals if needed. The NPM asked if there were any problems with detainees from specific countries. The head said that they had problems with Egyptians, but he did not give any reason for this, nor was he questioned further about this statement.

As the meeting was naturally drawing to a close, the NPM offered us the opportunity to ask any questions. Despite reminding them that we were there only to monitor the procedures, we were strongly encouraged to ask a question so one of my colleagues asked whether there had been any allegations of ill treatment by staff. There was a sense of unease around the room and it felt as if everyone was holding their breaths while the Director was preparing to answer. 'No, no allegations', he swiftly replied, and the meeting was ended shortly after that.

'I think this was a good inspection, no?' one of the members of the NPM asked, seeking confirmation from us as outsiders as we were walking back to our cars. To be able to answer this question, we must first consider the development of the NPM in Greece and

its defining characteristics. The discussion below will draw on shadowing monitoring visits, discussions I have had with a number of the NPM staff and trainings of the NPM I have participated in.

### *History*

The Greek Ombudsman's office was established in 1999. Greece ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) in 2014 (United Nations, Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2002), nominating the Ombudsman as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), and the Deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights as coordinator for this new duty. Preventive monitoring means working to a wide-ranging set of standards that contribute to creating an environment where torture and ill-treatment is less likely to happen (Steinbrecher, 2018). A preventive approach, as defined by the Association for Prevention of Torture, means that visits to places of detention are proactive rather than reactive so that signs of ill-treatment are spotted before they occur (See Association for the Prevention of Torture (n.d.)).

OPCAT further guarantees functional independence for NPMs. They should have a separate, guaranteed budget, and be able to appoint their own staff. They should have the right to publish and be able to both make recommendations and comment on legislation. States must grant them access to information necessary to perform their role, such as numbers of people detained and locations, local establishment data that can help NPMs to judge how detainees are being treated, and unhindered, private access to detainees. If these criteria are fully adhered to, NPMs can provide a powerful safeguard.

Article 4 of Law 4228/2014 ratifying OPCAT stipulates that the NPM may visit all public or private places of detention, including prisons, police station cells, psychiatric institutions, places of administrative detention of third-country nationals, social care institutions and elderly care units, etc., with or without previously informing the competent authorities (Law N° 4228/2014). Until then, the Ombudsman had been conducting ad-hoc visits to detention facilities, depending on evidence received about the treatment of detainees or particular issues with living conditions, through formal complaints or correspondence with NGOs (The Greek Ombudsman, 2005; 2011). According to the legislation, the NPM may collect evidence using any available means, including visiting the institutions, interviewing people, and taking photographs. It may request access to all files,

documents, data or archives. The Greek Ombudsman may make recommendations and proposals but cannot impose sanctions or annul any illegal actions.

#### *Funding and capacity*

Just one year after its creation, in 2015, the NPM made eleven visits to pre-removal detention facilities, police stations and reception centres (The Greek Ombudsman, 2015). However, it was not until 2017 that state funds were allocated to the NPM for the first time, allowing it to conduct more inspections and employ and train inspectors.<sup>93</sup> The NPM remains small, with only fifteen members of staff. Moreover, the staff continue to bear responsibility for additional tasks as part of the Ombudsman office. Thus, as well as their monitoring duties under OPCAT, NPM staff are also responsible for receiving and responding to complaints, as part of the Ombudsman's general mandate, monitoring of procedures for the removal of third-country nationals (art.23, §6 L. 3907/11 and Joint Ministerial Decree 4000/4/57 – ia/24-10-2014),<sup>94</sup> and investigating the arbitrary behaviour of law enforcement officials (Law 4443/2016, Part D, entry into force 9.6.2017).<sup>95</sup> In practical terms, this arrangement means that one staff member is responsible for over 100 citizens' complaints and around 40 files concerning complaints against law enforcement officials per year on top of monitoring visits. The latter must be resolved within a strict deadline, according to the law, which means they receive priority over preventive inspections.

The different roles that NPM staff have assumed means that they also visit detention centres in different capacities. This, NPM staff claimed, assists them in developing a rounded idea of detention centres and the treatment detainees are afforded. Thus, as part of the general Ombudsman mandate, staff receive complaints from foreign nationals, mainly through NGOs, relating to conditions in detention, asylum claims, etc. As has been

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<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that funding is provided on an annual basis and only after the submission of a request by the Ombudsman. As a consequence, funding is normally made available sometime in the course of the fiscal year (i.e., not from January 1st). As a result, the strategic planning and priority-setting of the Mechanism, although designed for a period of 3 years since 2017, can only be confirmed on an annual basis, as it depends on the availability of the financial resources requested.

<sup>94</sup> Article 23, paragraph 6 foresees that removal procedures are subjected to monitoring by the Ombudsman. The Joint Ministerial Decision further provides for the establishment of a system of external monitoring of removal procedures.

<sup>95</sup> Part D of Law 4443/2016 foresees the establishment of the 'National Mechanism for the investigation of arbitrary behaviour' with responsibility to collect, record, assess, investigate or refer for further investigation and disciplinary control, complaints about actions of police officers, the Hellenic Coast Guard, the Fire Brigade and Staff of State Penitentiaries, occurring in the performance of their duties, or abuse of their status (Law 4443/2016)

argued in a report by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights and the University of Bristol on the impact of NPMs, individual complaints ‘can serve as evidence to support recommendations, and promote their implementation in the dialogue with the authorities, as well as the communication and cooperation with other actors and the NPM’s public relations’ (Murray et al., 2015, pp. 60-1). They too visit detention facilities to participate in the monitoring of returns, during which they are able to observe the site and speak with detainees. While these multiple capacities, NPM staff report, provide them with useful information to build an intelligence file on every detention centre, which they can then use during their inspections, this context has had a profound impact on the NPM staff, with most expressing feelings of burnout and emotional fatigue.

#### *Trust and methodology*

In 2019, the NPM visited six police and coast guard facilities and six pre-removal detention centres, as well as five prisons, where foreign nationals may be detained (The Greek Ombudsman, 2020). However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020 they did not undertake any visits and thus decided not to publish a report. Up to June 2021, they had not resumed their monitoring activities. While the number of visits they conducted each year is not necessarily a small one, a closer look at their methodology of visits presents a picture of hesitant staff insecure in their role and mandate, which, then, allowed for a dubious relationship with police administration on the ground.

Prison and detention inspections are mostly unannounced. In their inspections, the NPM follows a checklist based on CPT standards, to observe life in detention, living conditions, register vulnerable cases, segregation, check the number of asylum requests, the provision of services and activities, staffing issues and access to outdoor exercise and the outside world. However, they did not appear to use this checklist in any of the inspections we shadowed.

As the Greek NPM is relatively new and has, in any case, been largely inactive during the Covid-19 pandemic, their methodology is still under construction. Drawing on knowledge exchange visits and collaboration with other NPMs and human rights organisations in Europe and abroad, the Greek NPM has worked on evolving their inspection practices. They have increased the duration of their inspections from one day to two days. However, this is the case only in prisons visits. Immigration detention inspections remain very brief and, in any case, do not exceed four or five hours. The frantic atmosphere- in all centres

we were instantly surrounded by anxious men who were keen to ask questions and to see if the NPM could help them- and the lack of a structured system for their visit, meant they were able to speak only to those detainees who were closest and loudest.

They have also developed and implemented a short detainee survey with eleven questions, inspired by HMIP's longer and more established survey methodology (Bhui, 2018). Even though it was in its pilot phase, and had not yet been introduced in detention centres for unidentified reasons, it was hoped that the survey would generate important evidence regarding detainees' experiences in custody, including information about ill-treatment. The survey had been translated into 3 languages and had received an average 40 per cent response rate. Yet, the results from all the centres had not yet been analysed due to lack of research officers.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, while, this survey was used in prison monitoring visits during 2019, the findings were not included in that year's report.

Its application in practice is questionable too. At the monitoring visit to the prison in Kos, two members of the NPM went to the prison early in the morning to distribute the survey to the prisoners. However, the guards did not allow them to do so, so instead they left the surveys to the staff, who agreed to give them to the men. When we went back to the prison that day as a delegation, the police said that only a few men were interested in responding, which NPM members accepted at face value and quickly put away the surveys in their bags. A few days later, they had still not gone through the responses, even though, some of the prisoners might have included sensitive information which might have to have been acted upon immediately.

Their presence In prisons is much more established than their efforts in immigration detention, where independent monitoring remains unfamiliar to detention staff and immigration officials. They do not understand its rationale or purpose, and inspectors often face issues of trust. Although the police who manage immigration detention are not explicitly obstructive, they rarely provide the fullest cooperation to monitors. For example, while most detention officers did not interfere with the inspection while it was underway, their focus on security concerns meant that inspectors were rarely left unattended or able to have confidential discussions with detainees as highlighted in the airport inspection at the opening of this section.

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<sup>96</sup> The NPM was exploring the possibility to cooperate with the National Centre of Social Research (EKKE), which could offer in house researchers but this had not materialised yet at the time of research.

Throughout all the visits we shadowed, their conversations with detainees were never private. Instead, they usually occurred in the hearing of the police who stayed in close proximity. It was not possible under these circumstances to obtain a reliable sense of how the detainees were treated, and most conversations lacked depth or structure. At a monitoring visit to the Petrou Ralli pre-removal centre, when the NPM walked into a cell, they were quickly swamped with detainees who wanted to talk to them about their cases. The corridor was squashed, and the wing felt extremely overcrowded. The NPM did not see any of the cells and spoke only to detainees who shouted loudest. The NPM took the names of detainees without any particular explanation of what they were going to look at. At the end of 15 chaotic minutes, the NPM gave the names of the detainees to the director of the centre. He put the crumpled piece of paper in his pocket and said that they would talk to them to explore what issues these people may have. There was no clarity as to what would happen in these discussions and the NPM did not ask to be informed about the outcome of these investigations, nor kept a copy of the names.

More importantly, due to funding restraints, the NPM has no interpreters accompanying them. Apart from funding obstacles, this is also a conscious choice taken in the higher management level. The NPM claim that interpreters need to be trained and that there are issues of confidentiality so they could not allow them to overhear any of the conversations they are having with those in detention. Furthermore, according to them, trained interpreters provided by NGOs could not be trusted. While they seem to attempt to overcome communication barriers, by handing out leaflets about the Ombudsman's office and the complaints process in English, they do not take note of specific issues or cases raised on the monitoring visit. Giving detainees written information about the Ombudsman's remit and work was potentially useful, but this practice was in danger of becoming a bureaucratic procedure that provided merely the illusion of purposeful monitoring. A leaflet is only of value if it informs and assists. Most of the immigration detainees could not read it and there was little evidence that anyone had actually made contact with the NPM as a result of receiving a leaflet. For example, during the visit to the pre-removal detention centre in Kos, they had mistakenly brought only leaflets in Arabic. Most of the detainees held there at the time were English and French speaking.

### *Impact and transparency*

Due to staff and time constraints, individual reports following inspections are not published or shared with any relevant stakeholders, limiting their effectiveness in shedding light on harmful detention practices. In most cases, they are not even written due to the lack of time available to NPM staff, who are undoubtedly overworked. Therefore, their dissemination strategy is focused on publishing annual special reports, summarising the main findings of all inspections.<sup>97</sup>

The government's likelihood of accepting recommendations is mainly at the hands of the police, the NPM told us. According to them, although some sympathetic detention managers try to implement recommendations where possible, a great deal of the NPM's findings are inadequately accepted or implemented. A meeting with the senior director based at Petrou Ralli, Mr Louziotis, in September 2018 gave little assurance that the concerns the NPM had raised would be acted on. On the contrary, he did not consider the meeting as part of a monitoring visit but merely as a way for the NPM to receive his complaints and help him attract some more funding. In fact, according to the NPM, most directors do not even recognize the NPM as an entity as most know them as 'the Ombudsman'. Mr Louziotis went on saying that the Ombudsman should think about the position of police staff in detention centres and what they have to deal with. What is more, he said as he laid back on his chair, he does not agree with some of what is written [about the Petrou Ralli pre-removal centre] in reports; a statement that was left unchallenged by the NPM.

Whereas maintaining good working relationships with the authorities is considered to be a good practice, having casual conversations with the directors of the centres over coffee undermines their ability to raise their findings and press for solutions (Birk et al., 2015). As one member of the Greek NPM blatantly put it '*We can't be very displeasing. We have a gentlemen's agreement with the police*' (Fieldnotes, Athens, 2018). Through this informal agreement between honourable men (Campbell, 1964), the NPM and the Hellenic police, have made their association a relationship relying on the fulfillment of spoken or unspoken obligations. Drawing on studies of Mediterranean anthropology and modern Greece, this aspect of fulfilling expectations is particularly tied to the Greek taxonomy of values and

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<sup>97</sup> The strained resources and staff have further affected the publication of annual reports. The reports for both the years 2016 and 2017 were both published at the end of 2018 (The Greek Ombudsman, 2018a; 2018b).

more specifically to the ‘word’ (*timi*) or verbal assurance which men give of their eventual intentions. In this case, the police become obliged to offer unrestricted access to all detention facilities, even though this is prescribed in law anyway, and the NPM offer back as a reward more appeasing or not entirely damning monitoring reports. However, this obligation implies a relationship of inequality and hierarchy, whereby the donor of the gift is inferior to the recipient (Hirschon, 2008). I further suggest that the binding notion underlying this unofficial obligation places a limitation on the sense of freedom the NPM have to criticize government practices.

The NPM’s constricted position in the field is not lost on those supporting those in detention. As an NGO practitioner shared, ‘*They are trying to step in two boats. They don’t want to clash with the police, they obviously don’t want to lose their access. So, they cannot be too hostile. I understand it but in Greece independence doesn’t work this way.*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). Closely linked to the NPM’s lack of capacity for the amount of work they have to deal with, NGOs report that their responses to their complaints are very slow. As John said, for example, ‘*Usually we have closed our cases, by the time the Ombudsman has done anything about them. They are slow, from the 50 cases we send them, we are getting a full answer on 10*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018).

Yet, while the NPM’s role in preventing ill-treatment inside detention centres is severely curtailed, their authority as the only monitoring institution of confinement practices is widely acknowledged by civil society actors, who confirm that their legitimacy is never questioned. If they did not exist, Greek NGOs offering support to those in detention would have nowhere to turn to in cases of complaints and ill-treatment inside detention. As another NGO practitioner put it, ‘*it’s a strategy on our behalf [to send complaints to them]. It secures visibility of the police’s specific practices. If you have a response from the Ombudsman you can use it in court*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018).

To go back to the question of the NPM member who wondered about the quality of the monitoring visit, while the Greek NPM has an important role to play in the abusive landscape of immigration detention in Greece, its inspections are fearful and vacillating. But more than the actual inspections, their outcomes are limited too. The NPM is highly constrained in what factors they are permitted to discuss and the conclusions they can draw in each case. Their remit is distinctly narrow, as they focus merely on official rules and procedures. Broader questions about the purposes of detention and the effects they have on people are beyond the scope of their investigations. By individualising systemic

problems, and focusing on the minutiae of cases in an inquisitorial forum, monitoring leaves detention uncontested.

It is time for the informal pact of silence between the police and the authority to be broken; only by doing so will monitors be able to follow their actual mandate to protect the rights of people deprived of their liberty and ensure that they can prevent their mistreatment. Whether, they can challenge institutions of confinement, though, is highly debatable. As Foucault put it, ‘the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them.’<sup>98</sup> By exposing the political violence inherent in the work of the NPM, I have shown how their mere existence can provide an alibi to the state for continuing their violence work unperturbed. Instead of making the system more just, this, risks spreading an unjust system to more people (Ben-Moshe, 2020)

## Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with one question. What explains the sheer disregard of human life inside Greek detention centres that was revealed in previous chapters? In answering this question, I have documented the relationship between the culture of violence inside immigration detention centres and those institutions that are supposed to prevent such experiences, protect those under their powers and investigate and punish the perpetrators of such harms. In exploring these relationships, I have identified a series of processes that have functioned to protect, legitimise and exonerate the Greek detention system in three ways.

First, by making the police the central actor inside detention, the Greek state showed from very early on the direction and nature of detention: It is a repressive, militarised system that seeks to function as a security blanket for scared and unsafe citizens. However, by subcontracting the management of detention to an overwhelmed and underpaid police force, that has knowingly strong alliances to the ultra-right, the Greek state has further shown that they prefer having uncontrollable racist police than face the responsibilities that come with dealing with an increasingly growing migrant population.

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<sup>98</sup> Foucault, in *Human Nature*, at 171 {as cited by The Foucault Reader 6 (Paul Rabinow ed., 1984)).

Second, detention has been legitimised through diverting scrutiny away from official responsibility and liability. Despite a long series of monitoring visits, reports and court judgments all testifying to Greece's monstrous immigration detention system, the authorities seem indifferent to or even ignorant of this evidence. Their indifference and ignorance, moreover, I argue are closely related to the point above, i.e., the powerful role that the police and the judiciary, in this case, have acquired over the years. By resorting to this power, they have become what Hogg and Brown term as 'primary definers' of the truth. As such, they hold a monopoly over what constitutes the facts of detention and everything else is marginalised and discredited as untruth. In this context, allusions to lack of finances, pressure from the government and/or Europe, and infrastructural pathologies have been used as vehicles to discredit unfavourable assessments. This, in turn, diverts attention away from official responsibility; thus, hindering scrutiny and public accountability.<sup>99</sup> As long as criticism is ignored, minimised or disbelieved, there is little reason to act upon it. 'We believe we are ok', as the manager of Petrou Ralli reassured me.

Yet, this would not have been possible, if it were not for the third process, I have analysed in this chapter; namely, the complicity of independent actors that operate as monitors of the situation inside detention. Here, I am not refuting the independence of these actors, but rather I point out their 'bare bones' approach to their institutional mandates, resorting to questionable alliances between them and the authorities (Grenfell and Caruana, 2022). This has inadvertently contributed to Greece not meeting its international obligations to protect individuals against human rights abuses on its soil. Therefore, I conclude, while putting people through such atrocities as those described previously in the thesis cannot be solely explained by a simplistic reference to Greek authorities' malicious intentions or disregard people's humane standards altogether, I argue that the safeguards built into social systems that uphold compassionate behavior and renounce cruelty have been in this case absent or scarcely found; thus, deliberately allowing for a continuum of institutional racism and harmful practices.

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<sup>99</sup> Carlton (2007) makes a similar case about the official responses to institutional crisis inside an Australian prison.

## **Chapter 5. The climate of fear: Secrets, silences and complicities between state and non-state actors**

*'The question is...what would happen if we were not there'*, Greek NGO practitioner (Interview, 2018)

### **Introduction**

The pre-removal centre of Amygdaleza, opened its doors on 28 April 2012, a few days after the Greek government had announced its intention to hold national elections later in June. Located inside the premises of the police academy in the northern suburb of Athens, Thrakomakedones, the centre was surrounded by a wired fence and equipped with 250 shipping containers divided along 3 sections. Amygdaleza was designed to host 2,000 detainees in 'exemplary' facilities. While conditions inside the centre were better than those at other of the country's substandard facilities, this did not render Amygdaleza exemplary in any way (Landscapes of Border Control, n.d.; Angeli and Triandafyllidou, 2014). When the centre opened, amidst fervent opposition from the local mayor, who feared further degradation of their already deprived and desolate borough, people who were transferred there were the result of massive sweep operations in the centre of Athens.

The then Minister of Citizen Protection, Mr Chrisohoidis had organised a police operation to evacuate overcrowded buildings in the centre of Athens in order to populate the centre. He even appealed to Greek residents of the city centre to report to the police cases of overcrowded apartments, announcing that property owners would be prosecuted, adding that the detention centre would address the humanitarian crisis in the centre of Athens and decrease criminality (Ta Nea, 2012; To Vima, 2012). 'This is a health bomb', he said referring to the overconcentration of migrants in rundown buildings in the city centre, adding that 'there is no room for delays and time-wasting. Our social peace and public health are in danger' (Nafemporiki, 2012c). As Alison Mountz and Nancy Hiemstra (2014) point out 'crises' are political phenomena that are able mobilise fear and uncertainty and a discourse of emergency among citizens of a polis.

The composition of the detainee population indicates the state's concerns. The majority of those detained were of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. Most of them had been living and working in Greece for many years and were arrested for failing to show proof of identity. The hasty opening of the centre, designed to send a message to Greek citizens that the 'government can and must function even before the elections' (Ta Nea, 2012),

meant that there was minimal preparation or strategic planning for the provision of services. The distance from the centre of Athens, where those detained had been living or had ties with, left them with very limited access to the outside world. Compounding matters, access was granted to a private lawyer offering services at grossly inflated rates, taking advantage of the lack of information offered to detainees. ‘Kyria (Ms) Maria’, as those detained referred to her, had extracted around 200 euros from each one of them for the submission of an asylum claim which was free of charge. After their first meeting, she disappeared and never picked up the phone. Men, who thought they were safe from deportation, found out months later, that their claim had never been registered.<sup>100</sup>

The ground was fertile for the intervention of humanitarian non-governmental organisations. The NGO Arogos, where I was working at the time, had locally established teams, comprised of doctors, social workers and psychologists, in all the detention centres in Athens. Following an unofficial agreement with the police, the NGO set up a screening process at Amygdaleza in order to select those more vulnerable and those needing urgent medical attention, as well as those who would voluntarily return to their countries. The NGO, in turn, hoped that this agreement with the police would act as leverage to attract more funding and officially establish a team at the centre.

Despite the motives, or perhaps because of them, this registration process was executed in a shabby and shameful manner. Every day a delegation of NGO workers, psychologists and social workers (seconded from other detention centres), including myself, would arrive for the intake screening.<sup>101</sup> We were instructed to finish this process as quickly as possible. We had been provided by the police with a container, where the officers would bring us detainees in dozens. They were lined up outside in scorching heat and without any protection from the sun waiting for their turn, while four or five of us sat inside in an air-conditioned room with no desk in front of us; just the chair for those we were ‘screening’.

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<sup>100</sup> NGO lawyers I have interviewed during my PhD research have confirmed they have also heard from detainees about the existence of this female lawyer. See also Schaub (2013) for another similar case documented at the Greek-Turkish borders.

<sup>101</sup> These forms were three pages long and included demographic details, medical history, details about their time in Greece and reason for detention, as well as results from any psychological enquiry and further comments about their case (See Annex 2 for a translated version of this form).

We were allowed no privacy; the police officers were present in the room and able to overhear everything. The officers, though, appeared to be totally disinterested in what we were doing, passing their time either watching TV or drinking their coffees and chatting noisily. In any case, it is not as if we could have had a proper conversation with the men we were ‘screening’, as we did not have any interpreters with us and instead had to rely on a mixture of sign language, Greek, English and whatever words in Urdu we had learned thus far. We are not police, we said. But we were in a room full of police officers. We are here to help you, we added. But in fact, we were unable to provide them with anything of use, neither information about their cases nor essential (hygiene) items the police did not offer.

In a few days, we had completed our task and delivered the paperwork to the NGO offices, for use as evidence to funders and the authorities for the ‘support’ offered. In this case, NGO Arogos acted as an intermediary between the state and those behind bars by registering around 2.000 detained persons that the police were unable or unwilling to do so. Yet its role and interests in doing so and the power inherent in acting this way are opaque and should be subject to critical examination (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). This experience, in fact, led me to question the ability of NGOs to do good without doing wrong (Fisher, 1997); hence, I opened with this story as an illustrative example of the collusions, complicities and entanglements between the police and non-state actors that the discussion here focuses on.

In this chapter, I examine the role of non-state actors, with a particular focus on non-governmental organisations, in shaping the practice of detention in Greece. My main goal is to unearth the perspectives of different actors inside detention, the challenges and struggles they encounter and the strategies they adopt to navigate the intricacies of life in detention. Building on scholarship in critical humanitarianism (Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Feldman and Ticktin, 2012; Hyndman, 2000; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; 2020; 2021) I argue, that there is a clash between non state actors’ moral and ethical drive to relieve suffering, and the constraints of operating in constrained circumstances. What is more, humanitarian interventions inside detention as they have developed over time in Greece, allowed detention to go unchallenged and also to thrive, often delivering discriminatory and violent consequences for those they purported to save.

The chapter is informed by my experiences as a researcher and NGO practitioner from 2011-2013 and from 2016 up until now; thus, reflecting upon my own understandings, at

the same time as providing an insider's picture of different periods in the development of the Greek immigration detention system.<sup>102</sup> It also draws on in-depth interviews I conducted in 2018 and 2019 with a number of experienced (I)NGO practitioners, researchers, journalists, academics, and activists. Drawing on this range of material, the chapter will cautiously begin to unravel a series of practices that will taint the façade of the humanitarian nature of organisations providing services inside closed facilities in Greece. It will be easy to twist what I write as an indictment of all NGO work. That would be wrong. But it is important to turn our attention away from all the gaps they have indeed been filling and consider their work in a broader socio-political context. While I understand that this account might leave my or others' work open to challenge, I prefer to see it as a way of accounting for ethical and moral failures.

### **Service provision and challenges of/in detention**

At a monitoring visit to the Petrou Ralli detention centre in 2018 with a delegation from the Greek National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), we entered one of the wings and quickly became surrounded by a large number of people waiting to speak to the monitors, mainly about their cases. The intense atmosphere on this wing showed a high level of frustration among those who were detained, all of whom claimed that they could not get help from anywhere to understand their situation and why they were being detained. When the monitors told the centre director that his staff and social services should be addressing the problems raised, he shrugged his shoulders and said that the police's role was simply to guard people and the premises. With that simple phrase, he washed his hands off any responsibility for those under his 'care'. And yet, if the provision of services was not his job, then whose job, was it?

As attested in the previous two chapters, for a number of years, the police had been using invisibilisation strategies to shield the centres from meaningful scrutiny; from not registering new arrivals in order to allow for easier pushbacks to employing empty police

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<sup>102</sup> For an understanding of detention officers and non-state actors inside detention in other contexts, see Hall 2010; Bosworth and Slade 2014; Fischer 2015; Puthooppambil, Ahlberg, and Bjerneld 2015; Esposito et al, 2020b)

buildings to transfer injured people and keep them out of sight. Actively neglecting the harm caused by detention and the way it was implemented in Greece from external observers, as well as withdrawing care and hampering aid (Loughnan, 2019), other than keeping the authorities physically and temporally remote from suffering, allowed the detention system to develop and thrive. In response to years of unmet medical and humanitarian needs (CPT 1997, 1999, 2001b, 2006, 2007, 2008), two types of interventions were the direct outcome of the ‘violent consequences of state inaction’ (Davies et al., 2017, p. 1263); the self-funded, which covered mainly the activities of international organisations, such as the MSF, UNHCR, etc., and the government funded ones, which applied to NGOs receiving a combination of state and EU funding. While the former had a limited timeframe with advocacy as the core objective, the latter sought to cover the vast protection gaps left by the state (Skleparis, 2015).

The gradual and limited involvement of external monitoring organisations went hand-in-hand with the expansion project of detention sites; thus, reinforcing sub-contracting relationships between state and non-state actors. Indeed, from 2008 until 2013, service provision inside detention was heavily reliant on non-governmental organisations; a move, which was unprecedented both for them and the authorities. Civil society had no previous experience with detained populations and the authorities did not want any outsiders to upset the status quo they had tried so hard to establish the years before. As the deputy head of the administrative district of Thrace put it *‘the focus should not be on bringing more organisations to the Evros region, but simply to stop migrants from arriving’* (Schaub, 2013).

The hesitation to bring in more actors could explain why the expansive tendencies of the NGO sector in Greece, especially after 2015, has not been reflected at all in the detention sector. In fact, funding for the provision of services inside detention centres has always been trickling down. Compared to the other more generous EC financial instruments, like the Return and External Borders Funds, as the previous chapter has highlighted, the amount available through the European Refugee Fund (ERF), which was meant to support organisations providing services to refugees, for the years 2007-2013, 39.9 million Euros, was strikingly low. Complicating matters, rules around use of ERF funding allowed for a broader interpretation of what could be funded, giving way to the government to use it for the construction or refurbishment of detention centres too; thus, dwindling its already meager support systems for detained populations. What is more, UNHCR, one of the

major funders of legal aid inside detention has been offering ongoing funding for a number of years, yet, at no point has it met the actual needs of the detained population. Even, self-funded programmes at border locations in Greece ‘remained very small in absolute and relevant volume’ (Kotsioni, 2016, p. 50).<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, limited funding created a very narrow space where the organisations could perform their duties. As a result, and reflecting the overconcentration of NGOs in the capital, services were mainly based in Athens, the country’s administrative centre for migrants and natives alike (Papadopoulos et al., 2013). All the same, services rarely included the regular presence of service providers inside detention centres, offering, for example, legal aid on a rota basis due to the lack of available lawyers. While funding constraints of local NGOs are practical matters debated at offices behind closed doors, their repercussions for the population behind bars were palpable. For many years, fewer than ten lawyers were available for the entire detained population across Greece, mainly through a limited number of organisations. While some had secure funding, others run on limited timeframe projects, leading to irregular and piecemeal services. For example, due to funding constraints, NGO AITIMA often self-funded their visits to centres and as of the end of 2019, they have ceased their operation.<sup>104</sup> Remote locations were covered only through ad-hoc visits and following referrals by other organisations (e.g., after UNHCR’s monitoring visits). As an NGO lawyer put it to receive legal aid as a detainee ‘*is entirely and absolutely a matter of chance...If there was a lawyer, who would be able to go to every police station and detention centre to check the detainees’ files, 1/3 would be automatically released*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). Instead, the vast majority of men, women and children remained locked up with almost no access to the outside world.

Within this broader context, the service provision by the NGO Arogos, which had locally established teams of doctors, psychologists and social workers, at every detention facility in Athens from 2009 to 2013, was remarkable. The organisation had unique access to

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<sup>103</sup> As Kotsioni (2016) reports, the MSF, acknowledging the constraints and ethical challenges inherent to operating in an environment of incarceration, considered activities inside immigration detention rather atypical. The MSF intervened in Lesvos and the wider Evros area, from 2009 to 2014, offering mainly primary healthcare provision, mental health and psychosocial support, identification and referral of vulnerable persons, and referrals for further medical care (Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010; 2014). Despite the limited timeframe, this has been the lengthiest involvement of the organisation in a detention system so far.

<sup>104</sup> There have, of course, been other organisations and individuals that offered legal aid to particular cases of people but have been limited in number and their interventions were more fragmented.

detainees and everyday contact with the authorities and other organisations offering support outside detention. On its website, the NGO prides itself that it has offered medical and psychosocial support to more than 70,000 detainees in Athens over the course of ten years. However, the figure alone cannot reflect the way this support was offered and the impact this has had on the detention system. The following will draw on my own experience as a social scientist employed by this NGO at one of Athens detention facilities in 2012, at the same time as referring to the whole system of service provision during a specific period, between 2010 and 2013, based on interviews with NGO staff that took place during my PhD research in 2017 and 2018.

### *Foreign bodies*

‘*Oh fuck*’, muttered a police officer when I told him that NGO Arogos would be visiting the airport detention centre every day.<sup>105</sup> For the police, outsiders and more specifically, NGOs, are a hassle. They disrupt their established daily routines and increase their workload. *‘If we open the doors now, they are going to keep knocking on the doors all night, and we are the ones who have to deal with it, not you’* (informal conversation, 2012), Kostas, a police officer at the airport detention centre explained to me when I asked to see a detainee at the beginning of his evening shift. During my time at the centre I was often denied access to detainees by detention officers, who invoked every time force majeure situations as an excuse; ‘we don’t have enough staff’, ‘they don’t want to see you’, ‘they are sleeping’, etc. In the words of a former social worker at an island detention facility *‘You are a foreign body [as an NGO professional] and that’s how they treat you’* (interview, Athens, 2018).

Such an approach hived off the police, who all too often saw themselves as protecting the country against ‘illegal immigrants’, from the humanitarians, who were considered radical left individuals offering help to the ‘other’. *‘If you care about them so much, then why don’t you take them home?’* (Diary, Elliniko detention facility, 2012), they would demand with nationalistic pride. The association of NGO workers with facilitators of ‘illegal immigration’ reinforced racialised ideas, which are legion in the police force anyway. Maria,

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<sup>105</sup> The NGO had been visiting this centre once every two weeks on a voluntary basis but in March 2012, a new programme was about to start for six months with funding from the European Refugee Fund, including the daily presence of a social worker (myself), a psychologist and a doctor.

who I interviewed in 2018, was a social worker at an island detention facility back in 2007. She remembers that she was not allowed to use the only toilet available in the police container nor enter their space for more than an 8hr shift. 'You are carrying the viruses of illegal immigrants (lathrometanastes) so go away because we have families', they would say to her as an explanation. At times, the police would let her stand at the centre's entrance in the sun for hours, before they let her in, citing administrative issues.

Greece has a long history of violent relations between the policing arm of the state and its citizens (Amnesty International, 2014). Cabot (2018) remarks that police power emerges within a larger state apparatus that is often characterised, by Greeks across the political spectrum, as fearful, corrupt and unlawful. Inside a detention setting this is extenuated. The anxiety against the 'other' does not disappear within detention, but instead becomes distilled cultivating a climate of fear infused, at times, with extensive abuse and harassment (Hall, 2010).

In their relationships with a predominantly female NGO workforce, officers drew on sexist tropes in which women were interpreted as sexually deprived seeking the attention of men. '*They would come to our offices to flirt...there was the assumption that we liked working with men and they took advantage of it*' (Interview, Athens, 2018), Joanna, a psychologist, recalled. On other occasions, the officers played with the dominant idea of policing as resting on violence, merely to provoke female professionals and create a climate of fear. As a former NGO worker related to me '*I remember I was at the airport detention centre. I had just taken my tea from the canteen. As I was walking back to the office, police officers were hanging out at the cafeteria, watching TV*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). It was the day Ilias Kasidiaris, a Golden Dawn MP, slapped a female MP with the communist party (Dominus, 2012). '*When that happened, they were cheering 'Harder! Slap her once more!', while looking at us anticipating our reaction.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018), she added with disgust.

Whereas harassment was mainly subtle, in some perilous cases it was much more manifest. Maria, who worked at a Greek island detention centre some years ago, was scared to be out on the streets alone because she was threatened and stalked by the police on the island. '*There was a specific police officer who had taken pictures of me and my boyfriend...Another would call me, especially after anti-fascist demonstrations on the island, to threaten me 'you are paying attention to those in uniform but you should be scared of those who cannot be seen'*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).

Others were more forceful accusing her of smuggling migrants from Turkey and suggesting that she would soon be into trouble. The same police officer would call her frequently to tell her where he saw her, with whom and even complimenting her on the dress she was wearing at the moment of the call, establishing evidence for the constant surveillance she was under. She had to leave the island to feel safe and still suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Yet, while often leaving the field seems to be the only answer, '*the question...is what would happen if we were not there*' (Interview, Athens, 2018), as posed by an NGO worker. The stark realisation that if they were not there, the detained people would not have had anything or anyone advocating for them, supported and legitimated NGO practices, including lack of effective action, as argued by Esposito, et al. (2020b) about the Italian context. This in turn allowed them to sidestep gross human rights violations, extreme violence and inhumane living conditions, some of which they saw themselves and others were reported to them by detainees. In the words of a former practitioner '*Nobody had told us that we should not speak up about what we saw but we sort of knew that we were not allowed to. We were afraid they [police officers] would become aggressive, not just physically, but also verbally, to humiliate us...Rather than clashing with the police, I chose to do my job and offer care*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).

#### *Humanitarianism without humanity*

While the police thought NGO workers were smug philanthropist (women), the reality on the ground was quite different. The booming of the third sector in Greece brought a rapid expansion of the NGO workforce. While so-called humanitarian volunteering has gained some academic scrutiny in Greece (Kalogeraki, 2018; Parsanoglou, 2020; Rozakou, 2012), NGO workers have eluded most analysis thus far. However, a closer look at these silenced protagonists helps unravel the multiple paradoxes of the humanitarian industry in Greece.

Locating the situation in the Greek context, the political responses that were imposed as a remedy to the debt-crisis in 2008, have completely altered the socio-economic grounds of the middle and lower classes, who have consented to an impoverished democracy in return for a debt-financed affluence. The majority of Greek people have lost various rights, including social benefits, welfare and labour rights. Their political liberties have also been undermined (Douzinas, 2013; Stavrakakis, 2013). A general reduction in wages and welfare

expenses has paved the way for the removal of legal barriers to the exploitation of labour for everyone. As an explosion in growth of the NGO sector is a symptom of the general deregulation of the welfare state (Lyberaki and Tinios, 2014), the aid industry in Greece represents often one of the most appealing sources of qualified employment for young professionals.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, NGO workers did not escape the implications of the generalised degradation of labour conditions in the country.

As a rule, under its funding mechanisms, the European Commission would only cover up to 80 per cent of the costs of an accepted project. The remaining 20 per cent had to be covered with co-funding from the state. Compounding matters, the EC would only start to disburse money once that latter share had been made available. Civil society organisations have for many years lamented that the Greek government usually took several months to pay its contribution, meaning that organisations had to pre-finance their operations. As a result, NGO workers would be left for months on end unpaid.<sup>107</sup> While it could be argued that the disposition of funds created administrative obstacles, funding delays have been often cunningly employed as an excuse for other labour violations. NGO workers experienced delayed payments for months at a time, constant unpaid overtime work, and a demand for extreme flexibility in working hours.

Statistics from SVEMKO, the Base Union of Workers in the NGO sector, indicate that there have been numerous violations of labour law.<sup>108</sup> A quick search on the website shows that, from 2013 to 2019, SVEMKO documented, publicised and intervened through covering trial costs in more than 50 cases of violations of labour law and ethics. It should be noted, though, that most violations go unrecorded for only a minority of them are reported. This may be attributed to the fact that most employees are scared to report their employers and the fact that SVEMKO is not well known to those who are not familiar with unions. Furthermore, according to recent research on NGO workers amid conditions of mass mobility, the participants said they felt very vulnerable to the whims of employers as they worked on precarious fixed term contracts (Katsenos and G.A., 2020). Not knowing when or if your contract might be renewed adds to widespread stress and a feeling

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<sup>106</sup> See Pascucci (2018) for a similar portrayal of the uncertain status of increasingly precarious Arab urban middle classes and their reliance on the aid industry.

<sup>107</sup> I have personally stayed nine months unpaid. This period combines work at two different organisations. This means that I left my previous post without getting back pay, which only came months later.

<sup>108</sup> SVEMKO's official blog is <https://svemko.espivblogs.net/>

of futility among frontline workers. NGO workers feel expendable, useful only for the successful completion of a particular humanitarian mission.

The same authors have found that most NGO workers are overqualified for the position they hold. This is not a coincidence. In fact, hiring people, who are expected to do more than their job description entails is a well-established practice of these organisations. As an NGO psychologist reflected '*I couldn't work as a psychologist.<sup>109</sup> It was a multifaceted role. I had to search for clothes for them, clean the office, distribute NFI items, make sure the detainees took their pills, negotiate access on a daily basis. Goodness, what have we done?*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). The way these programmes were implemented transformed workers into multifunctional machines expected to do everything with limited means available. In fact, the narratives of NGO workers examined shed light on a division of development and precarious aid labour that 'disproportionally puts the burden of unstable, physically and emotionally demanding, and scarcely prestigious, work on them' (Pascucci, 2018, p. 756).

The humanitarianism mission was often used as an alibi for these inhumane working conditions. 'We are here for the refugees, who are facing unprecedented hardships, so you can work past working hours or stay two, three, ten months unpaid', the line of argument went. By exploiting "us" wealthy individuals against poor refugees, reprehensible acts of NGO employees and the wider detention system are made righteous. In this case, migrants are never part of the equation but rather refugees, who are deemed more worthy of our sacrifices. The more flagrant the contrasting hardships, the more likely it is that the employers asking for more sacrifices appear benevolent. The task of making violence morally acceptable from a utilitarian perspective is facilitated by a humanitarianism which is ultimately bereft of its humanity (Kapsali and Mentinis, 2019).

#### *Documenting abuses*

In this general climate of fear, violence inside detention was normalised. Allegations of ill-treatment were either disregarded for '*people lie and complain all the time*' (Fieldnotes, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2012), according to the NGO psychologist at the Petrou Ralli detention centre, or treated as isolated incidents attributable to some well-known

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<sup>109</sup> For an analysis of the role of psychologists in refugee settings in Greece see Kapsali and Mentinis (2019).

particularly aggressive police officers. This lack of trust on the part of NGO workers against detainees rendered mistreatment a non-issue or an issue that NGO workers had learned to brush off. *'Violent incidents happened. We bore them, we restrained them and that's it...the NGO didn't want to be displeasing'* (Interview, Athens, 2018), a psychologist employed at one of the Athens detention centres disclosed.

Indeed, the conception of the police as gatekeepers upon whom access to detainees depends, had forced NGO Arogos, and other NGOs active in the field, to become enmeshed and invested in maintaining webs of power and bureaucracy, which, consecutively, diverted energy and focus away from building an oppositional framework; thus, creating a secret solidarity between NGO practitioners and detention guards. The following example from my experience at the airport detention facility is illustrative of this secret solidarity.

I started working at the airport detention centre in the wake of the landmark MSS v. Belgium and Greece case (2011), which held Greece responsible, *inter alia*, for violating Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights for the insalubrious living conditions inside the airport facility and ill-treatment by the police.<sup>110</sup> Four months after the decision, on my first day there, my colleagues and I were witnesses to the same, if not worse, conditions that the country was convicted for. At the time, 120 men were detained in nine single occupancy cells with very little natural light and two toilets to share. *'I wasn't expecting what I saw. It's like a butcher's fridge. Cold and dark. I didn't see any window, if there is one, it must be very small...The room is packed with people. They all sit and sleep on the floor.'* (Diary, Airport detention facility, 2012), I wrote in my notebook back in 2012. Their only physical movement was limited to going to the toilet in the morning and the evening. At all other times they were locked inside their cells. As I have noted elsewhere (Fili, 2013), other rules restrained them: they were not allowed to smoke more than three cigarettes a day, they were not given cutlery with their food for 'security' reasons and conditions of hygiene were never properly observed. During my time working there, I completed the intake of more than 950 detainees and held informal conversations with several detention officers. Allegations of abuse and ill-treatment were almost daily.

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<sup>110</sup> MSS v Belgium and Greece (2011). You can also see 'Dublin's Trap: Another side of the Greek Crisis' (Carter, 2012) for an account of the MSS decision and the events surrounding it.

My team implored the NGO director to act on the information we were collecting every day and to make a formal complaint against the policies and processes that made ordinary things, like a clean toilet, adequate food, dignity, or asylum such a distant dream for all these people. Yet each time we were discouraged from pursuing further action, because this would, allegedly, disrupt our relations with the police and would affect our daily routines (Fili, 2013). After a series of incidents, where the police expressed unease about our interference with the detainees' files,<sup>111</sup> we were further forbidden, via email, to go directly to the police authorities to confront them or even to ask about the detainees' case. All our queries had to be sent to one of our senior colleagues, who had established rapport with the police. In other words, we were considered a liability in the working relationship the NGO had established with the police.

The NGO director was right. The complaint letter we addressed to relevant ministries and the media, created outrage in the police force at the airport centre (Newsit, 2012). Detention officers compromised our access to detainees. Officials at the centre threatened to file lawsuits against us for slander. Others were hurt because they trusted us and thought we had betrayed them. Yet in the long run, the managing authorities grew more receptive to our recommendations, or at least appeared to do so by allowing for more 'freedoms' (e.g., cutlery, more cigarettes, more visits to the toilet). Our success was celebrated but soon forgotten as the situation gradually went back to 'normal'; namely, cruel, unjust practices and inhuman conditions.

As a former NGO worker noted 'We were in the police premises but didn't work for the police. We had to cooperate. You can't be denouncing because that would have repercussions the next day, repercussions for the detainees themselves, but for yourself too...We were afraid of the consequences. And it is not just my feeling. We all felt this way, that we had to be diplomatic and not challenge them [the police].' (Interview, Athens, 2018). The centrality of fear, not simply as the threat of harm but also as a mechanism through which the behaviour of non-state actors was controlled, 'contributed to managing and structuring dissent, channeling this into organizational structures and processes that do not threaten underlying power relations.' (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013, p. 5; see also Gill and Burrow, 2018). As Seigel (2018) argues, the potential violence, that which we don't see is the essence of police power. 'It often need not be made manifest, because people

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<sup>111</sup> This included giving information to those detained about their right to ask for asylum and complaining about ill-treatment.

fear it and grant it legitimacy, in direct extension of the legitimacy they grant to state violence' (2018, p. 9). The inherent violence of border control in Greece was indeed unstoppable and affecting not just border crossers but also those supporting them.

### *Getting out of detention*

An NGO worker described his role in service provision inside detention as '*saving what we can*' (Interview, 2018). Acknowledging their limited independence and the fact that they could not meaningfully prevent ill-treatment and abuse by police officers nor improve living conditions, but rather simply contain and soften the blows that hit those detained, NGOs focused on a more pragmatic operational scope that was successfully encompassed in the following mantra 'if you can't protect them, then get them out of there'. This belief materialised in informal practices that took shape over the years. The bureaucratic ethos of police decision makers (Vidali, 2007; Christopoulos, 2014) made releases inconsistent, poorly grounded, arbitrary and at times corrupt. Following years of investigation, a network of police officers at Petrou Ralli, secret service agents, migrants and even politicians was uncovered. According to the indictment, police officers at Petrou Ralli were bribed (EUR 1,500) to secure the release of certain detained migrants (Souliotis, 2019). Furthermore, release through the legal path of judicial reviews and objections against detention was nearly impossible (see AIDA reports from 2013 to 2015), so NGO staff instead worked to influence decision making, drawing not on the structural problems of detention settings but rather focused on the individual characteristics of detainees.

Similar to what Cabot (2013) has described about NGO encounters in the community, NGO workers inside detention codified migrants on a vulnerability grading scheme that allowed practitioners to assess which person it was possible or legitimate to 'save' (Cabot, 2013); the more vulnerabilities an individual had, the better the outcome was. The primary focus was on those whom NGO workers deemed to meet the criteria for refugee status. This strategy partly reflected the source of their funding from the European Refugee Fund but was also shaped by the reality in which refugees could be more easily presented to the authorities as 'release worthy'.

But even in these cases, the police set their own requirements by insisting they had to have a 'public order free' file. According to Greek law, individuals may be detained on public order grounds, i.e., when there is a previous criminal charge. The example of a Kurdish

Iranian activist, as related to me by one of his lawyers, is illustrative of the fixation of the authorities on this issue. Mustafa (pseudonym) was a victim of torture, well-educated with perfect English. His lungs were bleeding and he had a number of other health problems due to the torture he had suffered in Iranian prisons. When he fled, his wife, who had only one eye from having been shot, took refuge in the mountains in Kurdistan. His only concern was that she made it safely to Greece. He was detained for lack of papers. He spent one month in detention before the Asylum Service registered his asylum claim. According to the Asylum Service he could not be released after his registration because he did not have a passport, thus, his identity could not be verified. According to the police, there was a note of public order in his file because he lived in a house which the police had raided and found stolen goods. When the NGO worker offered to share with the police the hundreds of articles that she had found online about his case, they refused because they were adamant that he belonged in detention.

Once releasable individuals were identified, NGO staff would appeal to the authorities either in person or via the telephone presenting all the evidence they had collected on the vulnerability and/or legal claim to asylum of the individual and thus, his/her right to release. As an NGO lawyer aptly put it '*Before you decide on your course of action, you have to weigh the possibilities. If you address the head of the centre, the person might be released in one day. If you go through the formal road, it will take minimum 20 days.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). This strategy, which avoids putting anything on paper, was especially designed to bypass the official process. In fact, as practitioners have revealed to me, the police would often ask them not to file formal complaints to the Ombudsman about cases, such as mothers with their children or chronically ill individuals in detention, because this would delay the process; such vulnerable cases would indeed be released in a matter of hours through the informal route.

While, arguably, NGOs had devised a way with which they stretched the limits of the system for their own purposes, this practice had been shaped over the years through the conjoined efforts of NGO staff and the police's rules and hegemonic ideas of who is a worthy subject of freedom. Such aid encounters invoked 'normative, even stereotyped notions of race, class, gender and moralised conceptions of truth, deservingness and credibility' (Cabot, 2018; see also Rozakou, 2012). For example, migrants coming from countries with low refugee recognition rates were rarely put forward for release. As an

NGO lawyer explained '*Pakistanis in detention are left there, they are considered the underdogs of detention and are subjected to racial profiling by the police. It doesn't matter if they have refugee claims, they will stay in detention for the maximum period, no matter their circumstances.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). These people, it seems, were not worth fighting for. Vulnerability and, thus, eligibility to fit in asylum schemes are grounded not so much on standard operating procedures or the law, but more in unofficial encounters and negotiations between the NGOs and the police; what Cabot (2013) describes as 'the social aesthetics of eligibility'.

There are many consequences of this arrangement, whereby the migrants became entangled in nebulous frameworks of governance that, however inadvertently, effectively maintained the state of detention and the wider status quo of power relations between the police and NGOs. For those detained in remote locations who never have the chance of meeting a lawyer or other non-state actors, for example, this informal system is out of reach, leaving them confined for many months without a prospect for (early) release. The dynamics of inclusion/exclusion inherent in this practice have been informed by a 'biopolitical racism' (Mavelli, 2017, p. 812) that redraws the boundary between 'valuable' (to be released) and 'not valuable' (to remain in detention) lives (see also Bosworth, 2014). Indeed, the bureaucratic mechanics of these practices often enabled workers to leave those not deemed worthy behind. Devoid of power in this process, individuals are reliant on the goodwill of the state and the humanitarian intentions of non-state actors to grant or deny release (Rozakou, 2012).

More broadly, even as NGO staff sought to work against the police, they also had to cultivate good enough relations to secure their institutional survival and maintenance at the expense of enabling radical change inside detention. The constitutive codependence of state and NGO relations kept the hands of civil society actors clean from getting involved in the actual messy business of detention. As Cabot (2018, p. 13) emphasises 'the police and NGOs, while seemingly at odds, were thus mutually constitutive in that their bureaucratic structures and practices presumed, overlapped with, and reinforced each other.' In doing so, the structural problems of the Greek detention regime remained unchallenged and the critical role of NGOs was indefinitely suspended.

### *Shame and burn out*

While many of the decisions mentioned above were taken in the higher management level of NGOs, NGO staff implemented these decisions on the ground on a daily basis, in a context with very limited initiative allowed and poor working conditions in a toxic, violent and uncertain setting, immigration detention centres. This context had a profound impact on the health and well-being of those who worked inside or outside the centres.

Acknowledging that effective provision of aid can only be delivered in a safe and secure environment, which a detention setting cannot ensure, NGO staff had to come to terms with significant compromises in their work and concede their humanitarian principles, which led them to get involved in the first place. A lawyer, who offers legal aid inside detention centres, shared the limits of her work and her feelings about it '*When we go to a detention centre, we are able to see maximum 10 persons. Whether you like it or not, your work is based on criteria (vulnerability, nationality, who has called to ask for help) and you prioritise who you are going to see. In any case we cannot screen all the detained population to find out the ones most in need. Whatever we do, we feel it's not enough. It's a shame. That's how I feel every time I leave*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). Others described more intense emotions. '*I had no training so after four months of constant involvement with no boundaries I burned out. When after a shocking incident I started crying in front of the police officers, they told me I should change my profession. And perhaps I should have*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).

Feelings of burnout, disillusionment and compassion fatigue, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are very common among humanitarian frontline workers, who face increasing demands they cannot resolve and work in distressing contexts, and a much-overlooked issue in the profession, as the literature on practitioners and vicarious trauma cautions (Canning, 2021; McPherson & Burkle, 2021; see also Cardozo et al. 2012). NGO workers I interviewed expressed not being able to visit a detention centre or prison again or even experiencing difficulties in breathing when in closed environments. As a former practitioner put it '*It leaves scars. It is stigmatising*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). Personally, I became more cynical, which, over time, affected my efficiency and productivity as a practitioner. As Victoria Canning (2021, p. 2) aptly puts it 'if practitioners are increasingly negatively impacted by restrictions in policy and their ability to work well under changing

conditions decreases, then this will negatively impact on the people seeking asylum who require their support or care.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, no stories of harrowing border crossings, death and loss would shock me anymore (Fili, 2018b). Moreover, I often questioned whether all this suffering was real.<sup>112</sup>

My colleagues tried to reassure me by sharing their coping mechanism.

*You know the beginning is always difficult. Don't worry about it, you'll get used to it. We've been here for a very long time and we don't respond like this anymore, our sentiments have frozen, which is good about us but not good for the job because we get very suspicious. We've seen a lot and we have to screen everyone. We have to realise who needs help and who's lying. Sometimes we make mistakes but that's the way it is. We are humans and we have to deal with it. It's a strategic response to the difficulties of the work, I think. You have to be neutral and not let anything affect you so much.* (Fieldnotes, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2012)

The principles of neutrality and impartiality that infuse the apolitical character of humanitarian action are central in managing professionals' disillusionment with the field (Pallister-Wilkins, 2021; Rozakou, 2012). However, remaining neutral under conditions that so provocatively contravened basic standards of decency and humanity was extremely challenging.

NGO staff employed yet another resource for coping; they tried to normalise the violence inflicted with detention by appealing to hegemonic discourses and expectations about citizenship and migration, as well as racialised and gendered ideas of who is a worthy subject of empathy and compassion. In a general climate of mistrust, upheld by representations of the police connecting migration to dangers to public order, NGO staff often expressed a similar rhetoric. One of my first days as a volunteer at the Petrou Ralli detention centre, I was approached by a Romanian citizen, who wanted to tell me her story because I was new there. She was immediately stopped by one of the social workers there saying '*You don't need anything, you come here and beg, you've committed a crime. Go outside please*'. And then she turned to me '*She is a repeated offender. I am strict with criminals. Don't get offended. I just wanted to protect you.*' (Fieldnotes, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2012).

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<sup>112</sup> Bosworth and Kellezi (2016a, 2016b) have described similar difficulties when reflecting upon researching immigration detention centres in the UK.

The general belief that NGOs 'do good', unencumbered and untainted by the politics of authorities or indeed their human nature raises high expectations about them (Fisher, 1997). But, considering the police and NGOs as entirely distinct fails to capture the complexities of those working in this context. Indeed, the everyday contact and continuing contamination between their work and that of the police led sometimes to the justification of poor conditions in the centres.

On my first day at the airport detention centre as an NGO employee I met with a newly arrived migrant. He was puzzled about why he had been arrested and detained and he was very frustrated with the conditions inside the cells. He was hurling abuse and promised he would take Greece to the European Court for Human Rights. When he calmed down, his story unraveled. He originally came from Afghanistan but had acquired refugee status in the UK. He came to Greece allegedly to help his 5-year-old nephew, who was in Greece unaccompanied, and he planned to take him back to the UK with false papers.<sup>113</sup> He said that he had been taken to court for trying to rescue his nephew, but had been acquitted, at which point, my colleague started speaking.

*I understand that you feel angry about the conditions here but I'm ashamed of my country that acquitted a person like you, who has been trying to smuggle kids out of the country. Do you know that what you were trying to do was illegal? Of course, you knew. But I don't understand people like you. You get paid to smuggle kids and then you complain about the conditions of your detention...'. (Diary, 2012)*

When he left, she rolled her eyes and told me that she could not stand these people, i.e., smugglers. On another occasion at the Petrou Ralli facility when I was doing participant observation in 2012, an alleged smuggler had been badly beaten by the police. According to his testimony, they had beaten him for hours and the bruises all over his body attested to that. After the NGO doctor examined him, there was a debate about what had happened, with some NGO workers saying that they felt sorry for him and others claiming that he deserved this treatment.

Ideas of race and gender offered crucial resources for the regulation of who receives 'treatment' from the NGO workers, be it social and psychological help or medical care. In these cases, NGO professionals justified their actions and the harsh institutions in which

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<sup>113</sup> A very common story among those arrested at the airport.

they worked by appealing to cultural stereotypes and norms. ‘90% of Algerians are here for crimes. How do they live? You ask them what they do and they say nothing. How do they survive? They all steal and they come here and they cry. I don’t care. They are all criminals.’, said emphatically one of the doctors after he refused to treat a guy who was allegedly falsely claiming to be Syrian.

#### *Medical and carceral power*

The social field in which detention is practiced is, indeed, better ‘conceptualised as a continuum that is underlined by a dominant logic, common categories, shared political subjectivities and pre-agreed lines of political actions’ (Kalir and Wissink, 2016, p. 35). This was especially true for doctors employed by the NGO to offer primary healthcare services inside detention. There were two types, the retired ones who wanted to pass their time doing something meaningful and the young, often trainee doctors, who needed the money and, in a crisis-ridden country any job would be better than none. On the part of the NGO, doctors were difficult to recruit because this did not qualify as proper medical experience. The difficulty in employing doctors, meant that many were not screened for their beliefs or even their capacity to perform their duties.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, most of the doctors I encountered were unhappy to be there, and forged stronger relationships with the police, who were dissociated from the detainees, than with their NGO colleagues. This was reinforced by the same nationalistic frustration about the number of migrants, who are taking over our country taking advantage of our services. ‘Look at it. Just look at it. We have too many Dominicans in here. They have to go at some point, they have to get deported back to their country.’ (Fieldnotes, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2012), the NGO doctor at the Petrou Ralli centre stated, going around showing his colleagues the list of detained women at the centre. In this rhetoric, access to health services is perceived as the right of Greek citizens alone.

In line with research that examines the social representations of immigrant patients held by doctors, migrants were considered either as a burden taking advantage of medical services or as uncultured individuals, placing the responsibility for their health entirely on them. Vassilis Chatzimpyros (2014; 2021) in his extensive analysis of medical provision to immigrants lists a number of social representations the doctors he interviewed drew on

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<sup>114</sup> Adia Benton (2016) has shown how white supremacy and racial hierarchies shape everyday aspects of humanitarian practice from staff recruitment to professional expectations.

when speaking about immigrant patients. He mentions, *inter alia*, immigrants as a burden, immigrants with a lower cultural background, immigrants as patients who stink, immigrants as uncooperative or dangerous patients.

When a new police officer at one of the detention centres in Athens came to inform the doctor employed by the NGO that a lot of women were reporting feeling pain, he replied '*It doesn't matter. That's what they do. You are new here, you'll see. They are in prison and they want to rest...I don't understand them. They have all the free time in the world*' (participant observation, 2012). Similarly, he thought that they all lie and complain all the time for no reason. The same doctor told me that he was building a house. He went on adding '*Do you think I am going to employ immigrant builders? Of course not. I'm going to choose Greeks over them. They have to go back*' (participant observation, 2012). Despite his racist tirades, he remained one of the most trusted employees of the organisation, reinforcing the idea of humanitarianism as white supremacy (Pallister-Wilkins, 2021).

Doctors in other facilities were even more overt, blaming the migrants themselves for their bad health, oblivious of the conditions that contributed to this in the first place. The doctor, who had been appointed in Amygdaleza when the centre opened, was a young woman, who had just started working as a trainee in a public hospital but needed extra cash. She did nothing to hide her disgust towards detainees. '*They are not normal, they stink, they don't wash themselves*' (notes, 2012), she would emphatically say when complaining about the migrants' bad odour. '*Go have a shower*' was her cure to every complaint the migrants had about their health. Unsurprisingly she got along well with detention officers. At the end of her shift one day, she was fooling around with the officers, making fun of the detainees who repeatedly asked for more toothbrushes.<sup>115</sup> '*You know what they say about Pakistani guys, heh? What do they want all these toothbrushes for? They obviously use them for sexual stimulation.*' (Diary, 2012). They all laughed in agreement.

While an analysis of dynamics of medical and carceral power would warrant further attention and is beyond the scope of this PhD project, the discussion above, illuminates the confluence of public health and immigration systems and their complicity in the reproduction of punishable and detainable objects (Fischer, 2013). In doing so, it draws

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<sup>115</sup> The NGO was distributing NFI items.

attention to the body-punishment relationship and further explores the discursive and literal power of medical care in detention facilities to facilitate at the same time release and expulsion, as well as demarcate belonging. Ultimately, I have shown how medical care takes part in both medical relief and body control, thus working both as a limit and an aide to state violence.

## Conclusion

When the director of NGO Arogos founded the organisation back in the beginning of 2000s, she had already been on humanitarian missions in war ridden countries around the world. She was a passionate woman who wanted to fight for people's right to live in dignity. Less than ten years later, she was sitting at the office of the police director at Petrou Ralli, negotiating who was going to be released that day. While this may seem as her sacrificing her ideals, it is actually in keeping with the much-discussed aspect of humanitarian action; white saviourism and the need to soothe the troubled souls of white folk through the logics of care (Pallister-Wilkins, 2021).

Back in 2012, one of the social workers employed by the NGO told me that at night she often drove by Fylis street, an infamous street in the centre of Athens, where a large number of sex work houses exist, to see where the women she met in detention came from and where they would likely end up after their release. Despite all the limits of the provision of services inside detention analysed above, NGO staff did create personal bonds with detainees, often spending after hours to find a release path for some of those they met inside detention. '*We were there to care. To listen to them. Understand what they were going through so I could cope with it and help them cope with it then.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018), explained Anna, a former psychologist.

In this rhetoric of care, female professionals drew on gendered ideas to make sense of their roles; referring to maternal care and motherly bonds with male detainees (Esposito, et al., 2020b). In the process, detainees were infantilised. '*Some enjoyed the care. When we were giving them their pills, it was like feeding them.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018) Others emphasised the more practical aspects of their role, referring to themselves as an outlet for detainees, who were using the 'trip' from the cells to their offices as their daily walk. Furthermore, information

offered, by NGOs involved in service provision, to the CPT or international human rights organisations, have formed the basis of damning reports of the Greek detention system and have been used as evidence in Greek courts but also in the European Human Rights Court. However, the question remains can the involvement of non-state actors inside detention do good without doing any wrong (Fisher, 1997)? As I have shown in this chapter, by unpacking the micropolitics, complexities and interconnections between the state and these actors, service provision amounted to limited gains as opportunities might permit within existing power relations inside detention.

Elsewhere I have tried to tackle the question of whether researchers or practitioners can challenge the multiple drivers of detention policies and practices (Fili, 2018b). To return to this question here, I want to conclude by offering a tentative answer. When I conducted interviews with practitioners, I always asked two final questions, driven by my desire to find hope 'What do you think should change?' and 'Is change possible?'. Unfailingly, every time my interviewees would stumble for a few minutes, unable to find a clear answer. Feelings of exasperation, tiredness and futility were widespread. '*Something was improved, something else was destroyed. It was a constant fight to achieve certain obvious things.* (Interview, Athens, 2018). NGO staff in this field are indeed overworked further restricted by the lack of available funding to organise an advocacy strategy for political change. As a former practitioner painfully admitted, '*There is so much work needed for a public condemnation to stir a wider mobilisation, that a small team of lawyers cannot handle. So, it never happens.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018)

In this context, practitioners found it impossible to envision alternatives. '*I don't know what the solution is. But it's utopic to think that there will be justice. You can't win the system, or change it*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). However, the acceptance of the futility of any attempt toward system-level change has undoubtedly contributed to the continuation of detention in insidious ways, rendering alternatives outside of the current scenario of border control unimaginable (Tyler et al., 2014). As Kalir and Wissink (2016) have argued regarding deportation practices in the Netherlands, non-state actors in Greece fill intentional gaps in the provision of services inside detention but have strategically shied away from challenging the foundations on which detention has been built, i.e., fear, racism and bureaucracy, unshaken.

By displacing responsibility for the provision of services to other actors for a number of years, successive governments have spared themselves self-condemning reactions for authorising human cruelty inside the country's detention facilities. However, the state has always been there but has obscured its responsibility for the amount of pain caused in immigration detention in the country by hiding behind a collective instrumentality; thus, being absent in theory but orchestrating this shameful response to detained individuals in the shadows. I argue that the provision of services inside detention in Greece is one of the prime examples of the state of the politics of invisibility that successive governments wanted to enforce upon migrants in the state's facilities. NGOs give the impression that they are filling the vacuum created by an 'efhtinovos' (fear of responsibility) state (Herzfeld, 1992). And they are, but as I have argued, they do so in a materially inconsequential way.

The sub-contracting relationships forged as a result of this have had a profound effect on NGO practices, which in the process became routinised into detached subfunctions, at the same time as funding criteria placed a heavy burden of expectations. Consequently, NGO professionals shifted their attention from the morality of what they were doing to the operational details prioritising institutional survival and maintenance, similar to other contexts (Tyler et al., 2014). They attained short-term gains by achieving the release of vulnerable individuals, ameliorating the detention conditions or by addressing the shortcomings of the guarding police force. However, their real contribution is that non-state actors formed a sort of buffer between the police and detainees. They became the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators (Roy, 2014); thus, contributing to the version of less humans the authorities tried to create (Ticktin, 2006).

These lesser humans were forced to eat their food with their hands, sleep on the floor around sewage, had no right to defend themselves against police brutality and their welfare was dependent upon other actors who doled out as aid or benevolence that which people in detention ought to have by right. The everyday violence of Greek detention shapes and challenges humanitarian purpose: it becomes constantly necessary, constantly redundant, allowed to stay at the condition of not exposing its inherent violence.

Therefore, while humanitarianism worked to relieve the violence of detention, this chapter shows that instead it 'acted as a salve for sustained racial discrimination and violence [inside detention], working if not to entirely invisibilize racial hierarchies within suffering, then to make the racial underpinnings of such suffering acceptable through supposedly universal practices of care' (Pallister-Wilkins, 2021, p. 102). In doing so, NGO practitioners in

Greece uncritically legitimised the status quo of detention and further confounded the relationship between the NGO sector and the authorities, in particular the police.

NGO Arogos was forced to cease its in-detention programmes in 2013, due to lack of available funding and with the excuse that these services were now covered by the Ministry. In terms of medical services, in 2013, the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection awarded the healthcare provision of detainees to the National Centre for Healthcare Management (EKEPY) through KEELPNO (Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention); at the same time as they severely restricted the provision of psycho-social and legal aid, which were never regarded as necessary anyway. In 2017, the responsibility for the provision of medical services in pre-removal detention centres was transferred to the Ministry of Health, and in particular to the Health Unit SA (Ανώνυμη Εταιρεία Μονάδων Υγείας), a public limited company under the supervision of Ministry of Health. AEMY'S previous experience included managing two clinics that offer primary healthcare and one hospital on a Greek island.

On its website AEMY, states that the operation of hospitality centres (i.e., detention centres) is the most appropriate way to reduce and gradually eliminate the impact of thousands of foreigners living in the country; hence, unashamedly adopting the government rhetoric that detention centres are in fact protecting Greek citizens from freely-roaming immigrants in their cities. Therefore, according to their statement of aims, the provision of a serious, scientific and humanely appropriate programme to deal with the problem is mandated by security and hygiene matters and in the interests of preserving normality. Unsurprisingly, services in detention are yet to be fully staffed<sup>116</sup> and have not been evaluated or monitored in any meaningful way.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> For the latest official statistics see here: Coverage as of February 2020: doctors (22,22%), nurses (57,50%), health visitors (37,50%), administrators (63,64%), psychiatrists (12,50%), psychologists (80%), social workers (70%), interpreters (19,23%). Asylum Information Database (2021).

<sup>117</sup> I made repeated attempts to interview them but they did not respond to my calls or emails.

## Chapter 6. ‘Searching for Azadi’<sup>118</sup> Resisting the detention system from the inside and outside

*‘The aim is to have peace. To have inmates that don’t shout, don’t resist, don’t create problems- so that they have a nice time and we a better one’, Manager of the Petrou Ralli pre-removal detention centre (Interview, 2018).*

### Introduction

I first met Manuel (pseudonym) at the airport detention facility two days after he was arrested. He was a young man from Haiti. He had lost his parents in his early years and was adopted and raised by distant members of his family in Cote d’Ivoire, from where he fled before he turned 18. He arrived on a Greek island in 2011 and was soon found homeless in Athens. Attempting to cross to France with false papers, he was arrested at the Athens International airport and was detained at the airport detention facility. He found police treatment at the centre unbearable as they would often address him as the ‘black animal’ and would not give him information about his case. He also complained about not having access to the toilets when needed.

At the end of a working day in June 2012, the police came and summoned us because one of the migrants had attempted suicide. *‘It’s nothing serious’* the police officers reassured us. *‘He has just cut himself’*. The police had unsuccessfully tried to mop the floor, where we saw a curled naked body lying in his own blood. It was Manuel. The officers carried him to our office and left him on the doctor’s bed, where she started treating the cuts. In the absence of a sharp object,<sup>119</sup> he had tried to cut himself with his fingernails and he had managed to inflict wounds on both of his arms and legs. He must have spent a lot of time on it as the wounds were quite deep. According to his co-detainees, they had tried to alert the police when they realised what he was doing by banging the heavy metal doors and shouting ‘Help’ but the police did not respond in time because it was the time of a change in shifts. Some of his wounds needed stiches so we left the office that day relying on the police to take him to the hospital. We never found out what happened because that night he was

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<sup>118</sup> Azadi means freedom in Persian.

<sup>119</sup> The police had confiscated all sharp objects, including plastic cutlery for fear of self-harm. The men detained in the airport detention facility ate with their hands.

transferred to another detention centre in the region of Attica, allegedly to help him feel better, as if the change in ‘scenery’ would diminish the violence of detention.<sup>120</sup>

I begin the chapter with this vignette as an illustrative example of the inherent complexity of resistance and its loose definition. Rose Weitz (2001), in her exploration of how women seek power through both resisting and accommodating mainstream norms for female hair, writes that resistance is so loosely defined that this has allowed researchers to find it either everywhere or nowhere. Manuel was, indeed, labelled by numerous individuals at different points during the incident. At first, and largely as a means to avoid dealing with him, the police disregarded his physical condition as unimportant. When they came to realise the repercussions of such actions, they signed off liability by transferring him to another institution. NGO workers, including myself, easily cast his response as a challenge to the system. He, on the other hand, explained that he was feeling depressed that day because he had received no news regarding his case and when he saw that the new staff coming on shift included police officers who were known to be aggressive and violent, he felt the exasperation rising in him so he took to it. As Hollander and Einwohner (2004, p. 548) state ‘resistance is defined not only by resisters’ perceptions of their own behaviour, but also by targets’ and/or others’ recognition of and reaction to this behaviour...Understanding the interaction between resisters, targets, and third parties is thus at the heart of understanding resistance’. Only by understanding resistance as polyvocal, can we really grasp its textures and details.

While I understand the efforts to demarcate the epistemological boundaries of the term (See Abu-Lughod, 1990; Hoffman, 1999; McAllister Groves and Chang, 1999; Ortner, 1995), the aim of this chapter is not to come up with a definition of resistance inside detention centres. Nor is it a chapter about whether people in detention resist. Building upon previous research (Bailey, 2009; Bosworth, 2014; Campesi, 2015; Esposito et al., 2020a; Fiske, 2012; Griesbach, 2010; Hughes, 2016; Puggioni, 2014; Tyler, 2013), I take that for granted. Rather, this chapter seeks to critically examine the social world in which resistance inside and outside detention centres takes place. Therefore, as Jocelyn Hollander

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<sup>120</sup> Eventually, Manuel was released. He was housed by some of his compatriots in a basement flat in the centre of Athens. He called us to let us know that he was happy to be free and that he would try again to fly to France. We never heard from him again.

and Rachel Einwohner (2004) urge in the quote above, my analysis will be framed not only around speaking and acting subjects but around listening and witnessing subjects as well.

By examining the interactional nature of resistance, I argue, the role of power inside detention is problematised; therefore, we can better examine the multifaceted forms of violence nurtured inside Greek detention centres. As feminist scholars have argued, resistance and domination have a cyclical relationship (Faith, 1993; Flowerdew, 1997). Drawing on this, I view resistance as the predictable product of the Greek detention system. In fact, its predictability is what makes resistance the ultimate quest for freedom; a practice and force that challenges their presumed absence and unwantedness (Stierl, 2019). While this may lead to the further exercise of power by dominators, resistance will also be further provoked, and so on, creating a cycle of interrelated actions.

Previous chapters sought to understand how extreme violence and abjection became so normalised and institutionalised inside Greece's detention regime. This concluding chapter adds another layer to the analysis foregrounded in the thesis by highlighting that inside a detention setting, violence can better be conceptualised within the context of the resistance strategies with which it is confronted and which it seeks to overcome (Flowerdew, 1997). In other words, resistance inside immigration detention centres is such an inherent aspect of the detention system, that an exploration of what goes on behind bars without at the same time paying attention to how harmful practices and mechanisms are resisted, would be a fatal oversight. Resistant acts can no longer be left unaddressed, often covered up with the blood of those attempting to break free from the system of detention in Greece.

The chapter is divided in three parts. First, I will identify types of protest, including riots and demand-led protests and second move on to consider self-harm and other forms of corporal resistance. While these two broad types may differ immensely, they have one thing in common; they both have invited a militarised knee-jerk reaction, which is violent, spectacular and very politicised, and a bureaucratised response, which anonymizes, routinises and depoliticises challenges against the system. These responses I will show are not mutually exclusive and are often times overlapping and have a shared aim, to protect, legitimise and exonerate the system. The third part engages with the antiauthoritarian movement in order to explore the bond between the inside and the outside and the productive nature of resistance (Lilja et al., 2017). Here, the potential connection between resistance and social change is a particularly compelling avenue towards finding the light in the bleakness I have described in the previous chapters. In doing so, this chapter will

work as a hinge, linking resistance to a discussion about solidarity, abolition and imagining a radical future in the epilogue.

### **Animalisation of immigration**

The mass breach of human rights inside detention centres in Greece ‘operates in tandem with, and is lubricated by, stigmatizing representational practices which involve the extreme dehumanization of people’ (Tyler, 2020, p. 124). Women in particular were perceived through a racialised prism as morally and intellectually distinct from and inferior to citizens (Angel-Ajani 2003; Brennan 2004; Jiwani 2005; Kapur 2005). For example, Xenia, a detention officer at the Petrou Ralli detention centre tried to explain to me why Iraqi women do not love their babies. *‘Iraqis have a certain mentality, that women have to be animals. I’m not saying this to offend them but this is their way of thinking because of their religion, their culture, as a country, as a people.’* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). Detention officers overwhelmingly viewed women as the racialised embodiment of failing cultures, employing dogmatic claims about their naivety and their criminal, sexually deviant and subhuman nature (Angel-Ajani 2003). Maria, an outspoken detention officer, tried to explain *‘Nigerians suffer a lot. That’s why sometimes they are like animals in a cage. Asian women are very shy and not very provocative. But Nigerians and Dominicans are very hard women because their journeys and their lives have been hard too.’* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011)

What the officers’ testimonies make very clear is that women who irregularly cross borders are doubly stigmatised, first for their contravention of gender-based expectations and second, for their breach of the border. Black feminist thought has been instrumental in problematising the strong black woman ideology and the perception that black women lack access to femininity (Hartman, 2019; Spillers, 1983). The notion of hegemonic femininity (Collins, 2004) assumes the superiority of white women by devaluing other femininities that fall short of meeting the hegemonic standards. As Sandra Gilman claims in her book ‘Black Bodies, White Bodies’ the sexuality of black women became metonymic for deviant sexuality in general. A statement by the director of the Petrou Ralli detention centre highlights the intersection between race and gender as it applies to detained black women in detention. *‘Nigerians create more problems; they are more dynamic. We try not to put them all together in the same cells. They are into voodoo and stuff and you can’t communicate with them. Moreover, they have a different mentality, a street mentality. They come here and become prostitutes and they become harder than other women. Basically, they are men.’* (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). Bosworth, Pickering and I (2018) have argued elsewhere that ‘such

anthroporacialism, justified through prevalent culturalist narratives about the characteristics of certain peoples and civilising tropes, normalised the maltreatment of those in detention; for, animals do not deserve to be treated as humans' (Bosworth et al, 2018, p. 19).

Indeed, the prominence of animal metaphors and imagery is not only evident in representations of migrants in detention but also in their treatment (Andersson, 2014; Coutin, 2005; Khosravi, 2010). Many detained migrants have described how the police served them food by leaving the trays on the floor as if they were feeding their pets (Human Rights Watch, 2008). At the airport detention facility, detainees revealed to me when I was there as an NGO practitioner, that they were forced to eat with their hands because the police refused to give them cutlery, allegedly for security reasons (Fili, 2013). Poignantly, Iliadou (2019) remembers how police officers in Pagani detention centre on the island of Lesvos would summon detained men back to their cells using the sound shepherds make, 'tsaprou', when flocking their sheep together.<sup>121</sup> In another case, she recites how police officers in Pagani would watch detained men fight each other putting bets on who was going to 'win', as if they were the audience of a dog fight.<sup>122</sup>

As the above (and mounting evidence presented in the previous chapters) suggest, the material conditions of most detention spaces in Greece and their animalising effects can be read as a symptom of the 'zoopower' that seeks to reproduce anthropocentric hierarchical distinctions between human (citizens) and animal species (migrants). The zoo spectacle is a painful reminder of the stories of Ota Benga, who was kidnapped from, what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, and was caged and exhibited at the Bronx Zoo in New York (Newkirk, 2016; Sotiropoulos, 2015) and Saartje Bartman, a Khoekhoe woman who was exhibited as a freak show attraction in 19th-century Europe (Fausto-Sterling et al., 1995; Yiu, 2009). This is consistent with Vaughan-Williams' seminal work (2015, p. 5), where he argues that 'some forms of detention rely on animalization as a specific spatial technology of power'. Karen Morin's (2016) work further explores the resonances across human and nonhuman carceral geographies. By comparing prisons and zoos, she illustrates a number of overlapping oppressions and the cultural and sociological

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<sup>121</sup> For another reading of the appropriation of the state of animality by migrants themselves in order to ease their mobility see Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007).

<sup>122</sup> This has to be put into context of Greece's record of animal abuse, where acts of cruelty remain largely unpunished (Elafros, 2018) and widespread incidents of animal suffering (Keep Talking Greece, 2018b), especially in rural areas and islands (Keep Talking Greece, 2018a) are still socially acceptable (The Orphan Pet, 2020).

mandates of caging. In doing so, she reminds us that the animalization of certain bodies works to create the conditions for their exploitation and disposability.

Drawing on this diverse scholarship, I argue that racialised and gendered stereotypes and myths about immigration offered crucial resources to detention officers in Greek institutions for justifying their actions and the harsh institutions in which they work; thus, upholding and legitimating the spaces created by the hyper-politics of border control. The rest of the chapter shows how the animal imagery has provided supportive cues to the authorities to respond to resistance by detainees.

### **Making protests against detention illegible and illegitimate**

When I asked the Director of the Petrou Ralli detention centre about his role, he said '*The aim is to have peace. To have inmates that don't shout, don't resist, don't create problems- so that they have a nice time and we a better one*' (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2018). But what happens when this 'peace' is breached; when detained migrants shout and resist? In line with the animalization process described above, treating migrants as wild animals that have to be tamed in order to prevent them from revolting and eventually escaping had deeply corrosive effects in the perception of and reaction to moments of resistance, contestation, and other modes of critique. In this context, any attempt by those detained to resist the violence of detention actually reinforces the imagery of animals in cages and is perceived as yet another sign of their animal-like nature, which allegedly offers them brute strength; the rationale being that as sub-humans they cannot be reasonable, nor obey orders.

In the role of zookeepers, keeping them in cages is a matter of life or death for detention officers. Xenia, a female detention officer, told me that her method for avoiding risk is to keep the cell doors closed at all times. '*They are 100 and I'm 1. They can kill me in seconds.*' She went on to explain the reasons behind this strict regime '*When they've learned to be abused, to be beaten up day and night, to be naked all day...you know they keep them naked and they get sick and die. They get abused. So, this monstrous behavior has had an effect on their psychology and behavior. They once wanted to hit me. They could have killed me.*' Therefore, perceived animalistic behaviour on the part of detainees, who want to escape from their cages, can only be subdued through violence. The following incident illustrates this point.

Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017

Nothing was out of the ordinary about that day. It was sunny, and as usual, it was hot. Inside the Petrou Ralli detention centre, the temperature always feels higher than outside due to its unhygienic sanitation. On hot days, especially, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the noise, the smell, and the dirt. As the CPT noted after a visit in 2015, the cells at Petrou Ralli, are filthy, stuffed and infested with cockroaches (CPT, 2016). The centre is located on the premises of the Attica Aliens Police Directorate and has been in use since 2005. It was rebranded as a pre-removal centre in 2016. While the ground floor hosts administrative offices in fairly good condition, nothing can prepare visitors for the grimness of the upstairs detention centre. There are two floors. The second floor is the male unit and the third floor, which was formerly a female and children's unit, has been used to segregate detainees with severe medical issues, such as HIV and hepatitis. Upon the eviction of the female detention centre from Elliniko detention facility in 2017, women were again transferred to that floor.

Around half past six that morning, men detained on the second floor of the facility, started huddling behind the very crude, basic looking bars that separated their cells from the common area that detention officers used. Most of them had been detained for more than seven months. They requested to see the director of the centre to ask about their cases and when they would be released, a common request as all the information handed to them is mainly in Greek. The officers refused to assist them. Detainees became agitated. They started pounding the iron doors speaking a confusing mix of languages. Iron doors slammed and the officers shouted at them. The men would not stop. By seven, the tension had risen but this did not seem unfamiliar to any of those present. As one of the lawyers I interviewed, so vividly stated, '*even if the detainees do not admit to it, you feel the violence and tension the moment you enter Petrou Ralli. There is constant shouting*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).

There are two versions of what followed next. According to official police records of the incident, an escape attempt was underway. The detainees were trying to break the iron doors which separated the area with one wing of cells from the rest of the detention compound. As the director of the centre explained to me, in an interview in 2019, the doors of the cells had been damaged by the detainees, so they could not be locked; hence they were free to move inside a limited area. If they had broken those iron doors (that

separated detainees from the common area), they would have managed to escape and gone to the offices in the lower floors. In such a case, he would have gone to prison, he claimed.

Therefore, in order to stop the detainees, the officers on duty opened the iron doors at which point the detainees attacked them with handmade weapons. 'We received continuous physical attacks, with the obvious intention to push us back and escape', Mr. Barbalias, one of the detention officers, was recorded saying. 'We took our truncheons off their cases but we did not have to use them because the detainees...they slipped over and hurt themselves', he claimed (court testimonies; See also Aggelidis, 2018).<sup>123</sup> In contrast, the detainees' account, supported by video footage taken from the camera situated just opposite the wing, reveals that at 7:06 am the detention officers angered by the demands and complaints of the detainees, unlocked the doors and within seconds, six of them took their truncheons off and started beating them, while pushing them back inside their rooms. For four minutes, the camera, which can only capture the entrance to the wing, shows other officers overlooking the direction of where the beating or 'slipping over' was taking place (dededado, 2018).

Two of the detainees were so severely injured that they had to be transferred to hospital. Twelve hours later, the head of the Greek Police Aliens Directorate, Constantinos Louziotis, ordered the officers on duty to search for weapons in the detainees' belongings. They found a lighter, which is allowed by the regime, and a door hinge. Nevertheless, a criminal case was built against the eight detainees, who participated in the 'revolt'. Pending their trial, these men were transferred to eight different criminal prisons around the country in an obvious attempt to scatter them around to prevent any collective response. One year later, the trial, which took place in Athens over two days on 27 April and 23 May, was a farce. The three plaintiffs gave contradictory statements. While two of them could not recognise any of the defendants, the third one, despite testifying that they were all wearing full-face masks,<sup>124</sup> recognised four of them. Similarly, while the first two admitted to have seen at least eight weapons in the detainees' hands, the third one said he had not seen any. When challenged by the prosecutor over the video, which shows no escape attempt, they asserted that the video did not show what really happened.

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<sup>123</sup> These are extracts from testimonies given at court.

<sup>124</sup> In the video, the detainees are not wearing any masks.

The second day of trial proved to be even more ludicrous. Mr. Barbalias claimed that the injuries on the defendants' skulls could not have been caused by staff truncheons as these are especially made of a material that is meant to leave no scars. What is more, Mr. Barbalias attested, he had often used his truncheon against people at football games<sup>125</sup> and demonstrations and he had never seen any injuries caused.<sup>126</sup> Under pressure from the prosecutor and the defendants' lawyer, he had to admit that he did not think the detainees meant to escape.

In their defense statement, the eight accused claimed they were forcefully beaten for the sole reason of requesting information about their immigration cases. Two said they were sleeping when they heard the shouting during the beatings and rushed to help their fellow detainees. The prosecutor highlighted that the officers' testimonies were unreliable and that the defendants should be acquitted. Nonetheless, on 23 May 2018, just one year after what seemed a violent suppression of a legitimate request and despite glaring evidence of their innocence, the eight defendants were found guilty of revolt against the regime, causing physical damages and unlawful possession of weapons (i.e., the door hinge).<sup>127</sup>

The episode described above is not a unique case. The vast majority of detained persons do not have any information regarding their detention, nor any understanding of their legal situation. The only papers handed to them explain in Greek why they are being detained. CPT findings from 2018 add that 'there was an almost total lack of available interpretation services in all the establishments visited' (CPT, 2020a, p. 36) and that 'access to a lawyer often remained theoretical and illusory for those who did not have the financial means to pay for the services of a lawyer' (CPT, 2020a, p. 35). As a result, the lack of any information in a language they understand often leaves them in limbo about their future. Fighting back through demanding to know about their cases is their way of pushing the detention system to acknowledge them; it confirms their existence when all physical evidence of their existence is written away. On the other hand, as highlighted in previous chapters, physical violence by police officers against foreign nationals in detention centres in Greece is not

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<sup>125</sup> From the early 1980s onwards, football hooliganism spread across the country, and rapidly became a regular feature of football matches (Tsoukala, 2011).

<sup>126</sup> For more on the policing of demonstrations and ongoing human rights violations by law enforcement officials in Greece, see Amnesty International (2014).

<sup>127</sup> Lawyers I have interviewed claimed that this was the only outcome that would please both parties, the detainees and the administration. If the detainees were to be acquitted, the officers would have to be charged for physically attacking them. The sentences they were given, meant that they would be released and not returned to the Petrou Ralli facility, where they would be further targeted by the same officers that attacked them in the first place.

merely the inevitable outcome of an escape attempt or a revolt. Police abuse in these cases is the norm.

In 2013, following a series of abuses (CPT, 2013; see more in Flashnews.gr, 2013) including the death of one man, Mohamad Hassan, of an infection which had been ignored for months, and the announcement of their detention extended from 12 to 18 months, immigrants detained at the Amygdaleza detention centre, refused to be locked back in their rooms and set fire to their bedding. The riots soon escalated in the Amygdaleza detention centre and clashes broke out between the police and the detainees. Once again strong-arm policing was the only credible response. Greek riot police were deployed to forcefully end the riot, during which ten people managed to escape.

As a punishment, detainees were not allowed out of their rooms for days and 65 detainees allegedly responsible for the riot were charged with felony crimes (riot, attempted escape, violent physical injuries and attacks to guards, unprovoked damage of property and insult of officials) and sent to prison.<sup>128</sup> Yet, these charges seem to have been manufactured by the police officers present, who produced almost identical written accounts of what happened and identified those responsible amongst 750 people, in the dark and despite being hundreds of metres away from them (Aggelidis, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c). According to the police, the riot was an entirely illegitimate reaction, evidencing the herd-like nature of participants and pathological immorality or even criminality of the participants (See Epirus TV News, 2013) and someone had to be punished for that.<sup>129</sup> As Lucy Fiske has shown, naming an event a riot is a pejorative exercise ‘implicitly carrying a swathe of value judgements about the nature of the act(s), its legitimacy, the character of those involved, and its generalised threat to society’ (2014, p. 384).

Riots in detention, though, have also been used by the police as an alibi for maintaining poor conditions in the centres; thus, using resistance as a rhetorical defense mechanism against continued criticisms about the excessive use and deplorable conditions of immigration detention in Greece and absolving them of the responsibility to act upon these criticisms. ‘*You know, they are smashing chairs now and afterwards they are going to complain about the lack of furniture*’ (Diary, 2012), a detention officer commented cynically at the

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<sup>128</sup> For an analysis of the trial see Rozakou (2017b).

<sup>129</sup> The defendants stayed in prison for 15 months, after having been detained for more than 10 months inside Amygdaleza before that. They were found not guilty by the court, which found the accusations misguided and defective.

Amygdaleza closed hospitality centre during an uprising of Pakistani detainees. At a meeting I had with the Deputy Director of the Amygdaleza centre in 2017, she said that overcrowding in living units was not the detainees' fault but instead the result of significant degradation or destruction (including by arson) of accommodation containers caused by the detainees while rioting; focusing on the destructiveness of the riots and rioters rather than on systemic causes, like funding and the active state of neglect.

In May 2018 a fire broke out in one of the cells at Petrou Ralli. Even though it was quickly put out and left no casualties, it managed to burn a whole wing. The fire had allegedly been started as a sign of protest against the conditions inside the facility. As the Director of the centre told me: '*Most riots happened in this wing, so it [the fire] was meant to be*'. The police response was immediate and vengeful. The 10 persons, who were thought to be implicated in this were attacked, injured and transferred to an unknown situation. The rest of the detainees faced other repercussions, such as less food, no electricity, etc. (See Koinotita Katalipseon Koukakiou, 2018). According to the authorities, they did not have the financial capacity to renovate the burned wing, which resulted in less capacity and more overcrowding on the other wings. This did not seem to be a major concern for the administration, though. '*It is better like this because we have less people. More people, more concerns.*' (Meeting in 2019), the Director of the centre stated.



*Figure 11: The burned wing at the Petrou Ralli pre-removal detention centre*

Coming back to the quote that I opened this section with, what awaits people who shout and resist inside Greek detention centres is not a formal system that includes an investigation into the events to understand underlying issues. Rather, the response seems

to be very much in line with the culture of abuse and impunity that is nurtured inside the Greek police. Riot police and in general excessive violence to quell protests seem to be activated by reflex. In the words of an NGO lawyer, *‘the prison mentality is so prevalent that police officers treat them [detainees] as would-be rioters. So, they are ready to suppress any resistance at any time.’* (Interview, Athens, 2018)

Many of the detainees who have been involved in protest actions in detention are charged with criminal acts such as “revolting”, “civil disorder”, “grievous bodily harm against an officer” etc. An NGO lawyer I interviewed, indeed, testified that there has been a clear criminalisation of protest trend since 2017.<sup>130</sup> Yet, this is nothing but new. As early as 2010, the Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees reported that 42 detained men at the Venna special holding facility staged an upheaval protesting against the conditions, which so flagrantly violated fundamental elements of human dignity. The migrants were tried by the Three Member Misdemeanours Court of Rhodopi without access to a lawyer and without the necessary interpretation. They were sentenced to 4-8 months imprisonment and to deportation for disobedience and/or for causing damages. By 2016, the Ministry of Migration was discussing the creation of new detention centres to use them as segregation units for those deemed unruly (Spathopoulou and Carastathis, 2020)

The criminalisation process, indeed, involves bringing detainees to the court without any means to defend themselves, which in most cases ends up with them being convicted for a variety of acts.<sup>131</sup> They then end up in prison for more or less long periods and often with a deportation decision. They disappear in prison where often NGOs and activists lose track of them. Even if contact is kept it is nearly impossible to offer legal support due to high expenses in felony cases (Deportation Monitoring Aegean, 2019). However, even if

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<sup>130</sup> This is further evident in refugee camps too. Two notable cases stand out. The case of Moria 6, six young people who were accused of the fire that burned the Moria camp down with very little evidence of the involvement. Two of them, minors, were tried and convicted to 5 years imprisonment and the rest of them were sentenced to 10 years in prison. None of the fifteen witnesses who testified in court could identify the defendants and the only person, who did, did not appear in court. In a similar but even more grueling case, a pregnant woman who lived in Moria with her husband and three children tried to commit suicide by setting her self on fire. She was charged with 'aggravated arson with intent, resulting in danger to human life and property (Mare Librum, 2021).

<sup>131</sup> Recently there has also been a coordinated attempt to accuse newly arrived immigrants of human smuggling. Under this system of punishment and incarceration, immigrants are arrested, beaten, held for months in pre-trial detention, until they are convicted in a court with absolutely no access to procedural rights for driving the boats that brought them to Greece. Some were not aware of committing a felony, when they took in charge to bring a boat in distress to shore, others were simply on the boat and others were even tricked by the authorities to drive the boat, only to find out they had been charged later on. Most of them are sentenced to life long imprisonment (Hänsel, et al., 2020)

they are released, they have a public order file, which makes them even more detainable in the future. As in the case of Manuel in the beginning of the chapter, some are also transferred to other centres.

Inherent in the criminalisation process is a dispersal strategy, through which unruly migrants became less visible, and thus, less of a threat to the system. Martina Tazzioli (2020) describes practices of migrant dispersal as a way of regaining control over unruly mobility and argues that they are the ‘neglected and overshadowed aspects of migration governmentality, that are not in opposition to more spectacular and muscular border enforcement practices but, rather, are usually played out simultaneously by states’ (Tazzioli, 2020, p. 512)

The Petrou Ralli detention facility is one of the major nodes in this dispersal strategy, more than often used as a centre, where anyone considered a ‘control’ problem is dumped; turning it into a hub for riotous individuals, who can be better ‘managed’ there. In fact, in a meeting with the deputy director of Amygdaleza in 2017, she claimed that unruly migrants are swiftly sent to Petrou Ralli. The same happened to the eight persons, who were allegedly involved in the ‘revolt’ against the authorities in May 2017. They had been in detention for 8 months before they were transferred to Petrou Ralli, first in a police station in the Peloponnese when they were first arrested and then in the Corinth pre-removal detention centre. The Director of all detention centres in the Attica region at a meeting in 2019, said that they had created problems at all the previous centres they had been detained in but ‘*unfortunately they were not prosecuted before*’. As this section highlights, riotous individuals inside Greek detention centres, are beaten, prosecuted, invisibilised and further stigmatised as incessantly detainable. The next section turns to another form of resistance and how this has been perceived and responded to by the authorities.

### **Corporeal resistance: manipulative and vulnerable subjects**

In September 2019, under a research project, together with colleagues from the University of Oxford we visited the island of Kos as part of one of the Greek National Preventive Mechanism’s (NPM) monitoring visits to the island’s confinement institutions (the pre-removal detention centre (Fili, 2019), the police station and prison (Bhui, 2019), as well as the reception centre (see Bhui et al., 2019). The detention centre, where we met the manager, was our first stop. As he was complaining about the lack of psychiatrists in the

centre, which according to him was one of the biggest management issues he had to deal with, he admitted that some of the men detained there had been diagnosed with psychiatric problems.<sup>132</sup> He, then, casually said that people who self-harm have to be taken to another island nearby, Leros, and this generates an administrative complication as there are not enough officers available to make this transfer.

Later on in the discussion, he admitted that there had been two attempted suicides, ‘*but*’, he cynically added, ‘*you know, they were fake*’. The police’s attitude towards self-harming behaviour is supported by the Greek Correctional Code, which views ‘fake attempted suicide and self-harm for the avoidance of a responsibility or to achieve a benefit’ as a disciplinary offence (Article 68).<sup>133</sup> The three members of the NPM present in the monitoring visit, shared this perspective, stating that people who self-harm do not do it for real, they do not want to die, but rather to manipulate the situation to their advantage; in other words, to gain something, for example, a release.

In the official discourse, there is no recognition of self-harm as an extreme behaviour that indicates distress, nor of the potential for death to occur, regardless of the primary motivation for self-harming behaviour. The rationale is that self-harm is an attention seeking matter that upsets the smooth operation of the institution. By downplaying the importance of self-harm, management is relieved of the burden to address the causes of these acts and puts it on those committing the acts. As Afroditi Kapsali and Mihalis Mentinis (2018) argue, the psychologisation of repression and protest “sublimate the anger of incarceration into an ‘individual crisis’”. This process, though at times inadvertently, depoliticises resistance and routinises self-harm.

At no point during the discussion did any members of the NPM ask for any statistics on people who self-harm or on suicides. Perhaps, this oversight was intentional, since they would have been well aware that the police do not keep these statistics. Unlike in other countries where there is a specific registry for such acts, in Greece these incidents are registered in the book of incidents (*vivlio simvanton*), if at all.<sup>134</sup> As a former detainee recalls from the time he spent inside the Soufli border guard station ‘I saw many individuals

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<sup>132</sup> The doctor of the military visits the centre once a week.

<sup>133</sup> While the Greek Correctional Code is not applicable in detention centres, police’s practices and the way they run detention centres is very similar and influenced by prison governance. Penitentiary Code (Law No 2776/1999).

<sup>134</sup> This book includes the incidences and wrongdoings occurring inside any police institution and requires officers to take urgent action.

who cut themselves with razor blades. One Georgian and one Iranian detainee cut themselves. The police was reluctant to take these people to hospital, though they were at risk of excessive bleeding. We managed to get their attention and force them to react by hammering on the doors.' (PROASYL, 2012). What is more, there is no specialist investigation of self-inflicted deaths in Greece to help ensure that lessons are learned. Despite mental health problems abounding in reception and detention centres (Medicins Sans Frontieres, 2010; 2014; 2017), there has not been a systematic recording of self-harm, rendering these acts all the more invisible to outside observers.

*'Our hunger strike is our right to freedom'*

Other forms of corporeal resistance, such as hunger strikes,<sup>135</sup> attract more attention and some also make it to the public sphere, mainly because these acts are often accompanied by a written statement from those performing them. In 2011, PROASYL reported that nine of the men detained in the Soufli border station went on hunger strike which lasted for 15 days (PRO ASYL, 2012). 'We, the detainees of this prison who sign this petition, denounce the behaviour of the police, the detention conditions, the lack of hygiene, the bad quality of food served and we ask for your full support...Patience has its limits. We have reached our limit. Our hunger strike is our right to freedom.', they wrote in their statement.

As was related to me by a lawyer I interviewed in 2019, the police in an attempt to stop the hunger strike resorted to violence to an extent that two persons had to hospitalised. According to the hospital records she traced, one was admitted to the hospital in a coma. When UNHCR received information about the incident at one of its regular visits, the representative could not track down anyone involved. The police had told her that they were in the hospital, when in fact they were in the next room in hiding so that monitors could not see the scars and the wounds. When a delegation of lawyers, including my interviewee, met two of the men at a later visit to the border station, they told them what had happened, but they did not want to report it because they were afraid of retribution. The lawyers filed a complaint, which was even shared with the Ministry of Public Order, so that they could stop the deportation process underway. They were deported and the

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<sup>135</sup> The multicultural team of Infomobile systematically collects information about hunger strikes inside immigration detention centres. In fact, this is one of the few sources about resistance from behind bars in Greece. See Infomobile (n.d.).

police's investigation into the complaint said that the scars inflicted were the result of an accident.

In another extreme case, a person detained at the Amygdaleza detention facility had been admitted to the hospital following an act of self-harm. According to CPT (2013), upon his return to the centre, he was handcuffed to the fence of his compound for a whole day without food. At night his co-detainees covered him with a blanket because it was cold. According to the Movement against Racism and Fascism (KEERFA, n.d.), on another occasion in the same centre, the police demanded the men stopped their hunger strike and when they refused, they were beaten up. Some of the men fainted but the police denied to call the doctors provocatively uttering 'die if you don't want to stop the hunger strike...you dirty scum go back to your countries' (Flashnews.gr, 2013).

The police response was sometimes even harsher when it came to women hunger strikers. In line with the discussion above, the representations of female irregular migrants as both inadequate women and the racialised embodiment of failing cultures were dominant (see also Bosworth et al., 2018; Volpp, 2000). This justified their maltreatment, for as a female detention officer at Petrou Ralli told me '*They are sly, not as women from these countries, [but] as women in gender*' (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2011). The best way of managing them, another officer made clear, was, therefore to be firm. '*When they resist, I shout at them and they stop*', Xenia asserted (Interview, Petrou Ralli detention centre 2011). Sometimes, though, they did not stop.

At the end of October 2015, women detained at the detention facility of Elliniko (now closed), decided to abstain from food protesting against detention conditions and the duration of their stay. In May of the same year, they had started another hunger strike but officials from the Ministry who visited them, reassured them that they would bring changes to detention law and that they would be released soon. Following an intimidation campaign by the police, which included deporting some of the women who were involved and asking them to sign a paper in Greek about their will to abstain, implying that those involved would face repercussions, they backed down. Apart from two, a woman from Iraq and Sanaa Taleb. While the former stopped after two days, Sanaa continued. Sanaa came from Morocco and had been arrested when leaving her job one night.



Figure 12: The outside of the Elliniko detention facility for women

Five days later, on 5<sup>th</sup> November, the police announced to her that she would be released. Instead, she was transferred to a basement at the Petrou Ralli detention facility. When she was taken to the airport to be deported, she resisted. With handcuffs on, she was beaten, her hair was pulled while a police officer was holding her mouth shut. She was taken back to Petrou Ralli, where a criminal case was built against her for disobedience and destroying police property. According to one of her lawyers, she had allegedly caused some damage to the police car she was transferred with. When the collective found out, they started looking for her and they were sent from one police station to another. They, together with a solidarian lawyer, finally tracked her in Petrou Ralli. ‘*They staged the case against her*’, the lawyer told me. ‘*I was threatened that I wouldn’t be able to be a lawyer again if I pursued this case*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018).

On 6<sup>th</sup> November she was taken back to the Elliniko facility. Another struggle had begun. The police refused the collective to bring food to women from the outside in a move to turn them against Sanaa. They often ‘forgot’ to give her the pills she needed and threatened to transfer her to a ‘big prison’, cultivating a climate of fear amongst the detainees. Women were so afraid that they often refused to speak to solidarians visiting them. Sanaa was effectively isolated from the rest of the group. While her court date was approaching,<sup>136</sup> she was vindictively detained for another six months, totaling almost a year inside the

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<sup>136</sup> Her case was adjourned four times.

Elliniko detention facility. All this time she periodically went on hunger strikes. For a week she was hospitalised. Based on a medical report, her lawyer asked for her release at the end of November, which was declined. Her detention was extended every three months premised on the pretext that her deportation was pending. At the end of April 2016, almost a year after she was first taken to Elliniko, Sanaa was let free. During her trial in May that year she was acquitted.

Sanaa Taleb became an emblematic figure of corporeal resistance against the violence of detention centres in Greece. Her protest rapidly garnered wider support from her co-detainees and many collectives, who often gathered in solidarity in the street in front of the detention facility. Her struggle was transformed into a powerful message for anti-deportation and anti-detention activism, adorned with printed and handwritten posters and banners declaring that 'her struggle is the struggle of all immigrants'.

However, she was not alone in using her body as an 'active agent, capable of resistance as well as a signifier of time, place and event' (Phillips 2007, p. 504). At the end of 2019, following evidence of the verbal, physical and psychological torture against the women detained at Petrou Ralli centre, the House of Women, a solidarity group that visits women detainees on a weekly basis, reported that 16 women started a hunger strike protesting against their long-term detention in the facility. In March, one of the women attempted suicide by drinking detergent. Furthermore, according to activists' testimonies, on June 9, 2020, women in the Petrou Ralli facility began a hunger strike to protest against the conditions of their detention. As pressure mounted from the police to stop, one of the women was hospitalised in critical condition.

In line with what Imogen Tyler (2013b) describes about the naked protest of women detained in Yarl's Wood, UK's immigration removal centre for women, men and women tried to use their bodies to transform 'the abject zone of the detention centre into a highly charged space of resistance' in a variety of ways (Tyler, 2014, p. 117). In response to blind violence by the police, detained people seem to be taking back this corporeal power through playing along with this system. Similar to Puggioni (2014), who shows how detainees in Italian facilities inflicted wounds to their bodies in order to be taken to the hospital, detainees in Greece often used their assumed vulnerability to their own benefit,

e.g., to be taken out of their cells or be allowed to move within a restricted area and even go to the doctor's office. This strategy was evidently not welcomed by the doctors, who thought they were faking diseases and adding to their workload. As a psychologist formerly employed by an NGO remembers '*they tried to react with whatever means they had, with manipulative behaviours, with drama, cries, with hysteria. Oh, I'm on a crisis, take me to the doctor just so they can walk*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). Yet, while this may be considered a risky decision that would expose them to further police violence, this was indeed the detainees' way of resisting a rigid system that did not allow them access to basic rights, such as a walk in an outside area or medical care.

The resistant acts cited above are not isolated incidents. As I mentioned in the introduction, resistance is a predictable product of the detention system and it occurs in multiple forms. Drawing on Foucault and his 'analytics of power' in *The History of Sexuality*, Kathleen Griesbach (2010, p. 20) states that some of these forms of resistance are 'easily conceivable and others difficult to imagine; some solitary and others collective; and some peaceful and others violent.' As an NGO practitioner, I have seen all these forms developing before my eyes. Yet, this chapter is not an attempt to provide a definition of resistance inside immigration detention centres. Following Maurice Stierl (2019), who studied migrant resistance in a variety of contexts, I claim that resistance inside detention should be read as another form of exploring the inherent violence of the system. As diagnostics of the detention system, migrant resistance problematises detention by unmasking not only the ways in which it is implemented and performed, but also the foundations upon which it is built. In other words, through studying resistance, we can challenge the silencing of the violence that is inscribed in the making of detention.

### **The anti-authoritarian movement in the field of detention**

'*When we talk about resistance, who are we referring to? Those inside or those outside?*' (Interview, Athens, 2018), wondered a former NGO worker during an interview in 2018 when I asked about her thoughts on resistance in detention centres in the country. Her question directly speaks to the different worlds of resistance that this chapter wants to highlight and how they intersect and inform each other. The previous sections have dealt with the inside of detention and the multiple ways that the detained men and women attempt to challenge the system of detention and the official response to these acts. This part addresses what

happens outside the centres, on the streets overlooking the cells, by various anti-authoritarian and anti-fascist groups.

There were two decisive moments in the history of the anti-authoritarian movement that united in support of migrants and refugees; the collective solidarity to a group of hunger-striking immigrants and the response to the inspiring struggles of detained women. First, it was the struggle of 300 migrants from the Maghreb who went on hunger strike in Athens demanding mass regularization in 2011 (Pistikos, 2016). Their strike became public as they first took shelter in the Law School of the University of Athens and a few days later they were transferred to the Hypatia Mansion at the centre of the city.<sup>137</sup> Ilias Pistikos (2016), who examined this public performative act as a case study for his PhD, frames the 300 hunger strike as node of tensions, through which a multiplicity of individuals and groups were abruptly connected.

Solidarians<sup>138</sup> identifying with this struggle played a central role in the protest: they participated and coordinated press conferences, provided medical services, guarded and controlled entrance to the buildings where the protest took place, accompanied hunger strikers to the hospital and so forth. Their involvement, though, was also portrayed as the machine behind the hunger strike in the first place with the media (Margomenou, 2011) and the minister of Citizen's Protection (Chiotis, 2011) accusing them of being inciters.<sup>139</sup> Yet, for those involved was a life-changing experience '*I saw their needs, their need to struggle...it was such a powerful experience that whatever I had done before could not be compared with that*' (Interview, Athens, 2018), one of the activists involved shared with me.

In fact, immigrant struggles appear as one of the main motives for solidarity groups to be involved in detention matters. '*We started so that we support their own struggles. Because they existed, because we found out about them and because we thought that the more their struggles are known widely, it is to their advantage*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). The materialisation of solidarity for a range of collectives took new forms inspired by the struggles of women detained in the Elliniko facility. Sanaa Taleb's struggle is often commemorated and has been idolised by solidarity

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<sup>137</sup> This is a four-floor neo baroque style building built in 1908-9 in the centre of Athens, where migrants were transferred following an agreement between the Dean of the University, a number of NGOs and the owner of the building. See here the Minister for Citizen Protection's speech at the Parliament [in Greek] (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2011).

<sup>138</sup> Here I adopt the term 'solidarian' from Rozakou (2017b), who clarifies that solidarian is a neologism, which in Greek means 'he/she who stands in solidarity' (allilegios). Its extensive use the past years signifies the radicalisation of solidarity that took place in austerity-ridden Greece.

<sup>139</sup> This is a very common accusation towards the solidarity movement. However, it strips agency from migrants and views them as powerless subjects manipulated by political opportunists (Rozakou, 2017b).

groups. However, she was not alone. '*Women were very dynamic, active. I'm not just talking about Sanaa, they were all together. They were in the yard burning mattresses, they went on hunger strikes, refused to go back inside or go out, very dynamic*' (Interview, Athens, 2018).

The collective 'Solidarity to detainees in the south', having formerly established access to the centre, played a central role in foregrounding their struggles, by visiting them almost once or twice a week and taking their demands to the manager of the centre. A member of the solidarity described to me how they first decided to enter the detention space. '*We had information that three children who were detained there [the Elliniko detention centre in Southern Attica] had tried to kill themselves and there were riots. So we organized a rally and asked to be able to visit the children while they were there. At first they refused but then we found a way and we started visiting them.*' (Interview, Athens, 2018). He, then, gave more details about their role in assisting the detained women. '*What we did was suddenly we would go there in groups and the guards would not know what to do. We weren't aggressive. But we were 25 people, demanding stuff the detainees wanted. The director felt they weren't in control. So, we achieved simple stuff*' (Interview, Athens, 2018) towards the improvement of living conditions, remembered a member of the collective.

These changes were low numbers in detention, keeping the cell doors open at night so they can go to the toilet, give them shampoo and other cleaning items, etc. Solidarians brought phone cards for the detainees or clothes and medicines and they often bought these items on their own expenses. They also tried to keep in touch with the women post-release and even put some of them up in their homes, although most of them were unemployed or worked in part-time and low-paid jobs.

On one of their regular visits, the women were out in the yard refusing to go back inside. The director accused the collective for instigating the protest so the next time they requested to see them, the police denied them entry for reasons of public order and for failing to prove a relationship of friendship between the collective and the women, as was required by law in order to be able to visit them. In January 2017, the collective organised a demonstration protesting against the decision to stop visits. When they tried to communicate with the women, they were greeted by riot police, who were there to stop them from having direct access to those inside and intimidate them with their provocative attitude of noisily banging their batons against their shields (Allileggii Kratoumenon sta Notia, 2017).

When the police commander allowed the collective to visit those detained in the facility back in late 2014, the decision was interpreted as an attempt to keep the anarchists' activities under close monitoring in order to prevent any extreme interventions and violent protests on their part. However, when single everyday acts of resistance on the part of women became entangled with organised and sometimes collective resistance from the outside, they vengefully reacted. The day after the demonstration, the centre was evacuated and women were transferred to the Petrou Ralli detention centre, ostensibly for their security. In reality, this was a move to break the social interaction between solidarians and detainees, i.e., the bond between the inside and the outside.

The transfer does not negate the fact that what happened inside and outside of the Elliniko facility was unique. While the interplay between the solidarity movement and those in detention has been evident in other cases too, like the no borders movement on the island of Lesvos in 2009,<sup>140</sup> the duration of the involvement, the frequency of the visits and the relationship built between the two parties, has rarely been replicated.<sup>141</sup> The proximity of the centre to the members' zone of sociality, as they all lived in the vicinity, meant that they had more time to invest. Time is indeed a big issue for solidarians. As a solidarian told me '*I'm sorry but Amygdaleza and Korinthos are too far for us to go there. It's practical. It needs time... If someone told me here is 800 euros you don't have to work, I would go there twice a week. I wish we were four times bigger as a group, to have the time and energy to spend there [detention centres] three times a week. It [the solidarity movement] needs heads, legs and arms. Now we have to rely on chance.*' (Interview, Athens, 2019).

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<sup>140</sup> 'No border' movements are inspired by a politics that views the freedom of movement as a right for all and are committed to resisting against border regimes (for a brief history of the movement, see Schneider and Kopp, 2010). Before 2009, there was increasing discussion about the conditions inside the Pagani detention centre on the island of Lesvos. While on the mainland, the government, in view of upcoming elections was targeting public places such as metro stations, squares and specific neighbourhoods in the city centre, arresting hundreds of migrants, women, children and men huddled together in the Pagani detention centre were protesting against the 'unlivable places' of the Greek-Turkish sea border. The summer of 2009, around 400 noborder activists set up a camp on the island and organised protests outside the centre in support of the struggles of those inside. During the Noborder Camp video recordings with smuggled cameras document the inhumane conditions inside the centre. For the links to the videos, see noborderslesvos (2010a; 2010; 2010c). The publication of the videos on the internet attracted a lot of media attention, not least from international outlets. A few months later the camp was closed.

<sup>141</sup> Since then, many collectives have been actively involved in supporting those detained inside immigration detention facilities. Yet, never again have they been granted that level of access. 'The house of women for empowerment and emancipation', a self-organised initiative, visit women in detention, both in the Petrou Ralli facility and then to Amygdaleza detention centre, where they have been lately transferred. They offer them NFI items, as well as assist them with their cases with lawyers and linking them with services. For the link to their Facebook page, see To Spiti ton Gynaikon, gia tin Endynamosi & tin Heirafetisi (n.d.). Other collectives, such as 'The Mov' have also been visiting women in detention. Their website has more information (see To Mov, 2021).

Following the closure of Elliniko in 2017, the Petrou Ralli pre-removal centre has become the new locus of activist interventions. Access to detainees is not guaranteed every time. Therefore, demonstrations head to the entrance of the centre, directly addressing the immigrants with slogans. Reaching out to immigrants is mediated and obstructed not only by the human barriers of the police officers who stand between the two groups, but also by the fact that these two groups will most probably never actually meet.



Figure 13: A cell in the women's section in the Petrou Ralli detention facility

Yet, the visual contact between solidarians and immigrants, the exchange of gestures, looks and greetings through raised arms, chanted slogans, as well as placards raised by protesters and slogans written by detainees on cardboards that hung outside detention bars or in bottles thrown at the crowd, are all attempts to communicate. This is despite clear instructions by the police to steer clear of the windows. Shockingly, they are even bribed with more food or release the next day if they refuse to connect with those outside.

According to testimonies by solidarians, those who disobey are taken to the basement of the building to get physically abused.<sup>142</sup>

Retribution by the police has generated debate among the activist groups involved about whether their presence creates more repression. On the one hand they question the support they can practically offer knowing that those involved in the exchanges will be abused. On the other hand, they see resistance as a human need. *'What I keep thinking is that when they [detainees] rebel, they very well know how badly they are going to get beaten up. It is a given fact. Yet they decide to do it. This means that there is a need. It's very extreme what happens to them. When they choose to do it again and again, they are playing with their lives.'* (Interview, Athens, 2018), a solidarian admitted to me adding that detainees are adults who can freely choose what is harmful and can opt out from engaging with the demonstrations. *'We think that our interventions when we go there and speak with them matter. Something happens. We don't know what. It empowers them? They feel good there are people outside? I don't know exactly. But they have proven to us that it means something that we are out there, the 30 people that we are there. We are not 200 that I would like but it matters.'* (Interview, Athens, 2018)

As Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) argues, romanticizing resistance involves searching for heroic accounts of resistance without accounting for ambiguities and conflicts that operate within situations and persons.<sup>143</sup> Assuming detainees as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location suppresses differences among them and could potentially reproduce existing hierarchies of power. As has been argued elsewhere too (Rozakou, 2017b), solidarians seem to be trying to instill some sense of collectivity among refugees and immigrants, imposing solidarity onto them, as well as between the immigrants and themselves, when in fact a small number actually engage with them.

This 'forced' solidarity is more evident in the infusion of the political in migrants' everyday struggles. Solidarians often want to keep in touch with detainees post release and invite them to meetings. At the same time, they report severe exhaustion as they are a very small

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<sup>142</sup> The basement of the Petrou Ralli detention centre is a well-known spot of violence for those who challenge the authorities or try to resist. For example, an Afghan man detained at the Amygdaleza detention centre was taken to this basement because he complained to the police about one of his compatriots inside the cell, who had mental issues. He was so badly beaten up that his pelvis was severely dislocated to the point where he could not sit properly (in.gr, 2014).

<sup>143</sup> See also McAllister Groves and Chang (1999) for a discussion on the importance of field relations in accounting for either resistance or victimhood. Their insightful analysis shows that the way we represent our research subjects "depends not so much on what is objectively happening in the field but on our relationships in it" (McAllister Groves and Chang, 1999, p. 263).

group with a heavy load to carry. ‘*After three or four years either you decide that there is very little hope but it matters or you get burnt out and lose hope*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). In this context, they do not have much time for those who are not politically minded, including those former detainees who are preoccupied with everyday practical issues, like homelessness, money, legal aid, etc. A quote by a member of these groups is particularly telling. ‘*We have a good relationship with those who are already in a state of mind to change their lives. Those who are desperate or not necessarily political beings, they can't be involved in this... And the best, the ones that were at a squat in Exarcheia, with whom we've had many discussions about anarchism and self-management, most have left. The ones that have the need to live without depending on anyone's balls, e.g. the state, leave. And good for them. So, there's no good core left behind. Once they reach a good understanding they leave, and we are left at the beginning again.*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018)

While solidarity social spaces emphasise lateral and antihierarchical frameworks, they are not necessarily havens of equality and acceptance. This is also evident in the decision of some of the members of collectives to back out from the movement because they did not want to support immigration detainees who had a penal history (See also Rozakou, 2017b).

However, the solidarians’ effectiveness in practically assisting detainees is not only questioned from inside the movement but by other observers too, who think that those who cannot grasp the legal background of detention cannot effectively challenge it. ‘*They don't know the practical aspects of detention. So, they raise issues but I don't think its clever because they get exposed. It's a show game*’, claimed a human rights lawyer. ‘*They go and celebrate New Year's Eve outside Petrou Ralli. This is a farce. What do they think they are doing?*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018) another lawyer sarcastically asked when I brought up the issue of the solidarity movement.

This ‘show’ is partly attributed to their overt anti-statist and abolitionist agenda that makes them clash with the police. Protesting outside of detention centres is considered to be nonsensical by other non-state actors. *On the one hand, I understand how much the police's attitude can annoy you, but bringing troubles has never ended well. There is no way if you are not a lawyer or coming from a specific organization to achieve what you want to do. Especially, when those who belong to solidarity movements will be characterized as anarchists and detainees as aliens (αλλοδαποίς).*’ (Interview, Athens, 2018). Therefore, the argument goes, the naming of an event as solidarity is often a pejorative act, implicitly carrying value judgements about the nature of the act (frivolous), its legitimacy (illegal) and the character of those involved (anarchists).

Their legitimacy as a movement is a puzzle to those involved too and is closely related to their political strategies of visibility in order to “make public” migrants’ specific concerns and grievances. *‘We don’t have a communication policy that addresses the masses. The videos we have disseminated from inside the Petrou Ralli centre have not been disseminated outside of our circles...It is our choice to put limits to how widely something is disseminated.’* (Interview, Athens, 2018), a solidarian who has been involved in detention matters for more than five years told me. For example, the issue of disseminating the video of the uprising of the Petrou Ralli 8 and its violent suppression, which I mention earlier in this chapter, has been widely debated in the movement as they were very eager for this to attract more attention. However, they all agreed that they would not sacrifice their ideals and speak to statist and mainstream media. They instead shared the video they managed to receive from CCTV cameras at Petrou Ralli through a video platform (dededado, 2018).<sup>144</sup>

Another was even more blunt. *‘Demonstrations [outside detention centres] don’t have much power according to my opinion, it’s more for us and the people we are struggling for, to feel we are there for them...if we had more people on our side, this would give us more power to demand things, and this would bring change. The movement, apart from the fact that it is limited in size, its people are extremely tired’* (Interview, Athens, 2018). As she admitted later on in the discussion, these interventions, like the open-mic gatherings during which they offer information to the public and publicise their rallies, need time and patience, for, the Greek public has been fed a specific image of anarchists, who wear black clothes and are involved in damaging property, so cannot see them as a credible source of information.

The main argument put forward in this section is that ‘resistance inspires, provokes, generates, encourages or eventually discourages resistance’ (Lilja et al. 2017, p. 52). Everyday, and at times collective, resistance from behind the bars has served to shape solidarity initiatives in the outside. Stripped from funding constraints, silences and complicity with the authorities that have marred NGO work, solidarity groups are free to engage more meaningfully with those inside, which might lead to other innovative forms of resistance that seek to bring the plights of those detained to a wider audience, albeit still a very limited one.

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<sup>144</sup> The video has 16,300 views so far.

These different forms of resistance often feed off each other and together these ‘revolting subjects’, detainees and solidarians, have constituted a new, if precarious, political collective. It is precarious because their antiauthoritarian background and their focus on the idea of ‘pure’ resistance and resisters leaves little conceptual or political space for uncovering the subtle and ambivalent ways men and women may be challenging detention. Furthermore, being identified as part of this collective from the authorities might arguably bring more oppression. Therefore, more than a mechanism for providing help to those in need in detention, solidarity movements are more valuable in their role as a means of shaping a more dynamic social consciousness; one that places the abolition of detention at its core. In cases of severe unfreedom in crisis-afflicted Greece, solidarity with the plights of immigrants is a much-needed resource for our society to survive.

## Conclusion

*‘If I could make a general observation is that detention breaks people, their morale... There is no systematic resistance.’* (Interview, Athens, 2018). With this statement the NGO practitioner effortlessly reproduced the image of the helpless and voiceless migrant. Similarly, an advocacy officer at a human rights organisation confirmed that she did not see any collective protests while she was working on detention issues. Paradoxically, though, she went on saying that *‘there were hunger strikes and protests but there was always an excuse. They started spontaneously and that’s how they ended. I’ve seen people sew their lips but it was individualized so it was not continued and it had no impact.’* (Interview, Athens, 2018). Outside observers seem to be easily downplaying the significance of resistant actions on the part of detainees because there is not a clear connection between these acts and change in the system. As a member of an international human rights organisation shared *‘They know that if they revolt, it’s going to be suppressed one way or another. No one will find out. It’s not in their interest?’* (Interview, Athens, 2018).

While this may be true, resistance inside detention is, indeed, violently subdued, this misses the opportunity to explore the interactional nature of resistance and entirely overlooks the reality of migrants’ experiences behind bars. It further sidelines the role of the police and other observers in participating in the construction of what resistance is. The previous chapters placed a lot of emphasis on the resilience of the system of detention in Greece and the different actors that are complicit in nurturing it. By just studying how power is

structured, exercised or changing the world, we miss half of it and run the risk of overemphasising the role of power (Baaz et. al, 2016).

This chapter aimed to reverse this reading by showing the power of resistance in revealing the gaps of the system and the ways that the system is forced to cover these potholes and adapt to the resulting changes. More importantly, as Mainwaring and Silverman (2017, p. 35) contend ‘these acts of resistance force acknowledgment of the inherent in detention systems. They momentarily allow spectators and those scripted as “others” to redirect and transform the narrative, to make visible what has previously been obscured, and to narrow the distance between noncitizen detainee and citizen spectator.’ But, if resistance exposes violence, then ‘we need to find ways to read violence better, more swiftly. ‘Cause, violence literacy also houses a literacy of fissures and resistances.’ (Rutazibwa, 2021, p. 622).

In his efforts to understand how violence works, Seidl (2018) argues that the more people are exposed to violence, their more their attempts to escape it exacerbate the exercise of violence. To take this further, as this chapter has demonstrated, rather than quelling the threat and event of detainees’ resistance, the authorities’ violent responses merely intensified detainees’ challenges, opening up new possibilities for resistance within the extremities of the Greek detention regime; thus creating an enduring cycle. By exploring the interaction between violence and resistance, I do not want to claim that repression structures the available paths to resistance, but rather the opposite. It is not only power that shapes different articulations of resistance, but resistance also reinforces new power relations. I have also shown that resistance brings resistance and, in this case, it has in fact inspired a growing solidarity movement. Therefore, there exists a cyclical relationship; by studying resistance, we explore violence, which then unavoidably leads us to other forms of resistance.

Maurice Stierl (2019, p. 190) has shown in his exploration of migrant resistance in contemporary Europe, that ‘there can be no idea of freedom that is detached from the forms of violence that wrap themselves around any enactments of freedom, seeking to prevent and stifle their exercise’. Detainees do have a voice; sometimes they let it be heard, other times they prefer to be silent. Detainees speak to the authorities, to observers and to each other. They speak above and beyond fences. The problem is that as abject speaking subjects, they *do not matter*. There is always the fear lest the process of silencing them by the variety of measures I have identified above renders them further animalised in zoopolitical categories and spaces. But if we take a moment to appropriate this harmful

portrayal for our own purposes, we can imagine them as chameleons, because resistance can also be fierce, flexible and adapt to circumstances, all with the purpose of *azadi*, freedom.

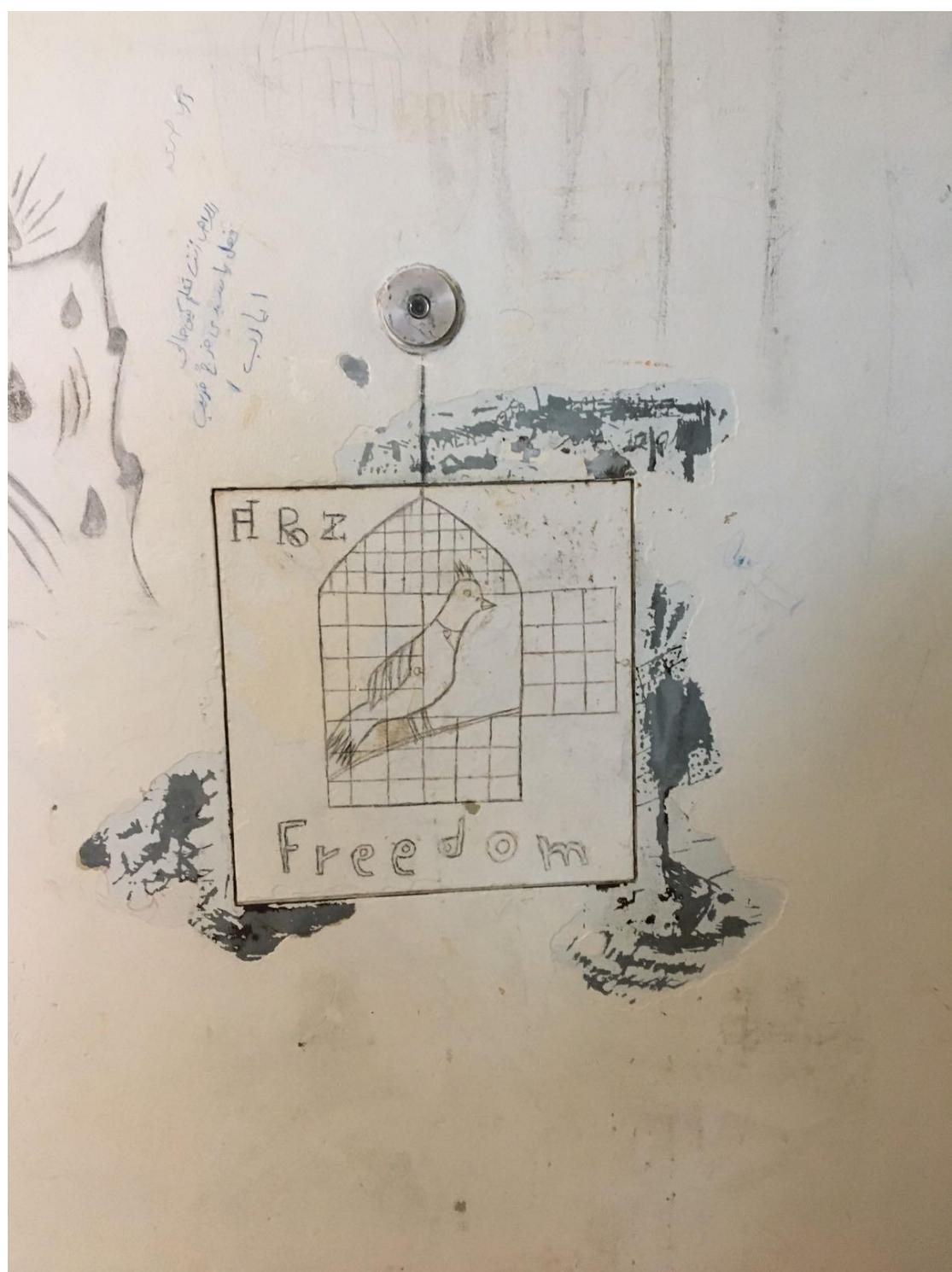


Figure 14: The word 'Freedom' engraved on the inside of a cell door at the airport detention facility.

## Epilogue

One day, after the first phase of interviews in the Petrou Ralli detention centre had been completed, I was in the NGO's doctor's office, when the manager of the centre walked in. Everyone stopped what they were doing, seemingly waiting for some kind of command in order to continue. He had come to discuss with the social workers about the case of a man from Afghanistan. The cold response of the NGO staff made it obvious that they did not think very highly of him. When he realised I was there, he was very cordial to me and even asked me about the progress of the research. Before he left, he stared at me and laughingly, while pointing his finger at me, he said '*Just make sure you don't write anything bad about us.*' (Fieldnotes, Petrou Ralli detention centre, 2012). I silently nodded. During the writing stage of this thesis, I often thought about this remark.

At first, I took it as a threat and often wondered what would happen to me if the police read my critique of their work inside Greek immigration detention. In light of other incidents, where researchers and practitioners have been intimidated and stalked in public, I was afraid that something similar could happen to me (see Iliadou, 2019). I remember police officers at the airport detention facility telling me that if I saw them in public, I should not divulge their identity as part of the police force for we would both be in danger; them for being members of an institution that is despised by a large part of the Greek public, and me for knowing them. When I was younger, I was afraid of the possibility of this happening one day. I also thought about the relation between his comment and my failure to acquire access into detention centres for my PhD research. Did the articles I had published in the meantime affect my chances of being able to conduct research in this field? How can I navigate this challenge in the future?, I asked myself when reflecting upon access.

But, more than a fear about the police affecting my work and my personal life, his demand of not writing anything bad about him or the detention centre he managed, made me reflect about knowledge production and its users. Are the police officers who I have criticized throughout the thesis going to read these accounts? Will the women detainees I have interviewed ever have the chance to read about the system that has abused them? Will this documentation of a normalised violent institution ever be discussed among government circles responsible for migration policies? More, importantly, even if they read the thesis,

would this bring change to an established detention culture? In other words, what is the meaning of academic writing in the face of so much hardship?

To answer this last question, I see the contribution of the thesis as twofold. First, it unites a decade of experience and personal and professional involvement with immigration detention in Greece, contributing to the nascent field of border criminology. Drawing together a large amount of empirical data, including: more than 950 informal conversations with detainees and staff, 70 semi-structured interviews with detained people, staff, key stakeholders, and a wide range of actors in the community, as well as detailed fieldnotes, this thesis examined the development of the Greek immigration detention system from its beginning through the years. But more than a descriptive account, this project sought to engage with the nuances, textures and details that only empirical research can bring to any interested reader.

Taking an historical approach, chapters 2 and 3 situated the modern detention estate in older practices of deterrence and exclusion, which mainly materialised at Greek borders. In doing so, I traced the connections between nationalism in Greek political culture, the historical depths of the ultra-right's intrusion into the Greek state and the legal and institutional basis for a detention regime for those deemed undesirable in the country. In opposition to the bulk of scholarship on Greek borders and border control, I intentionally shifted focus from the spectacle of migrant camps to the systems, structures and processes through which detention is (mis)managed by the state and its actors in the mainland. Empirically grounded, this project consisted of fieldwork inside Greece's central detention facility in Athens and outside detention with a wide range of actors. My access to the Petrou Ralli detention centre to conduct interviews with women, staff and other stakeholders has, to date, been unique. The thesis also draws on my first-hand experience of working inside a Greek immigration detention centre as an NGO practitioner for 14 months. This large dataset brings together important elements of the personal, political and professional. At its heart, then, this thesis is a commitment to bearing witness to the conditions within detention and what these mean for those held in immigration detention, highlighting both the neglect for human lives and the brutality of these conditions.

Building upon this, both my historical and empirical chapters explored the mechanisms through which the detention system in Greece has withstood harsh criticism. In other

words, I sought to understand the continuum of violence and harmful practices against immigration, as this plays out in the country's detention facilities. As I show in the thesis, these are not strategies, planned and implemented by a sole actor, nor do they have a legitimisation basis. Instead, detention is guarded, monitored and nurtured by a wide range of actors that think of the carceral space as a naturalised place and of violence inside it as exceptional and an aberration; thus, legitimising its existence. Yet, this violence is not an anomaly but a defining characteristic, without which detention would not exist. In chapters 4 and 5 I examined the set of institutions, practices, and ideologies responsible for creating and maintaining a condition of mass and violent immigration detention. I termed this as the 'detention industrial complex'.<sup>145</sup>

In trying to untangle the complex, I asked: How should we think about violence in a way that allows us to appreciate its magnitude? What is the adequate amount of data to explore the violence of the Greek immigration detention system? The interdisciplinary literature that explores immigration detention systems in the world has provided useful tools and value-laden concepts with which we can appreciate the violence of the systems they study. Yet, is this enough? I argue that it is not. This body of literature largely takes detention facilities for granted, as if the injustice and inequalities within them were natural and permanent. Following Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke de Noronha (2022), who make a case against borders, things do not have to be this way.

In his book *Change the world without taking power*, John Holloway (2010), asks how we can reformulate our understanding of revolution. He claims that there is no room for the scream in academic discourse because it is considered unscientific. But as he (2010) urges, our scream against a system of social domination should be our starting point as academics. 'The fact that 'we' and our conception of 'we' are product of a whole history of the subjection of the subject changes nothing. We can only start from where we are, from where we are but do not want to be, from where we scream.' (Holloway, 2010).

In this context, I see the 'scream' as my way of finally addressing all these moments when I had been previously silent as a researcher and a practitioner. All those times, when I did not object against harmful practices that I witnessed. Through this scream, I tell a story of

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<sup>145</sup> This is paraphrasing the term 'prison industrial complex' as explored and developed by e.g., Davis (1995), Davis (2003), Gilmore (1999).

abuse, neglect and complicity inside Greek immigration detention centres. But, while this is very personal, this is not and should not be just my story. I hope it becomes part of a bigger story as I work with other academics in similar fields, as I join forces with activists to build living archives of stories of abuse and as we build on each other's work and sometimes write together. Finally, as academics continue to collaborate with those mostly affected by border control practices, the stories we tell should have an active political commitment. Therefore, whoever ends up reading this thesis, can no longer say that they do not know what was and is happening inside immigration detention centres in Greece. Knowledge, though, should foreclose silence, for silence is complicity.

Closely related to the above, therefore, the second contribution of the thesis is a call to radically imagining the future of migration control. Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (2014, p. 3) term radical imagination as 'the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. It is the courage and the intelligence to recognize that the world can and should be changed.' The thesis makes for a bleak reading and it would be easy to give up hope in face of the apparent inevitability of the violence of the detention system, not just in Greece but worldwide. However, as I maintain in the final chapter resistance from those behind bars has the power to weaken a detention system. Resistance exposes the tools which have been used by the state and other authorities, like the police, to stave off their decline once they experience attacks to their foundations. Resistance shows how a detention system can in fact be poorly adapted and disorganised and therefore not at all as pervasive and strong as we might have thought. Only through foregrounding resistance can we refuse to accept that there is no alternative to a system that excludes, abuses and even kills those unlucky to be found inside.

Resistance also invites new forms of solidarity today. Radical imagination, here, is our capacity to build solidarity across boundaries and borders, real or imagined. Oscillating between roles for more than a decade and navigating the duality of researcher/practitioner often felt disorienting. I was neither here nor there and after encounters that challenged my authority to speak, I thought that I should choose between the two. At other times, I pondered whether I should choose neither. This is closely related to the ethics of representation, which has preoccupied my analysis of the field before, drawing on the work of Lucy Pickering and Helen Kara (2017). In 2018 I wrote,

'While researchers and practitioners ebb and flow in and out of detention centres, dependent on their funding and access arrangements, detainees either float in the murky waters or sink hard and fast in the detention maze. Since I first encountered the immigration detention system in Greece in 2011, little has changed. The institutions remain resistant to academic scrutiny and practitioners' recommendations, and people inside them continue to suffer.' (Fili, 2018, p. 221).

So, what is our role in either case?

Borrowing from the Autonomous Geographies Collective 'the most important principle for academics committed to social change is to make strategic interventions collectively with the social movements we belong to' (2010, p. 247). Here, I briefly show how the distinct projects that this thesis builds on have guided me towards collective action; namely, my attempts to make impact, understood as the capacity for teaching and research to disrupt, discredit and dismantle the post-political malaise that dominates the 'West' (see Swyngedouw 2005), and instead open up new possibilities for hope in what the future(s) could look like.' (Russel, 2015, p. 227).<sup>146</sup> The projects have as shared aims, to visualise the world of detention, make it legible to a lay audience, and work as tools with which detention can be challenged.

### *Mapping detention*

Using a large set of data obtained over different time periods and under a range of diverse projects, Mary Bosworth, Francesca Esposito and I had gathered the past years from and about Greece and Italy, we set up a project that aimed to visualise what goes on in detention centres in the two countries in order to increase public access to knowledge about immigration and the treatment of immigrants in detention settings. 'Landscapes of Border Control' shows the locations of facilities where irregular detainees may be detained in both Greece and Italy with extensive profiles about these facilities, complemented by a variety of forms of evidence including videography, photography, original art, oral history, and testimonies, from those directly affected.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> These projects have been funded by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, Open Society Foundations and the Engagement PER seed fund at Oxford.

<sup>147</sup> For a link to the map see Landscapes of Border Control (n.d.).

In line with the critique of cartography, which sees maps as a practice for the control and government of mobility and for corroborating the image of migrants invading Europe, this countermapping project aimed to challenge attempts by the Greek and Italian states to invisibilise and spatially isolate immigrants, while becoming a platform for civil society organisations, solidarity groups, (ex) detainees and the public to communicate their experiences from detention (Tazzioli, 2018; van Houtoum and Lacy, 2020; Casas-Cortes et al., 2017).<sup>148</sup> By depicting the Italian and Greek detention systems through the lens of resistance and migrants' presence and their struggles, we hoped that this project could provoke critical witnessing.

#### *Know your rights*

The vast majority of detained persons in Greece do not have any information regarding their detention, nor any understanding of their legal situation. Often, the only papers handed to them explain in Greek why they are being detained. What is more, access to legal aid is severely restrained. The lack of any information in a language they understand often leaves detained people in limbo about their future. In a bid to fill at least some of this gap, and in collaboration with the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), we set out to create a 'know your rights' leaflet with information about immigration detention in Greece (Know your rights in immigration detention, n.d.). In simple language, the leaflet explains practical things detained men, women and children can do in order to safeguard their human rights while in detention, as well as giving some advice about post release. It also links to websites for further information and offers outlets to condemn violent practices inside detention. It was written in Greek and has been translated in 5 languages, English, French, Arabic, Urdu and Farsi. It is available online and has been distributed to detainees all over Greece. We hoped that this leaflet could become a useful tool in the hands of detainees, as well as assist lawyers and organisations that seek to support them.

#### *Documenting through videography*

Through a number of collaborations with NGOs, academics, lawyers and activists and with technical support from a videographer, I created five short, accessible videos about

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<sup>148</sup> For reasons that are beyond the scope of this section, the idea that the material would be enriched by original contributions from people in the field never materialized.

immigration detention in Greece, to inform public understanding and debate in simple, non-academic language about the practice. The videos draw on my research and the experiences of actors in the field. The first video highlights some basic facts about immigration detention in Greece. The second video draws on the leaflet above and is a valuable resource for those at risk of detention, inside detention or post-release and their families and communities that support them. The third video focuses on Lesvos as a prison island and as such, it illuminates the growing intersections between practices of immigration detention and asylum reception, which have been previously legally distinct. It presents images and videos from practitioners in the field. The fourth video draws on the work of Evgenia Iliadou, who offers a self-reflexive account of working and researching inside immigration detention centres. She has also provided never-before-seen footage from the inside of detention centres and drawings from unaccompanied minors detained on the island of Lesvos. The final video addresses the continuum of violence inside detention in the country with unique footage from people on the ground evidencing abuse and ill-treatment behind bars.

In making them available online,<sup>149</sup> the videos will foster a living resource hub and an accurate historical record for the growing community of academics and students the world over engaged in human rights. The videos are further aimed at civil society actors, who operate in volatile, often insecure settings with limited resources, technical skills and infrastructure and whose work is focused on supporting people in detention, whether this be through activism, advocacy or litigation.

#### *Creating a database of human rights violations*

Closely related to the mapping effort described in the beginning of this section, a new, ongoing collaborative project, between Border Criminologies and the Border Violence Monitoring Network,<sup>150</sup> seeks to establish, develop and maintain an interactive, open access database of human rights violations inside immigration detention facilities, with an initial focus on Greece. In pooling knowledge and making it freely available via a new online and interactive platform, the project will document for the first time at such scale

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<sup>149</sup> The videos will be available online in March 2022 on Border Criminologies YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVhQn5PcFJ5BOGGVZ4w2yUQ>

<sup>150</sup> Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) is an independent Network of NGOs and associations mainly based in the Balkan regions and in Greece, who monitors human rights violations at the external borders of the European Union and advocates to stop the violence exerted against people on the move. For a link to their website see Border Violence Monitoring Network (n.d.).

the behaviour of law enforcement personnel inside detention centres and establish opportunities for legal action by disseminating the evidence and research to support advocacy and to advocate justice and accountability. Information in the database will help them develop legal cases, advocacy, and strategic litigation to realise significant changes in the law, legal practice and public awareness. The database will also facilitate trans-regional learning and maximise opportunities for advocates and lawyers in other parts of the world to access information that could strengthen their causes and filings. Such actors are crucial to dialogue and (collective) action on this issue. They can engage with the media, politicians and policymakers in ways that academics cannot, to effect change and hold the detention system to account. The database will be launched in 2023.

As I have argued throughout the thesis, violence inside detention centres is not an accident. The complicity of other actors in keeping detention knitted together is not acceptable. In the end, detention centres are not inevitable. No matter how impossible it may seem, we should be able to imagine a world without them. We can only do so in solidarity with each other.

*The shape of the monster is repulsive. But when it stops scaring us, then we should be terrified...because this means that we have started to look just like it. [Η μορφή του τέρατος είναι αποκρονωτική. Όταν όμως το πρόσωπο του τέρατος πάφει να μας τρομάζει, τότε πρέπει να φοβόμαστε... γιατί αυτό σημαίνει ότι έχουμε αρχίσει να του μοιάζουμε]*

Manos Hatzidakis, Greek composer

## List of Annexes

### Annex 1: List of detention spaces in Greece found in figure 4

Pre-Removal (Red hexagons)
Location
Amygdaleza
Petrou Ralli
Corinth
Fylakio
Kos
Xanthi
Paranesti
Moria

Special holding facilities for aliens (Green squares)
Location
Ioanina Centre for Illegal Immigrants
Pagani special holding facility
Aspropyrgos Alien detention facility
Venna Special holding facility for aliens
Vrissika Special holding facility for illegal immigrants
Thessaloniki Aliens Division Detention facility
Sparta Special Holding Facility for irregular migrants
Poros detention facility
Attica Green Circle
Airport
Hellenikon Holding Centre for Aliens
Piraeus Holding Centre for Aliens, Asklepiou Street

<b>Hotspots (Yellow stars)</b>
<b>Location</b>
Samos closed controlled centre
Malakasa reception facility
Kos Reception and Identification centre
Lesvos Reception and Identification centre
Leros Reception and Identification centre
Fylakio Reception and Identification centre
Chios Vial Reception and Identification centre
Malakasa reception facility

<b>Port Police Stations (Blue arrows)</b>
<b>Location</b>
Heraklion Port Police Station
Piraeus Port Police Station
Chios Port detention facility
Mytilini Port detention facility
Igoumenitsa Coast Guard detention facility
Patras Port detention facility
Academy of the merchant navy, chania

<b>Border Guard Stations (Purple Triangles)</b>
<b>Location</b>
Transitional Detachment holding facility for illegal aliens, Feres
Kristalopigi Police Station and Border Guard Post
Mesopotamia Border Guard Post
Iasmos Border Police Station
Isaakio Border Police Station
Kiprinos Border Police Station
Neo Visa Border Guard Station
Neo Himoni Border Guard Station

Tychero Border Guard Station
Soufli Border Guard Station
Metaxades Border Guard Station
Kordello Border Guard Station
Thermi Border Guard Station
Xanthi Police and Border Guard Station
Αστυνομικό Τμήμα Εχίνου 25440-22122
Nea Karvali Border Guard Station

<b>Police Stations (Orange cubes)</b>
<b>Location</b>
Iasmos police station
Alexandroupolis Police Station and Police Directorate
Igoumenitsa Police Headquarters (including the Drepas Camping site)
Kastoria Police Headquarters
Kozani Police Headquarters
Komotini Police Station
Drama Police Station
Orestiada Police Station
Mytilini Police Station
Monasteriou Security Police detention facility
Chios Town Police Station
Amfissa Police Transfer Centre
Serres Police Station
Siderokastro Police Station
Kavala Police Station
Heraklion Regional Police Headquarters
Tripoli Police Station
Kalamata Police Station
Argos Police Station
Sparta Police Station

Xanthi Police Station	
Ioannina Police Station	
Larissa Police Station	
Didimoticho Police Station	
Vathi Police Station Immigration detention facility	
Kos police station	
Chania airport	
<b>Orange Circle (Attica)</b>	
Police Headquarters, Alexandras Avenue, Athens	
Piraeus Central Police Station, Iroon Polytechniou Street	
Glyfada Police Station, Dousmanis Street	
Drapetzona Police Station, Socratous Street, Piraeus	
Kolonos Police Station, Athens (Laodamantos Street)	
Omonia Police Station, Athens (Socratous Street)	
Kypseli Police Station, Athens	
Nikea Police Station, Piraeus	
Akropolis Police Station	
Neo Kosmos Police Station	
Palio Faliro Police Station	
Aghios Panteleimonos Police Station	
Syntagma Police Station	
Zografou Police Station	
Kifissia police station	
Aspropyrgos Police Station	
<b>Orange Circle (Thessaloniki)</b>	
Metagonon (Transfer) Centre, Thessaloniki	
Stavroupoli Police Station, Thessaloniki	
Toumba Police Station, Thessaloniki	
Sindos Police Station, Thessaloniki	
Menemene Police Station, Thessaloniki	
Aristotelous Police Station (Λευκού Πύργου)	

## Annex 2: Translated Initial Registration form

## NGO Arogos

### Detention centres:

- Airport (men and women, families)
- Petrou Ralli (central- men and women, families)
- Former airport facility
- Amygdaleza (minors)
- Aspropirgos

## Personal details

Date:                    Gender:                    Adult or not:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Surname:

Father's name:

Mother's name:

Date of birth:

Country of or

Nationality:

### Religion:

Language of communication:

### Other spoken languages:

### Detention details

Date of entry to the facility:

Place of arrest:

Reason for detention:

Time in Greece:

Number of arrests in total:

Number of attempts to enter Greece:

Number of attempts to enter Europe:

Legal aid:

Comments:

#### Social details

Family status:

Wife (country of residence):

Children (age, gender, country of residence):

Other relatives in Greece or Europe (and their status):

Education:

Occupation in their country:

Occupation in Greece:

Place of residence in Greece:

Legal documents (including pending):

Former cooperation with other organizations:

Comments:

#### Medical details

Date of examination:

Number of examinations:

Current state:

History of illness:

Gynecological issues:

Findings:

Diagnosis:

Medical intervention:

Medication, advice:

Follow-up comments:

#### Psychological (psychiatric) details

Psychological enquiry:

Current symptoms:

Support:

Diagnosis:

Comments- referrals:

Follow-up comments:

## Glossary of terms

No	Terms	Definitions
	Agios Panteleimonas	Agios Panteleimonas is a neighbourhood of the centre of Athens, inhabited by a large number of immigrants. The immigrants have been widely targeted in the area by members of Golden Dawn and a resident's committee, creating ongoing conflicts. It is also home to one of the most infamous police stations in the country, which has been the focus of many allegations of ill-treatment and even torture.
	AEMY Health Unit SA	AEMY was established by Law 3293/2004 as a legal entity of private law, the Greek State being its sole shareholder. It has been offering psychosocial and medical services, as well as interpretation, to detained people in pre-removal detention facilities across Greece since 2017.
	AIDA	The Asylum Information Database (AIDA) is a database managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), containing information on asylum procedures, reception conditions, detention and content of international protection across 23 countries. It has been publishing reports on Greece since 2013.
	AITIMA	AITIMA is a Greece based NGO that was founded in 2008 to provide legal support to (detained) migrants. At the end of 2020, it ceased its operations due to funding constraints.
	Amnesty International	Amnesty International is an independent worldwide organization working against human-rights violations. It has been operational in Greece since 1976 and has published numerous reports on police violence, hate crimes, the rights of refugees and migrants, as well as LBGTQI issues.
	APT	The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) is an international independent non-governmental organisation that was founded in 1977 to promote an international convention that would create a universal system of visits to places of detention and reduce the risks of torture and ill-treatment inside them.
	Asylum Service	The Greek Asylum Service is the only responsible service for processing asylum and related procedures. It was introduced with Law 3907/2011 'Establishment of Asylum Service and First Reception Service, transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2008/115/EC on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, and other provisions' in January 2011. It became operational in 2013.

	Attica	Attica is an administrative region of Greece, that encompasses the entire metropolitan area of Athens, the country's capital and largest city.
	Axis occupation	The occupation of Greece by the Axis powers started in 1941, when Germany invaded Greece, and lasted until 1944.
	CAT	The European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was adopted by the member states of the Council of Europe in 1987 and entered into force in 1989. It was ratified by Greece in 1991. The Convention's aim is to strengthen the protection of persons deprived of their liberty against torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, by establishing a non-judicial machinery of a preventive character, based on visits.
	CPT	The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) was set up in 1989 under the auspices of the Council of Europe's 'European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment'. The CPT visits any places within the State's Party jurisdiction where persons are deprived of their liberty by a public authority (i.e., police stations, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, social care homes, immigration detention centres, juvenile institutions, military barracks, etc.) with a view to examine the treatment of such persons and make any recommendations it considers necessary. It has made 18 visits to Greece and has published subsequent reports.
	Deaths at the borders database	The Deaths at the Borders Database is the first collection of official, state-produced evidence on people who died while attempting to reach southern EU countries from the Balkans, the Middle East, and North & West Africa, and whose bodies were found in or brought to Europe. It covers Spain, Gibraltar, Italy, Malta and Greece.
	EBF	The External Borders Fund (EBF) was a solidarity fund used in particular to support Schengen countries that bear high costs protecting Schengen external borders because of their extensive land and maritime borders. The fund was set up to run from 2007–2013.
	EC	The European Council (EC) is a collegiate body that defines the overall political directions and priorities of the European Union. It is composed of the heads of state or government of the EU member states, along with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.
	EC	The European Commission (EC) is the executive branch of the European Union, responsible for proposing legislation, enforcing EU laws and directing the union's administrative operations.

	ECHR, European Convention on Human Rights	The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) protects the human rights of people in countries that belong to the Council of Europe. All 47 Member States of the Council, including the UK, have signed the Convention. The Convention was based on the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was signed in Rome in 1950 and came into force in 1953. Greece ratified it in 1974.
	ECtHR	The European Court of Human Rights is an international court that applies and protects the rights and guarantees set out in the European Convention on Human Rights.
	ECRE	The European Council on Refugees and Exiles is an alliance of 105 NGOs across 39 European countries. ECRE's mission is to protect and advance the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers and other forcibly displaced persons in Europe and in Europe's external policies. ECRE's work covers mainly legal support and advocacy. ECRE developed and managed the Asylum Information Database (AIDA-glossary term No 4), European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL) and European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA).
	EKEPY	The National Centre for Healthcare Management was established in 2005 under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. Its mission is to coordinate the bodies responsible for the implementation of actions related to the response to public health emergencies and the health sector in general.
	EKKE	The National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) was established in 1959 under the auspices of UNESCO and is the only public institution in Greece dedicated to the social sciences. EKKE is a public law legal entity supervised by the General Secretariat for Research and Innovation (GSRI) of the Ministry of Development and Investments.
	EMHRN	The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) is a network of more than 80 human rights organizations, institutions and individuals based in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Established in 1997, it aims to promote and strengthen human rights and democratic reform within its regional mandate through civil society networking and cooperation. Its activities include monitoring migration and asylum policies, conducting advocacy related to the situation of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the region, and enhancing regional collaboration and capacity among organisations active in the field of migration and asylum
	EMN	The European Migration Network (EMN) is an EU funded network, set up in 2008 with the aim of providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum for Institutions of the European Union, plus authorities and institutions of

		the Member States of the European Union, in order to inform policymaking. It has been publishing reports on Greece since 2008. Its latest report was in 2019.
	ERF	The European Refugee Fund (ERF) was one of the four funds under the General Programme Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows designed to facilitate the sharing of the financial costs of the reception, integration and voluntary repatriation of refugees amongst European Union member states. The ERF was allocated €630 million in funding over the period 2008–13. In 2014, it was replaced by the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) established for the period 2014–20. The ERF funded most of the NGOs providing services to immigrants and refugees inside and outside of detention in Greece.
	EU	The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe. The union has a total area of 4,233,255.3 km <sup>2</sup> and an estimated total population of about 447 million.
	EU-Turkey statement	The EU-Turkey statement was signed in March 2016 as a response to the sharp rise in numbers arriving in the EU after 2015. According to the statement, Turkey would take any measures necessary to stop people from crossing the Greek-Turkish border, anyone arriving irregularly in Greece would be returned to Turkey as a safe-third country and for every Syrian returned, a Syrian waiting in Turkey would be accepted by an EU member state. Turkey received 6 billion Euros under the statement. The statement has been criticised for contributing to Greece's containment policies at borders.
	EUR	Euros
	ΕΧΠΑ, Ειδικός Χώρος Παραμονής Αλλοδαπών	Article 81 of Law 3386/2005 foresees the development of special facilities for aliens (Ειδικός Χώρος Παραμονής Αλλοδαπών, ΕΧΠΑ in Greek). They are to be guarded by Greek police. The name now has been changed to pre-removal facilities.
	First Reception Service	The First Reception Service is an autonomous body reporting to the Minister of Citizen Protection, responsible for the reception of third country nationals, including identification, registration, medical screening and socio-psychological support, provision of information on their rights and obligations, and the referral of vulnerable persons. It was established by law n. 3907/2011 and became operational in 2013.
	FIDH	The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) is an international human rights NGO federating 192 organisations from 117 countries. Since 1922, FIDH has been defending all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
	FRA	Fundamental Human Rights Agency

	Federation of Border Guards of Evros	The Federation was founded in 2000 in Soufli, Evros and is one of the founding members of the Panhellenic Federation of Border Guards.
	Frontex	The European Border and Coast Guard, founded in 2004, is the collective term for national border and coast guard forces within the European Union's Schengen Area, as well as the EU's own agency. Headquartered in Warsaw, this EU agency runs its own operations in coordination with the national authorities, and maintains a Standing Corps. The agency's involvement in the ill-treatment of migrants in Greece and in pushbacks to Turkey has been widely documented.
	GCR	The Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) is a Non-Governmental Organization, which has been active since 1989 in the field of asylum and human rights in Greece. It is the main provider of legal services to detained people in Greece, with unique access to detention centres.
	Golden Dawn	Golden Dawn is a banned far-right ultranationalist political party in Greece. It was founded in 1985 as an organisation and in 1993 as a political party. In the June 2012 national elections, they secured for the first time in their history 19 seats in the Parliament. Its members have been involved in various acts of violence and hate crimes against immigrants in the country. On 7 October 2020, the Athens Court of Appeals announced verdicts for 68 defendants, including the party's political leadership. The General Secretary Nikolaos Michaloliakos and six other prominent members and former MPs, were charged with running a criminal organization. Guilty verdicts on charges of murder, attempted murder, and violent attacks on immigrants and left-wing political opponents were delivered and the leadership was sent to prison.
	Greek National Commission for Human Rights	The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) was established by Law 2667/1998 as the independent advisory body to the Greek State and is the national institution for the protection and promotion of human rights (NHRI) in Greece.
	Greek Council of State	The Greek Council of State (Symvoulio tis Epikrateias) is the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece. The Council of State, the Supreme Civil and Criminal Court (Areios Pagos) and the Court of Audit (Elegktiko Synedrio) are the highest courts in the nation. The Council of State is at the top of the hierarchy of ordinary administrative courts (administrative courts of first instance and administrative courts of appeal).
	Hellenic League for Human Rights	The Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR), set up in 1936, is the oldest human rights organization in Greece. The League since its establishment is a permanent member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and represents this network in Greece and

		participates in its organs. According to its statute, the League “undertakes activities in the domain of dissemination, advocacy and development of principles that reckon to men rights and freedoms, integrated to social structures”.
	Human Rights Watch	Human Rights Watch, founded in 1978, is an international non-governmental organization, headquartered in New York City, that conducts research and advocacy on human rights. Human Rights Watch investigates and reports on abuses happening in Greece.
	HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for England and Wales (HMI Prisons) is an independent inspectorate led by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. They provide independent scrutiny of the conditions for and treatment of prisoners and other detainees and report on their findings.
	Idomeni	Idomeni is a small village in Greece at the border with North Macedonia. After the closure of the Balkan route in early 2016, migrants who wanted to leave Greece and travel onwards to Europe were stuck there. A huge makeshift camp was built through humanitarian support. The camp was evacuated later in 2016 and the people were transferred to refugee camps across the country.
	Joint Operations Poseidon Land and Sea	These operations were deployed by Frontex in 2011 aiming to provide increased level of border surveillance, increased level of border checks and assistance with debriefing activities to Greece. They covered both the land border with Turkey and the Aegean islands, as well as the island of Crete. They involved border guards from 23 EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries.
	KEELPNO	Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention is the operational center for the planning and implementation of public health protection actions in the country and is responsible for the surveillance and control of diseases in Greece. From 2013 until 2017, it covered medical aid inside Greece's detention facilities.
	LAOS	People's Orthodox Alarm, abbreviated to LAOS is a right-wing populist political party, which was in the Greek parliament from 2007 until 2012.
	Macedonian question	That is, the question of recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as an independent republic, the name that the neighbouring country would take, as well as its claims to what the Greeks deemed ‘their’ national heritage.
	MIGREUROP	MIGREUROP, founded in 2005, is an EU-African network of associations, activists and researchers (51 associations and 43 individual members present in 17 countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East). The network strives to raise awareness of and to oppose

		policies that marginalise and exclude migrants, notably, detention in camps, various forms of displacement and the closure of borders, as well as the externalisation of migration controls by the European Union and its Member States.
	Ministry of Public Order	The Ministry of Public Order implements public order policy within the context of overall government policy and guidelines. Its mission is to safeguard and maintain public order, protect public and state security and participate in the safeguarding of national defence in cooperation with the Armed Forces. The Greek police falls under its jurisdiction. Its name has been changed numerous times so according to the period, the Ministry is referred to as Ministry of Public Order and Ministry of Public Order and Citizen's Protection. Its current title is Ministry of Citizen's Protection.
	Movement against Racism and Fascism (KEERFA)	This movement was established in 2009 as a means to coordinate the activities of individuals and groups against the racist rhetoric of the Greek state and other far-rights groups in Greece.
	MP	Member of Parliament
	MSF Médecins sans Frontières	Médecins Sans Frontières, founded in 1971, is an international humanitarian medical non-governmental organisation of French origin. They provide medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from healthcare. They have been active in Greece since 2008 and have in the past offered medical, as well as psychosocial services to detained people, mainly at border locations. They have also been active in many of the country's refugee camps.
	New Democracy	New Democracy is a liberal-conservative political party in Greece. In contemporary Greek politics, New Democracy has been the main centre-right political party and one of the two major parties in the country. It has been the governing party five times since 1974.
	(I)NGOs	(International) Non-Governmental Organisations
	IRC	The International Rescue Committee, founded in 1933, is a global humanitarian aid, relief, and development nongovernmental organization. They started work in Greece in 2015. They visit places of detention to monitor the situation inside them but they do not make their reports public.
	IRCs	Immigration removal centres are holding centres for foreign nationals awaiting decisions on their asylum claims or awaiting deportation following a failed application.
	National Operation Aspida	Operation Aspida (Shield), was launched by the Greek police in 2012 and involved the deployment of around 1,800 Greek police officers to the Greek land border with Turkey and technical equipment to the Evros region.

	Norwegian Helsinki Committee	The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, established in 1977, is a non-governmental organisation working to ensure that human rights are respected in practice. They do this through monitoring, reporting, teaching and democracy support.
	NOAS	The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) is an independent membership organisation working to advance asylum seekers' rights in Norway. NOAS assists asylum seekers at different stages of the asylum process.
	Norwegian Immigration Appeals Court	The Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) is the appellate body for immigration and citizenship cases in Norway.
	NPM	National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) are independent visiting bodies established in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). According to OPCAT article 3, States parties should set up, designate or maintain at domestic level one or several visiting bodies for the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment ("National Preventive Mechanisms"). In 2014 Greece nominated the Ombudsman as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), and the Deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights as coordinator for this new duty.
	The Greek Ombudsman	The Greek Ombudsman is an Independent Authority sanctioned by the Constitution. It has been in operation since 1998. The Greek Ombudsman mediates between public administration and citizens in order to help citizens in exercising their rights effectively. As a mediator, the Greek Ombudsman makes recommendations and proposals to the public administration. The Ombudsman does not impose sanctions or annul illegal actions by the public administration.
	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT)	The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international agreement aimed at preventing torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. OPCAT was adopted in 2002 and entered into force in 2006. OPCAT is a human rights treaty that assists in the implementation of and builds on the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT) and helps States meet their obligations under CAT. The objective of OPCAT is to prevent the mistreatment of people in detention. Greece ratified OPCAT in 2014.
	PRO ASYL	PRO ASYL, founded in 1986, is an independent organisation advocating for human rights and refugee protection in Germany and Europe. In collaboration with

		other (Greek) civil society organisations, it has published many reports on the situation of migrants and human rights in Greece.
	PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event.
	RABIT	Rapid Border Intervention Teams were created in 2007 by Frontex as a mechanism that provides rapid operational assistance for a limited period to a requesting EU Member State facing a situation of urgent and exceptional pressure at points of the external EU borders from large numbers of third-country nationals trying to enter the territory of the EU Member State. They were first deployed in Greece in 2010. Under this project, around 200 officers and interpreters were deployed to patrol the land borders and collect intelligence information on migratory routes and smuggling activities.
	RVRN	The Racist Violence Recording Network, established in 2011, is an initiative of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Office in Greece (UNHCR). It is an umbrella network and its members are non-governmental organisations as well as other entities offering legal, medical, social or any other support services that come into contact with victims of racist attacks. It aims to systematically record violent acts with racist motive, so as to analyse the quantitative and qualitative findings of racist violence and hate crime in Greece.
	Schengen	The Schengen Area is an area comprising 26 European countries that have officially abolished all passport and all other types of border control at their mutual borders. The area mostly functions as a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes, with a common visa policy.
	Security Battalions	Security Battalions are Greek paramilitary groups, which were formed in Greece during the Axis occupation in WWII, to support occupation troops. They were officially disbanded after the occupation but many of its members were assimilated by the security forces and later by the police.
	SVEMKO	The Base Union of Workers in the NGO sector was established in 2010.
	Swedish Migration Board	The Swedish Migration Agency, is a Swedish government agency, established on 1 July 1969. Its task is to evaluate and decide on applications from people who want to seek a temporary residence permit, acquire permanent residence or citizenship in Sweden.
	Syriza	Syriza (Coalition of Radical left) is a left-wing political party in Greece. In 2015, they won the elections and they

		became the first left-wing party in the country to achieve that.
	UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is a UN agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country. The Agency has been active in Greece since 1952. They are the main funders of legal aid inside immigration detention centres in the country and they also do monitoring of detention facilities across Greece.
	Visegrád	The Visegrád Group is a cultural and political alliance of four countries of Central Europe, Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia.
	Xenios Zeus	Xenios Zeus was a police operation in the country's big urban centres with an aim to target and arrest undocumented migrants. The large-scale controls, inaugurated in 2012, were mainly focused on Athens and were predominantly aimed at migrants without legal documentation. This operation is directly linked to the expansion of the detention system as the thousands that were arrested fed the detained population of the new pre-removal centres in Greece.
	WWII	World War II

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