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Humanitarian shame and cosmopolitan nationalism: Norwegian volunteers at home and abroad

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Declaration

'This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee

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Abstract

Following the so-called refugee crisis unfolding on the Greek islands in 2015, a multitude of citizen-led agencies emerged to mitigate or contest the EU's policies of securitisation and containment. This dissertation explores the trajectory of one of these initiatives: a Norwegian humanitarian volunteer organisation *Dråpen i Havet* (A Drop in the Ocean, DiH). Established by a mother-of-five with no prior experience in humanitarian or social work, DiH aspires to "make it easy" for ordinary people to help refugees in Greece, but has undergone a process of partial professionalisation, leading to larger responsibilities inside and outside Greek refugee camps. The organisation also tries to scale up their acts of care and hospitality to the Norwegian state and to influence co-nationals who do not share their humanitarian sensibilities.

The dissertation is based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Greece and Norway. Chapter 1 discusses the emergence of a new humanitarian geography and the rise of "Fortress Europe." Chapter 2 and 3 trace DiH's trajectory from spontaneous volunteering to "NGOization" and explore the organisation's shifting and contested efforts to "fill humanitarian gaps" on Europe's southern border. Chapters 4 and 5 examine DiH's widespread appeal amongst Norwegian citizens and the organisation's vision of volunteering as a transformative experience. These chapters also explore volunteers' pathways to help refugees in Greece and ambivalent experiences of returning home and negotiating different worlds and relationships. Chapter 6 analyses DiH's political turn and efforts to witness and mobilise for more inclusive asylum policies and positive public orientations towards refugees in Norway. The conclusion discusses the redemptive potential of volunteering.

Taken together, the chapters challenge enduring representations of humanitarian actors and volunteers as "rootless cosmopolitans" or "transnationals" motivated by either selfish or altruistic concerns to help distant strangers. Conversely, the dissertation shows that DiH staff and volunteers felt deeply ashamed by Norwegian affluence and their government's restrictive asylum policies and increasingly worried over the moral health and future of the Norwegian state and society. The dissertation argues that DiH staff and volunteers can be understood as "cosmopolitan nationalists," called to help as indignant and ashamed Norwegian citizens and mobilising against what they perceive as an illicit, inward-looking nationalism. Drawing on feminist and anthropological work on the politics of affect, the dissertation analyses shame (*skam)* as both culturally and politically contingent, expressed on personal and collective levels and simultaneously *on behalf of* and *against* the nation. Contrary to popular and scholarly assumptions, DiH staff and volunteers experience shame as largely productive and self-affirming. However, the dissertation argues that its political force is hampered by its reliance upon (and reproduction of) a sanitised and romanticising national narrative.

While primarily a contribution to the study of humanitarianism, nationalism and border politics, the dissertation addresses anthropological and philosophical debates on ethics, affect, cosmopolitanism and liberalism. It further provides windows into changing and increasingly fragmented and hostile humanitarian and political landscapes on the fringes of Europe. Analysing volunteers' post-utopian and redemptive aspirations, the dissertation identifies "sticky attachments" to national and humanitarian frames and imaginaries yet also some cracks and openings.

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This PhD has been a long journey, and there are many other people I need to thank for their role in getting me to the end. At Cambridge, my first thanks go to my supervisor Harri

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Note on language and terminology

Writing about asylum and migration politics is fraught with ethical and political dilemmas, several revolving around terminology. In the context of this dissertation, two of my terminological choices in particular need explanation. First, I frequently refer to the "refugee crisis" despite the many convincing critiques of "crisiology" in general (De Lauri 2019; Ramsay 2019; Roitman 2014; Vigh 2008) and the notion of a "European refugee crisis" in particular (Albahari 2015; Cabot 2015; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016). I have chosen this mainly because the "refugee crisis" (*flyktningkrisen)* remained a central emic concept throughout my fieldwork. Prevalent in my interlocutors' personal narratives and political appeals, but also Norwegian public life and political debate, the notion of the "refugee crisis" shaped my interlocutors' engagement and sharpened the political discourse and fault lines in Norwegian society (Bendixsen and Wyller 2019). To avoid this concept entirely would thus be a missed opportunity to engage with my interlocutors' experience of moral breakdown and rupture and cloud my analysis of political debates and developments in Norway (see also El-Sharaawi and Razsa 2019; Rozakou 2019). I nevertheless put "refugee crisis" in quotation marks to recognise the Eurocentric assumptions and depoliticising and de-historicising effects of the term. I also examine some of the limitations with "crisiology" in Chapter 6.

Second, I generally refer to the people crossing the Mediterranean to apply for asylum in Europe as refugees, though I occasionally also use other terms, including asylum seekers and people on the move. I use the term refugees hesitantly, as I am cognisant of the risk of homogenising the experiences of people on the move (Malkki 1995) and reproducing violent hierarchies casting migrants as undeserving or "undesirable leftovers" (Carling 2017). While other researchers have used or coined different terms to mitigate these risks, including "forced nomads" (Fassin 2018), "border crossers" (Kalir and Rozakou 2016; Cabot 2019), or "life seekers" (Pallister-Wilkins 2018), I use refugees because this is what my interlocutors used to describe themselves or the people they sought to help. However, in contrast to the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), *Al Jazeera,* and many of my interlocutors, I do not consider refugees and migrants as mutually exclusive categories. Instead, I take what Carling (2017) describes as an "inclusivist view." That is, I consider migrants as an umbrella term to describe everyone who has left their place of residence, irrespective of reason, but has not completed the legal process of claiming asylum. According to this view, the term migrants includes

refugees and other people on the move whose life stories and motivations defy such neat categories. Hence, I occasionally write "refugees and other migrants" but not "refugees and migrants." As Carling (2017) underscores, this choice of terminology does not undermine the right to seek asylum, as it recognises that all migrants might have protection needs or a well-founded fear of persecution, as stipulated by the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, it also avoids reproducing hierarchies of suffering and worthiness, including those stipulated by the convention.

Finally, a few words about translations. All interviews with Norwegian staff and volunteers were conducted in Norwegian and transcribed and translated into English by myself. Extracts from public speeches, Facebook posts, blogs, and newspaper op-eds have also been translated from Norwegian to English unless otherwise indicated. As mentioned in the acknowledgments section, I was assisted by several Greek, Arabic, and Farsi-speaking volunteers and coordinators in translating interviews, conversations, and texts in these languages. However, I only specify this when using direct quotations. Norwegian and other non-English words and phrases are italicised with my English translation put in brackets (or vice versa).

Introduction

On a Friday afternoon in August 2015, Trude was sorting her youngest daughter's overcrowded wardrobe while listening to the radio about the unprecedented number of refugees arriving in flimsy dinghies on the Greek Islands. While standing in her daughter's bedroom, amidst her family's physical and economic comforts, she experienced what she would later describe as "an uncanny and powerful call to do something." Eight days after this epiphany, she was on a plane to Lesvos with fourteen suitcases of clothes and blankets donated by her family and friends. Trude, who had no previous experience in humanitarian or social work, had not planned to assist the boat landings, nor did she have any intention to rescue people. However, after driving to the northern coast of Lesvos, where the majority of boats were arriving, she was shocked to witness the lack of professional and organised assistance. Realising that she could not simply stand by and watch, she spent three days and nights helping receive boats and distribute warm clothes and blankets to refugees arriving onshore. Transformed by this experience, she returned home to Norway as "a different person" and resigned from her job as a production manager for a Nordic television service provider. With the help of some of her female friends, Trude established the Norwegian humanitarian organisation Dråpen i Havet (*A Drop in the Ocean*).

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In the summer of 2015, the Greek island Lesvos was thrust into the world's spotlight as the epicentre of what was misguidedly labelled the "European refugee crisis" (Cabot 2019; Rozakou 2017). That year, over 800,000 people risked their lives by crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece in overloaded rubber dinghies. Lesvos alone received more than half of the boat refugees, most of whom were escaping war-torn countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Eritrea (UNHCR 2015). Moved to action by images of suffering and rescue, ordinary citizens from foreign countries flocked to the scene to assist the refugees and "volunteer at the frontline of history" (Papataxiarchis 2016: 8). Significantly, while the situation on the Greek Islands was dramatic, it was neither completely new nor unprecedented. Situated at the crossroads of populations and cultures, Greece has been forged by a long history of movement, and many of the residents on the Greek Islands are themselves descendants of boat

refugees from Asia Minor (Giannuli 2015; Hirschon 2003; 2007; Papailias 2004). Due to its geopolitical location, Lesvos has also been one of the most important gateways for asylum seekers to Europe since at least the mid-2000s (Afouxenidis et al 2017; Cabot 2014; Papadimitriou and Papageorgiou 2005). Moreover, local residents provided hospitality and rescue for years prior to the arrival of large groups of foreign helpers in the summer of 2015 (Rozakou 2016; Trubeta 2015). What was new and unprecedented on Lesvos that year, therefore, was neither the arrival of boat refugees nor the care provided to them, but the scale and pace of the arrivals, and surge in global attention and people arriving from the North Atlantic to offer assistance (Cabot 2019; Knott 2018).

The international volunteers who came to help were from a wide variety of countries and professional backgrounds, but had generally limited experience with humanitarian work (Afouxenidis et al 2017; Kitching et al 2016). Intervening in the gaps resulting from the absence of public authorities, the European Union (EU), and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), they worked alongside more experienced local actors to improvise *ad hoc* assistance (Guribye and Mydland 2018). Besides patrolling the coast and assisting with boat landings, volunteers helped meet basic needs such as clothing, water and food, transport, and even medical support and rescue (Kitching et al 2016; Papataxiarchis 2016). During the autumn of 2015, some volunteers also established more robust organisations to provide better structured and more sustainable humanitarian responses (Hernandez 2016). While several of these organisations were dissolved or co-opted in the years that followed, others survived by formalising or reinventing themselves and assuming new roles and responsibilities.

This dissertation explores the trajectory of one of these initiatives, the Norwegian volunteer humanitarian organisation Dråpen i Havet (*A Drop in the Ocean*), hereafter referred to as DiH. Briefly summarised, it seeks to help refugees by "filling humanitarian gaps" in Greece, but is run from an office in Oslo, Norway's capital. As we shall see, DiH has relocated and shifted its operations many times since its birth in 2015, and gradually assumed larger roles and responsibilities. During my fieldwork, it worked primarily inside two refugee camps on the Greek mainland: Skaramagas on the outskirts of Athens and Nea Kavala in northern Greece. The organisation also returned to Lesvos, where volunteers resumed "boat spotting" and opened an activity and educational centre in Moria village. In the spring of 2019, DiH also started providing recreational activities to unaccompanied minors inside the notorious Moria camp.

Established by a Norwegian mother-of-five with no previous experience in humanitarian work, DiH further aspired to "make it easy for ordinary people to help refugees." From September 2015 to the end of my fieldwork in January 2020, DiH sent over 7,000 volunteers from 67 countries to help refugees in Greece. The organisation was proud to attract volunteers from across the world, generations, and different backgrounds, professions, and experiences. However, as I discuss below, most volunteers where white, relatively well-off, and came from countries in the Global North. Moreover, women were clearly overrepresented amongst staff and volunteers both at home and abroad.

Volunteers were self-recruited and self-funded. After learning about the organisation (often via social or mainstream media) and possibly attending an information meeting in Norway, they contacted DiH via email or registered their "trip" on the organisation's website. Unless they were unemployed or amongst the many students and retirees volunteering for DiH, they took leave from work and/or spent their vacation in Greece. Some applied for positions as "coordinators," which entailed managing DiH's projects, supervising volunteers on site, and communicating with staff in Norway. During my fieldwork, coordinators had to commit to at least two months and ideally have some relevant work experience. In contrast to volunteers, coordinators were provided with shared housing, rental cars, and a modest stipend of 300 euros per month to cover food and other essentials.

Besides the self-recruited volunteers and coordinators, DiH also engaged many volunteers amongst the refugee populations they sought to help. Most were single men in their twenties or thirties, but there were also some women and men who had come to Greece with their partners or families. Following the organisational lingo, these volunteers were "resident volunteers," but in this dissertation, I refer to them as "refugee volunteers." These were generally assigned normal volunteer tasks, but because of their cultural and linguistic skills, intimate knowledge of the needs and conditions in the camps, and generally lengthy participation, many assumed key roles as translators and consultants. In addition to sending volunteers to Greece, DiH also mobilised many "domestic volunteers" in Norway, either to work for the administration in Oslo, or assist with fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and other tasks and projects. For reasons I explain later on, this dissertation focuses primarily on Norwegian citizens, who constituted nearly 40 percent of DiH's volunteers in Greece, and all of the organisation's staff and domestic volunteers during my fieldwork.

Image 1: Female volunteers posing outside DiH's mother and baby space in Skaramagas refugee camp (photo: DiH).

In parallel with assuming increasing responsibilities in Greece, DiH underwent a gradual and partial professionalisation of its administration and guidelines. Nonetheless, throughout my fieldwork, it continued to rely predominantly on short-term volunteers with limited or no prior experience or training in humanitarian fieldwork. As we shall see, part of the rationale of this organisational model is that volunteering is imagined as a transformative experience that might change volunteers' perspectives and attitudes and empower them to engage in further humanitarian work or political advocacy once they return home. Yet, DiH's leadership also emphasised volunteers' "ability to think outside the box" and their conviction that "one does not need a master's degree in humanitarian work to do good."

Finally, DiH followed a common trend amongst contemporary humanitarian volunteer and solidarity organisations in Europe, namely challenging the traditional divisions between humanitarian organisations and social movements and engaging in political advocacy (Fechter and Schwittay 2019; Kynsilehto 2018; Rozakou 2017a). At DiH's annual meeting in 2018, the board voted for an amendment to the organisation's statement of purpose, adding "spreading information about the plight of refugees" to the initial aim of "providing aid to displaced persons." Subsequently, DiH increasingly emphasised the organisation's and volunteers' responsibility to "witness" and thereby "wake up" the Norwegian public and politicians. During my fieldwork, the organisation also mobilised for more inclusive asylum policies and positive public perceptions toward refugees at home through campaigning and storytelling.

Research questions

The dissertation explores a set of ethical, political, and "intimate questions" (Malkki 2015) about DiH's popular appeal, humanitarian interventions and advocacy work, and staff and volunteers' personal journeys and experiences. First, what moral-political convictions, emotions and imaginations inspired Trude and later thousands of other "ordinary" Norwegian citizens to leave their daily routines and help refugees in Greece? Moreover, what is it about DiH' organisational model and imagery that appealed to Norwegians across the country, generations, and with different backgrounds and life situations? And why did so many describe volunteering in a context of violence and abjection as "surprisingly joyful" and "addictive," as well as "transformative" and "life-changing"?

After European policies transformed Greece from a transit country to a place of containment and limbo for people seeking asylum (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2016), the humanitarian field on Europe's southern frontier has been characterised by increased fragmentation (Rozakou 2019) and hostility, including policing and criminalisation of aid and rescue (Carrera et al 2019; Fekete et al 2017; Fekete 2018; Gordon and Larsen 2020; Rozakou 2017; Tazzioli and Walters 2019). During my fieldwork on Lesvos, there were also escalating tensions and resistance toward the enduring presence of overcrowded refugee camps and foreign NGOs, with local citizens voicing demands to "get their island back." Moreover, refugees responded to the EU's containment policies and the violent conditions in Moria camp by demonstrating, going on hunger-strikes, and self-organising—demanding human rights and freedom. How did DiH negotiate access and legitimacy with Greek authorities, more professional humanitarian organisations, local citizens, and refugees? And how did the organisation understand and respond to new and enduring humanitarian risks and dilemmas, including depoliticisation, humanitarian overreach, bureaucratisation, local discontent, and criminalisation?

Unlike Greece, Norway received fewer asylum seekers in 2018 and 2019 than the country had since the Balkan wars in the early 1990s, even forcing local reception centres to close. Nevertheless, the Norwegian government followed the European race to the bottom in refugee protection and implemented increasingly restrictive asylum policies. Typically legitimised on the basis of "liberal" concerns with equality, freedom, and welfare chauvinism (Bangstad 2015; Eriksen 2018; Hagelund 2020), these restrictions also unsettled the country's public self-image as a *"humanitær stormakt"* (humanitarian superpower) (De Carvalho and

Neumann 2015; Tvedt 2002; 2017; Witoszek 2011). How did volunteers experience returning home to Norway after volunteering and reintegrating into their everyday lives? Moreover, how did staff and volunteers seek to "scale up" (Ben-Yehoyada 2016; Candea 2014) their acts of hospitality and care to the Norwegian state and influence co-nationals who did not share their humanitarian sensibilities? Finally, what can DiH's humanitarian and political mobilisations teach us about liberal politics and cosmopolitanism, as well as the potential and barriers for a "borderless world" (Mbembe 2018) in this "post-utopian age" (Redfield 2013: 6; see also Parla 2019)?

The dissertation is based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork from June 2018 to January 2020 during the relatively unexplored aftermath of the frantic 2015-2016 "crisis" (Pascucci and Jumbert 2021). Adopting an extended-case study, I followed and participated in DiH's humanitarian and political work in Norway and Greece as a full-time volunteer. I also visited and interviewed volunteers in their homes across the country, and traced their personal pathways to help refugees in Greece, and ambivalent experiences of returning to Norway and negotiating different worlds and relationships. However, the narrative presented in this dissertation has an even longer temporality, as it is based on my close and ongoing contact with DiH since an initial pilot study on Chios in 2016. I further draw upon multiple secondary sources, including social media posts and other digital texts, newspaper articles, organisational documents, and reports. While the main characters in this thesis are Norwegian citizens, my arguments are also based on interviews and conversations with refugees, local Greeks, and humanitarian workers and volunteers from other countries and organisations, reflecting on the past, present, and future.

The remainder of the Introduction outlines my analytical, theoretical, and methodological framework. I begin by situating this thesis in relation to recent literature on volunteers providing aid to refugees at the European and US-Mexican borders. After highlighting several common themes, I distinguish my analytical approach from attempts to categorise volunteers' motivations and subjectivities by reference to popular stereotypes or based on rigid divisions between altruism/egoism or domestic/transnational concerns. I also introduce and unpack the two key terms that make up the title of this dissertation: "cosmopolitan nationalism" and "humanitarian shame." Next, I describe the background of my study, followed by a consideration of the methodology and some of the ethical dilemmas that followed. I then

conclude with a brief outline of the thesis and chapters to follow.

Studying humanitarian volunteers

Following Malkki's (2015) call for anthropologists to attend to humanitarian subjects as carefully as their so-called recipients or beneficiaries, there has been increased ethnographic research in recent years into the impulse to help suffering others. A relatively small but growing share of this research has examined the motivations and actions of ordinary citizens who have travelled to borderlands like the Greek Islands to help refugees in need, such as Trude and the majority of my other interlocutors. When reviewing this literature, I was struck by the many common themes and resonances with my own research.

For instance, echoing observations made by Gomes et al (2020), Knott (2018), Larsen (2018) and Jumbert (2020), my interlocutors often narrated their decision to leave their daily routines and head to Greece to help refugees as an almost compulsive desire to "do something" or "do something concretely." "I could not just sit at home and do nothing," many said, for example. "It felt like I had no choice," others maintained and described an irrepressible urge to contribute to alleviating the suffering at the European border. As suggested by the vignette framing the Introduction, "do something" was also the ethical demand Trude experienced in her daughter's bedroom in August 2015. Like other scholars, I also found that many volunteers were moved to action by graphic footage or images of frightened and suffering refugee children at the doorstep to Europe. The now-iconic image of Alan Kurdi—the Syrian toddler whose lifeless body was pictured lying face-down on a beach near a Turkish resort—elicited particular attention and sympathy, and was frequently emphasised by my interlocutors when explaining their decision to volunteer (see also Guribye and Mydland 2018; James 2019; Knott 2018).[1]

Like Knott's (2018) interviewees, nearly all interlocutors also emphasised their belief in a common humanity. More specifically, they stressed their belief in a shared world or planet ("*vi bor alle på den samme kloden*") and highlighted that everyone is of equal moral worth

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[1] Much has been written about the affective power of Kurdi's image. According to Ticktin, it "gave the 'refugee crisis' a new face: innocence" (2017: 557). Pointing to Kurdi's young age, light skin, and Western clothing, several scholars have argued that the charitable responses to the image demonstrate the selective empathy and/or paternalism of European audiences (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; El-Enany 2016; James 2019; Morgans 2020). Notably, Alan's last name was actually Shenu, but he was misidentified as Aylan Kurdi in Turkey because of the family's ethnic background. The press reiterated the mistake with the result that we only come to know and mourn Alan or Aylan Kurdi. Alan's brother Galip and mother Rehana also drowned when the boat capsized.

(*likeverdige)* and therefore subjects of moral concern and obligations (cf. Barnett and Weiss 2012: 12). Many also identified as "*medmennesker"* (fellow humans) responding to other *medmennesker,* thus explicitly rejecting national, cultural, and other barriers and categorisations. Yet, as we shall see, several interlocutors also expressed moral outrage and shame in response to the location of the crisis on "European soil" or "our continent", Norwegian privilege/affluence, and the government's inaction.

Finally, several scholars have remarked that volunteers who flocked to the Greek Islands during the peak of arrivals in 2015-2016 were motivated by a "desire to experience the border first-hand" or "witness" (Cabot 2019; Di Matteo 2021; Knott 2018; Papataxiarchis 2016). As Papataxiarchis specifies, many foreign volunteers he encountered on Lesvos during the height of the crisis in 2015 were "inspired by the understanding that this tragedy is also history in the making" and wanted to volunteer at "the front lines of history" (2016: 8). Likewise, Trude and several other interlocutors expressed a strong urge to see the border crisis with their "own eyes." Some interlocutors characterised the influx of boat refugees to the Greek Islands in 2015 as a big historical event akin to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and said they wanted to "be there" and "witness history as it unfolded." Analysing international volunteers' "pilgrimage" to the lifejacket graveyard on Lesvos (see image on pg. 188), Di Matteo further notes that many expressed a growing "moral imperative to spread awareness" (2021: 172; see also Sandri 2017). As we shall see, my interlocutors likewise came to frame witnessing as an ethical or political obligation (cf. Sontag 2002[1977]), but also a way to "wake up" the Norwegian public and insert themselves "on the right side of history."

Common themes—diverging analyses
Despite many overlapping themes, the scholars cited above have analysed the motivations and actions of humanitarian volunteers in strikingly different ways. Knott, who conducted five weeks of fieldwork volunteering for DiH and another volunteer organisation on Lesvos and Chios in 2016, takes a particularly critical approach. Discussing volunteers' compulsion to "do something," she rightly questions the widespread assumption that doing something is necessarily better than doing nothing, and points to harm resulting from "ethnocentrism, Othering and egocentrism." Describing the volunteers as "volunteer tourists," she is furthermore critical of volunteers' desires to document or witness, arguing that they rarely respected refugees' right to privacy and appeared overly concerned with showcasing their "desired" selves on social media (2018: 359-362; see also Papataxiarchis 2016; Franck 2018).

Knott also highlights volunteers' selective empathy with, and desire to help, Syrian refugees, which she points out have racial and class-based aspects (see also Cabot 2015; El-Enany 2016; James 2019). Echoing familiar critiques of humanitarianism (Agier 2010; Fassin 2005; Hardt and Negri 2000; Harrel-Bond 2002), she concludes by suggesting that "most humanitarian interventions, including those run by volunteers at the border, allow the perpetuation of this vastly unequal global system, and even inadvertently support it" (Knott 2018: 263).

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Skala Sykamnias, a small village on the northern coast of Lesvos that has served as one of the main entry points for asylum seekers on Lesvos, Papataxiarchis compares the motivations and actions of the different actors who assisted boat refugees in 2015. These actors include "Greek 'solidarians' (*allileggyos),*"[2] professional humanitarians, and "ordinary people," including "grannies" and "fishermen" as well as foreign volunteers or "volunteer tourists." Like Knott, Papataxiarchis observes that the foreign volunteers on Lesvos tended to be "highly conscious of their volunteer personas" and refers to them as "ambitious performers," "well-wishers," and "humanitarian pilgrims." However, he argues that "the ideological inspirations which underpin long-term volunteering lie on the same continuum as the widespread mix of curiosity and compassion [driving] volunteer tourists," and suggests that all volunteers pursue a form of "agency." Unpacking this further, Papataxiarchis also makes a distinction between politically engaged Greek solidarians seeking autonomy from the state and foreign volunteers enacting a form of "transnational citizenship" motivated by humanitarian, civic, or religious values (2016: 8-9).

Goomez et al. take this categorisation a step further. Based on a review of the existing literature on humanitarian action, they argue that "the question of what motivates people to 'do something'—to go out of their way to alleviate the suffering of people they do not know and will likely never meet—[is] only explored partially and in a fragmented fashion" (2020: 2). Based on "these scattered bits" and the authors' own observations from having researched humanitarian volunteers at the US-Mexican border, they propose a typology to better understand the "drivers of altruistic behaviour" in the context of rising nationalism and xenophobia. The typology differentiates between secular/faith-based motivations and

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[2] As Rozakou (2017a:99) explains, the Greek word *allileggyos* (solidarian) captures "the overt antagonism of vernacular humanitarianisms to the formal humanitarian world." While the term was initially confined to anarchist groups, it is today commonly used to refer to individuals or groups providing unpaid support to refugees and other migrants.

deontological/virtue motivations, with particular behaviours in each of the four categories: "The Missionary Type," "the Good Samaritan Type," "the Do-Gooder Type," and "the Activist Type." They also suggest four additional "self-centred" or "non-altruistic" types: "the Militant," "the Crusader," "the Martyr," and "the Humanitarian Tourist."

James, who conducted ethnographic research while working for a volunteer-run kitchen on Chios, offers a more nuanced and sympathetic reading grounded in feminist theory. While noting that some international volunteers acted as "saviours" setting out to rescue refugees conceived of as passive and vulnerable victims—thus reinforcing colonial binaries—he also highlights other forms of care that were "feminist and postcolonial in character" and sought to foster "mutuality and solidarity beyond the boundaries of race and nation." Crucially, James notes that "this ethics of care did not proceed in accordance with a set of predefined social and moral dispositions but rather was grounded, reflexive, and worked out through social practices." Describing the "caring space" as "also a learning space," he thus leaves room for volunteers to disrupt colonial modes of thinking and doing (2019: 2474-5). Similarly, Di Matteo observes that "volunteer tourism" is often characterised and limited by a depoliticised model of care and individual or narcissistic desires. However, reflecting on her interviews and conversation with volunteers on Lesvos, she suggests that memorial visits might enable international volunteers to enact a form of "transnational citizenship" and "express contestations to border regimes" (2021: 161).

Finally, Larsen, who conducted autoethnography and interviews with "spontaneous volunteers" on Lesvos in 2015, maintains that his interviewees' desires and experiences reflect broader trends in volunteering, which today is driven primarily by individual choice and expectations of self-fulfilment rather than social networks and collective aspirations. Larsen further suggests that volunteers' yearning for meaning, personal development, and community can best be understood with reference to the wider neo-liberal society in Europe, which, he argues, fails to fulfil these needs. However, compared to most other scholars examined above, Larsen is remarkably positive about the role of "spontaneous volunteers" and volunteer organisations. While noting that they have "less financial capital and organisational know-how" than the larger and more established ones, he describes them as quicker to respond and more flexible and dynamic (2018: 49-50). Likewise, Sandri defines the volunteer groups she studied at the UK-France border in opposition to the "humanitarian machine" and "neoliberal governmentality" and suggests that they can be viewed as a

"symbol against the violent border policies across Europe" (2017: 1).

Toward ethnographic specificity

While acknowledging these scholars' various contributions, most of which I will return to later in the thesis, I wish to avoid some pitfalls that characterise the aforementioned analyses. First, I have deliberately avoided referring to my interlocutors as "volunteer tourists/voluntourists/humanitarian tourists," "missionaries," "do-gooders," or "saviours." The reason is not only that my interlocutors would object to these representations, as they undermine their work and self-image (Di Matteo 2021), but also that they are the very same concepts and stereotypes as they and many other volunteers use to label and differentiate themselves from "bad" or unethical volunteers.[3] Arguably, these terms have therefore lost much of their analytical value. I further maintain that some of these terms—and particularly the tendency to categorise humanitarian volunteers as "voluntourists"—are often used in ways that are too broad and general, and thus end up neglecting qualitative differences. Crucially, in writing this, I do not imply that DiH volunteers never adopted touristic habits or practices like going to the beach or eating at nice restaurants—which most of us did—or that they did not occasionally combine volunteer trips with vacations or travelling—typically after their volunteer trips. As suggested above, I also concur with Knott (2018) and Di Matteo (2021) that there are structural and other similarities between foreign volunteers on the Greek Islands and "conventional tourists" that are useful to identify and reflect about, including access to mobility and the aforementioned desire to see things with their "own eyes." In fact, by these and several others measures, both my Norwegian interlocutors and myself—as a white Norwegian PhD student from Cambridge University—have much in common with the "figure of the global tourist" as analysed by Harrison (2003).

Yet, following Guribye and Mydland (2018), I believe it is useful to distinguish analytically between different, but sometimes overlapping, forms of volunteerism, such as:

1) volun*tourism* as a growing sector within the global tourism industry that enables paying volunteers to combine short-term aid or conservation work with cultural sightseeing and leisure (Mostafanezhad 2014; Wearing and McGehee 2013);

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[3] For an insightful discussion of the work of gossip in the aid industry, see Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka (2020)

2) spontaneous or episodic volunteerism following crises or disasters (Guribye and Mydland 2018; Kitching et al 2016; Larsen 2018);

3) grassroot or "vernacular" humanitarianism providing aid to refugees and other migrants in their own state or community (Brkovic 2017; Dunn 2017), including Greek solidarity initiatives (Rozakou 2016);

4) so-called "independent volunteers" not affiliated with organisations; and

5) small-scale volunteer organisations established by engaged individuals to aid refugees abroad (Knott 2018; Jumbert 2020).

Following this typology, Trude started out as a spontaneous (2) and independent volunteer (4), but DiH can best be described as a small-scale volunteer organisation established by an engaged individual (5). While attracting some "independent volunteers" (4) and occasionally collaborating with grassroot organisations (3), the relationships between these actors were often characterised by mutual suspicion and distrust. Moreover, DiH's organisational model shares several affinities with the booming voluntourism industry (1) but is not based on the same commercial model or incentives. In fact, the controversies and opportunities associated with the voluntourism industry made it an object of both interest and disdain for DiH, causing parallel desires to distance themselves and learn from the industry.

I am likewise wary of tendencies to categorise humanitarian volunteers as (neo)colonial without specifying this further. Significantly, this is not because DiH volunteers' ways of thinking and acting were not influenced by the workings of coloniality (Quijano 2000), but rather that attention to historical and ethnographic specificities is necessary to unpack these dynamics. More specifically, I suggest that DiH staff and volunteers were not only shaped by globalised ideas about race and difference (Loftsdóttir 2020b; Vuorela 2009) and "hegemonic western discourses and their universalistic modes of thoughts and practices of dominance" (Purtschert et al 2015: 4). Drawing on the work of Nordic post-colonial scholars, I argue that they were also influenced by national presumptions of colonial innocence and benevolence (Keskinen et al 2009; 2019; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). Briefly summarised, Norwegians typically consider themselves as "innocent outsiders" of the European colonial project (Gullestad 2006a). This belief is part of what I will later describe as a narrative of Norwegian

exceptionalism and frequently made to legitimise the country's ´self-image as "humanitarian superpower," as well as popular ideas of Norway as a small and harmless, anti-racist, peace-loving society (Gullestad 2002; Harlap and Riese 2021). As I will try to show, these assumptions further extend to Greece. As a non-member of the EU remotely located on the north-eastern periphery of the European continent, Norwegians also typically consider their country as outside many intra-European conflicts and power dynamics. This includes what anthropologists have described as central European powers' "guardianship" over Greece (Herzfeld 2002; 2016) and practices of domination, marginalisation, and paternalism directed toward Greece and the Greek people, specifically in the wake of the financial crisis (ibid; see also Cabot 2014; Dalakoglou and Angelopoulos 2018; Theodossopoulos 2013). Here, I suggest that these twofold presumptions of innocence worked to render Norwegian volunteers' presence in Greece harmless and unproblematic in the eyes of many interlocutors —despite the fact that many local Greeks accused northern European volunteers of attracting more refugees, disregarding local needs, and colonising their islands (see Chapter 3). As we shall see, presumptions of historical innocence also influenced my interlocutors' political appeals and redemptive national project (see Chapter 6).

Another pitfall I wish to avoid is reducing volunteers' motivations to help refugees to a question of personal desires or means of self-gratification or self-cultivation. Whether we frame these motivations as "neoliberal" (Larsen 2018) or "post-humanitarian" (Chouliaraki 2013), or analyse them as a kind of Foucauldian care of the self (Campbell 2020; Givoni 2016), these motivations were certainly present in volunteers' narratives. However, what is lost by focusing exclusively on volunteers' desires and self-fulfilment is the sense of moral obligation and existential compulsion to "do something" that Trude and many other interlocutors narrated, and which makes their decision to help refugees not merely subjective but also intersubjective (Englund 2008: 43; see also Jackson 2011).[4] Analysing volunteering to help refugees as a route to self-growth, self-gratification, or prestige also fails to "take seriously" volunteers' moral and political ambitions and dilemmas (Trundle 2014: 112). As

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[4] Observing the tendency of liberal philosophers and contemporary anthropologists to reduce ethics to a question of personal desires or self-cultivation, Englund suggests that both of these perspectives "regard human relationships as secondary to human existence" (2008: 36). In doing so, they also overlook the existential importance of moral obligation, which itself is constitutive of, rather than external to, the person who gives or cares (ibid).

MacFarquhar (2015) neatly shows, popular and scholarly suspicion of "do-gooders" has a long history that anthropologists should be careful not to replicate.

While less common in anthropology, I am particularly sceptical of Gomez et al (2020)'s and similar attempts to classify or categorise volunteers' motivations into "personality types" based on a rigid division between altruism and self-interest. Although some might find these categories useful ideal types to "think with," I consider this binary way of thinking about human motivation as fundamentally misguiding, as "action always has many sources" (Neumann 2015: 142). While the egoism/altruism binary has underpinned many anthropological studies of gift exchange (Trundle 2014), anthropologists have also shown that it rests on an idealisation or ideology of the "pure gift" (Parry 1986) constructed both by the people under study and, frequently, by scholars (Rozakou 2016; Yan 2017).

Challenging this binary, my interviews and conversations with volunteers taught me that their desires to help refugees were typically driven by a complex mix of self-interested and other-interested concerns, including moral obligations and collective aspirations. By following volunteers across time and space, I also noticed that their stated motivations and understanding of their own role as volunteers and refugee advocates changed or acquired further layers of complexity in response to new insights or experiences (see also Bendixsen and Sandberg 2021; Weiss 2015). Rather than trying to "pin down" volunteers' motivations or subjectivities through the use of new or established categories or ideal types, I thus emphasise what Fassin describes as the "heuristic benefit in accepting [the] complexity and indeterminacy of human action" (2014: 432).

Finally, and most importantly for the core arguments of this thesis, I am critical of the tendency by several aforementioned scholars to take volunteers' cosmopolitan or transnational outlooks as a given or leave these sensibilities unexamined. As Bornstein and Redfield maintain, the desire to "do something" to help suffering others might be widespread and characteristic of the contemporary age. However, an anthropological perspective must engage with such desires in the context of "the actual places they unfold and the larger histories they draw upon" (2011: 27). More specifically, Malkki's (2015) study of Finnish Red Cross workers and home-based volunteers demonstrates that anthropologists are wrong to approach humanitarian actors as rootless and "culturally anonymous" cosmopolitan figures. Challenging "the image of a generic aid worker," Malkki shows that the practices and desires to aid distant others are as much about "the home society" (and its specific history and

characteristics) and the emotional needs of the helper as it is about global sensibilities of foreign others. Similarly, Englund stresses the "situatedness of the cosmopolitan predicament," arguing that "while it may appear counter-intuitive to regard home as the ground on which cosmopolitan projects are built (…), imagined and enacted homes are precisely the historical circumstances in which cosmopolitans are compelled to pursue their projects" (2004: 312).

Building on this work, this thesis challenges enduring representations of international humanitarian actors and volunteers as "rootless cosmopolitans" or "transnationals" motivated primarily or solely by global or universalistic concerns and values. I do so partly by highlighting my interlocutors' situatedness within, and affective attachments to, particular localities, including Europe, Greece, and most notably Norway. I specifically show that DiH staff and volunteers felt deeply ashamed of Norwegian affluence and their government's restrictive asylum policies, and increasingly worried about the moral health and future of the Norwegian state and society. I further show that DiH's political interventions were just as much inward-looking as outward-looking, as staff and volunteers considered helping and accepting more refugees as essential to safeguard the humanitarian values and identity of the Norwegian welfare state.

Cosmopolitan nationalism
To capture these intricacies, I argue that DiH staff and volunteers can be understood as "cosmopolitan nationalists" called to help refugees as indignant and ashamed Norwegian citizens and mobilising against what they perceive as an illicit, inward-looking and nativist nationalism.

Notably, cosmopolitan nationalists/nationalism are etic terms that I suspect many of my interlocutors would disapprove of. Indeed, very few interlocutors defined themselves as cosmopolitans and nobody self-described as nationalists. This might be explained by the particular and largely negative or foreign associations these identity markers have in Norwegian public discourse. First, being cosmopolitan (*kosmopolitt/verdensborger)* is generally understood in cultural terms as a way of life associated with "sophisticated urbanites" (Eriksen 1993) and cultural elitism (Werbner 2009). As Eriksen argues, this clashes with the typical Norwegian self-understanding as "even the most urbane and sophisticated members of the Oslo bourgeoisie" would rather stress their connection to, and home in, nature, and Norwegian identity is primarily rural (1993: 10; see also Witoszek 1998; 2011). Secondly, while Norwegian nationalism is usually seen as good and benevolent

(Gullestad 2006a), self-identifying as a nationalist is today typically associated with parochial and right-wing politics.

While cosmopolitanism signifies an openness to the world, it should further be emphasised that I do not use it here to describe a way of life or attitude embracing cultural heterogeneity or difference (sometimes referred to as "cultural cosmopolitanism," see e.g., Horst and Olsen 2021). While the notion of Norway as "exceptionally homogenous" is problematic and flawed (see Chapter 1), the country cannot be described as "ethnically plural" (Werbner 2009: 10; see also Eriksen 1994), nor is my interlocutors' contention that it ought to be. Conversely, I here refer to cosmopolitan/ism in the more classical normative sense: as a moral-political orientation entailing a sense of responsibility, hospitality, and interdependency beyond the local and particular. I also challenge the widespread (though largely Eurocentric) tendency to define nationalism as inherently parochial, conservative and exclusionary (for a recent example, see Valluvan 2020). Instead, I define nationalism in more neutral terms as an attitude or ideology involving identification with one's nation and support for its interest (variously defined).

Following on from this, I argue that my interlocutors can usefully be described as cosmopolitan nationalists, as this conceptualisation illustrates how their cosmopolitan sentiments towards refugees are intimately linked with their personal investment in the moral health and future of the Norwegian state and society. Moreover, cosmopolitan nationalism usefully captures their ethical and political project to scale up their personal acts of hospitality and care to the level of the nation-state, and share Norwegian land and wealth with people on the move. While this could be framed as a cosmopolitan project, I argue that it can be better conceived as a competing national project to promote (and rescue) what my interlocutors believe are authentic Norwegian values of equality, solidarity and *"medmenneskelighet"* (compassion towards fellow humans) across borders.

Notably, the formulation cosmopolitan nationalism is inspired by various literature, including the aforementioned work of Malkki and Englund, as well as recent writing on affective nationalism (Antonsich and Skey 2020; Shoshan 2016; Wilson and Anderson 2020). It also builds upon the work of anthropologists and philosophers who have demonstrated how cosmopolitan ideals and sensibilities are rooted in local or national attachments or identities (e.g., Appiah 1997; 2006; Kymlicka and Walker 2012; Werbner et al 2009).

Deriving from the Greek word *kosmopolites* (citizen of the world), cosmopolitanism has traditionally been understood as allegiance to humanity as a whole (Cheah and Robbins 1998; Horst and Olsen 2021). While the so-called "new cosmopolitanism" has challenged this commitment to an abstract humanity (B. Robbins 2012), we shall see that it is still alive in the words and feelings of many of my interlocutors. At the same time, I show that concepts and imagery that appear indisputably cosmopolitan—including "a drop in the ocean" and "*medmenneske*" (fellow human)—derive their value and meaning, in large part, from Norwegian social and political life. Moreover, DiH staff and volunteers are not merely citizens of the world, but also what scholars associated with the movement for new cosmopolitanism have described as "situated," "rooted," or even "patriotic" (Appiah 1997; 2006; Werbner et al 2009).

Like comparable terms (such as "situated," "rooted," or "patriotic cosmopolitanism"), the formulation cosmopolitan nationalism acknowledges that cosmopolitanism does not require localism or nationalism as its "ideological opposite" (Englund 2004: 311; see also Abu-Rabia 2009; Appiah 1997; 2006; Kymlicka and Walker 2012). Conversely, we shall see that the affects, imaginations and interests that make up cosmopolitan and nationalist projects can be perfectly aligned. However, as Prakash (2015) observes, persuading others on this is a matter of moral and political work (see also Appiah 1997; R. Werbner 2009).

It must further be noted that other scholars have used the term cosmopolitan nationalism before me. This includes Eckersley (2007), who uses it to signify a join commitment to justice and liberty at home and abroad. Hence, neither the novelty of the term, nor the ideas it expresses, should be overestimated. However, unlike many of the aforementioned scholars, my objective is not to provincialise cosmopolitanism.[5] Nor is my goal to showcase how particular attachments (like national loyalty) and universal commitments (like cosmopolitan hospitality) can be balanced or coexist, or advocate for a middle ground. Instead, I use the formulation cosmopolitan nationalism to describe a sensibility and vision of one's nation-state as authentically and desirably cosmopolitan.

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[5] As several anthropologists have argued, cosmopolitan values and orientations are not exclusively "Western" (Clifford 1992; 1998; Graeber 2009; see also Mignolo 2002), nor are they confined to people belonging to a particular class or culture (Englund 2004; Parry 2009; Werbner 2009). Indeed, like humanitarianism (see Chapter 1), cosmopolitanism is historically situated and exists in plural formations: elite, subaltern, religious, secular, and so forth (Prakash 2015). For efforts to rethink cosmopolitanism from the vantage points of refugees and other migrants, see Baban and Rygiel (2014) and Horst and Olsen (2021).

To bring out the specificity of my argument, I will compare my use of the term with Eckersley (2007). In her article titled "From cosmopolitan nationalism to cosmopolitan democracy," Eckersley argues that "alleviating global injustice depends on rescuing and reframing, rather than weakening, of national identities so that they take on a more cosmopolitan character" (2007: 675). My argument is essentially the inverse. While my interlocutors care deeply about the plight and future of refugees stuck on Europe's border, I argue that their political project is centrally about their attachments to the Norwegian state and society. Arguably, it is also less about global justice than national redemption. By convincing the Norwegian government to welcome more refugees, and promote more positive public orientations towards non-western asylum seekers (cosmopolitan values of hospitality and openness/tolerance), they hope to save their country's "warm" and "humane" welfare society and restore its national identity as a "humanitarian superpower."

In the current political climate in Norway, this vision is contested and can perhaps best be described as counter-hegemonic, yet nevertheless finds legitimacy in dominant national narratives and imaginaries. However, while coined to describe a competing and oppositional national vision, the term cosmopolitan nationalism might also be used to describe attempts to promote cosmopolitan nationhood by the state (see e.g., Shoshan 2016). Although I here focus on moral–political strands of cosmopolitanism, the formulation might also be used beyond the Norwegian case to describe national visions of countries as ethnically or culturally heterogeneous or plural (see e.g., Eriksen 1994).

On critique

Before I proceed to introduce the second key concept of this thesis, a few words must be said about my approach to critique. As Ticktin argues in her review of anthropological studies of humanitarianism, there has been a noticeable shift from "alliance to critique" and, more recently, a "push back at diagnoses and condemnations of humanitarianism" and ensuing focus on "ambiguities, limits and constraints" (2014: 274, 281). However, as alluded to above, current scholarship on humanitarian volunteers in Europe (and here I also include work by scholars who are not anthropologists) has not—with few exceptions—embraced this latter trend and consequently presented quite polarising analyses.

On the one hand, several scholars have been suspicious or denunciatory, questioning volunteers' intentions or suggesting that they do more harm than good (e.g., Cabot 2019;

Knott 2018; Papataxiarchis 2016). Echoing earlier critiques of humanitarian aid, some have also suggested that humanitarian volunteers are part of the same border regime or "border/migration industrial complex" as commercial and governmental players (Franck 2018; see also Rozakou 2019), or that they have been "consolidated and brought under control" by the global refugee regime in the interest of maintaining "a liberal order" at home (Pallister-Wilkins 2018). According to most of these scholars, the result of this is that humanitarian volunteers unintentionally but inevitably contribute to the reproduction of an unequal and unjust global order.

On the other hand, other scholars have perhaps been too optimistic about the contemporary proliferation of volunteer humanitarianism in Europe. For instance, some have suggested that independent volunteers and volunteer organisations are more dynamic and can work with greater independence than more established and bureaucratised organisations (Haaland and Wallevik 2019; Larsen 2018; Sandri 2017). Others have observed that volunteer organisations have created more dignified, emancipatory, "migrant-centric," or egalitarian approaches (Ishkanian and Shutes 2021; Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan 2020). While most of these scholars underscore that volunteer humanitarianism is characterised by internal and external limitations, they seem attracted by the "utopic visions" and potential these actors resonate (Rozakou 2017a). In fact, some have even defined volunteer-based humanitarian organisations as alternatives not only to the established aid sector, but also to the entire border regime and neoliberalism (Larsen 2018; Sandri 2017; cf. Vandevoordt 2019).

In place of such sweeping claims, this dissertation draws inspiration from the aforementioned shift in anthropological work on humanitarianism (Ticktin 2014) and foregrounds the ambiguities, limitations, and dilemmas that characterise volunteers' efforts to navigate a "broken system" (Cabot 2014). I do this partly by letting my interlocutors' own critiques and uncertainties—some of which echo scholarly critiques—animate my prose (cf. Russo 2018). However, I also analyse DiH staff's and volunteers' "sticky attachments" (Ahmed 2014) to hegemonic narratives and imaginaries and their complex and uneasy entanglements with the regimes they are trying to challenge (see also Bendixsen 2018; Wright 2018). The thesis further highlights some of what remained unquestioned or unsaid by my interlocutors, which, as Bornstein (2017) notes, is an important part of the ethnographic story.

Affect and emotions

To analyse my interlocutors' attachments and entanglements, I have found myself drawn to feminist work on the cultural politics of affect and emotions (e.g., Ahmed 2014; Berlant 2011). To avoid misinterpretations, it is important to note something about this work as well as my understanding and use of the two terms. In the wake of the so-called "affective turn" in the social sciences, much ink has been spilled to discuss what affect is, how it is different (or not) from emotions, and whether and how we can study it. Contrary to Massumi's (2002) influential view of affect as a pre-linguistic and non-conscious force disconnected from language and subjectivity, I follow feminist critiques of the affective turn who have stressed the social and cultural history and underpinnings of these.[6] As Liljestrøm notes, "this positioning of affects in relation to norms and power understands them as formative for subjects, social relations, politics and political mobilization" (2016: 18). It also recognises that affects are not easily distinguishable from emotions, as both are mediated by social norms, power, and history (Ahmed 2014; Mazzerella 2009; Ngai 2005; Shoshan 2016).

In the chapters that follow, I thus consider the difference between affects and emotions as "a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind" (Ngai 2005: 27). More specifically, I take affect to be a force that "variously energizes, contradicts, deconstructs, and overwhelms the narratives through which we live" (White 2017: para 4) and therefore "less formed and structured than emotions" (Ngai 2005: 27). Furthermore, I take emotions to be neither private nor psychological states but "social and cultural practices" that mediate social life and the relationship between individuals, objects, and communities (Ahmed 2014).

However, the question I address in this dissertation is not what affects or emotions *are* but what they *do:* in other words, I examine how they move my interlocutors away from some bodies and objects—such as the nation—and toward others, as well as how they are taken up, articulated, and used by social actors. I also examine my interlocutors' relationships to their feelings which, as Ahmed insightfully notes, might vary even when the feelings they express are the same (ibid: 10). Accordingly, I also assume that both affect and emotions can be

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[6] By drawing a sharp distinction between affect and emotions, affect scholars like Massumi (2002) and Thrift (2008) have been able to declare a theoretical shift or turn, and thus their own work as novel and original. However, this "affective turn" has misrecognised many feminist scholars whose work on emotions, politics, and racism do not operate with this binary, in part because it has depoliticising and de-historicising effects (Liljestrøm 2016; see also Navaro 2017).

studied ethnographically by attending to what people say and how they interact with the material world (Navaro 2012; 2017).

To be more precise, I explore how affects and emotions shaped and traversed DiH staff and volunteers' humanitarian and political mobilisations, and contoured tensions both amongst and within volunteers (cf. Lashaw et al 2017; Naples and Mendez 2015; Shoshan 2016). Following scholars like Ngai (2005) and Antonsich and Skey (2020), I examine not only "strong" feelings like anger, love, empathy, and pride, but also "weaker" or "uglier" feelings like frustration, alienation, melancholy, doubt, guilt, and—most notably—shame (see below). I also attend to my interlocutors' ambivalent and seemingly contradictory feelings or oscillations between attachment and detachment, affection and disaffection, shame and (a desire for) pride (Antonsich and Skey 2020: 593).

As Malkki argues, attending to humanitarians' more unsettling experiences is crucial for grasping the ambiguities of this kind of work and the politics associated with it (2015: 75; see also Sharma 2017). Moreover, the focus on affect is important in the study of nationalism, which tends to be "dominated by representational approaches that often struggle to go beyond the idea of nations as imagined communities" (Antonsich and Skey 2020: 580; see also Navaro-Yashin 2002; Shoshan 2016).

Humanitarian shame

While this thesis considers several different affects and emotions, "humanitarian shame" is of particular importance. This is partly an emic term (*skam)*, frequently expressed by my interlocutors in personal conversations and interviews, as well as in their public and political interventions. In this sense, it is not unique, as shame and shaming have been prevalent concepts and tactics in humanitarian and political discourses in response to the "refugee crisis" (Naguib 2016). Moreover, shame and associated terms like sin, atonement, redemption and salvation remain an important part of the vocabulary of many humanitarian actors (Redfield 2012b: 463) and scholars (e.g., Barnett 2011: 15). However, like other emic concepts, *skam* has a specific social and political history, as well as significance in the Norwegian context. In the following paragraphs, I will start to unpack this, drawing specifically on the work of literary scholar Elizabeth Oxfeldt.

In a series of publications, Oxfeldt and her colleagues (Oxfeldt et al 2016; 2017; 2018) discuss what they describe a particular form of Scandinavian guilt or shame. While suggesting that Scandinavian guilt/shame is a "variant of Western guilt," they maintain that "each nation (and region) has its particular history of privilege and guilt" that must be understood in the context of both local particularities and globalisation (Oxfeldt 2018: 2). The Scandinavian guilt/shame is, in their analysis, a symptom of the discomfort most Scandinavians feel when confronted with global injustice (ibid: 10). While noting that many Scandinavian guilt traditions have pietistic roots, they underscore that contemporary expressions of Scandinavian guilt/shame are not primarily about people's relationship to God, but to suffering or less privileged others.

They further suggest that Scandinavian guilt/shame distinguishes itself from that of many other Anglo-American nations due to prevailing assumptions of Nordic exceptionalism and innocence in relation to colonialism, slavery, and imperialism. Specifically, they argue that Scandinavians do not typically feel guilty or ashamed because of historical wrongs, or vis-à-vis particular national groups or minorities, but rather when confronted with the suffering of global others (Oxfeldt et al 2016: 13-14; see also Tvedt 2016). Historically, these suffering others are people from the Global South, and often Sub-Saharan Africa, which harkens back to missionary campaigns (Gullestad 2007) and is also reinforced by popular culture and socialisation. For instance, Oxfeldt (2018) notes how Scandinavian parents often remind their children about "the starving children in Africa" to encourage them to "eat everything on their plate or feel grateful for what they have," a parental approach I remember vividly from my own upbringing. Yet the suffering others who challenge or "disrupt" Scandinavian happiness and become "the source of bad conscience" are increasingly also refugees fleeing from war and persecution, or even a post-human being: the planet or the environment (Oxfeldt et al 2017: 432).

Oxfeldt and her colleagues make several important observations that resonate with my findings and help sharpen my analysis. First, whereas many social theorists define shame and guilt as morally and experimentally different feelings, typically relating guilt to actions and shame to one's being (e.g., Leys 2007), Oxfeldt remarks that the two commonly converge as "what one does reflects who one is" (2018: 1). This also corresponds with my interlocutors' usage of the terms: although using shame more frequently than guilt, volunteers generally did

not observe the action/being distinction and regularly described actions or inactions as shameful.

Second, they usefully highlight how Scandinavians typically relate to questions of shame and guilt in a context where they consider themselves to be good and innocent. Arguably, this is particularly true regarding Norway and Norwegians who, according to the late anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (2006a), typically consider themselves as "moral and innocent helpers" abroad. However, as I describe in Chapter 1, this self-congratulatory public image is based on a hegemonic and whitewashed version of Norwegian history and a number of historical and contemporary silences.

Third, Oxfeldt and her colleagues suggest that feeling guilty or ashamed by global injustices is typical of Scandinavians and is experienced as particularly heavy and burdensome, not only because of these countries' egalitarian ideals, but also because Scandinavians generally conceive of themselves as "on the top of the world" in terms of happiness, wealth, peace, and equality (Oxfeldt et al 2016: 13-14). This sense of being exceptionally privileged in a radically unjust world was expressed by nearly all Norwegian interlocutors. However, as we shall see, they not only expressed shame in response to global inequalities and injustice, but also personal and national shame in response to Norwegian excess or overabundance (*overflod*), and the government's increasingly restrictive and "inhumane" refugee politics.

Finally, while not distinguishing between shame and guilt, Oxfeldt notes a morally relevant and important distinction between (1) feeling guilty or ashamed "based on a realization that one's personal happiness and privileges are, or have been, attained at the expense of suffering others*"* versus (2) not seeing a direct or causal connection between one's privileges and the suffering of global others, but nevertheless feeling responsible for alleviating the latter and guilty or ashamed if not succeeding in doing so (2018: 1). This distinction resembles the one Mancilla makes between so-called "justice cosmopolitans" (represented by Thomas Pogge) and "assistance cosmopolitans" (represented by Peter Singer), where only the former traces "causal connections between the actions of the wealthy and the plight of the needy in order to ground the duties of the former" (2016: 2; see also B. Robbins 2009: 6).

In this dissertation, I build on and extend Oxfeldt's analysis by studying how shame was felt and expressed on both personal and collective/national levels, and accompanied by other emotions and aspirations, including gratitude, luck, and desires for political change, national

pride, and redemption. I chose the term "humanitarian shame" because my interlocutors most commonly articulated shame in response to what they perceived as "humanitarian injustices" (defined by Zack (2018) as misfortunes beginning with bad luck) and violations of Norway's humanitarian traditions and values. However, as we shall see, their political understanding and discourse developed and fit uneasily with critiques of humanitarian reason as depoliticising (Fassin 2012). Moreover, we shall see that humanitarian shame interacted with other, often overlapping, forms of shame, including environmental– or "eco-shame" (Bruhn 2018).

The thesis pays particular attention to the role (and use) of shame in mobilising my interlocutors to volunteer to help refugees in Greece. In doing so, I bring ethnographic specificity to the wealth of scholarship that in recent years have drawn on Malkki (2015) to highlight humanitarian workers and volunteers' "need to help" or humanitarian impulse "do something" without situating these needs and impulses socially or historically. Notably, my analysis suggests that my interlocutors were not only or primarily moved to act by feelings of empathy or identification, as is often assumed in the humanitarian literature. Conversely, it was often the huge distance, or contrast, between their Norwegian privileges and excess vis-à-vis the plight of refugees, which caused their affective and ethical response. I further show how DiH staff and volunteers rely on such contrasts or juxtapositions to shame the Norwegian public and politicians into action. By highlighting my interlocutors' expressions of national shame in response to their government's border policies, the thesis also challenges the widespread assumption that citizens in Europe acted primarily out of an apolitical humanitarian imperative, for only to later becoming politicised (see also Jumbert 2020; Vandevoordt 2019).

In considering feelings of shame as a catalysing factor for volunteering and advocacy, I echo other anthropologists who recently have shown how "negative" affect can stimulate social and political action (Greenberg 2016; Wright 2018). Following volunteers across time and space, the thesis also describes how their feelings of shame intensified, were taken on as "mine" or "ours" (Ahmed 2014), or scaled up to the level of the nation. While shame is commonly described as personally harmful or paralysing (Every 2013; Leys 2007; Nussbaum 2013; Probyn 2005; Tarrow 1998), I argue that many volunteers experienced it as appropriate, self-affirming and productive. However, analysing its political potential, I show that it turned volunteers inwards and reproduced their prior attachments to the Norwegian nation-state.

Drawing on Oxfeldt's and Mancilla's distinctions above, I further make a distinction between (1) feeling ashamed because you consider Norway and/or yourself to be *complicit* in refugees' suffering versus (2) merely conceiving of Norway and/or yourself as *morally responsible* (because of Norwegian wealth and privileges). In the latter part of this thesis, I use this distinction to analyse my interlocutors' political subjectivities and interventions, and show that only the former unsettles hegemonic and whitewashed narratives of Norwegians as peaceful and innocent helpers.

Methodology

Reflecting on the subtle but significant difference between Humphrey's theorisation of events and her own work, Das ponders whether these differences can be explained by the anthropologists' different field locations or the fact that they are "attracted to different modes of philosophizing" (2019: 53). While the answer might be that both of these factors matter to various degrees (cf. Englund and Yarrow 2013; Laidlaw 2014), so do other aspects, including choice of methods and positionality. This section elaborates on these two factors, which I believe have fundamentally shaped my findings and analysis.

As mentioned, I approached DiH as an extended-case study and followed the organisation and individual volunteers at home and abroad—in Norway and Greece—for 18 months. Initially developed by anthropologists associated with the Manchester School, the extended-case study is characterised by its injunction to follow events and developments as they unfold across time and space (Englund 2018). Similar approaches have been used by anthropologists studying transnational humanitarian organisations (Bornstein 2012), illegalised migration (Andersson 2014; Holmes 2013; Lucht 2011), and struggles for mobility (El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2018). However, these studies have often been framed as "multi-sited" (Marcus 1995), underplaying the early innovation of the Manchester school and its attention to temporality and emergence in social life (Englund 2018: 128; though see Andersson 2014: 283-284). Some migration scholars have also attempted to not only multiply but sidestep localities, framing their field site as "arbitrary" and calling for a "nonlocal ethnography" (Feldman 2011). While challenging methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller 2003), this approach loses sight of what Gluckman and his colleagues at the Manchester school referred to as the "always situated nature of lived existence" (Kapferer 2015: 8).

Employing an extended-case study methodology enabled me to address at least two limitations with much of the contemporary work on humanitarian volunteerism in Europe. First, by following and participating in DiH's work across time and space in both Norway and Greece, I could observe and experience first-hand how the organisation responded to new humanitarian needs and policies in Greece and political inertia at home. I also explored connections and "frictions" (Tsing 2005) between home and abroad, the administration and "the field," and the southern and northern borders of Europe. As Naguib (2016) observes, such trans-local links and breaks remain largely unexplored in the study of humanitarian practices and encounters in general (see also Fassin 2012) and have arguably been particularly absent in recent work on humanitarian volunteers. Moreover, scholarship relying on shorter fieldwork or interviews has been largely unable to track volunteer organisations' shifting operations, practices, and politics (Ishkanian and Shutes 2021).

Second, the extended case study methodology enabled me to treat my interlocutors as people with histories and relationships extending beyond the event of volunteering (Englund 2002; 2018). Contrary to most of the work examined above, this dissertation thus explores volunteers' experiences of returning home to their everyday lives in Norway, highlighting some of the immediate and longer-term repercussions of volunteering to help refugees on the European borderland. I also demonstrate how my interlocutors' subjectivities changed in response to their humanitarian encounters, new insights, and developments, thus avoiding the tendency to "freeze" or "anchor" people to specific identities or self-representations (Andersson 2014; Faier 2009).

My choice of methodology relied on long-term cultivation of trust and relationships. As mentioned, the seeds of my research were planted in September 2016, when I volunteered for DiH on Chios Island for three weeks and met Trude and some other interlocutors for the first time. Since this pilot study, I maintained a relationship of ongoing rapport with the organisation's management and several volunteers and refugees. Between January 2017 and the beginning of my fieldwork in June 2018, I made repeated visits to the organisation's office in Oslo to build rapport and negotiate access and expectations. I also helped DiH create and conduct an internal assessment, which I discuss in Chapter 5. In April 2018, I spent eight days volunteering for DiH in Paris, where it was temporarily partnering with a French grassroots organisation, distributing food and clothes to refugees and other migrants living on the streets. In addition to building trust and dialogue, these recurring visits and engagements

gave me insight into organisational debates and developments prior to my fieldwork.

My official fieldwork took place between June 2018 and January 2020. During this period, I spent about nine months in Greece conducting participant observation as a full-time volunteer for the organisation on Lesvos (for 6 months), in Skaramagas refugee camp in Athens (for 2 months), and Nea Kavala refugee camp in northern Greece (for 3 weeks). I also spent about three weeks volunteering for two smaller organisations started and run by former DiH volunteers on Chios. The bulk of my fieldwork in Greece took place between June and December 2018 and March and May 2019, but I returned for follow-up research between November and December 2019. My fieldwork in Norway took place intermittently between the late summer of 2018 and January 2020, with the main periods being January to March and June to October 2019.

Image 2: Nea Kavala refugee camp (photo: DiH).

Image 3: DiH's community centre in Skaramagas refugee camp.

Significantly, my fieldwork's mobile and fractured character mirrors the lives of many returning volunteers and coordinators, but also highlights one of the main challenges associated with the extended-case study, namely, how to recognise and decide the limits of extension (Englund 2018). Regarding spatial extension, I sometimes compromised ethnographic depth to gain wider reach, but tried to mitigate this by choosing two main locations: Lesvos and Oslo. While my research constantly introduced me to new volunteers—and following the growth of transnational networks and relationships was interesting—I also chose to focus specifically on DiH's Norwegian volunteers and identified some key interlocutors with whom I cultivated particularly close relationships. Following Strathern (1996), I also attended to where connections and relations were cut or severed.

Why primarily Norwegian volunteers? To some extent, my research follows Cabot's (2019) recent call for anthropologists to (re)direct the ethnographic gaze towards the "elites" in the refugee regime, including humanitarian workers (cf. Malkki 2015). Following Gullestad (2002), I further believe that an important part of decolonising anthropology entails studying majority populations and cultures in Europe (see also Lewis 1973). Finally, I argue that studying humanitarianism and refugee advocacy in Norway raises interesting anthropological questions and might usefully help to both provincialise and nuance scholarly work and generalisations of "Western humanitarianism," coloniality and liberalism (see Chapter 1). By examining my Norwegian interlocutors' uneasy feelings towards their personal and national wealth, the thesis also follows Nader's earlier (but still important) call for anthropologists to study "the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty" (1972: 5).

Regarding temporal extension, concluding the fieldwork was challenging for intellectual, affective, and ethical reasons (Page 2017). Eager to return to Greece for follow-up research during the volatile fall of 2019, I first extended my fieldwork for three months. Contrary to well-meaning advice, I also continued to follow and participate in DiH's work and the lives of many interlocutors throughout the writing stage, though less intensely, and (because of Covid-19) mainly through digital channels. Underscoring the slow and provisional nature of ethnography, so much happened in the aftermath of my fieldwork that an interlocutor commenting on an early chapter questioned whether it was still relevant. Particularly significant are the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fire that burned down Moria camp on Lesvos in September 2020. To various degrees, my field locations and interlocutors were all affected by one or both of these events, and DiH had to adapt its work and volunteer model to meet new needs and constraints.

Recognising the provisional nature of all scholarly interpretation (Gullestad 2007) and the value of "slow scholarship" (Cabot 2019), this dissertation focuses on what happened prior to and during my actual fieldwork. However, I reflect on some more recent developments in the postscript (see appendix).

Image 4: Map of fieldwork locations.

Demographics

Before I discuss my fieldwork in greater detail, a bit more must be said about the demographic characteristics of my research participants, focusing mainly on my Norwegian interlocutors. As mentioned, DiH was proud to have attracted volunteers from different countries, cultures, generations, backgrounds and professions. However, apart from an increasing number of refugee volunteers, the overwhelming majority of DiH's volunteers came from countries in the Global North. A large minority was also Norwegian citizens (nearly 40% in 2018 and 2019 according to DiH's own estimate), though the relative proportion of Norwegian volunteers in Greece varied considerably throughout my fieldwork. Crucially, DiH's Norwegian volunteers came from all of Norway's eleven counties, though the majority lived in the more populated cities in the south.

Regarding class, DiH's leadership proudly emphasised that the organisation draws volunteers from all professions, as well as a large number of pensioners, students, and the unemployed. While my own observations largely support this, the requirement of being completely self-funded created financial barriers, and most DiH volunteers seemed to be relatively resourceful and well-off even by Norwegian standards. The cost of living in Greece is also relatively cheap, which, for most volunteers, facilitated a comfortable lifestyle involving nice accommodation and frequent restaurant visits in the evenings. Many volunteers (specifically

Norwegians) also came with private funds or donations to spend on DiH's projects in Greece. Following Redfield, we might say that they were "materially heavy and socially light," especially compared to the refugee volunteers who were often "materially light and socially heavy (Redfield 2012a: 360).

Nevertheless, there were clearly economic differences between volunteers. This was sometimes reflected in their choice of accommodation or willingness to rent a car versus getting rides or using public transport or bikes to get around. While some of my Norwegian interlocutors owned property in Greece or were used to going on vacation abroad every year, others told me they had to save money to afford to volunteer or complained about how expensive it was. These differences seemed to be mostly related to volunteers' age and job status/security. Nevertheless, many of my interlocutors were students or retirees who had more time and flexibility (and apparently enough money) to volunteer. Some were also in-between jobs or currently unemployed, and a few received disability benefits. Amongst the working volunteers, the most common professions were teacher and nurse, though I also met several government bureaucrats, social workers, journalists, psychologists, artists and people working in commerce or finance.

The average age of DiH volunteers in Greece in 2019 was 38.5 years, but the majority came from two age groups: 20-30 and 50+. While most foreign volunteer organisations I encountered in Greece relied heavily on young adults and students, DiH had a comparably large number of volunteers in their late sixties and seventies. Many of these were Norwegian mothers and grandmothers who had experience volunteering at home but never previously had worked or volunteered abroad.

More generally, DiH was also an organisation that appealed specifically to women. While the gender balance was quite even during the early and more frenzied phase of the crisis, recent years saw primarily the engagement of female volunteers (Jumbert 2020). During my fieldwork, approximately 75% of DiH's volunteers in Greece were women. Moreover, women were even more overrepresented amongst the domestic staff and volunteers and occupied all of the organisation's leadership roles. As I discuss later, this gender imbalance might be partly explained by Trude's personal story and mobilisation of motherhood, which has had a decisive impact on DiH's work and discourse. While femininity is often associated with affectionate and harmless relations (Wekker 2016), the large number of women and

mothers volunteering for DiH also created special power dynamics which occasionally reproduced practices of colonial maternalism (Braun 2017; Sahraoui and Tyszler 2021),

Regarding religious affiliation, I met several foreign volunteers who identified as Christians and expressed missionary values, however, only a few of my Norwegian interlocutors talked openly about their Christian beliefs. Since Norway is a relatively secular country, this was not that surprising (on Norwegian secularism, see Bangstad et al 2011). However, as we shall see, Norwegian values and vocabulary remains deeply influenced by the country's Christian heritage (Bendixsen and Wyller 2020). Apart from refugee volunteers, I only met a handful of volunteers who identified as Muslims (and only two Norwegians). Despite DiH's emphasis on the diversity of their volunteers, the organisation also attracted few volunteers with immigrant or minority backgrounds.

Moreover, DiH's volunteer population was overwhelmingly white, evoking neo-colonial imagery of white men and women "helping" or "rescuing" black or brown bodies (Spivak 1988; see also Mohanty 1984). Notably, this was rarely problematised amongst DiH staff and volunteers, who generally had little to say about race. For instance, I almost never heard staff or volunteers reflect over whether DiH embodied or reproduced racial hierarchies and inequalities (Benton 2016). Despite the massive attention to Black Lives Matter and white supremacy in the US, very few of my interlocutors also seemed to acknowledge whiteness as a racial positioning (Wekker 2016). This was particularly the case with the Norwegians who, as Harlap and Riese (2021) observes, tend to see colour-blindness ("not seeing race") as a virtue. Indeed, while many of my Norwegian interlocutors reflected on their privileges as Norwegian citizens, only a few understood themselves as members of a racial group that enjoy unearned privileges or "capital" (Hage 1999; see also Baldwin 1985; Bonilla-Silva 2006). Following Wekker (2016), we might thus say that their presumed Norwegian innocence was accompanied by a "white innocence": a satisfying way of being in the world that involves disavowing or evading race, including whiteness – which nevertheless works as an unspoken norm and is connected to privilege, entitlement and national belonging.

Fieldwork in Greece

My fieldwork in Greece was intimate and all-consuming. As a full-time volunteer, I spent nearly all day working together with other volunteers and often shared transportation, dinner, and

accommodations with them as well. A typical day of volunteer work began between eight and ten in the morning and ended sometime between six and ten in the evening. Depending on the location, we would either spend the whole day inside refugee camps (in Athens and northern Greece), in outside facilities (on Chios), or a combination of both (on Lesvos). Volunteers' tasks varied depending on location, needs, and volunteers' length of stay and skills, but typically involved sorting and distributing clothes or food, teaching informal language or computer lessons, running cafés and spaces for women and children, and organising recreational activities involving arts and crafts or sports. During my first month of fieldwork on Lesvos, we also had night shifts patrolling the coast and "spotting" for incoming boats. Every day also involved cleaning, organising and preparations. Once a week, the on-site coordinators arranged a semi-formal "team meeting" where new volunteers were introduced, updates and information shared, and there was space for questions and discussion.

Depending on the season, there was often a shortage of volunteers, meaning that the days were long and quite hectic. However, there was also time for socialising and enjoyment. As elsewhere, sociality often revolved around eating and sharing food (Naguib 2017). In Skaramagas and Nea Kavala, volunteers would generally eat lunch or spend their breaks drinking coffee or soda at one of the pop-up restaurants run by camp residents. On Lesvos, we usually stopped to eat or pick up food at local tavernas or supermarkets, or the bakery or café in Moria village. After a long day of work, volunteers would normally have dinner together somewhere in the city centre before going to bed. Especially on Lesvos, where humanitarian workers and volunteers typically flocked to the same restaurants and bars, this was an opportunity for volunteers and anthropologists alike to meet and talk to people from other organisations. Alternatively, coordinators and volunteers also commonly stayed in the activity centre in Moria village to eat and play games with refugee volunteers or have a beer at the local café next door.

On Saturdays or Sundays, volunteers generally had a day off to rest and rejuvenate. Depending on their length of stay, personality, and energy level, volunteers typically spent their time off sleeping in, washing clothes, catching up with friends and family at home, visiting nearby towns or tourist sites (including the lifejacket graveyard on Lesvos, see Di Matteo 2021), or simply wandering around the city or relaxing at the beach. Some volunteers also spent their day off socialising with refugees. However, as I discuss later, this was subject to increasing regulation. I usually accompanied volunteers or coordinators on their excursions, as this provided a cherished

opportunity for private conversations. I also utilised the free time to write field notes and make research visits to other camps and organisations.

How we are situated and positioned in the field affects not only what we observe and experience, but also our ability to build relationships and trust with our interlocutors (Hurston 1990; Mogstad and Tse 2018; Navaro 2012; Posel and Ross 2015). In addition to sharing "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2016[1997]) with most interlocutors as a co-national and/or fellow "drop" or humanitarian, my position as a long-term and returning volunteer was of critical importance. For instance, by staying longer than most other volunteers, I became close friends with several coordinators and other "long-termers." This was especially fruitful on Lesvos, where coordinators had an inclusive leadership style and often involved me in meetings and discussions. It also enabled me to build rapport and friendships with several refugees. I became particularly close with some of the refugees volunteering for DiH as we spent many hours together on a daily basis working, chatting, sharing food, drinking tea, playing cards, listening to music, and learning each other's languages. While not the main characters of this thesis, some of them became key interlocutors: not only did they have unique perspectives and experiences of DiH, but they also provided linguistic and cultural translations and clarifications.

Like many other long-term volunteers, I was also regularly invited to tea or lunch in the tents or containers of refugees volunteering for DiH or attending the organisation's classes and activities. Occasionally, I was also invited to visit or drink coffee or *ouzo* (an anise-flavoured liquor linked with Greek island culture) with locals curious about DiH's work or pleased to see familiar faces amongst the ever-shifting body of volunteers. Again, this was especially the case on Lesvos, where I spent the majority of my fieldwork and actively tried to cultivate relationships with some locals in Moria village. While I had daily conversations with several villagers, I benefitted especially from my conversations with a young English-speaking Greek woman who volunteered for DiH for over a year. I also had many interesting conversations with Katerina, the friendly and opinionated café owner next door to the organisation's activity centre, whose popular establishment I frequently visited for lunch or coffee, or to write fieldnotes. Moreover, I was lucky that my landlord—a female archaeologist with an academic career in the United States— was eager to talk and had relatives in Moria village to whom she introduced me.

While my inability to speak Greek was clearly a barrier when talking to non-English speaking residents of the village, I often had Greek-speaking coordinators or volunteers to spontaneously

translate for me. While I can certainly not claim to have gained deep knowledge of Greece or Lesvos (see Cabot 2019; Rozakou 2019), this provided me with at least some understanding of life and politics in Moria village and the island more broadly. While my fieldwork in Greece mainly relied on participant observation and ethnographic interviews, toward the end, I also conducted some semi-structured interviews with some Greek villagers and refugees volunteering for DiH. These enabled me to ask about observations I had made, clarify misunderstandings, and gain different perspectives on DiH's work and the European border regime.

Fieldwork in Norway

My fieldwork in Norway was simultaneously a study of personal, organisational and national trajectories. I mainly lived with my partner in Oslo, Norway's capital, where DiH's office is based, and many volunteers lived and worked. During this time, I was involved in two large projects for DiH involving research, logistical support, and political advocacy. This allowed me to work closely with staff members and domestic volunteers and provided insight into organisational dynamics and bureaucracy. I also accompanied staff and domestic volunteers on demonstrations, seminars, and events, including an annual week-long political festival on the southern coast of Norway. While in Oslo, I also spent time hanging out with volunteers in their everyday lives. We sometimes attended demonstrations or other refugee-related events together, and also regularly met up for coffee, walks or drinks, or played football together, and I was introduced to their non-volunteering friends and family.

Apart from participant observation, my fieldwork in Norway relied heavily on interviews. In my previous research in South Africa, I found life story interviews useful because they enabled me to understand people's longer-term trajectories and their experiences and reflections of wider social and political processes. For this research, I also focused on volunteers' biographical experiences, but combined narrative beginnings with more topical and thematic interviewing.

My questions focused specifically on volunteers' pathways to becoming humanitarian volunteers and experiences of volunteering and returning home to Norway. I also asked questions about their worldviews, opinions of Norwegian and European politics, and thoughts about the future. During the course of my research, I conducted around 50 interviews with volunteers, coordinators, and staff. On average, the interviews lasted around two hours, but could occasionally go for much

longer or take place over several meetings. Most were conducted in the privacy of my interlocutors' homes, but some were held at their work places or in a quiet corner of a café, as per their preference.

The majority of interviewees were people I already knew from volunteering or working together in Greece or Norway. Oftentimes, we had shared powerful or challenging experiences together and had many common friends and acquaintances. This helped create an informal and intimate atmosphere and elicited retrospective contemplation and expression of personal qualms and emotions, as well as gossip and critique. It also made it possible for me to compare my interlocutors' responses during the interview with their unsolicited accounts and opinions expressed while volunteering. I also interviewed some volunteers who I had not met before but knew had interesting stories or experiences to share. While the limitations with interviews became more visible in these instances, I found, like Malkki, that we had enough shared experiences and understanding to facilitate "intersubjective, ethnographic engagement" (2015: 22). Like the Finnish aid workers Malkki interviewed, many volunteers also "needed to talk" and described our interviews as therapeutic or cathartic (ibid: 6).

My sampling strategy can be described as purposive: a non-probability sampling method that entails deliberately selecting participants anticipated to yield rich sources of relevant data (Yin 2011: 311). "Relevant" included volunteers who had found helping refugees in Greece as politicising, empowering, or transformative, and those who struggled to cope with what they had experienced or with reintegration into everyday life in Norway. I also made sure to talk to volunteers with very different experiences and opinions of DiH, ranging from some of the organisation's most active and dedicated volunteers to people who had left DiH— sometimes for other volunteer organisations—or grown increasingly critical or doubtful of its operations. While my intention was not to gain a representative sample, I tried to seek out volunteers of different genders, generations, backgrounds, and trajectories. To avoid only interviewing volunteers from the capital, I also travelled to several other localities in Norway to visit volunteers in their home towns and communities. These included several towns and settlements around Oslo and along the country's southern coast, two of Norway's bigger cities on the western coast, and two areas north of the Arctic Circle in northern Norway (see map above). In most instances, I was invited to volunteers' private homes and got a chance to talk to their partners and family members, who occasionally also joined parts of the interview.

While conducting fieldwork in Norway, I also followed the "flow of movement of public life" (Navaro-Yashin 2002), focusing specifically on Norway's asylum and immigration politics. In practice, this meant that I observed and analysed political events, speeches, and debates on social and mainstream media and in Parliament. I also spent some time in the court house, following asylum cases that I had become engaged in through my fieldwork. Finally, I spent considerable time communicating with volunteers and refugees via social media. I also followed DiH's official website, blog, and Facebook page, Facebook groups for previous volunteers, and staff and volunteers' personal blogs and Facebook pages. As Kaufman (2015) observes, "social media is not only a place where useful information is circulated but where emotions are expressed and dealt with" (2015: 975; see also Chouliaraki 2013). While not initially a part of my research design, digital ethnography thus became a central part of my fieldwork. I also examined the organisation's material culture and self-representation as found in written reports, brochures, the organisation's logo, shifting slogans, apparel, merchandise, and other branding efforts.

"Insider research"

Before concluding this section, I must consider my "insider" positionality. First, conducting research in the country where I was born and socialised was a new experience. While sometimes involving "defamiliarisation," I could not always claim familiarity (Vike 2018: 31-50), nor was I always and everywhere positioned as an unambiguous "insider" (Carling et al 2014; Narayen 1993). The problem with treating "anthropology at home" as a straightforward matter is partly that notions of "nativity" and "home" are entangled with nationalist discourses and imaginaries linking culture and affinity with a whole nation and territory (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 14; Vike 2018: 31-50). Moreover, my disciplinary training and "home" in anthropology and the social sciences resulted in epistemic gaps and frictions that created distance and the need for clarification or translation (cf. Strathern 1987). Despite being a co-national and fellow volunteer, I thus found that familiarity and identification were relative and relational phenomena that had to be explored and discovered in particular social contexts and conversations (Vike 2018).

Second, while all ethnographers are embedded in the social relations under study, my positionality was especially close. Not only did I participate in the organisation's humanitarian work in Greece as a full-time volunteer, but due to my position as a long-term volunteer and researcher, I was also given special assignments by staff and coordinators, including assisting unaccompanied minors and other refugees with relatives in Norway,

"hosting" journalists, and giving public presentations. In December 2019, I even acted temporarily as a coordinator on Lesvos to enable the permanent coordinator to travel home and spend Christmas and New Year's with her family. I also collaborated with DiH and volunteers on different projects in Norway, mostly involving writing or co-authoring reports and articles, but also advocacy and fundraising projects. My close involvement with DiH was partly a strategic decision to gain deep insight and access. As an organisational insider, I could track staff and volunteers' internal discussions and debates, as well as ethical and political dilemmas as they unfolded in response to new policies and needs, identifying both points of contestation and areas seemingly "beyond debate." I also had privileged access to volunteers' "frontstage" and "backstage" performances (Goffman 1959), including the emergence of new rationales, convictions, and doubts. Participating in DiH's work as a fellow volunteer was also crucial to build trust and gain shared and embodied understanding (Lenhard and Samani 2020: 22-33). Following Howes, it allowed me to both sense and make sense with my interlocutors (2021: 129).

However, while anthropologists regularly discuss how to find the appropriate balance between autonomy and involvement, or detachment and engagement, this was not merely my choice to make (cf. Tengan 2005). First of all, my participation in DiH's work took place in the context of the organisation's own agendas (Bernal and Grewal 2014; Sampson 2017) and I depended on staff and field coordinators as gatekeepers and door openers. Moreover, as an anthropologist "whose expertise is predicated, in a fundamental way, on the generosity of others," I also considered myself ethically obligated to "establish appropriate forms of relationality, and explore ways of building balanced reciprocity" in dialogue with my interlocutors (Nyamnjoh 2015: 60). Without suggesting that collaborative approaches are necessarily more ethical or meaningful for the people under study (Englund 2011; Trundle 2018), I thus accepted many of the roles and tasks DiH assigned me and experimented with different collaborations.

Crucially, some anthropologists have warned about such "NGO-dependent anthropology" and called for more analytical distance (Sampson 2017). From their perspective, the issue is not only that NGOs try to influence the anthropologist's views and observations. In most places and situations, it is also NGOs that presents the anthropologist to the field, and the field to the anthropologist (ibid). As Lemons (2017) argues, it is difficult to maintain an independent and critical voice in such a complicated environment. Moreover, after gaining trust,

anthropologists working with NGOs are confronted with complex ethical dilemmas regarding what to reveal and what voices to amplify, knowing that an unflattering picture might jeopardize NGO's reputation or abilities to secure access or funding (Bornstein 2017; Kapusta-Pofahl 2017). Following on from this, I emphasise the power relations that enabled my research, and recognise that they might have directed both my analytical gaze and sympathies. Moreover, my status as an organisational insider did not merely facilitate access and trust; it also foreclosed other spaces and conversations, thus marginalising the voices and perspectives of other people and lifeworlds (Sampson 2017; see also Cabot 2016). Finally, my close and long-term engagement with DiH created a sense of loyalty that affected both my approach to critique (see above) and representational choices.

Nevertheless, I concur with those who maintain that deep engagement—not only with the NGO but also the cause they are advocating for—often provide richer and more nuanced insight (Woomer 2017). As Trundle (2018) argues, this is true even if—or perhaps precisely because—it can make the ethnographer feel uncomfortable and complicit.

Ethics

As alluded to above, my close and long-term relationship with DiH had ethical bearings on my research. So had also the fact that much of my research involved interactions with marginalised or over-researched populations (refugees and residents in Moria village in particular). Ethical considerations are often considered separately. However, in this introduction, I have tried to show how they have influenced all stages of my research: from the relationships I formed and data gathered to my analytical and representational choices. A few general points should be added. First, I approached research ethics as an ongoing and interactive process involving continuous reflection, situated judgment and open-ended dialogue with my interlocutors (Posel and Ross 2015). However, while sharing many of my interlocutors' concerns and convictions, I did not agree with everything the organisation or individual staff and volunteers said or did. Rather than concealing my disagreement, I tried to be present in the field as a "welcome self" whose person and beliefs are "enabling and hosting, rather than dominant yet absent" (Green 2005: 98; see also Mosse 2005; Woomer 2017). While this approach sometimes resulted in mutual learning and reflection (Schneider 2020: 636), not all tensions and disagreements were resolved. Although reflecting on these frictions can be revealing, I have chosen to foreground my interlocutors' internal debates and

critiques—some of which echo my own. However, in Chapter 6, I address a few of my personal qualms and disagreements.

Secondly, I tried to be reflexive about my subject position as a white, Norwegian student and anthropologist from Cambridge University, and the larger political-economic structures and histories I am implicated in (Cabot 2019; Posel and Ross 2015). First, as both a volunteer and researcher, I came to Greece largely uninvited and engaged in hierarchical and uncertain relationships with refugees and local residents. As a PhD student studying humanitarianism, I am also complicit in the wider industry of illegal migration (Andersson 2014) and "business of anthropology" (Cabot 2019), both of which incite "crisis chasing" and manage or appropriate refugees/refugee voices while granting researchers access and status (Cabot 2016; 2019; Rozakou 2019; Stierl 2020). Finally, I share collective responsibility for my government's policies of exclusion and abandonment towards refugees and Greece (Arendt 1987; Chomsky 1987).

While I cannot escape my complicity with the border regime/ industry, I tried my best not to reinforce practices of domination and intrusion in my research. In practice, this meant that I did not push refugees and locals for interviews or access and was sensitive to the changing atmosphere in my field site. Briefly explained, in 2016, many refugees and locals were eager to tell their stories and commonly urged volunteers to share their experiences with the world. However, recent years have been characterised by increasing hopelessness and crisis fatigue (see Chapter 1). During my fieldwork, several refugees and locals (on Lesvos in particular) also said they were sick and tired of sharing their stories to journalists and researchers. While I was clearly interested in hearing their voices and experiences, I thus tried to respect their silences (Ross 2003) and rights to refusal (Simpson 2007) and opacity (Cabot 2016; Khosravi 2018; Page 2017).

I also tried to find tangible and practical ways to assist my refugee interlocutors beyond regular volunteering. Following Colvin (2015: 74), I consider such efforts a form of compensation or "fair return" that can "fill the space between abstract knowledge and direct payment and exchange." I further hope that some of the knowledge I have produced and disseminated to wider audiences can help inform DiH's humanitarian and political work, as well as public debates in Norway. As anthropologists, we cannot expect that our scholarship will make a difference on its own. However, as Cabot (2019) maintains, engaging in different

forms of action outside the academy is one way of addressing—though not escaping—the discipline's complicity with the border regime (see also Gullestad 2006b).

In writing this thesis, I have also tried to exercise care and some restraint to not inflict unnecessary harm (Abu-Lughod 2016; Tsing 2005). This is manifested in different narrative decisions, including portraying my interlocutors as historical beings with complex personhood and capacity to learn and change. (Boochani 2017; Faier 2009). Following Faier (2009), I have also used the past tense rather than the "ethnographic present" to indicate that things were said in the moment and might thus no longer hold true for people whose ideas about themselves and the world are in constant flux. While acknowledging my implication (Fortun 2001; Redfield 2005), I have also tried to avoid letting my own story, opinions and emotions overshadow the experiences and reflections of my interlocutors.

Further, this is not an exposé –but rather an attempt to describe some of the moral, institutional, and political complexities of DiH's humanitarian and advocacy work (cf. Cabot 2019:271). Apart from DiH and Trude (who I, in dialogue with the organisation, judged to be impossible to anonymise due to their public role in the Norwegian society), all interlocutors have been given fictitious names, and I have occasionally changed or omitted details to protect their confidentiality. When requested, or dealing with personal or sensitive information, my interlocutors were further offered a chance to read and object to my representations of them (on the "right to objection," see Mosse 2006). Cognisant of the politics of citation, I have also engaged with the work of many Greek scholars, too often misrecognised in contemporary accounts of humanitarianism and migration in Greece (Cabot 2019; see also Rozakou 2019).

Finally, I have tried to remain accessible and responsive to the people whose time and generosity my research depended on, rather than seek a clean break or "cut the networks" of fieldwork (Strathern 1996) to make space and time for writing. This was not always easy and raised difficult questions about where (if at all) my obligations end. Like the Norwegian staff and volunteers on whom this dissertation centres, I have had to negotiate competing and unresolved responsibilities and often felt uneasy and ambivalent about my own role and work. More than anything, my fieldwork has thus taught me that NGO anthropology can be seductive but also complicated and messy. However, in this messiness lies the potential for new insights and arguably more ethical research (Sampson 2017: 4; Trundle 2018).

Chapter outline

In the Introduction, I have presented my research questions and briefly introduced the organisation under study and then outlined my chosen analytical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 1 contextualises the study by describing the emergence of a new humanitarian geography and assemblage of humanitarian actors in Europe. I also discuss how the "refugee crisis" has affected political dynamics and reinforced tensions and divisions across Europe, focusing mainly on my two field sites: Greece and Norway. Chapter 2 unpacks Trude's personal story of "revelation" and "transformation." After providing an ethnographic analysis of the founder's call to help in her daughter's bedroom, I argue that the story serves as a founding myth for DiH and does important work for the organisation. Chapter 3 traces DiH's organisational trajectory from spontaneous volunteering to "NGOization" and shifting and contentious efforts to fill humanitarian gaps in the context of growing encampment, criminalisation, and local resistance. I further highlight some of the ethical and political debates and dilemmas that have followed, focusing especially on the question of professionalisation and the risks of de-politicisation and normalisation. Chapter 4 examines DiH's widespread appeal amongst Norwegian citizens. I focus particularly on the impact of the founder's personal story and character, but also analyse the work of DiH's organisational model and imagery.

Chapter 5 examines and complicates DiH's transformation narrative by discussing my interlocutors' ambivalent experiences of returning home to Norway after volunteering and negotiating different worlds and relationships. I specifically highlight volunteers' intensified feelings of shame and estrangement and ask what these feelings *do* to my interlocutors and their relationships to the nation, friends and family and other co-nationals. Chapter 6 examines DiH's political turn and efforts to "wake up" and shame the Norwegian public and politicians into action through witnessing and campaigning. Drawing on Shoshan (2016), I argue that DiH can be understood as an affective public advancing a competing national project, but highlight my interlocutors' "sticky attachments" (Ahmed 2014) to hegemonic national and humanitarian imaginaries. The thesis' conclusion reflects on the redemptive potential of volunteering before ending with a brief postscript where I describe some of the developments that took place in the aftermath of my fieldwork.

Chapter 1:
Humanitarianism at the fringes of Europe

"I am so sorry refugees—this is not Europe" read a message written in big blue letters on the wall surrounding the infamous Moria refugee camp on Lesvos during the summer of 2020 (see image below). During my many months volunteering for DiH on Lesvos, I saw multiple messages written on this and other walls and buildings in the city of Mytilini and elsewhere on the island. Yet, unlike the vast majority of these messages, this statement did not express radical political agency, solidarity, or critique (Karathanasis and Kapsali 2018; Tsoni and Franck 2019) as much as a commitment to a hegemonic idea: the notion of Europe as a liberal powerhouse and human rights defender (Balibar 2004: 189; Loftsdóttir 2020a). While perhaps unintentionally, the statement also fed into neo- or crypto-colonial attitudes of Greece as not fully modern, and thus not properly European (Cabot 2014; Green 2012; Herzfeld 1987; 2002; 2016; Knight 2017).

Image 5: Message on the walls of Moria camp (photo: URL[7]).

While I was never able to confirm who wrote the message,[8] it echoed expressions of shock and disappointment I had heard from volunteers and refugees throughout my fieldwork. For instance: "Is this Europe?" or "I cannot believe this is Europe!" many said in disbelief or exasperation when they first arrived to work or live in Moria camp, or after having been

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[7] https://www.open.ac.uk/centres/voluntary-sector-leadership/news/courses-from-executive-education.

[8] Most people I spoke to suspected the message was written by an international volunteer or humanitarian worker. However, someone told me it was written by a camp resident.

"stuck" in the camp for months under deteriorating conditions. Sometimes the statement was qualified or re-politicised. For instance: "This is not the Europe I read about at school," an engineer from Afghanistan told me before expressing his disapproval of the asylum system and what he, like several other refugees, described as "European lies" or "hypocrisy." Moreover, DiH staff and volunteers often wrote, "This is happening on European soil (*Europeisk jord*)," "on our continent (*vårt kontinent*)," "the cradle of civilization (*sivilisasjonens vugge*)," or "birthplace of democracy (*demokratiets fødested*)" in newspaper op-eds or social media posts, calling on Norwegian politicians to take responsibility and address what they defined as a *"skamplett"* (stain of shame) in European history.

However, it was not only Greece or the European community at large that my interlocutors accused of violating historical and normative ideals. Conversely, their prime target was the Norwegian government, whose unwillingness to evacuate and accommodate refugees stranded on the doorstep of Europe they believed dishonoured and undermined Norway's long-standing traditions and public self-image as a "humanitarian superpower." Moreover, my interlocutors were not only critical of the Norwegian state and Europe. DiH staff and volunteers also commonly defined their work and identity in opposition to the mainstream and established aid sector, which they accused of being absent or too slow and inflexible in their responses, or of treating humanitarianism as a job rather than a calling.

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Studies of humanitarian organisations or interventions often start with a definition and history of humanitarianism, typically referring to the genealogies presented in the seminal work of Didier Fassin (2012) or Michael Barnett (2011), or the critique of humanitarianism's colonial legacies presented by Lester and Dussart (2014; see also Rutazibwa 2019). However, in recent years, several scholars have problematised these "Western" or "Euro-centric accounts" and criticised the "northern appropriation of the humanitarian label."[9] By rediscovering humanitarianism's diverse roots (Davey 2014; Yeophantong 2014) or "writing the 'Other' into the history of humanitarianism" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto 2016: 18; see also

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[9] These biases are sometimes explicitly recognised (see e.g., Barnett 2011: 15).

Benthall 2011; Bornstein 2012; O'Sullivan et al 2016), these scholars have challenged the common tendency to define humanitarianism as a product of the West or Christianity. By studying contemporary humanitarian actors in or from the Global South, including Islamic, refugee-led, diaspora, or South-South humanitarianism, scholars have also demonstrated that humanitarian assistance is not always provided by "the West" to "the rest" (O'Sullivan et al 2016: 2; see also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Horst et al 2015) and helped broaden our understanding of what constitutes "legitimate humanitarian action" (Yeophantong 2014: 1).

However, while these efforts to provincialise "Western humanitarianism" are important, the argument that humanitarianism varies across time and space also applies to Europe (Pallister-Wilkins 2018: 994). Indeed, far too often, "Western" or "European humanitarianism" are treated as monolithic, unchanging, and unproblematic categories, neglecting that "every concept of humanitarianism (…) has a history and, more important, a historical context that we ignore at our peril" (Rieff 2002: 67; see also Weiss 2015). Anthropologists studying humanitarianism have also often focused exclusively on the politics of "distant suffering," hence overlooking projects and policies with similar rationalities closer to home and failing to analyse how even long-distance humanitarian assistance is entangled with the national and domestic (Brković 2017; Fassin 2012; Malkki 2015).

With this in mind, the ethnographic fragments I started this section with illustrate some of the factors I argue are distinct though not unique with the humanitarian "crisis" and interventions under study: geographic proximity, the "crisis" as a locus of affect and contestation, and the emergence of new actors and new or intensified political dynamics and tensions. In the following, I will briefly unpack these factors and thereby paint a picture of what other scholars have identified as a new humanitarian geography and assemblage of humanitarian actors on Europe's southern border (Pallister-Wilkins 2018; Pascucci and Jumbert 2021; Rozakou 2019). I focus specifically on my two field sites (Greece and Norway) thus setting the stage for the chapters that follow.

A new humanitarian geography

Humanitarianism is typically defined and understood as the provision of care and relief to distant strangers in far-away places (Barnett 2011). Following Burman (1994: 241), we might say that this geographical imaginary echoes the "colonial paternalism where the adult-

Northerner offers help and knowledge to the infantilised-South" (see also Malkki 2015: 7; Quijano 2000). However, as Pallister-Wilkins observes, the so-called refugee crisis unfolding on the Greek Islands in 2015 and continuing in new forms and phases in the present has unsettled this "traditional and Eurocentric" imaginary (2018: 999). First, the strangers are no longer geographically distant to Europeans, but rather arriving or "stuck" in southern border countries, or wandering across other European towns and cities (ibid). Hence, for DiH staff and volunteers, their humanitarian and political engagements are not about their obligations to abject people across the world (the topic of many philosophical discussions (see e.g., Appiah 2006; Singer 1972; 2009)), but to "people knocking on our door," as my interlocutors frequently said.

Second, the new—and equally Eurocentric—humanitarian imaginary defines the locus of the "crisis" in the European continent, specifically at the continent's southern borders. This includes Greece, which in historical terms is described as the "cradle of civilization" or "birthplace of democracy," and in recent decades, has been a popular and cherished holiday destination for Norwegians and other northern European citizens (Bromark 2016). Arguably, therefore, the "refugee crisis" has not only challenged dominant geographical imaginaries of humanitarianism. As illustrated by the ethnographic fragments presented above, it has also unsettled European citizens' affective attachments to familiar places and the stories and imagery commonly used to describe these places, and the relationship between "us" and "them," Europeans and non-Europeans, insiders and outsiders (cf. Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2018; Stierl 2018). However, as we shall see, hegemonic discourses and images of Europe and its peripheries have also been reproduced. These include the somewhat contradictory notions of Europe as a coherent geographical and ideological entity (Loftsdóttir 2020b) and Greece as "not-quite-European." They also include the aforementioned idea of Europe as a liberal powerhouse or "bastion of democracy, liberty, and universal rights" (Danewid 2017: 1675).

Contested humanitarianism

Another key dynamic defining the humanitarian landscape in Greece concerns humanitarian actors' vexed relationship with state and superstate actors. As Pascucci and Jumbert note, humanitarian interventions have "historically responded to situations where the state is unable or unwilling to assist crisis-affected communities" (2021: 3). As we shall see, the perceived absence of public authorities and other actors considered more professional or responsible

was also what prompted Trude to establish DiH. However, European states did not only remain passive or distanced in response to the "crisis." Greek authorities, other European states, and the EU responded to the growing number of asylum seekers arriving at the continent's southern borders by expanding their security apparatuses, including sea patrols, surveillance, fencing, and policies of criminalisation and detention to selectively control or hinder the mobility of people from the Global South (see also Andersson 2014; Besteman 2019; Brown 2017; Carr 2015; Mbembe 2019; Stierl 2018). Drawing on the work of Mbembe and Galtung, Davies et al (2017) usefully conceptualise European states' response to the "refugee crisis" as a "dialectic unity" between bio- and necro-politics, structural violence and abandonment, and action and inaction. To paraphrase Ruben Andersson (2019), we might also say that, when distance collapses, it is even more powerfully reasserted.

Intervening in this complex and highly politicised environment, humanitarian organisations have not only sought to fill gaps left by states unwilling or unable to intervene, but also mitigate the hardship and vulnerability imposed on refugees by state and superstate laws and policies. Following Pascucci and Jumbert (2021), it is worth emphasising that they have done so in a region "traditionally understood as able and/or willing to secure protection for vulnerable lives, yet where the securitized borders and migration politics put this idea into question" (2021: 4). Moreover, humanitarian actors in Greece have been increasingly targeted by public authorities, manifesting in instances of criminalisation of aid and rescue and the imposition of ever-increasing bureaucratic rules and requirements (Gordon and Larsen 2020). Humanitarianism, in this context, is unavoidably a fraught and contested practice. However, as we shall see, humanitarian actors have not only entered conflictual and politicised relationship with states; they have also been accused of collaborating with or being co-opted by state actors and their agendas (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019; see also Rozakou 2019).

New actors
Following the highly mediatised 2015-2016 "refugee crisis," a multitude of new humanitarian agencies led by "ordinary citizens" and volunteers emerged to help refugees on the European borderland (Sandri 2017). As Pascucci and Jumbert (2021: 194) observe, the proliferation of what they call "citizen humanitarianism" in Europe can be read both as a "symptom of and reaction to the political impasse revealed in the European crisis of refugee reception." However, as we shall see, the enduring presence and growing responsibilities of these actors

also reflect the actual or perceived absence and limitations of more professional and established humanitarian organisations.

Notably, these new actors' understandings and practices of humanitarianism are diverse. Some have attempted to distance themselves from the label for ideological reasons (Rozakou 2016; 2017a; Theodossopoulos 2016), while others have espoused socio-culturally specific notions of humanism and compassion (Brković 2017). The work and objectives of these new agencies also vary and range from emergency aid to "endurance projects" (Feldman 2015), empowerment, and European or local integration. Some have also engaged in prefigurative politics, seeking to materialise new social relationships, communities, or worldviews (Rozakou 2016; Sutter 2020; Vandevoordt 2019). As we shall see, the extent to which these new actors have challenged or collaborated with Greek authorities and more established humanitarian organisations also varies considerably. While some actors, like the Greek solidarians, distrust professionalised NGOs and have defined their work in opposition to the state, other organisations have sought training and support from more established organisations or engaged in uneasy collaborations with Greek authorities to gain access (Pascucci and Jumbert 2021; Ishkanian and Shutes 2021).

Nevertheless, the growing role and presence of these volunteer- or citizen-led agencies have helped to reconfigure the humanitarian landscape in Greece, which is today characterised by a "fluid assemblage" of different state, non-state, and superstate actors (Rozakou and Kalir 2016; Rozakou 2019). Many of these new actors have also challenged the traditional division of labour between humanitarian organisations and social movements and engaged in political advocacy (Fechter and Schwittay 2019; Kynsilehto 2018; Vandevoordt 2019). While sometimes espousing a "no border politics" (Karakoulaki 2018; Stavinoha and Ramakirshnan 2020), this advocacy has often focused on more modest goals, such as increased humanitarian assistance or evacuations of refugees from the Greek Islands. For this reason, these new actors fit uneasily with Barnett's well-known distinction between "emergency agencies" and "alchemical" humanitarian organisations seeking to remove the root causes of suffering (2011: 39). I return to this point in Chapter 6, where I discuss DiH's political advocacy.

Political tensions and divisions

The "refugee crisis" also created new and exacerbated pre-existing tensions and divisions within Europe. Most immediately, the "crisis" revealed and aggravated the dysfunction and unfairness of a European asylum system which, following the Dublin regulations, places the

obligation to register, process and house asylum seekers on the country of first entry (Cabot 2014; see also De Lauri 2019). Moreover, the re-introduction of internal border controls and other unilateral measures in several European countries threw into question the contemporary European project, including the "political and material architecture of a border-free Europe" (Holmes and Castañeda 2016: 18). Later on, faltering efforts to disregard or amend the Dublin regulations, and relocate refugees fairly among EU member states, exposed the Union's fault lines and aggravated inequalities and tensions between northern and central European countries and southern border countries (Krastev 2017).

Regarding Greece, the country was assigned responsibility for maintaining both the "security" and "humanitarianism" of Europe (Cabot 2015), while still coping with its debt crisis and austerity measures imposed by the European Troika (the European Commission, Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund). Significantly, these austerity measures have constrained the Greek state's capacity to meet the basic needs of its own citizens and other long-term residents, let alone newcomers (Bournakis et al 2017; Cabot 2018; Dalakoglou and Angelopoulos 2018). In 2017, unemployment rose to almost 25 percent and nearly half the Greek population fell below the poverty line (James 2019). The resulting situation was described by politicians and scholars as a "double crisis," "a humanitarian crisis within the economic crisis," or "two overlapping humanitarian crises" (Cabot 2018).[10] While the southern borders of Europe have often been called liminal zones or frontiers between the Global South and Global North, or between poverty and affluence (Agier 2016; Eriksen 2018), it might thus also be described as a space of shared precarity (Cabot 2018; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2018).

Nevertheless, Greece initially responded to the incoming refugees with locally and historically contingent notions and practices of solidarity (*allileggíi*) and hospitality (*filoxenia*) (Afouxenidis et al 2017; Rozakou 2016; 2017a; Papataxiarchis 2016). As I discuss later on, many Greeks experienced the "refugee crisis" as a revivification of their own history of displacement following the 1923 forced population exchange, and saw in the newcomers

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[10] Former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras referred to the unprecedented influx of refugees to the Greek Islands in 2015 as a "humanitarian crisis within the economic crisis." Questioning the analytical value of the term "crisis," Papataxiarchis (2018) notes that "Greek citizens and denizens have lived in times of generalized trouble" since 2010. Many Greek scholars also prefer the phrase "Greece under austerity" partly to challenge narratives blaming Greece based on essentialist ideas of culture and economy (Dalakoglou and Angelopoulos 2018).

their own grandparents or other relatives (Cabot 2018; James 2019). As Cabot surmises, "xenophilia in Greece" might also have "opened up new ways of being European," of being "more welcoming than the rest of Europe—at a time when Greeks' own Europeanness was deeply in question, owing to the debt crisis and austerity" (2017: 142; see also Ishkanian and Shutes 2021). However, as months and years passed, living in an enduring state of exception caused crisis fatigue and growing tension and resentment. To understand this, it is vital to consider the impact of EU's containment policies including the controversial 2016 EU-Turkey statement.

Image 6: Statue on Lesvos symbolising the
Greek refugees from Asia Minor.

EU's containment policies

In the spring of 2016, the EU made a deal with Turkey aimed at curbing irregular migration to Europe. Signed at a time of increasing anti-refugee sentiment across the continent, the deal included €6 billion and promises of visa liberation and renewal of EU accession processes to Turkey in exchange for the country's containment of European-bound asylum seekers (Meral 2020). Everyone arriving irregularly (that is, without official permission) on the Greek Islands after March 20th, 2016 was to be returned to Turkey under the condition that an equal number of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey would be resettled to EU states (Bialasiewicz and Maessen 2018; Skribeland 2018). The EU-Turkey deal has been criticised on both moral and legal grounds for externalising responsibility to a non-European country, blending security concerns with humanitarian justifications, and violating international and legal principles, including the right to apply for asylum and the principle of *non-refoulement* (ibid). Like the

EU-IMF bailout programmes, the EU-Turkey deal and complementary efforts to intervene in Greek migration policies were also framed by Greek politicians and interpreted locally as "neo-colonialism" and unacceptable violations of national sovereignty (Dittmer and Lorenz 2021; Rozakou 2017b).

In the wake of the deal, the number of arrivals to the Greek Islands decreased for several years. However, the number of asylum seekers sent back to Turkey remained very low, leaving thousands of refugees stranded in precarious and overcrowded facilities on Lesvos and other Aegean islands (Skribeland 2018; Meral 2020). Along with other European countries' border closures, the deal thus transformed Greece from a place of transit and registration to one of management and reception (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2016). Notably, the Greek Islands were especially affected due to geographical restrictions imposed on asylum seekers awaiting decision on their applications and the establishment of EU-funded Registration and Identification Centres (RIC) or "hot spots" (see Pallister-Wilkins 2018; Gordon and Larsen 2021).

While the official purpose of the "hot spot approach" was to fast-track asylum policies, these camps have been viewed as new frontiers in the EU's war against irregular migration and used to control and detain people on the move (MSF 2021). The most notorious example is the former Moria camp on Lesvos, where DiH started to work in the spring of 2019. Rozakou fittingly describes Moria camp as a "par excellence sorting centre for 'managing the undesirable' in Michel Agier's terms" (2019: 72), while simultaneously noting that the fragmented governance of the camp produced less order than illegibility and chaos. Since at least 2015, Moria camp has suffered from severe overcrowding, lack of police protection, and appalling living conditions, as highlighted by various humanitarian and human rights organisations calling for immediate improvements or evacuations (Rozakou 2019).

The camp's problems were highlighted by a series of avoidable deaths resulting from these living conditions, including that of a newborn baby from dehydration in 2019, and those of several adults and children following carbon monoxide poisoning, hypothermia, fire outbreaks, and violent brawls. Since 2016, MSF has repeatedly warned of a "mental health crisis" on the Greek Islands, noting that adults and children as young as six years old were self-harming, attempting suicide, suffering from panic attacks, anxiety, aggressive outbursts, or constant nightmares (MSF 2017; 2018).

Image 7: Drawing by child in Moria camp
(photo: Claudia Sabenca).

Evidence of violence in Moria camp is of course also found in statements expressed by residents themselves, who typically referred to the place as a prison or living hell, and repeatedly protested against the conditions by organising demonstrations or hunger strikes. A good example is Ghafar, who volunteered for DiH at the organisation's activity centre in Moria village from October 2018 to April 2019. He was born in the Herat province of Afghanistan in 1994, where he studied journalism and worked part-time for a radio station before fleeing from the Taliban in 2018. After a long and dangerous flight to Lesvos, which involved both kidnapping and torture, it was the daily hardships he experienced in Moria camp that shattered him. "Moria is killing me slowly," he told me numerous times. Like many other refugees I spoke to during my fieldwork, Ghafar also expressed shock and disillusionment over what he had associated with Europe, namely the commitment to freedom and human rights. In a Facebook post, he described the camp accordingly:

> "NO freedom
> NO human rights
> NO justice
> NO dignity
> NO peace
> NO rights
> Humiliation—yes
> Police and tear gas—yes
> Sexual abuse—yes"

As indicated above, the EU's containment policies and "hot spot approach" also affected Greece, and especially the populations on the Aegean islands who had their lives turned upside down by the border spectacle and enduring crisis (Afouxenidis et al 2017; James 2019; Papataxiarchis 2016). Greek politicians and locals regularly complained that Greece (and Lesvos especially) had become *"i apothiki tis Evropis"* (Europe's warehouse) or, more empathically, "a warehouse of souls" (Rozakou 2017b). As we shall see, some islanders also directed their anger and frustration toward foreign NGOs like DiH, who were often treated by local Greeks with suspicion and resentment (Papataxiarchis 2016; Rozakou 2019). The ongoing "double crisis" also fuelled domestic shifts and tensions, including the electoral victory of the conservative party New Democracy in 2019 and the resurgence of far-right movements like Golden Dawn and local fascist groups (Bampilis 2018).

Image 8: The informal spillover tent camp dubbed "the jungle" with the official Moria camp in the background (photo: Knut Bry).

Apart from Greece and other border countries, the "refugee crisis" also affected political dynamics and outlooks in many Northern European countries. On the one hand, the "refugee crisis" provided charitable responses across the continent, including compassion, solidarity, and (often selective or conditional) hospitality (see e.g., Brković 2017; Cabot 2017; Sandri 2017; Vandevoordt 2019).[11] This was particularly the case in the late summer of 2015 when

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[11] For instance, several European leaders have indicated that Christian refugees are more welcome than their Muslim counterparts. In public and humanitarian discourses, Syrian refugees have also frequently been framed as more deserving (Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016).

the image of the Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi "pricked the conscience of millions" (Hosseini 2018) and temporarily gave refugees a new face: innocence (Tickin 2017:557). However, refugees and other migrants from the Middle East and Africa were also framed as threats to "the European way of life" and galvanised moral panics around immigration in many countries (Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi 2017; Shoshan 2016). Using metaphors like swarms, floods, hordes, or flows, mainstream media and political discourses suggested that refugees are "invading" or "overwhelming" Europe, changing its shape or face, and threatening its values and future (Bhambra 2017; Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Crucially, these fears are not only highly exaggerated given the relatively small number of refugees who have applied for asylum or settled in Northern Europe since 2015,[12] they are also based on a mythical imagining of Europe as culturally and religiously homogeneous (Bhambra 2017; see also Keskinen et al 2019). Nevertheless, most European countries responded to the increase of asylum seekers by militarising their borders and criminalising people on the move (Franko 2020).

As Bhambra notes, several European states also "reconsidered [their] commitments to human rights" by restricting the application of the right to seek refuge, deporting refugees and other migrants to war-torn countries, and outsourcing their humanitarian obligations to countries like Turkey and Libya (2017: 397).

Sometimes framed as a resurgence of fascism (Holmes 2016), but more often as the "rise of Fortress Europe" (Carr 2015), these trends have challenged the grand narratives that Europe has based itself on, including its self-declared humanitarian ethos (Stierl 2018). Like the presence of the infamous Moria camp on European soil, they have also caused moral shock and outcry and produced narratives of ethical and civilisational decline. As Pope Francis asked in a public speech in 2016, "What happened to you, the Europe of humanism, the champion of human rights, democracy, and freedom?" (Pullella 2016). Notably, this question reframes the "refugee crisis" as a "crisis *of* Europe as opposed to simply a crisis *in* Europe" (Bhambra 2017: 400 (emphasis added); see also De Genova 2017; Stierl 2018). According to

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[12] As Bhambra (2017) notes about the asylum applications in Europe in 2015, the proportions in percentage per local population range from 1.8% in Hungary to 0.06% in the UK, with the EU average around 0.25%. A refugee advocate from the Norwegian Refugee Council often used the analogy of a classroom, suggesting that the 2015 "influx" of refugees meant that a European classroom of 500 students would merely get an additional classmate.

Krastev (2017), a crisis of Europe is also simultaneously a crisis in liberalism (see also Boyer 2016).

However, whether the current rise in xenophobia and border restrictions are described as a "crisis of Europe" or "liberalism," these popular and scholarly narratives have largely failed to question the association between Europe/liberalism and human rights/freedom (Bhambra 2017). Instead, underlying the expressions of moral shock and decay are "notions of Europe as inherently better than other parts of the world and characterised by an untainted legacy of human rights and compassion" (Loftsdóttir 2020b: 12). Moreover, by framing current border violence as a historical exceptionality, these narratives divorce the "refugee crisis" from Europe's long and brutal histories of colonialism and empire (Danewid 2017; see also Bhambra 2017). This ahistorical approach overlooks how the majority of people seeking asylum in Europe today come from postcolonial countries. It also neglects the colonial genealogy of European immigration restrictions and the fact that black or non-European migrants have "always been cast as 'threats' to the (white) nation-state" (Danewid 2021: 3; El-Enany 2020; Weheliye 2018).

Diagnosing "Fortress Europe"

Rather than asking what happened to the "Europe of humanism," we might thus ask two less charged, albeit more precise questions: First, what explains the fervent fortifications of new borders and security apparatuses in response to the "refugee crisis"? Secondly, how should we interpret Europe's recent failure to "live up to the very values it claims define its institutional and civilisational project?" (Bhambra 2017: 399).

Narrating European responses to the "crisis," many scholars and commentators have observed a shift in public sentiment or "moods" (Holmes and Castañeda 2016) from an initial and short-lived outpouring of compassion and empathy following the circulation of the image of Kurdi, to growing xenophobia, hostility, or indifference. Seeking to diagnose this shift, several have pointed to the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris and the sexual assaults on German women in Cologne on New Year's Eve of the same year. For instance, Borneman and Hammoudi argue that these events "activated latent fears and mobilized a xenophobic mood—primarily fear of the Muslim male's sexualized aggression" (2017: 110). Likewise, Muehlebach observes that Cologne undermined the "unstable infrastructure of compassion" that had been built in previous months, reframing Kurdi from a "child in need" and symbol of

innocence to a future menace threatening to violate the bodies of European women (2016: para 2; see also De Genova 2017; Morgans 2020; Ticktin 2017; 2020).

Others have diagnosed the European public with compassion fatigue (Hosseini 2018), or pointed to a broader "globalization of indifference" (Friedman 2016) regarding black and migrant deaths. For instance, in a recently published book, the Norwegian author and antiracist activist Berglund Steen (2021) argues that Europeans have become "too comfortable" with the continuous deaths of racialised others at their front yard. Muehlebach (2018) describes this racialised logic as a question of unequal tolerability, whereas Butler (2009) has coined the term "unequal grievability" to express the unequal value placed on human lives (cf. Fassin 2010; 2018). For several refugee interlocutors, the European public's acceptance of non-white refugees drowning (or being let to drown) and suffering on the border was interpreted as a sign of Western or European betrayal or hypocrisy. As Zekria, a teacher from Afghanistan who founded his own school and humanitarian organisation in Moria camp, asked: "Where are Black Lives Matter now?" (Mogstad and Farzad 2021).

Moreover, some scholars have viewed European states' breach of international law and human rights obligations as an expression of contradictions and exclusions embedded in European liberalism. For instance, following thinkers like Mbembe (2018) and Kotef (2015), Western liberal democracies have always considered their freedom and security contingent on the exclusion and control of the freedom and mobility of others. Similarly, Pallister-Wilkins (2018) suggests that Europe's policy of containment is a political tactic to maintain liberal order at home in the face of growing xenophobia and increasing support for far-right parties.[13]

From a related, but slightly different, perspective, De Genova (2018) argues that the rise of Fortress Europe is best understood as an attempt to re-draw the global colour line, or institutionalize what Balibar has termed "a European 'apartheid'" (see also Besteman 2019). From his perspective, the reanimation of nativist sentiments and policies in contemporary Europe are symptoms of an "unresolved racial crisis" in which Europe and Europeanness is (re-)articulated as racially white. Moreover, the production of "Europe" (not as a place but as an idea or *project* in Glissant's sense) has "become synonymous with the utter disposability of black and brown lives" (De Genova 2018: 1779; Glissant 1989).

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[13] While I find these arguments convincing and important, I will later challenge the treatment of liberalism as a singular and coherent entity

Echoing this analysis, but also bringing in the economy, Danewid (2021) draws on the work of Stuart Hall to suggests that the current policing of racialised migrants in Europe is an expression of white anxieties fuelled by economic insecurities and diminishing white privilege. Like Mbembe and Kotef, her analysis also underscores that contemporary European border policies are "consistent and continuous with, rather than exceptional to, its normal state of affairs." (2021: 5). However, as she emphasises, "to recognise these links between contemporary border security and the longue durée of racial–colonial violence is of course not to suggest that there is nothing new about contemporary migration management." Like other scholars (see e.g., Besteman 2019) Danewid specifically notes that both "the scale and intensity of European border enforcement has increased dramatically over the last few decades" (2021: 5).

 Besides this escalation, I believe it is crucial to recognise shifts in moral and political discourses and sentiments that, while brewing for decades, have intensified or crystallised in response to the crisis. These include a change in public and political attitudes toward the ideals of the 1951 Refugee Convention. As Fassin insightfully observes:

> "Whereas many European states once regarded asylum as a right, they now increasingly treat it as a favour. In parallel, the image of refugees had to be transformed, from victims of persecution entitled to international protection to undesirable persons suspected of taking advantage of a liberal system" (Fassin 2016: para 5).

While nationalist sentiments and support for border controls have been on the rise in Europe for a long time (Gingrich and Banks 2006; Holmes 2000), recent years have also been characterised by the emergence of an "unashamed right-wing populism promoting misogynistic, xenophobic, and white supremacist politics" (Fassin and Harcourt 2019: 6). As Engle (2019) observes, these far-right populist actors sometimes deploy the language of human rights to justify their exclusionary politics, while at other times outwardly repudiating human rights and states' obligations following international law. However, it is far too easy to confine these discourses to the political margin, as it has become increasingly difficult to draw a clear line between the extreme right and mainstream discourse (Bangstad 2015; Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2018; Shoshan 2016).

Indeed, in contemporary Europe, both human rights and "humanitarian reason" (Fassin 2012)—the desired targets of many anthropologists—are no longer the main vocabulary of European states, but rather a minority or counter-discourse articulated, in different forms, by humanitarian organisations, activist groups, and refugees demanding their rights, dignity, or recognition (Gilroy 2019; Harcourt 2019). At the same time, both of these discourses are regularly instrumentalised by political leaders across the political spectrum to frame "the externalization of European borders and policies of rejection" as acts of compassion and protection (De Lauri 2019: 153).[14] These developments have led some scholars to suggest that we live in a post-rights era, that is, a time where rights no longer occupy the place of that which, in Spivak's terms, "one cannot not want" (Engle 2019: 100; see also De Genova 2017; cf. Moyn 2010).

Polarisation

Finally, the "crisis" has fuelled domestic polarisation in many northern European countries. As mentioned in the Introduction, this polarisation is often conceptualised as a schism between localists and globalists or cosmopolitans and nationalists (Eriksen 2018; Krastev 2017; Piketty 2020), but also sometimes also as a class conflict pitting the working class or unemployed against the middle class or cosmopolitan elite (Holmes and Castañeda 2016; cf. Shoshan 2016). As in the case of the intra-European tensions and inequalities examined above, these divisions are not new (Holmes 2000). However, crises often make conflicts and contradictions in societies sharper and more visible (Rakopoulos 2015).

The most studied example appears to be Germany, where Angela Merkel's decision to welcome over a million asylum seekers is widely considered responsible for her party's electoral loss and growing popular support of the nationalist far-right party Alternative for Germany (Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Shoshan 2016; Ticktin 2020). However, many other European countries have also been divided in their response to the "crisis." This includes Norway, which is typically seen and sees itself as a humane, inclusive, and consensus-oriented society, but where immigration and asylum politics have been contested and divisive political issues for many years (Bendixsen and Wyller 2020; Gullestad 2006a).

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[14] As Ticktin (2006) shows, this is not a new phenomenon. The use of force and policing are commonly accompanied by a gesture toward the ethical and humane.

Introducing Norway

Norway is constitutional monarchy of about 5.2 million inhabitants in the north-western corner of Europe. A relatively recent nation-state, Norway did not become independent before 1905, after having been under Danish crown for four hundred years, and a junior partner in a union with Sweden for nearly hundred years. However, the country has enjoyed constitutional, democratic governance since 1814, apart from five years of Nazi-German rule during WW2. Due in large part to the discovery and exploitation of oil and gas in in the North Sea, Norway is today one of the world's wealthiest countries (measured in GDP per capita). In September 2017, the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund announced that its assets had reached one trillion dollars. Like its Scandinavian neighbours, Norway is also a proud social-democratic welfare state with a strong ideology of egalitarianism (Bendixsen et al 2018). Emphasising solidarity and redistribution among social groups, the country has modest class differences and a high degree of informality (Eriksen, 2002). The so-called "Norwegian model" is also characterised by a stable democracy, a strong public sector, a porous relationship between the state and civil society, and high level of trust in the state and public institutions (Viek 2018; Østerud 2005).

The Nordic countries are often presented a group of small and peculiar countries that are difficult to tell apart. Not surprisingly, most citizens and scholars of the Nordic countries would disagree with this, though narratives of Nordic exceptionalism are also nurtured within the region (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Puyvalle and Bjørkdahl 2021). While the Nordic countries are often viewed as a coherent bloc in European decision-making, part of what distinguishes them from each other is their different relationship to the EU and NATO. Bordering Russia in the north, Norway is located in an "uneasy geopolitical position between the USA and EU" and has sought consistently balanced its foreign policy between internationalism and national self-assertion (Østerud 2005: 712-713).

Unlike Sweden and Finland, Norway is a founding member and active participant of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Eager to present itself as a good and trustworthy ally to the US, Norway has in recent years lifted its defence spending and contributed with troops and advanced weaponry to NATO military operations in Afghanistan and Libya. However, unlike most of its neighbours, Norway is not a member of the EU (membership being turned down in two public referenda). While Norway does not participate in decision-making in Brussels, the country nevertheless participates in key aspects of EU cooperation,

including the EEA (EU's single market) and Schengen (the internal free-travel area with common external borders) and FRONTEX (The European border and coast guard agency, which coordinates the management of EU's external borders). The Norwegian state is also party to the Dublin regulations and has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Norway is a major donor in humanitarian aid and development assistance and has led diplomacy efforts and peace negotiations in a variety of countries, including Israel/Palestine, Columbia and Sri Lanka. Like the "Norwegian model" (Abram 2018), these international efforts enjoy wide public and political support (McIntosh 2015) and have become part of the Norwegian "brand" (De Carvalho and Neumann 2015; Puyvalle and Bjørkdahl 2021). They have also bolstered self-congratulatory public images of Norway as a "humanitarian superpower" (ibid; see also Tvedt 2002; 2007; 2016; 2017; Witoszek 2011), "champion of aid and diplomacy" (Leira 2013) and "country of peace and compassion" (Gullestad 2006a).

These public images are widely accepted in the Norwegian society and actively nurtured and reproduced in public discourse and popular culture. Narratives of Norwegian goodness and innocence are also performed in public rituals and speeches, for instance, by Norwegian kings, politicians, and famous diplomats and writers (Demiri and Fangen 2019; Leira 2013; Svendsen 2016; Tvedt 2016).[15] However, crucially, these national images and narratives rely upon a hegemonic and whitewashed version of Norwegian history where Norwegians play the role of either victims or heroes—and very often both (see also Demiri and Fangen 2019; Witoszek 2011). Notably, this history also constructs Norway as morally superior to its neighbour states. For example, Norway is typically described as a colonial outsider, or a former colony of Denmark during colonial times rather than a participant in the Danish colonial enterprise and coloniser of the country's indigenous Sámi population in the north (Gullestad 2006a: 39; McIntosh 2015; see also Keskinen et al 2009). Norwegian history and popular culture also tend to glorify Norwegian resistance against the German occupation during World War Two, while the Swedes are commonly accused of collaborating with the Nazi regime and the Danes are said to have surrendered too quickly and easily (for scholarly intra-Nordic comparisons, see Keskinen 2019). Notably, this sanitised and heroic national

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[15] These narratives figured prominently in Norway's response to the July 22 terror attack, where public displays of unity and compassion, and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg's widely quoted speech promising "more democracy, more openness and more humanity" were said to signify Norwegian "inherent goodness" and frequently contrasted with other countries' militarised and polarising responses to terror (Eriksen 2011).

history is also used to depict the Norwegian nation as innocent of racism (Harlap and Riese 201). To sum up, Norway is thus framed as exceptional in two ways: exceptionally good/noble and exceptionally innocent.

However, like the Dutch exceptionalism brilliantly analysed by Wekker (2016), Norwegian exceptionalism is predicated on a number of silences, including Norwegian participation in the Danish colonial enterprise (Gullestad 2006) and the state's brutal assimilation policies towards the indigenous Sámi population in the north and other national minorities (McIntosh 2015; Plesner & Vollebæk 2014). Further absent from this narrative is the role the country played in race science (Harlap and Riese 2021) and the role Norwegians played during World War Two in arresting and deporting the country's Jewish population to death camps (Bruland 2010; Michelet 2014). Finally, public self-images of Norway as a "humanitarian superpower" or "country of peace and compassion" disavow the country's complicity as one of the world's largest exporters of oil and gas, as well as of weapons to countries engaged in refugee-producing conflicts, such as Saudi Arabia. These images also fit uneasily with Norway's active participation in the NATO-led invasions in Afghanistan (where more than 9000 Norwegian soldiers served) and Libya (where Norway dropped 588 bombs "in the name of humanity" (Tvedt 2016; cf. Feldman and Ticktin 2010)).

The "refugee crisis" in Norway

Despite its location in the far-north region of Europe, Norway saw a record-high number of refugees arriving in 2015, with more than 30,000 people crossing the country's borders to apply for asylum (Hagelund 2020; Jumbert 2020). The existing reception structures were initially overwhelmed, causing ordinary citizens to mobilise to provide care and hospitality and welcome refugees to their country and communities (Bygnes 2017; Naguib 2016). For a brief moment, debates conducted over the course of the local elections also stopped focusing on questions of property tax and school policies in favour of what was initially framed as an international humanitarian crisis (Bromark 2016). However, the political mood changed swiftly when about 5,500 asylum seekers crossed the Arctic borders from Russia (mostly on bicycles), galvanizing moral panic and a public focus on "regaining control" (Brekke and Staver 2008; NOAS 2019).

In 2015 and 2016, the Norwegian government followed the race to the bottom by European asylum standards and reintroduced national border controls while pushing for new legislation

and restrictions through parliament which violated international laws and obligations (ibid). Representing herself as the face of reason and rationality, former Minister of Immigration and Integration, Sylvi Listhaug, proudly claimed that Norway had one of Europe's strictest refugee policies. At the same time, Norway also pushed heavily for involuntary returns, especially of Afghan refugees, a group for whom Norway has had the harshest deportation policies in Europe (NOAS 2018).[16]

As in other countries, the government's response to the "refugee crisis" fuelled polarisation in Norwegian society; this was often crystallised in heated public debates over national culture, identity and future (Talleraas and Erdal 2015). It is significant to note that these debates focused largely on the moral, and sometimes the legal, obligations affluent societies have to help less fortunate others. To return to the distinction I made in the Introduction, the debates thus neglected structural questions of responsibility, and assumed that Norway and Norwegians were related to refugees as moral and innocent helpers, rather than complicit actors or beneficiaries (cf. Pogge 2002).

Moreover, both pro- and anti-refugee voices argued that Norwegian culture and values were under attack and had to be defended. On the one hand, asylum seekers were depicted as potential threats to national security, equality and the freedom of women. Underlying this politics of fear was often Islamophobia (Bangstad 2015) or what De Genova (2017) fittingly describes as "anti-Muslim racism." However, as elsewhere, liberal values including gender and sexual equality and freedom of speech (commonly described as "Norwegian values") were used to justify the exclusion of racialised others (Keskinen et al 2009).

On the other hand –and as illustrated by the ethnographic fragments I opened this chapter with –Norway's unwillingness to help more refugees was said to violate the country's proud humanitarian traditions and values. As we shall see, several of my interlocutors also believed their government's harsh border policies threatened the society's moral fabric and humanity (*humaniteten*).

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[16] To illustrate this: in 2016, Norway accounted for 65 % of all forced returns from Europe to Afghanistan (NOAS 2018).

At the centre of these controversies were long-standing questions and concerns regarding the sustainability of the welfare state. More specifically, the perceived influx of refugees begged the questions: "Who are entitled to Norwegian welfare?" and "Can the welfare state cope with current and future increase in immigration?" (cf. Bendixsen and Wyller 2020; Brochmann 2019; Eriksen 2018).

Briefly summarised, the last decades have seen growing welfare chauvinism in Norway and the framing of welfare provisions as reserved for "our own people." Embedded in this rhetoric are not only racialised stereotypes of migrants as public expenditures, "welfare scroungers" (Eriksen 2018) or "*lykkejegere*" (luck hunters")[17], but also increasingly exclusionary understandings of Norwegian identity based on ethnicity or descent (Gullestad 2006c). However, there are also two "softer" versions of these concerns that were raised by politicians and voters across the political spectrum. The first of these worries is that accepting more refugees will inevitably lead to increased socioeconomic inequalities or spatial segregation, sometimes described in derogatory terms as "Swedish conditions." In a country that regularly praises itself as exceptionally egalitarian and cohesive (Abram 2018), this is seen as inherently problematic. The second suggests that Norway's expansive welfare system depends on citizens' continued willingness to pay high taxes, which is said to depend on continued high levels of social trust and cohesion, which in turn are assumed to depend on cultural homogeneity. Marked by their cultural difference (and often assumed to be unable or unwilling to fully integrate into the Norwegian society), non-European migrants are thus conceived as threatening Norwegian egalitarianism and the future of the Norwegian welfare state.

To better understand these concerns, it is important to note that non-Western immigration to Norway is generally expressed as a dramatic injection of difference into a cultural, religious and racial or ethnic (*etnisk*) homogenous society. As McIntosh notes, "homogenizing rhetoric is not uncharacteristic of national stereotypes throughout the European region, which similarly equate territory, language and culture with racial identity, and render the representation of secular white identity synonymous with, and constitutive of, national belonging". However, "Norway has long been a country that insiders and outsiders alike consider to be at once primordially European and exotically homogenous" (2015: 312). While

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[17] A derogatory word used in Norwegian discourse to describe economic migrants.

some scholars and activists have challenged the "myth of Norwegian homogeneity" by reference to the country's historical diversity and oppressive assimilation policies (Ryymin 2019), claims of Norway's exceptional homogeneity are also regularly reproduced by politicians and scholars alike (see e.g., Tvedt 2017). Furthermore, the assumption that Norwegian welfare and egalitarianism rests upon cultural cohesion and homogeneity is so widespread that even self-declared immigrant-friendly politicians or commentators on the Left frame immigration as a trade-off between two supposedly incompatible values: diversity and socio-economic equality (e.g., Solhjell 2017).

Notably, these "softer" concerns with how non-European immigration might threaten Norwegian equality and welfare rest upon similar ideas of race and difference and racial homogeneity as part of the nation-state as those described above (Keskinen et al 2019; see also Lentin and Titley 2011). They also rest upon what Gullestad describes as a seemingly innocent cultural idea of equality as (imagined) sameness (Gullestad 2001; 2002; 2006c). Briefly summarised, Gullestad points to an "unquestioned assumption" in Norwegian social life "that people need to be more or less similar in order to get along well" (2006c:76). This belief is exemplified by the common Norwegian proverb "*Like barn leker best*," awkwardly translated into "children who are like each other play together more happily than other children" (ibid). In the context of immigration, the notion of "equality as sameness" implies that cultural uniformity and homogeneity are valued, while difference is usually viewed as a problem.

In Chapter 6, we shall see that my interlocutors tried to address these fears and concerns in various ways. In doing so, they intervened in ongoing struggles and anxieties over national identity, values and future.

Significantly, both the Norwegian welfare model and Norwegian humanitarianism have, in recent years, been challenged on several accounts. Indeed, my fieldwork coincided with what might be described as, following Hartog (2015: 16), a moment in time when "the way in which the past, present, and future are articulated no longer seems self-evident." Most notably, the rise of a public environmentalist movement in Scandinavia has challenged both the sustainability and morality of Norway's reliance on revenues from oil and gas resources, provoking both "oil-shame" and anxieties about the future. Concerns about the future of the welfare state have also been sparked by declining birth rates and neoliberal reforms, leading

some to question the narrative of Norwegians as ideal egalitarians (e.g., Stjernø and Halvorsen 2021). Furthermore, recent years have seen a number of popular (but often controversial) publications questioning both Norway's sanitised and heroic history (Aas og Vestgården 2014; Bruland 2010; Michelet 2014; 2018) and contemporary humanitarianism (Tvedt 2017; see also Puyvalle and Bjørkdahl 2021). In reference to Norway's military operations in Afghanistan and Libya, some have even argued that Norway has become a war nation (Neumann 2004; Yttredal 2021; see also Hammer 2019; Heier et al 2019).

As we shall see, these public concerns and critiques have shaped my interlocutors' moral and political subjectivities and interventions in complex ways. By attending to how they appear in my interlocutors' narratives and discourses, I draw on the potential of ethnography to chronicle "thresholds into possible lives and futures, into larger socio-political transformations which may have already begun to take shape through the seeds of a nascent critical consciousness" (Cabot, 2014: x). However, supplementing this attention to emergence and becoming, I also show how difficult it can be to challenge or divest from hegemonic national and humanitarian imaginaries (cf. Wilson and Anderson 2020; Wright 2018).

Finally, by attending to these ongoing struggles over Norwegian history, humanitarianism, and the welfare state, this dissertation seeks to both provincialise and complicate scholarly debates on "Western humanitarianism," coloniality, and liberalism.

Chapter 2:

Called to help: Unpacking DiH's foundation story

21ˢᵗ of August. This day will always mean something special to me. On this day, three years ago, it was as if I suddenly woke up from my privileged, comfortable lifestyle, to a brutal world I had never before bothered to learn or care about. I remember that Friday afternoon as if it were yesterday. The experience of nearly fainting after listening to a discussion [about refugees arriving in Greece] on the radio. A discussion that I would normally ignore or tune out from. I remember the feeling that there was something, or somebody, in the room who said: "DO SOMETHING!" I remember my physical reaction: the trembling, the tears, and the overwhelming need to know more, to learn, be useful, and help...For the first time in my life, I understood what people meant when they said they had received a call."
-Trude, excerpt from a Facebook post, August 21ˢᵗ, 2018

Most humanitarian organisations have a creation story that is typically centred around one or more charismatic protagonists whose personal actions in response to suffering have formed the organisation's image and vision. Take, for example, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), often considered paradigmatic of classical humanitarianism (Hilhorst 2018). According to the dominant story, the ICRC was established after its founder, Henry Dunant, was shocked into action after stumbling upon wounded and dying soldiers on the battlefield of Solverino in 1859 (ibid; Dromi 2020). Similarly, the creation story of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) involves the founders' encounters with emaciated children in Biafra, as well as their famous rejection of Red Cross' silence (Redfield 2013).

The origin stories of humanitarian organisations like World Vision, Oxfam, and Save the Children likewise involve individuals or groups of concerned citizens overcome by a humanitarian impulse and vision after encountering mundane or, more typically, extraordinary suffering (Bornstein 2005; Henquinet 2020; Wall 2016; Walker and Maxwell 2009). To give an example outside the Global North, the origin story of the transnational relief organisation Tzu Chi involves the founder, a Taiwanese Buddhist nun called Cheng Yen, encountering a pregnant aboriginal woman who suffered from a miscarriage because the family could not afford to pay for medical help, and consequently asking herself what she could do to help the poor (Huang 2009).

As I demonstrate in this chapter, DiH is no exception to this norm. Trude's personal experience is not merely constitutive of DiH's birth, but has fundamentally shaped the

organisation's rationale, profile, and priorities. Like the examples above, Trude's narrative is also frequently reiterated to explain the history and purpose of DiH and attract new volunteers and donors. However, her narrative also presents an ethnographic puzzle, as her sudden call to help refugees in Greece is framed as a mysterious, quasi-religious event, and radical break with her prior concerns and lifestyle. As Trude asked in a Facebook post she posted exactly five years after she received her call while listening to the radio in her daughter's bedroom, "How can a life change direction so drastically in just a few minutes?" Moreover, where did the call come from?

This chapter begins by describing Trude's narrative, as recollected in our interview, but also numerous public talks she gave, interviews, social media posts, and speeches. Both prior to and during my fieldwork, I heard her perform her story for various audiences, sometimes adding some new details, or emphasising or de-emphasising certain aspects, but always following the same plot. Drawing mostly on my own interview material, I identify four key sequences in her narrative: 1) the call, 2) her humanitarian encounters, 3) the establishment of DiH, and 4) her personal transformation. I then explore two questions about Trude's narrative. First, how, if at all, can we understand her experience of being "called to help" ethnographically? Second, what work does Trude's narrative—and specifically the emphasis on rupture, motherhood and transformation—do for DiH?

However, before I begin, it is important to note something about the performative aspect of Trude's narrative. In some ways, all storytelling is performative. As Jackson (2002: 15) argues, stories are means to rework or reconstitute events that we tell both in dialogue with others and within our own imagination. Stories are also partial, selective and situated: we emphasise and de-emphasise certain aspects depending on our audience and what message we seek to get across (Abu-Lughod 1993; Maggio 2014). While centred on the self, personal narratives are no different. Never simply an imitation of past experiences, they are means for people to make and remake their individual identities and histories, and reclaim or assert their agency (Jackson 2002; Ochs and Capps 1996; Webster 2013). In this capacity, they can work as a "coping mechanism" (Jackson 2002). However, as we shall see, narratives –and in particular "institutionalised storylines"– can also be a device of legitimacy and power (Ochs and Capps 1996).As a publicly performed story, Trude's narrative was also told and retold to *move* or *draw* people in, and elicit both admiration and identification.

Trude's narrative

Trude was born in May 1971 in Bærum, an affluent suburb of Oslo known for having the highest income per capita in the country. She was an active and social child and teenager who liked to hang out with her girlfriends and played basketball in the junior national team. In 1991, when she was 20 years old, she decided to go to Israel to work in a Kibbutz, like thousands of other young Scandinavians did starting in the 1960s (Rosmer 2016). Trude's father was a pilot, so she caught a ride with him to the Greek island Rhodos, where she was supposed to take the ferry onwards. However, having too much fun to leave, she postponed her ferry trip several times and eventually decided to stay on the island while reading for an exam in Italian and working as a water-ski instructor. On Rhodos, Trude also met her ex-husband, a local Greek who moved to Norway with her. Later, the couple moved to Athens, where Trude worked for a Norwegian travel company and had three children. But the marriage eventually failed and, after eight years in Greece, she filed for divorce and moved back to her hometown in Norway. She later remarried a Norwegian man and had two more children, making her a proud and happy mother-of-five in a country with a declining birth rate. After moving home, Trude also completed a bachelor's degree in relational management at Norwegian Business College and worked for different companies, specialising in customer service.

When the so-called refugee crisis gained global attention in the summer of 2015 (Holmes and Castañeda 2016), Trude was 44 years old and lived with her husband and three youngest children in the house and neighbourhood where she grew up. Reflecting back on this time of her life during our interview, she described herself as happy and privileged. She worked as a production manager for a Nordic television service provider, which she described as "the best job in the world" and secured a good income and work-life balance. While mostly consumed with her daily routine and family life, she also enjoyed meeting friends for dinner or drinks. During long weekends and holidays, Trude and her family would often escape the city and drive to their cabin in the mountains. In the summer, they sailed on her husband's sailboat along the Norwegian coast or went on vacation to Greece.

The call

On a warm and sunny afternoon in late August 2015, Trude experienced something akin to what many Christians would describe as a revelation. It was about five o'clock on a Friday

and she had just completed her first week back at work after the long Norwegian summer holiday. The previous week, the family had been on vacation in southern Greece. It was a relaxing holiday and she admitted that she had not given so much as a single thought to the influx of boat refugees arriving nearby on the North Aegean Islands. But that Friday afternoon something happened, which according to Trude, would change the direction of her life and ultimately turn her into a different person.

Trude was at home, standing in the bedroom of her three-year-old daughter and sorting her wardrobe while listening to the radio in the background. She recalled thinking that her daughter had far too many clothes, some of which she had not even worn before growing out of. While feeling slightly annoyed and ashamed of this, the radio tuned in to a debate about the "refugee crisis" unfolding on the doorstep to Europe. The topic of the discussion was whether Norway should accept 8,000 asylum seekers to help alleviate the pressure on the Greek asylum system; a number only one of the discussants believed was embarrassingly small for a humanitarian superpower.

As Trude described in the Facebook post opening this chapter, this was a debate she would normally ignore or tune out. However, on that particular afternoon, she listened. She recalled that the radio host said that thousands of refugees—including families with young children—were arriving in overcrowded dinghies to the Greek Islands nearly every day. Moreover, many of them did not make it, and drowned instead trying to reach safety in Europe. The Mediterranean Sea, where Trude had spent hundreds of hours working as a water-ski instructor in her twenties, and later enjoyed both as a long-term resident and tourist, was becoming a "mass grave" (De Genova 2017: 3; cf. Albahari 2015). Standing in her daughter's bedroom, amidst her family's physical and economic comforts, Trude suddenly realised that she had to do something. When recollecting the moment, she described a powerful and affective reaction with a religious character:

> "I got a physical reaction, a really weird physical reaction. I felt terribly unwell and started to tremble and cry hysterically. And then it felt like someone placed a hand on my shoulder and told me, 'Don't just stand there in the safety of your own home and feel sorry for these people. Go and do something!'"

After coming back to herself, Trude got "obsessed about learning more", "being useful", and above all, "doing something to help." When her three-year-old daughter, who came into the room and saw her mother in tears, asked what was wrong, Trude answered: "I have just realised that I might be able to do something for the refugees in Greece." Reflecting back on the episode, she also said she wanted to witness and understand the human drama unfolding on Europe's southern border. "On the radio, they just talked about the numbers, how many people were coming and how many Norway should take…but I had to see who these people were," she explained. Filled with determination, Trude called her husband, who was picking cloudberries in the mountains, and told him that she had decided to travel to the Greek Islands to help boat refugees.

> "I told him I had to go. He was surprised because I had never done anything like that before. I mean, I am very impulsive, but I had been very little engaged [in social or humanitarian issues]. I had not even been a *'bøssebærer'*[18] But he was very supportive. I think he could hear in my voice that this was important to me and that I had already made up my mind. There was no room for discussion, or for him to tell me that he did not think it was good idea."

Acting quickly, Trude booked a direct flight leaving the following week to the Greek island Lesvos through a Norwegian tour operator. After putting her children to sleep that evening, she also established a Facebook group that she named "A Drop in the Ocean," where she invited close friends and family to donate clothes and other items she could bring with her, and later used to keep them updated on her journey. While waiting for the flight, she spent the evenings after work driving around the city and collecting clothes, blankets, and baby carriers from friends, family, and colleagues. Eight days after her epiphany, Trude was on a charter flight to Lesvos with fourteen suitcases filled with donations.

Notably, Trude's hasty decision to embark on a humanitarian mission surprised her closest friends and family, who expressed a combination of wonder, concern, and support. Recalling the episode when we met on her sailboat four summers later, one of her oldest friends told me it appeared as if Trude, who she knew was an atheist, had received a call from God. Trude

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[18] A *"bøssebærer"* is a volunteer going door-to-door collecting money for charity during the annual nationwide Telethon, which is arranged by the national broadcaster NRK and often described by scholars as a national ritual performing Norwegian goodness (e.g., Tvedt 2016).

herself was equally puzzled by the incident. "I have asked myself more than a hundred times what happened on that fateful afternoon, but I still don't know," I often heard her say. While underscoring that the call had not led her to embrace a religious faith, she also found it hard to describe what happened in secular terms:

> "I am not religious myself, but I can understand why people who have this kind of experience become religious. Perhaps one could say that it was a call from above, from some higher powers or something, but I am not so sure. I do not really believe in those things. To be honest, I still do not understand where the voice came from…."

Humanitarian encounters

Arriving late at night at the small airport in Mytilini, Lesvos' capital, Trude picked up her rental car, filled it with suitcases and drove to the northern coast of the island where she had learned that the majority of refugee boats were arriving. While driving north, she passed thousands of people walking the opposite direction toward Mytilini and the ferries to the Greek mainland. "There were families with small children, men carrying their injured parents, people sleeping by the roadside… I suddenly realised that I was in the midst of the biggest '*folkevandringen*' (wave of migration) since WW2," Trude recalled. For the first time since she received the call in her daughter's bedroom, she also felt a twinge of doubt: "I realised that this trip was very impulsive and naïve and started to question myself," she explained. However, as soon as she arrived on the north coast of the island, there was no more time to contemplate.

Trude travelled to Lesvos in late August 2015 during the height of the "refugee crisis" when several thousand people arrived in overcrowded and flimsy dinghies every day, and locals and international volunteers improvised assistance (see Introduction). Cognisant of her lack of training and experience, Trude had not planned to get involved with the boat landings. However, boats were arriving at a pace and rate locals and volunteers were unable to tackle. Realising that she "could not simply stand there and watch," Trude joined a group of loosely organised volunteers spotting and receiving incoming boats. For three days and nights, she helped receive several hundred refugees arriving on the northern coastline of Lesvos. In addition to guiding the boats into safe and shallow waters and helping stabilise them as they

approached the beach, she and other volunteers handed out water, dry clothes, and food. They drove refugees who were in bad shape, pregnant, or too young or old to walk for hours to the nearby village or hospital. The work felt both important and thrilling. In our interview, Trude recalled feeling completely engrossed and filled with adrenaline. In the Facebook group she had created to keep her closest friends and family updated, she wrote the following post at the end of her first day, August 30th:

> "This has been the best (except when my children were born) and worst day of my life! (...) Today we have seen 4 cars, around 6–8 people who have driven back and forth with children, pregnant, and old people from where the boats arrive and the 8 km into the village. I am sure there are more who have contributed, but I haven't seen any. I haven't seen a single person from any of the aid organizations!!!"

Reflecting back, Trude also emphasised her first encounters with refugees arriving onshore, describing them as "moments and meetings I will never forget." She added:

> "There were small children with simple swimming rings around their arms, babies, old people and injured people. Some had open wounds… I remember an old lady with a deep and stinking wound down her leg and a pregnant woman who was in pain whose water just broke. At one point, someone passed me a tiny baby. I held her in my arms; she was soaking wet and her body was stiff. At first, I was not sure if she was dead or alive. (…) But there were also moments of joy and relief when [the refugees] realised that they had arrived safely in Europe. People were smiling, crying, praying, taking selfies… ."

In public interviews, Trude also underscored how her humanitarian encounters challenged media representations of refugees as mostly young men and economic migrants. "I was surprised by how many women, small children, and elderly people I met. Many of them were from Syria and they spoke good English. I realised they were just like us," she recalled, a claim and conviction I will critically examine in Chapter 6.

*Image 9: Trude on her spontaneous trip to Lesvos
in August 2015 (photo: DiH).*

Establishing DiH

After three intense days and nights with nearly no sleep, Trude returned home to Norway feeling both disquieted and inspired by what she had witnessed and been part of. Eager to do more, she took leave from work and sat down with a group of female friends who shared her new concern for the plight of refugees on Europe's southern border. Together, they established DiH, which was registered as a Norwegian NGO in September 2015. Unable to return to her old life, Trude later resigned from her job in the television industry and became a full-time humanitarian worker, managing and building DiH from the ground up.

When reflecting on her personal journey, she often underlined that it was never part of her plan to start a humanitarian organisation. Stressing her lack of experience in the humanitarian field and with volunteer work more broadly, she said she simply did not think that was something she was capable of doing. On the other hand, she simultaneously felt that she had to do it since the humanitarian gaps she had witnessed on Lesvos were so enormous. When narrating her decision to establish a humanitarian organisation, Trude also emphasised her personal attachment and accountability to the cause. "After having seen what I saw on Lesvos, and '*følt på kroppen*' (felt on my body) that I am able to do something... it felt like I did not have a choice."

Moreover, there was not merely the refugees' need for assistance, but also what Malkki (2015) eloquently describes as people's "need to help." Trude recognised this. In only three days, the Facebook group she had created to keep her friends and family updated had grown from 150 to 11,000 members. When she landed in Oslo, many had already started fundraising

campaigns or collected clothes and equipment they hoped she could distribute. After her story was published in the mainstream press, ordinary Norwegian citizens across the country also started contacting her to ask how they could help or expressed their desire to volunteer "on the frontline" (Papataxiarchis 2016). Trude was touched and inspired by people's eagerness to help. Based on her own experience on Lesvos, she also believed that ordinary people like herself could make a difference. Yet, having witnessed the chaotic situation on Lesvos firsthand, Trude also acknowledged the need to establish guidelines and coordinate volunteers on the ground. Creating a formal NGO would further enable Trude and her supporters to handle the money that had been flowing into her personal bank account in a transparent and orderly manner. As she saw it, establishing an official NGO thus became necessary to ensure accountability and provide a more responsible and sustainable humanitarian response.

The transformation

As mentioned, Trude also regularly remarked that she returned from Lesvos a different person. Not only did she make the major decision to quit her comfortable and well-paying job to build a humanitarian NGO, but the three days she had spent witnessing and assisting refugees on Europe's southern border had also transformed her mode of being-in-the-world: her outlook, perspectives, sensibilities, and priorities had changed. As she explained in an interview with the Norwegian magazine *Bistandsaktuelt* (Aid Update), this made it difficult to return to old habits and pleasures:

> "A few weeks after I came home from Lesvos, I travelled with some of my girlfriends to Gdansk. We went to a spa and drank champagne, but it didn't feel right; I could not do it. I flew straight from Poland to Greece!"

Significantly, she also underscored that her transformation was permanent: several years after she first travelled to Lesvos, she had become "less materialistic," was "no longer interested in things like shopping," and had "stopped, almost entirely, to care about small and trivial problems in Norway." She also argued that she had become increasingly attentive not only to the plight of refugees in Greece and elsewhere, but to other social and political issues, including climate change, environmental issues, and the predicaments of marginalised groups in society. Trude further stressed how much she had learned, not only about humanitarian work and volunteerism, but also politics and the world at large. Summarising her own transformation in our interview, she said she had become more emphatic, engaged and

knowledgeable but also less naïve and more critical towards her own country and government.

Finally, Trude often emphasised all the new friendships and connections she had made with people across Norway and the world. These included volunteers and refugee activists, but also many refugees, of whom she said, "I previously looked upon as masses of people I did not have to relate to, but I now see as individuals." One of these refugees was Maryam, a Syrian mother who volunteered for DiH on Chios for five months while waiting for a decision on her asylum application. After receiving two rejections, she managed to reach Norway with a false passport and Trude and several DiH volunteers helped her navigate the Norwegian asylum system and apply for family reunification with her four daughters in Turkey. After a long struggle to get Maryam's daughters to Norway, the family moved into Trude's house, where they stayed for 1, 5 years.

Reflecting on her new life as a humanitarian worker, Trude also frequently expressed how lucky she was to "live in a country where it is possible to make such drastic life decisions." She also expressed gratitude for her own family, who had accepted and adjusted to the fact that she came back as a "different person," that she worked much more than before, and that her personal and professional lives could no longer be easily separated.

Unpacking Trude's story

As described above, DiH's founder was an unlikely candidate for establishing her own humanitarian organisation. Not only did she not have any previous experience with humanitarian work, but—unlike many other interlocutors—she had also been very little engaged in social issues or politics more broadly. Nevertheless, Trude experienced, one afternoon in August 2015, a sudden and overpowering call to do something to help the boat refugees arriving in Greece. In the previous section, I described how she narrated this call as a mystical and quasi-religious event. She emphasised both the spontaneity and immediacy of the call and her embodied and affective reaction. While emphasising that she was not religious, she also said she struggled to describe the episode in secular terms. I further showed how she narrated her decision to travel to Greece to help refugees, and subsequently establish her own NGO, as a profound rupture and break with her pre-existing concerns and sensibilities.

Following Humphrey (2019), we might say that Trude narrated her personal transformation as simultaneously a break *from* past habits and preoccupations and a break *toward* a more socially and politically aware life characterised by new relationships and priorities. Significantly, both of these breaks were described as positive: in the normative sense of enabling Trude to live a more ethical and responsible life, and in a more personal sense of feeling mostly good about it. In fact, in both private and public conversations, she repeatedly emphasised how grateful she was for all the people she had met and for having found "*noe å brenne for*" (something to be passionate about). If Heidegger was right when he suggested that care is what makes human existence meaningful, and that the amount of energy we put into the projects we care about determines the intensity with which we live (Watts 2014: 77), then it seems that Trude found a project to care about outside herself and her family, and that this led her to experience her life not only differently, but more fervently and meaningfully.

However, I cannot stop my analysis there if anthropologists are to do more than simply repeat our interlocutors' narratives and interpretations. How can we understand Trude's narrative of rupture and transformation ethnographically? In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide two overlapping answers to this question. I begin by offering an ethnographic analysis of her mysterious call in her daughter's bedroom based on a closer reading of my interview and fieldwork notes. Without questioning her sincerity or the ability of human beings to embrace new thoughts and possibilities (Humphrey 2008), I will try to show that her decision to help refugees in Greece was not a complete break with the past, but mediated by cultural norms and histories and her personal biography and attachments. Second, I will argue that we might usefully approach her narrative as a founding myth for DiH. This entails looking closer at the performative functions of Trude's story, asking not only what it says, or can tell us, but what it does.

Interpreting Trude's call: A detour through philosophy

How, if at all, can we understand what happened to Trude during that fateful afternoon in her daughter's bedroom? We can find many possible explanations in the fields of philosophy and social theory, where many contemporary anthropologists look for theories and concepts. For instance, following Žižek (2014), we might understand her experience of being called an event. Žižek describes an event as an "unexpected" and "radical turning point" which "interrupts the usual flow of things" and emerges seemingly out of nowhere (2014: 1, 179-180). Resonating with Trude's own narrative and inability to explain what happened to her,

Žižek emphasises that there is, "by definition, something 'miraculous' in an event" and that one "cannot really account for the synergetic energy that gives birth [to it]" as the event is "the effect that seems to exceed its causes" (ibid: 2, 3). Nevertheless, Žižek suggests that we can understand such events as an "encounter with Truth that shatters ordinary life," "destabilizes the symbolic order we dwell in," and leads to "a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it" (ibid: 10-32). Following Žižek, we could thus read Trude's call as an unexpected and destabilising encounter with a Truth that fostered a new relationship with the world.

Other philosophers would describe Trude's experience in more existential terms. Following Heidegger (2019 [1962]) we might read the call she heard as a "call of conscience," not from God or an alien voice (although it might sound like one),[19] but as Trude talking to herself— calling herself back from an inauthentic immersion in the unreflective mode of everyday life. Notably, to hear and respond to the call of conscience, Heidegger argued that one must first "want to have a conscience" (*gewissen-haben-wollen*) (ibid). As Critchley (2009) observes, this want is a second-order desire, as Heidegger believed human beings already have a conscience, but must want to have it to become answerable or responsible (*verantwortlich*). Furthermore, Heidegger would not depict Trude as a sovereign and fully rational subject calculating the most ethical option, but as a "human figure whose ethical quality is its uncompromising humbleness and openness to otherness" (Duarte 2005: 175). From Heidegger's perspective, this includes an openness to the otherness in oneself, as the call— while sounding strange and unfamiliar—is really a call from herself to the "other" that she already is.

Similarly, Critchley would probably describe Trude's experience of being called as an "ethical moment" in which her encounter with otherness—the boat refugees discussed on the radio—produced an ethical demand (Critchley, 2013: 8-9). Seeking to break with what he describes as the "autonomy orthodoxy" in post-Kantian philosophy, Critchley suggests that it is the alterity at the heart of the human subject that makes one's response to others possible (ibid: 36). However, noting the omnipresent possibility of a Sartrean bad faith, Critchley emphasises that an ethical demand "is not something objectively given, rather it is only felt

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[19] As Critchley (2009) points out, Heidegger's emphasis on an "uncanny call of conscience" closely resembles the Christian experience of conscience that one finds in Augustine and Luther. Likewise, Trude described her call as akin to a religious revelation.

like a demand for the self who approves it" and thereby binds itself to it (ibid: 17-18). Following both Heidegger and Critchley, Trude's decision to travel to Greece to help refugees might not have been experienced as actively chosen, nor was it a result of careful contemplation. However, she was not a passive recipient of the call, as Žižek's analysis might suggest. Conversely, she heard the call because she had opened herself to it or wanted to have a conscience, as Heidegger would say, or recognised and approved the ethical demand, in Critchley's view.

Yet, as fancy and fitting as these philosophical theories appear, superimposing them on my ethnography can easily lead to skewed and homogeneous interpretations (Laidlaw 2014: 40-41; Borneman and Hammoudi 2009: 17). Consider first the work of Žižek (2014) and Critchley (2007). Both provide grand theoretical arguments abstracted from everyday social life and historical contingencies.[20] While they might provide us with a vocabulary to describe what Trude struggled to articulate, I believe they tell us more about the philosophers' own political commitments than what happened to her. Critchley, for instance, seeks to address what he describes as the overriding problem of liberal democracy: the lack of political motivation. By combining and altering the work of several continental philosophers (his only interlocutors), Critchley offers the solution in the form of a meta-ethical proposition (the ethical demand as binding but unfulfillable) and uses this proposition to defend an ethically informed neo-anarchism (Critchley 2013[2007]: 12-13). However, his philosophical-political formula not only assumes that ethical attachments always take the form of an ethical demand—a generalisation most anthropologists would object to—but as the feminist theorist Ella Myers observes, he also posits that the subject binds itself to an ethical demand without seeking to explain "how or why such a demand is heard, felt and taken up (or not)" (Myers, 2013: 82).

Žižek's work is notoriously more difficult to understand, but is similarly coloured by his political commitment to a future and radical political event that will bring down capitalism and its power over the human mind. While Žižek offers the concept of "dis-eventualization" to suggest that certain events are undone or denied, he likewise says little about what makes certain happenings register as events and thus how an act of reframing occurs. Echoing

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[20] To be fair, Žižek uses several examples from popular culture and world politics.

Trude's puzzlement, Žižek continues instead to envisage events as radical ruptures that are unconditioned and mysterious.

Regarding Heidegger's uncanny call of conscience, this surely resonates with Trude's experience of being called to help refugees in Greece, yet differs in important ways. First, the Heideggerian call of conscience is silent: it does not give any advice or instructions, but is rather a disclosure. Second, and more importantly, this disclosure reveals that human beings are ontologically or existentially guilty, that is, guilty in their very being as opposed to for specific misdeeds. As Watts (2014: 81) explains, the Heideggerian notion of conscience is thus a Conscience with a capital C: it is primordial or ontological and thus stripped of the moral judgments and directives associated with ethical and religious views of conscience, which Heidegger regarded as relatively superficial.

Yet for this reason, Heidegger's notions of guilt and conscience have little to do with how Trude and my other interlocutors use and understand these and related concepts. More broadly, Heidegger focused his analysis on the truth of Being, thus subordinating questions regarding our ethical responsibilities to other beings (Levinas 1969: 45). Conversely, an ethnographic understanding of Trude's experience must be concerned with the social and political world in which, in Heidegger's words, she has been "thrown" in and must navigate.

A moral breakdown?

Of greater relevance for my investigation is anthropologist Zigon's (2007) theory of "moral breakdowns." While drawing heavily on several of the aforementioned philosophers, he does not make any transcendental claims, nor does he discuss politics or ethics abstracted from the messiness of social life. Rather, he uses philosophical insight to shed light on particular ethnographic situations that he describes as moral breakdowns. Borrowing much of his vocabulary from Heidegger (but also Løgstrup), Zigon defines moral breakdowns as moments in which, he believes, the unreflective dwelling that characterises everyday life is disturbed, forcing people to step away from their normal mode of being-in-the-world and make ethical decisions (Zigon 2007: 134-5).

At first glance, his idea that moral breakdowns change the subject's mode of "being-in" appears to echo Žižek's idea that events foster a new relationship between the self and the world. However, while Žižek describes events as unconditioned and mysterious, Zigon underscores that a moral breakdown is "situationally sensitive" and "socially constituted"

(ibid: 138). Moreover, he argues that the individuals responding to moral breakdowns are informed partly by their own personal histories and experiences, as well as the "socio-historic-cultural possibilities for thinking and acting in such situations" (ibid: 139).

This sounds promising compared to the more abstract philosophical theories discussed above. Following Zigon, we might read Trude as having been shaken out of her unreflective state by the discussion on the radio and responding to a socio-historic-culturally constituted demand. Yet, at this point, her experience departs from Zigon's theory. Based on an eccentric reading of Heidegger,[21] Zigon suggests that "dwelling in the unreflective comfort of the familiar" is the state of being that most human beings desire, and that "the main motivation for responding to the ethical demand" is therefore to "step back into" this comfortable state (ibid: 138-140; see also Zigon 2010: 5; cf. Zigon 2017: 203-204). As Laidlaw argues, there are multiple problems with this narrow conception of ethics. Not only does Zigon suggest that everyday consciousness is unreflective,[22] but in a very un-anthropological fashion, he also posits "a singular and normative conception of the necessary telos of ethics" and thus "pre-empts what should be the empirical questions of whether everyday moral life really everywhere has this 'comfortable' quality; and whether ethical thought and practice are necessarily always bent towards achieving it." (2014: 125-26). I will add to Laidlaw's critique that Zigon focuses predominantly on the individual subject's needs and desires. Accordingly, he marginalises relational thinking, including the import of moral and existential obligations on ethical life (Englund 2008; see also Introduction). Finally, Zigon argues that the subject experiencing the ethical moment returns to an unreflective state only subtly changed (2007: 148), thus discounting the potential of human subjects making radical departures (Humphrey 2008: 364; see also Bodenhorn et al 2018).

As detailed above, Trude did in fact describe her former everyday life as both comfortable and unreflective. Yet, as we have seen, her ethical work was not directed toward returning to

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[21] While Zigon suggests that the goal of ethics is to cultivate existential comfort and live sanely, Heidegger believed that anxiety was a precondition for leading an authentic and responsible life.

[22] Zigon's theory has been rightfully criticised for suggesting, like Critchley, that ethics is something that only occurs in singular moments or distinct episodes, while everyday consciousness is unreflective (Mattingly 2012; Keane 2014). In suggesting this, Zigon not only misinterprets Foucault's notion of problematisation (Laidlaw 2014: 118-119), but also reinforces a "traditional view of culture in which people move more or less smoothly along the grooves that have been laid out for them" (Keane 2014: 134-5).

this state. Furthermore, according to Trude's narrative, her experience of helping refugees in Greece did not merely constitute a temporary rupture, or a subtle shift in her morality, but had a decisive and lasting effect on her life trajectory and subjectivity. Significantly, this does not mean that she distanced herself or broke away from all the practices and relationships that made up her former life. Nor does it suggest that she experienced her new life as a socially and politically engaged humanitarian worker as easy and uncomplicated. In fact, she often emphasised that leading a new humanitarian NGO was challenging. It also caused personal stress and anguish, and Trude readily admitted that, when it got too demanding, she "sometimes wished that she did not care so much." Nevertheless, the prospect of returning to her former carefree life was described as both *impossible* (because she had changed too much and felt obligated to continue her work) and *undesirable* (because she considered her current life more meaningful).

In the next section, I will provide a different reading of Trude's narrative by attending to her modes of subjectivation. More specifically, in what role—or as what—did Trude feel called upon to help the refugees arriving on the Greek Islands? Or, put differently, under which category or categories did she feel that the ethical demand applied to her?[23]

However, before I begin, a bit should be said about her choice of words and storyline. As mentioned above, her narrative closely resembles Christian revelation narratives. Since Trude does not believe in God, it is tempting to read her experience as a case of the "secularization of the religious" or "the religious after religion" as Gauchet put it (Fassin 2012: 249). As Fassin argues, contemporary Euro-American humanitarianism might describe itself as secular, but remains inscribed within a particular Christian history and moral economy (2012: 251; see also Asad 2003; Barnett and Weiss 2012; Fountain, 2015; Taylor 2007). The same can be said about Norway. While often described as comparatively secular, Norwegian society remains deeply influenced by its Christian heritage to the extent that many Norwegians equate it with Norwegian culture or tradition (on Norwegian secularism, see Bangstad et al 2012). Another manifestation of this imbrication is that it is nearly impossible to distinguish secular values and concepts from Christian ones (Bendixsen and Wyller 2020).

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[23] These questions are inspired by Foucault's late work on ethics and the way it has been developed in anthropology, especially by Laidlaw (2002; 2014) and Faubion (2011).

Yet, while this helps explain why Trude found it so difficult to describe her experience in non-religious terms, it does not clarify why her call was "heard, felt and taken up." To answer this question, some might want to push the link between humanitarian sentiments and Christianity further. Pointing to the enduring legacy of evangelicalism and missionary thinking in contemporary humanitarianism (Barnett 2011: 21, 54; Fountain 2015: 85) or Norwegian consciousness (Gullestad 2007), they might read her call to help refugees in Greece as a neo-colonial missionary impulse to save strangers. My own reading does not support this conclusion, at least not without many qualifications. Conversely, I understand her call as primarily existential: a call of conscience, though not as Heidegger theorised it.

Modes of subjectivation

In what role, or as what, did Trude feel called upon to do something to help the boat refugees arriving in Greece? Based on a closer reading of my interview with her and other fieldwork material, I have identified two key modes of subjectivation at work at the moment she experienced her call. The first, and most significant, was her position as a mother of young children living in comparative ease and comfort in Norway. As she recalled during our interview, "when I heard about all the children who risked their lives on the Mediterranean, I remember thinking that children are not supposed to experience that." For the sake of clarity, there were two overlapping identities at work. The first was that of Trude as a mother, and the second her status as a privileged citizen of Norway, typically understood by Norwegians to be the richest and most peaceful country in the world, largely protected from global crises by its robust state and economy, and peripheral geographical location on the northern fringe of Europe (Gullestad 2006a; Leira 2013).

I suggest that these identities worked together to shape Trude's affective experience and existential compulsion to do something. As a mother, she was easily moved by the thought of frightened children arriving or dying enroute to Europe. As she later emphasised, she could also feel an affective bond with their parents. However, as a well-off Norwegian citizen, her confrontation with the boat refugees' plight also provoked a strong and uncomfortable sense of wrongness or injustice. In fact, standing in front of her daughter's overcrowded wardrobe, the contrasts between her own children's excess and the hardships of refugee children risking their lives at sea felt simply unbearable.

Crucially, these affective responses are not natural, but rooted in cultural norms and histories. The first sentiment, which we might describe as emotional proximity with refugee children, is

embedded in Norwegian and broader Western narratives of young children as not only particularly vulnerable but also morally and politically innocent, and thus especially worthy of sympathy, care, and protection (Burman 1994; Malkki 2010; 2015; Ticktin 2017; Wark 1995). The second response I described in the Introduction of this thesis as a particular form of Scandinavian guilt/shame that commonly arises when Scandinavians are confronted with their own privilege vis-à-vis the suffering global others (Oxfeldt et al 2016). As I noted there, this Scandinavian guilt/shame has pietistic roots and is also entangled with Norway's Christian missionary history (Gullestad 2007). However, as mentioned, it cannot be reduced to a neo-colonial missionary impulse to save strangers. Conversely, I understand Trude's call as a call of conscience prompted by an uncomfortable confrontation with extreme global inequalities and her own family's comfort and privilege.

The second mode of subjectivation I identified is Trude's self-described identity as a citizen of Europe with a long-term and affectionate relationship with Greece. Notably, her political and personal attachments to Europe and Greece were often sidelined when she narrated her revelation story in public, but emerged prominently in interviews when asked to elaborate on her thoughts and opinions. For instance, both during our interview and others, she said she was shocked when she realised that young children were drowning on the doorstep of Europe, which she described as "our own continent" and "the cradle of civilization." This suggests that she felt called to help, in part, as an indignant European citizen attached to ideas of European humanism and superiority (see Chapter 1). Second, my interview and conversations with her indicated that her call to go to Greece was also shaped by her intimate relationship with the country. As noted, she lived in Greece for eight years before getting a divorce and moving home to Norway. During these years, she learned to speak fluent Greek and grew both familiar and fond of the country's sunny climate and hospitable culture. Despite moving home and remarrying, she also continued to travel to Greece nearly every summer holiday and described the country as her *"andre hjemland"* (second homeland). In light of this, it is not difficult to imagine that Trude, when asked to elaborate on her decision during our interview, described an urge to witness and understand not only "who the refugees were," but also how her "second homeland" was coping with the crisis. In retrospect, she also described a sense of personal obligation to the Greek people who had welcomed and accepted her as one of their own, despite her initially patchy knowledge of Greek culture, language, and customs.

Locating the humanitarian impulse

As I described in the introductory chapter, many scholars have highlighted ordinary citizens' humanitarian impulse to do something in response to the "refugee crisis". While this desire might be characteristic of our contemporary age, I concur with Bornstein and Redfield that "an anthropological perspective must engage with such desires in the context of 'the actual places they unfold and the larger histories they draw upon'" (2011: 27). In the previous section, I attempted to do this by unpacking Trude's call to help ethnographically. Rather than interpreting the call in generic and conventional terms (e.g., as a missionary impulse or cosmopolitan desire to help distant others), or superimposing abstract philosophical theories, I attended to the moment and scene where Trude's experienced her call, and analysed it as a moment of subjectivation. On the one hand, this analysis highlighted the affective and ethical significance of her role and position as a mother-of-five. This affirms a well-recognised point in the anthropological literature on humanitarianism, namely the widespread and selective concern for and empathy with refugee children, typically seen to embody human goodness and representative of a pure and common humanity (see especially Malkki 2010: 60; 2015: 79). However, Trude was not called to help as a generic mother, but as a Norwegian mother living with her family in a safe and affluent neighbourhood. Moreover, while she felt empathy and identification with refugee children and their parents, it was arguably the huge distance, or contrast, between her family's abundance vis-à-vis the refugee children she heard about on the radio, which caused her affective and ethical response.

While Trude narrated her decision to help refugees in Greece as a radical break with her previous concerns and sensibilities, I also pointed to the influence of her pre-existing attachments as a citizen of Europe who regards Greece as her second homeland. Notably, while highlighting these factors, I do not question Trude's personal experience of rupture and transformation. Conversely, my research suggests that her decision was more impulsive and transformative than equivalent decisions made by the majority of my other interlocutors. In the words of Arendt (1958), it represented a "new beginning," the beginning of someone and something new. However, such new beginnings, or ruptures, look less mysterious and unconditioned when examined ethnographically (cf. Holbraad et al, 2019). The same goes with affects, which, although less structured and formed than emotions (Ngai 2005), also have social and cultural histories and underpinnings (see Introduction).

Before I conclude this section, three additional points should be made. First, as already

alluded to, Trude's personal identity and background not only shaped her decision to help refugees in Greece, but have also strongly influenced DiH's identity, work, and priorities. The clearest example of this is perhaps DiH's mission statement, which from the very beginning wowed to "focus particularly on helping children and their mothers".

Second, as argued in the Introduction, it is important not to anchor people to specific self-representations or freeze their convictions and understandings. In line with Trude's own sense of becoming more politically aware and critical of her own country, one of the changes I detected in her discourse was a stronger political voice and consciousness. For instance, while she initially articulated feelings of personal shame when confronted with the plight of refugee children vis-à-vis her own children's comfortable lifestyle, she increasingly expressed a more political and collective form of shame on behalf of Europe and specifically the Norwegian state. In public interviews and speeches, she also increasingly spoke from her position as a rights-bearing and voting citizen seeking to hold her government accountable.

Moreover, with time and enhanced knowledge, Trude's urge to witness and understand how her "second homeland" was coping with the crisis also developed into a strong conviction that Greece was abandoned and betrayed by other European countries, leaving it with a disproportionate and unmanageable share of the responsibility of caring for refugees in Europe. This recognition affected her political discourse, which increasingly demanded that Norway show intra-European solidarity rather than merely humanity and compassion. I further observed how her self-conception shifted from initially describing herself as an observer and helper to being an agent of history acting against the current and anticipating how these actions will be judged in the future.

Third, while Trude accepted my reading of her different modes of subjectivation, she vehemently insisted that it was neither because of her "Norwegianness" (that is, her supposedly compassionate disposition, see Leira 2013) nor her status as a Norwegian citizen that she provided help and support to refugees in Greece. Conversely, she also insisted strongly that she was "first and foremost a *'medmenneske'* helping other *'medmennesker.'"* It is useful to pause and reflect on this contention, as it illustrates the importance of situating cosmopolitan claims and concepts. It also illustrates how a concept and discourse can be simultaneously political and depoliticising.

According to Norwegian dictionaries, *medmenneske* means to "be a human in relation to other humans". Following this definition, it is thus a relational and equalising concept that declares a fundamental unity and equality amongst all people. The concept is widely used in Norwegian public discourse both to designate self and others and as an adjective ("*medmenneskelig*") and adverb ("*vise medmenneskelighet*"). While similar concepts exist in many other languages, it has also been highlighted and promoted by the Norwegian state and politicians as an important and specific Norwegian value.[24]

When I first encountered the concept in DiH's discourse, I read it as a depoliticising term. Like many scholars have warned, representing people as "mere humans" erases politics and history (Arendt 2017 [1951]; Malkki 1995). This is not only the case when discussing refugees; it also applies to their so-called helpers or advocates whose identification with refugees as "fellow human beings" masks inequalities in power and privilege. Moreover, terms like *"medmenneske"* treat the human as an uncomplicated and undifferentiated category (Jobson 2020), thus failing to recognise how racism divide humanity into "full humans, not-quite humans, and nonhumans" (Weheliye 2018: 4; see also Çubukçu 2017).[25]

However, I gained a more nuanced perspective through my fieldwork. First, from the viewpoint of Trude and many other interlocutors, self-identifying as a *"medmenneske* helping other *medmennesker"* was a basic but crucial recognition of common humanity and global equality in a world and region characterised by growing nativism and xenophobia. That refugees in Greece frequently urged the people and leaders of Europe to recognise their humanity, and often asserted that they were not treated as human beings but animals, gave this recognition added and specific value (Mohammed and Al-Obeed 2020; see also Gilroy 2019; Nguyen 2018). Secondly, while identifying as *"medmennesker"* can be depoliticizing,

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[24] For instance, Rozakou (2016) describes the Hellenic Red Cross's mission as "assisting suffering fellow humans (συνανθρώπους)." Likewise, Brković (2017) argues that humanitarian assistance in former Yugoslav countries is based on a socio-culturally specific notion of humanness (*ljudskost*, *čovječnost*) which theoretically extends to all people in the world. Over the course of my fieldwork, I also encountered volunteers, humanitarian workers and refugees from many different countries who described themselves as "humans helping other humans." According to the Norwegian historian of ideas, Dag Herbjørnsrud, the concept "fellow human(s)" is so common that he believes it exists in some way or another in nearly all languages in the world (personal conversation). Nevertheless, the concept has been claimed as a specific Norwegian value. This is illustrated by the fact that the words *medmenneske(r)* and *medmenneskelighet* were mentioned 12 times in the *Value Commission Report* from 2001 (Syse et al 2001).

[25] Drawing on Wynter and Du Bois, Pallister-Wilkins (2021: 98) argues that the failure to recognise the racial hierarchies embedded in universalist understanding of the human is precisely what provides humanitarianism with its normative power, and simultaneously allows white supremacy to go unchallenged and thrive.

we shall see that Trude and many DiH volunteers used this concept to frame helping and welcoming refugees as a fundamental Norwegian value. Notably, for them, being a "*medmenneske"* did not mean being an unrooted cosmopolitan or universal human subject. Conversely, by helping refugees, they claimed to act both as "*medmennesker"* and as true or authentic Norwegians.

Conclusion: A founding myth?

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, my purpose was to offer two overlapping ways of reading Trude's narrative ethnographically. So far, I have provided a close, but explorative reading of her story with the intention to better understand her affective and ethical experience of being called to help in her daughter's bedroom. To conclude, I will suggest another way of reading her narrative, namely as a founding myth for DiH. In popular discourse, the word "myth" is equated with falsehood or fiction, as something opposed to rather than in continuation with history (Levi-Strauss 2005[1978]: 18). Myths are also commonly viewed suspiciously as tools of political or religious indoctrination (Paul 2014) or something associated only with "primitive" or religious communities (Segel 2004). In contrast to this everyday usage of the term, I consider myths as a type of story we frequently encounter in politics, literature, and other arenas of public life, and which is characterised by deep symbolic meanings and performative powers (ibid). A founding myth is a particular genre of myth which, simply put, tells a tale about how a polity came into existence. Like other myths, founding myths often involve a hero or protagonist overcoming a challenge or difficulty, or establishing a break from the past. However, while seeking to explain something, the purpose of founding myths cannot be reduced to this. First, myths have a social or intersubjective dimension: they work to establish collective histories, identities, and communities and interpellate people as members (Paul 2014: 27). Second, founding myths are often means of exercising power through naturalisation or legitimation.[26]

With this in mind, what work does Trude's narrative do as a founding myth for DiH? To answer this question, it is useful to first consider what her narrative has in common with other humanitarian organisations' creation stories. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter,

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[26] See, for example, Lähdesmäki (2018) for a discussion of the legitimising and naturalising effects of the EU's founding myth.

these often involve their founder(s) encountering and responding to instances of human suffering and becoming galvanised or even transformed as a result. For instance, the story of ICRC's founder Henry Dunant assisting wounded soldiers on the battlefield of Solferino is often "told as a triumph of human spirit over barbarity" (Redfield 2013: 46). However, on a less abstract level, it is also a story about a pious businessman and civilian from a wealthy Genevan family who was touched by the plight of the tormented soldiers he accidently stumbled upon and "threw himself fervently into the work" of caring for them (ibid: 45). MSF's creation story similarly involves the founders' encounters with suffering bodies, though it reflects a changing humanitarian landscape: civilians including children dying in a civil war in Africa (Redfield 2013). Yet, particularly prominent in MSF's foundation story is Kouchner's decision to bear witness and openly criticise the Red Cross for being silent and complicit (Brauman 2012; Redfield 2013). As Redfield observes, "the historical record suggests a more gradual and muted departure from the Red Cross fold." However, the radical departure emphasised in the mythic version of the story better serves MSF's rebellious identity and ethos (Redfield 2013: 102).

As examined above, important elements in Trude's narrative resonate with the founding myths of both the ICRC and MSF. First, Trude's emphasis on being pulled into action by the sheer need she encountered on the shoreline of Lesvos resonates with the portrayal of Dunant as an inexperienced civilian turning nurse when witnessing suffering soldiers on the battlefield. In both narratives, it is emphasised that the decision to help were taken spontaneously and by a non-professional. Moreover, both narratives are coloured by the protagonists' expression of emotions. All of these factors suggest a kind of authenticity (Lazar 2018) or sincerity (Webster 2013). However, in contrast to the more famous example of Dunant, Trude's narrative is characterised by its focus on her position as a Norwegian mother-of-five.

The symbolic power of motherhood has long been recognised by feminist scholars as a political and emotional resource (e.g., Athanasiou 2017), but is mobilised in specific ways by Trude and DiH. Particularly significant in her narrative is her mysterious and affective experience of being called to help in her daughter's bedroom. As Smirl (2015) observes, aid workers commonly narrate their decision to intervene as a personal call (see also Drążkiewicz 2020). Like helping someone spontaneously, this suggests a non-calculated or morally pure intention to help. Yet, in the same way as the scene of the battlefield matters in ICRC's

creation story, the image of Trude receiving her call while sorting her daughter's overcrowded wardrobe is also significant. While the battlefield symbolises barbarism, the latter scene epitomises Norwegian affluence and excess. As shown in Chapter 4, this symbolic scene resonated with many DIH volunteers who told me they could easily identify with Trude's ambivalent feelings as a caring mother of overprivileged Norwegian children. At the same time, the different ingredients in Trude's narrative—her identity as an ordinary mother-of-five, the sudden and powerful call in her daughter's bedroom, and her spontaneous and affective decision to help refugees—were also utilised by DiH as a testimony of the organisation's authentic or genuine origin and mission.

It is further crucial to underscore that Trude did not represent herself as an idealised mother figure (such as, for instance, the Buddhist founder Cheng Yen does (see Huang 2009)), as much as an *ordinary* Norwegian mother balancing her new-born humanitarian engagement with ongoing care and commitments to her family at home. Significant is also Trude's emphasis on her proven ability to assist refugees despite her lack of professional training and prior experience with humanitarian work. As we shall see, these aspects of her narrative have convinced many volunteers that helping refugees on the doorstep to Europe is not only urgent, but also practically feasible for a wide range of Norwegian citizens (see Chapter 4). However, the emphasis on Trude's ordinariness can also be read as a strategic attempt to appeal to Norwegian values of egalitarianism, humility and anti-elitism (Eriksen 1993; Skirbekk 2002). Moreover, a careful reading of Trude's narrative shows how her "ordinariness" takes considerably work to construct and sustain. Left out of this narrative is, for example, the fact that Trude's decision to, first, travel spontaneously to Greece to help refugees, and subsequently, quit her job and build a humanitarian organisation from scratch, were both clearly dependent on her family's economic wealth and security. When constructing her ordinariness, Trude also downplayed other factors that makes her less ordinary or similar to prospective volunteers, such as her home and upbringing in one of Norway's poshest neighbourhoods and long-standing personal connection to Greece.

Second, Trude's emphasis on the shocking absence of professional organisations on Lesvos resonates with MSF's emphasis on the silence of the Red Cross in Biafra. In both narratives, it is the declared failure of more established organisations which legitimises the establishment of a new organisation constructed as more ethical and responsible. As we shall see in the next

chapter, DiH continued to legitimise its expanding work and responsibilities in Greece with reference to the absence of more established humanitarian organisations.

At the same time, other aspects of Trude's persona received more emphasis, and were drawn on strategically to please or appeal to specific audiences (cf. Drążkiewicz 2020). This includes Trude's personal familiarity with the Greek society and language, which worked to differentiate DiH from other international NGOs construed as less knowledgeable or sensitive to Greece's predicaments. It also includes Trude's background from the private sector, which was increasingly referenced to explain DiH's alleged efficiency, dynamism and inventiveness vis-à-vis more established humanitarian organisations. Notably, these aspects were mobilised to present Trude and DiH as not only authentic and sincere but also competent and productive. Emphasising these latter qualities were especially important in front of funders and professional INGOs, but also appealed to some volunteers who were suspicious of the humanitarian industry or foreign interventions (see Chapter 4).

Finally, a few words must be said about her transformation narrative. As exemplified by Dunant's narrative and Henquinet's (2020) recent work on World Vision, humanitarian founders often describe themselves as profoundly shaped by their humanitarian work and encounters. Building on recent anthropological work on ethics, Henquinet analyses World Vision's founders' narrated transformation as "a neo-evangelical North American *ethical self-formation* developing alongside responses to suffering overseas" (Campbell 2020: 589, emphasis added). However, while Trude has certainly cultivated a new moral persona, her narrative of returning home to Norway as a different person has stronger affinities with Christian Born-Again conversion narratives. As Webster argues, these narratives are "not entirely or even predominantly a project of self-transformation." Conversely, he suggests that we can read these narratives as a kind of evangelism, that is, a relational performance and interaction with listeners intended to "move" or "call upon" them and ultimately "reform their soul" (2013: 121-123).

Building on Webster's argument, I argue that we can view Trude's emphasis on her personal experience and transformation as an intentional interaction with her audience, inviting them to volunteer with the organisation and thus potentially transform themselves. This invitation not only appeals to Christians seeking to follow Jesus' example (Henquinet 2020), but also to those who in our current neoliberal culture are in constant search for ways to improve or work on themselves (Gershon 2011). As we shall see, Trude's transformation narrative also serves

to exemplify DiH's vision of volunteering as a route to *social* and *political* transformation, as it is imagined (and emphasised) that volunteers will return home (like Trude) with new attitudes and understandings and change their societies from within (see Chapter 5).

Chapter 3:

Filling humanitarian gaps

> *"What we are doing here is good,*
> *but of course it is not ideal.*
> *In an ideal world, we [volunteers]*
> *would all be superfluous."*
> -DiH coordinator on Lesvos

In the last chapter, I examined DiH's birth and foundation story. This chapter traces its organisational trajectory and shifting and contested efforts to fill humanitarian gaps on the European borderland.[27] It shows how the organisation has relocated and adjusted its work in response to enduring but changing humanitarian gaps, needs, growing criminalisation of aid, and local resistance. Particular emphasis is placed on DiH's efforts to negotiate access and legitimacy vis-à-vis Greek authorities and more established humanitarian organisations, as well as local residents and refugees. I further highlight some of the ethical and political dilemmas and debates that have followed, focusing especially on the question of professionalisation and the risks of de-politicisation and normalisation. The chapter argues that DiH's decision to accept and continue its work with unaccompanied minors inside the Moria camp serves as a useful limit case that illustrates the inevitable impurity of humanitarian assistance in a field where responsibility is increasingly outsourced to volunteers and care becomes easily entangled with the politics of containment. I show that DiH is not oblivious to this impurity, and highlight their distinct reasoning and wider implications for refugees' access to rights and accountability.

Organisational trajectory

As described in the previous chapter, DiH was established when Trude returned from Lesvos to Norway and asked herself how she could do more to help the refugees arriving on

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[27] Parts of this chapter has previously been published in a book chapter, see Mogstad (2021).

European shorelines in unprecedented numbers. As I argued, the organisation responded to two seemingly complementary needs: 1) the absence of humanitarian assistance Trude had witnessed on Lesvos, and 2) ordinary Norwegian citizens' need to help (Malkki 2015) or felt obligation to "do something" in response to images of suffering and rescue broadcast on TV and circulating on social media.

Driven by a clear sense of moral urgency, DiH started work immediately. Only three days after Trude returned to Norway on September 2nd, 2015, a team of 16 self-recruited volunteers travelled to Lesvos, representing the first drops in the field. Trude placed the only person she knew in charge and instructed them to team up with a group of volunteers led by a British couple living on the island. Meanwhile, she put together a small team of domestic volunteers to deal with the surge of people who contacted her because they wanted to help or volunteer on the frontline of the crisis (Papataxiarchis 2016). On top of responding to and registering prospective volunteers, the domestic volunteers sorted and shipped donated clothes, created guidelines, managed finances, and provided updates on social media. The domestic volunteers initially consisted of Trude's friends who had followed her trip on the Facebook group and shared her new-born humanitarian sensibilities. Like her, some had lived in Greece for several years and thus also shared her affection and care for the country. Soon, a few more people also got involved after contacting her and asking how they could contribute from home. Of particular significance was Jenny, a young mother who first ran the organisation's warehouse in 2015 and later assumed various managerial and advisory roles. While the first team of volunteers leaving for Lesvos in September consisted of mixed genders, all the domestic volunteers were initially women, ranging in age from the late-twenties to the mid-fifties.

DiH also quickly recruited a human resources (HR) and emergency manager, a woman in her fifties named Mette. Like Trude, she had no previous experience with the humanitarian sector, but had worked many years for private companies. Unlike Trude, she had also been a legal guardian of several unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Norway in 2014 and earlier a support contact for people suffering from mental illness. These two middle-aged women formed the backbone of the organisation throughout its first five years of existence and were also the first to be officially employed on full-time contracts in the spring of 2016. Reflecting on the first hectic months of the organisation's life in their separate interviews, Trude and Mette both emphasised that building a new humanitarian organisation from scratch was

challenging, especially given their lack of experience with the humanitarian industry and organisational work. As Trude often put it, "it was a steep learning curve."

However, both women also argued that their background in the private sector proved useful and fundamentally shaped DiH's practices and structure. Perhaps most notably, Trude's experience working with customer relations shaped the organisation's focus on being easily accessible and quick to respond—a feature that many volunteers said they appreciated and distinguished DiH from many other organisations (see also Jumbert 2020). As Mette specified, the two women's background in the private sector also made them think "a bit business-like," not with the intention of making profit, but in terms of "making demands, putting in place systems for monitoring and evaluation, and ensuring role distributions and transparency." The two women's unorthodox backgrounds also made it easier for them to "think outside the humanitarian box," she added, and explained that not being bound by conventional structures and norms made the organisation more flexible and creative.

From first-responders to camp-workers

Motivated by a desire to fill humanitarian gaps, DiH relocated and reinvented its operations many times from its birth in September 2015 to the end of my fieldwork in January 2020. Initially, DIH focused exclusively on assisting boat refugees on Lesvos. Easily recognisable by volunteers' yellow vests and drop logo, DiH became a well-known actor on the island and was awarded the "Winner of the best volunteer group" prize by the UNHCR and the Aegaeon University on Chios in December 2015. However, by the end of 2015, after several months of increasing global attention, Lesvos had become a crowded field. As Rozakou (2017a, para. 13) writes, "intergovernmental, international and national humanitarian organizations, local grassroots groups, local citizens, independent volunteers and solidarians worked together, formed unexpected coalitions, collaborated and often competed with one another." The situation was chaotic. Several volunteers told me that, by Christmas 2015 and especially during the first weeks of 2016, there were simply too many people on the beaches trying to help. Similarly, Guribye and Mydland concluded that there were eventually "too many actors, with too many agendas and too little collaboration." (2018: 360). Lack of systems for coordination and information also added to existing mistrust between volunteers and established humanitarian actors and increased tensions between volunteers and local residents and authorities (ibid; Papataxiarchis 2016).

Image 10: Landing support on Lesvos 2015 (photo: DiH).

Responding to the changing conditions on Lesvos, DiH started to work on Chios, where fewer organisations were present. At first, they joined a local organisation scouting for boats and providing landing assistance. However, when I first encountered DiH for my pilot study on Chios in September 2016, they had shifted their focus to organising children's activities and distributing daily meals to refugees in two makeshift camps in the city centre. Before the closure of the Balkan route, DiH volunteers also provided basic assistance to people moving along the migrant trail, such as the port of Piraeus and the border between Greece and Macedonia. DiH also started to work in various reception centres on the Greek mainland, where they heard that help was needed. For better or worse, gaining access to these, mostly unofficial or temporary structures, was not difficult. Volunteer organisations like DiH worked next to independent volunteers and professional humanitarian organisations that declared their resources were overstretched (IRC 2016; Kynsilehto 2018).

However, during 2016 and 2017, Greek authorities responded to the prolonged crisis by closing and evacuating most of the provisional structures and replacing them with official camps, typically located in spatially isolated and socially marginalised spaces (Kandylis 2019). From 2016 onwards, these camps became long-term residences for tens of thousands of asylum seekers stuck in limbo on the doorstep to Europe. For volunteer organisations like DiH, gaining access to these new and official camps became more difficult. Still, on the Greek mainland, the organisation was invited to work inside Skaramagas in Athens, one of the largest camps in Greece, and Nea Kavala in northern Greece by the INGOs that were *de facto* running the camps. Working alongside more established humanitarian organisations, DiH assumed responsibility for critical tasks, including the scheduled distribution of dry food and clothes.

Image 11: Clothing distribution (photo: DiH).

Simultaneously, DiH also responded to the longevity of the crisis by moving beyond the traditional humanitarian tasks of responding to emergencies and covering necessities. Like many other volunteer organisations in Greece, it focused increasingly on providing psychosocial support through various recreational activities and social spaces, including sports, arts and crafts, libraries, and movie screenings. In Skaramagas, DiH also organised daily activities for children and created a space for mothers to meet and care for their babies. During my fieldwork, these "mother and baby spaces" usually provided tea and biscuits, diapers, sanitary items and milk for the children, but also intermittent visits from volunteer nurses providing guidance and information. DiH also offered informal English classes for men and women at different levels. While generally taught by untrained volunteer teachers— and often non-native English speakers like myself—these classes were hugely popular and typically framed as means to support refugees' professional development and future integration into European societies.

While focusing predominantly on grammar and vocabulary, volunteers were also commonly encouraged to teach their refugee students about European society and culture. Like the advice and guidance from the visiting nurses, this information was generally viewed as value-neutral. However, like the volunteers Braun (2017) studied in Germany, some volunteers linked the English classes to a liberal feminist agenda of emancipating refugee/Muslim women (Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1988). Notably, these volunteers not only believed that teaching refugee women to speak English would enable them to become more independent in their future lives as European citizens. Many also emphasised the importance of teaching female, and specifically male, refugees about gender and sexual equality and freedom in

Europe. Underlying the seemingly innocent goal of empowering refugees (and refugee women in particular) were thus gendered and racialised stereotypes of non-European refugees as "backwards" or oppressed, but also neo-colonial desires to educate and civilise and a stern belief in the supremacy of European culture and values.

Several DiH activities were also designed to promote a more dignified and normalised existence for refugees waiting or stuck in legal and existential limbo in camps (Cabot 2012; Hage 2009). For instance, in both Skaramagas and Nea Kavala, DiH distributed fabric and organised a system where camp residents could book appointments to access sewing machines. During my fieldwork, the sewing room attracted long queues of men and women who wanted to repair or make clothes or curtains for decoration or privacy in their containers, but it was also a space for socialising. In Nea Kavala, the organisation rented bikes so camp residents could cycle to the nearest supermarket and village, and ran a laundry service and tool-shed where refugees came to create or repair furniture, bikes, and other items. In both camps, we also organised social gatherings to mark religious and other holidays, with the official goal of improving cohesion and contributing to a sense of community amongst the diverse people living in the camp. Volunteers also ran "drop shops", which were distribution centres designed like clothing stores where camp residents could come for scheduled appointments and use DiH's digital currency (drops) to buy clothes they liked. Framed in the language of liberalism, the drop shop was designed to promote freedom of choice as a dignified alternative to the traditional handouts I had witnessed on Chios in 2016.

A coordinator in Nea Kavala also described the drop shop as a "social hub, where residents can shop with their friends and family, hang out and chat with each other and our volunteers, and, for a moment feel some kind of normalcy in life—having to face 'finance' decisions and fashion dilemmas." During my fieldwork in Skaramagas and Nea Kavala, much work was dedicated to realising this vision of normalcy, which coordinators also stressed depended on volunteers' performance. For instance, volunteers were told to behave as shop assistants helping their customers find the right clothes, run the check-out counter, and keep the shop "nice and tidy like a H&M store." As a regular volunteer in DiH's drop shop in Skaramagas (and to a lesser extent, Nea Kavala), I sometimes observed this vision materialise. For instance, I often saw teenagers argue with their mothers about what shoes or clothes to buy, and many customers spent a considerable amount of time in the fitting room making sure they found something that suited them, and asking their friends or a "shop assistant" for advice.

However, I also witnessed many episodes and encounters that exposed the limits of the drop shop as a means of providing choice, dignity, and normalcy. Especially at the check-out counter, the imagined customer/shop assistant relationship was also frequently reverted back to a giver/recipient hierarchy. Moreover, refugees regularly complained about the selection and quality of clothes and the rules governing how much they could buy.[28]

Image 12 and 13: DiH's "drop shop" in Skaramagas.

Back to Lesvos

In January 2018, DiH returned to Lesvos, which, following the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, had become a place of containment of people waiting for a decision on their asylum claims or permission to move to the mainland (see Chapter 1). Partly because of the deal, this was a period with fewer arrivals, and most of the boats that crossed into Greek waters were intercepted and brought to shore by the coastguard or Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency). Not fully aware of this, DiH resumed boat spotting. However, according to the coordinator on site, volunteers complained that nothing happened and she had to send them to work for other organisations during the day to keep them feeling busy and useful.

After a few months, DiH decided to adjust to the changing humanitarian landscape and needs on the island by reorganising its work. To serve the population in Moria camp—the largest camp on Lesvos and infamous for its overcrowded and unsanitary facilities (Rozakou 2019; see also chapter 1)—the organisation rented an old bakery in nearby Moria village, where from May 2018 it ran an activity and educational centre. In the beginning, the centre attracted

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[28] For two different but insightful analyses of how to read refugees' dissatisfactions with aid services and distributions, see Trundle (2014) and Dunn (2014). In a more recent publication, Dunn (2018) also argues that humanitarian agencies leave displaced people in a state of limbo unable to act as normal citizens.

few visitors, causing several volunteers to doubt whether their services were actually needed (see also Bendixsen 2018). However, during the autumn, and following extensive outreach, the centre became increasingly popular, prompting DiH to rent the adjacent apartment on the second floor and later an additional building in the same neighbourhood to make space for more visitors. The offered activities varied, but generally involved informal English lessons and a daily café where refugees could come for tea or coffee, listen to music, play cards and board games, or simply stay warm during the cold winter months. During my fieldwork, many also came to the café to use the Wi-Fi or sewing machines in the room next door.

Eager to serve their target group, DiH also created a separate space for women and children only, where they served tea and biscuits and provided various toys and games, arts and crafts, books, and make-up kits. Depending on the initiative and interests of the volunteers and women attending, the space was sometimes used to teach informal English, but could just as easily turn into a henna and nail salon or an informal knitting or sewing workshop. While volunteers acted as hosts, serving drinks and cleaning, both the café and the women and children space also provided an opportunity for volunteers and refugees to socialise and engage in mutual learning. During my fieldwork, the coordinators on Lesvos also introduced new and more structured activities at the centre, including Greek, computer, painting, chess, and yoga classes. To ensure better quality and continuity in the English classes, a group of long-term volunteers also created a teaching curriculum dubbed "Teaching for dummies."

Notably, DiH staff and volunteers generally described the centre in Moria village as a *"pusterom"* (breathing space) or home for refugees looking to escape the congested and tense atmosphere in the camp. However, as I discuss below, some staff and coordinators also embraced more ambitious visions, including empowerment and integration, or building bridges with Greek residents in the village. In 2019, DiH also teamed up with a Christian teaching organisation from the US to provide informal education for children in Moria. The project received top priority and had the purpose of helping fill the massive educational gaps on the island and later ease the children's transition to formal schooling.
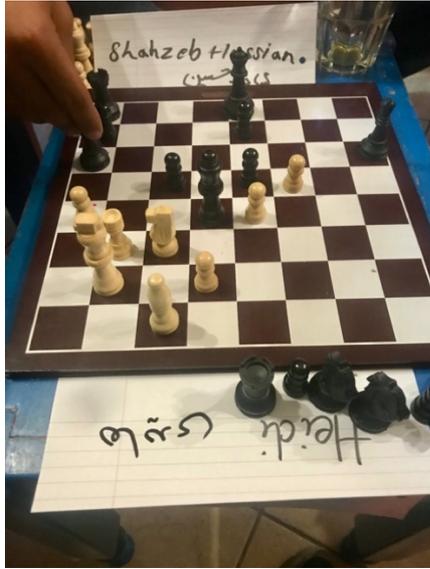
Image 14 and 15: Chess and sewing at DiH's activity centre in Moria village.

In the spring of 2019, DiH started to work inside Moria camp, where volunteers were asked to provide recreational activities to unaccompanied minors living in separate sections or safe zones. Around that time, the organisation also recruited nurses to a volunteer-run medical clinic inside the camp. From 2018 onwards, but especially during the autumn and winter of 2019 when the conditions in Moria camp rapidly deteriorated, DiH donated a large number of blankets, sleeping bags, medicines, and other essential items to the organisations or authorities responsible for distribution. In 2019, DiH moreover sent a small team of volunteers to Samos to provide activities for refugee youth in collaboration with other volunteer organisations.

Filling humanitarian gaps

As suggested, DiH has developed and assumed increasing responsibilities in response to shifting humanitarian gaps and needs. However, these two are not objective facts, but social constructs that must be identified and declared. As mentioned in the previous chapter, new organisations often emerge on the basis of declared institutional failures. This was also the case with DiH. Similar to volunteers interviewed by other scholars (Kitching et al 2016; Larsen 2018), my interlocutors were generally harsh in their criticism of the perceived inadequate INGO and UNHCR response in 2015 and 2016. Yet, whereas many volunteers expressed a lack of trust in the top-down agendas of these established actors (Guriby and Mydland 2018), DiH staff focused mostly on their absence. Indeed, the very premise for establishing the organisation in the first place was what Trude described as a "shocking

absence of large, professional humanitarian organisations" on Lesvos in 2015. Throughout my fieldwork, similar considerations led DiH to send their volunteers to other locations in Greece.

Despite the steady growth of international and Greek organisations (Tsitselikis 2019), DiH also continued to criticise the large, professional humanitarian organisations for being absent or withdrawing from the frontline, or for not doing enough to assist the most vulnerable refugees. Staff and coordinators were specifically vocal concerning the chronically overcrowded Moria camp on Lesvos. During 2016 and 2017, many big INGOs suspended their operations inside Moria, either in protest against the conditions in the camp and harshening border regime, or as a result of changes to EU funding leaving the Greek government in charge. Henceforth, the daily operations of the camp increasingly depended on volunteer organisations providing goods and services, including medical assistance and protection (Kalir and Rozakou 2016; Rozakou 2019). After an unaccompanied 15-year-old Afghan boy living in a protected zone where DiH worked was stabbed to death by some of his peers in August 2019, Trude expressed her disapproval of the situation in a Norwegian newspaper:

> "When a refugee camp on our own continent is described as one of the worst in the world, you expect that all the big established humanitarian organisations turn up. This is unfortunately not the case. Greece is geographically so close and it should be possible to come. IRC [International Rescue Committee], NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council], Save the Children and other humanitarian giants are sorely missed."

It is worth dwelling on the notion of the absence of the big humanitarian organisations. Of relevance is not only its truthfulness, but also the assumptions embedded in this statement and its performative effects. First, and most obviously, the statement can be read as an attribution of responsibility and blame. As Trnka and Trundle (2017) observe, claims of absence or lack of care regularly become the basis for attributions of particular forms of responsibility, namely blame and culpability. However, the statement is also a legitimacy claim. By deploring the absence of the humanitarian giants, DiH staff are simultaneously saying that "we are here and we need to be here because they are not." It is also interesting to note that it was primarily INGOs and UNHCR, and not the Greek state or the EU, that were criticised for being absent, although criticism of the latter also occurred. As Rozakou (2017b: 14) observes,

this reflects a "shift in authority." Yet, it also reflects a more general disregard of national sovereignty, and particularly the sovereignty of the Greek state, which remains politically, legally, financially, and symbolically marginalised within Europe and the EU (Cabot 2014; Green 2012; Herzfeld 2016; see also Chapter 1).

As illustrated by Trude's statement, DiH also emphasised Norway's geographical proximity to Greece and that the suffering of refugees in Moria and other Greek refugee camps took place on "our continent" or "European soil." This suggested not only greater access and opportunities to intervene, but a special moral or political responsibility. Like other calls for responsibility, it also indexed an ideal, aspiration, and obligation that are difficult to refute (Trnka and Trundle 2017: 1).

Notably, whether stressing their responsibility as Europeans, Norwegians or *"medmennesker"* (fellow humans), staff and volunteers rarely problematised the organisation's right to intervene or to transgress Greek sovereignty. Moreover, very few interlocutors considered that the local populations might interpret their work and presence as a form of colonialism (Howden and Fotiadis 2017; Rozakou 2019). Conversely, DiH's humanitarian efforts were typically framed as a display of both humanity and intra-European solidarity, and a means to support local aid efforts. Like the "this is not Europe" graffiti and statements analysed in Chapter 1, the presumed "right to intervene" might be partially explained by neo– or crypto-colonial attitudes of Greece as not fully modern, independent or capable of addressing its problems (Cabot 2014; Green 2012; Herzfeld 1987; 2002; 2016; Knight 2017). However, according to my analysis, it was mainly Norway's self-image as a small and innocent outsider of the EU and its practices of marginalisation and paternalism that worked here as an unacknowledged assumption.

Last, a word about the construction and framing of gaps and needs. As suggested above, DiH's decision to start a new project was often influenced and legitimised by the absence or withdrawal of more established humanitarian actors. However, in other contexts, it identified and constructed new gaps and needs, often in dialogue with other organisations or the UNHCR,[29] and increasingly—though not always—based on consultations with the refugee population. For instance, as mentioned above, DiH responded to the increased encampment of

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[29] For instance, DiH's decision to provide informal schooling for refugee children emerged from inter-organisational meetings led by the UNHCR.

refugees by creating projects to meet shifting needs, including psycho-social support, access to technologies, and informal education. In line with the recent humanitarian turn to innovation (Sandvik 2017; Scott-Smith 2016b), DiH also experimented with new technologies and humanitarian design (Nielsen 2020; Redfield 2019) to run their projects and distributions in a more effective, fair, and dignified manner.

In the process, the organisation embraced a new vocabulary. While previously talking about the urgent need for "direct and immediate assistance," DiH increasingly employed new buzzwords such as "dignified distribution," "empowerment," "breathing space" (*pusterom*), "community cohesion," and "building bridges." As Sandvik (2019) suggests, humanitarian buzzwords work by "singling out" and "framing problems," thereby providing the legitimacy humanitarian actors need to justify their efforts. DiH's emphasis on innovation, design and the aforementioned buzzwords were also used to distinguish the organisation's work and profile from other NGOs in Greece engaged in similar efforts of branding and boundary-making (Franck 2018).

Another rhetorical change should also be highlighted. As noted earlier, DiH initially wowed to focus specifically on helping children and their mothers. However, during my fieldwork, DiH's mission statement was revised to say that: "*Where appropriate,* our main focus will be on helping children and their mothers (emphasis added)". At first, I thought this change reflected the organisation's growing recognition that adult male refugees were also vulnerable or equally worthy of care and assistance (Ingvars 2019; Sandvik 2018). However, my conversations with staff indicated that this change was made, not primarily to signal new attitudes or prioritizations, but rather to reflect the *de facto* mixed demographics of DiH's beneficiaries, whom, depending on the activity, often included a relatively high proportion of single male refugees.

Negotiating access

As described, DiH demonstrated an impressive flexibility and willingness to embrace new projects and directions, and gradually assumed larger responsibilities. Yet, far from being a fully self-controlled process, the organisation's humanitarian space was increasingly controlled by various agencies of the Greek state and more established INGOs and UNCHR, which functioned as "humanitarian gatekeepers" (Rozakou 2019) for many humanitarian

projects and locations in Greece, specifically refugee camps. While DiH sometimes requested access to camps, the organisation was also invited by these gatekeepers to fill specific roles inside official camps like Skaramagas and Nea Kavala. According to DiH's understanding, these invitations were a direct result of the good impressions volunteers had made while working alongside these more professional actors in places like Piraeus and Idomeni. A similar vetting process took place on Lesvos. In the spring of 2019, a representative of a humanitarian NGO acting on behalf of Greek migration authorities asked DiH to provide recreational activities for unaccompanied minors living in protected zones in Moria camp. While DiH was not the only volunteer organisation tasked with providing services inside Moria, I observed that the request was first made after the NGO employee had visited our activity centre and successfully collaborated with the coordinators on a project to distribute sleeping bags. Moreover, DiH was initially asked to provide recreational activities to unaccompanied boys between 14 and 17 years of age. However, the coordinators were told that if the camp management was pleased with the organisation's work, DiH would be asked to assist the younger boys and girls in the safe zone too—which they were, after a few months. The camp management also required DiH to document that they had been officially approved by Greek authorities to work with refugees in Greece.

By performing responsibly, gaining official documents and approval, and developing professional and sometimes personal relationships with INGOs, DiH managed to gain entry to several official refugee camps where they assumed important roles. However, not infrequently, DiH's efforts to aid refugees were also met with considerable resistance. This was particularly the case on the Greek Islands, where local authorities increasingly lamented the influx of unregistered and unskilled volunteers and NGOs and accused them of not cooperating with the municipalities and disrupting or destabilising social life on the islands (Godin 2020; Papataxiarchis 2018; Rozakou 2019). For instance, in 2017, Greek authorities closed the makeshift camps centrally located in Chios Town (Souda and Dipithe) and transferred all asylum seekers to Vial, an aloof and isolated camp run by the Greek army. While DiH played a significant role in Souda and Dipithe by distributing food three times daily and arranging children's activities, all foreign NGOs were refused access to Vial and at one point even officially requested to leave the island. In 2019, DiH and other foreign NGOs were similarly denied access to the severely overcrowded and under-resourced Vathy refugee camp on Samos. On the mainland, DiH was invited by an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) to come and work in a refugee camp west of Athens and did so for a while, but was

later requested to leave to make space for Greek organisations that allegedly never showed up.

In my interviews and conversations with DiH staff, they often emphasised that it was not a problem to relocate or discontinue a project if they were replaced by local or more professional actors. While sometimes frustrating, they also said they understood why volunteer organisations had to prove their worth and relevance. What they found troubling, however, was having to navigate an unpredictable and largely incomprehensible humanitarian regime that often appeared to make arbitrary and even harmful decisions. Both staff and volunteers also expressed frustration over how "politics get in the way of assistance," as one coordinator put it.

The clearest example of this was on Lesvos, where DiH resumed boat spotting on the southern coast of the island in the summer of 2018. At that time, volunteers' relationship with the Greek coastguard was largely civil and cooperative. We were told by our coordinators to call the coastguard immediately if we saw any boats in distress, as they were better equipped to provide rescue. However, volunteers' relationship with the Greek police was significantly more tense. When patrolling the coast at night, we were regularly followed or stopped by police officers, who could be both intimidating and unpleasant.

In August 2018, following increasing efforts to criminalise humanitarian assistance across Europe (Carrera et al 2019; Fekete et al 2017), we woke up to the news that several members of one of the organisations we collaborated with were arrested. They were accused of aiding human smugglers and eventually charged with people smuggling, espionage, forgery, and membership in a criminal organisation (for a discussion on this and similar cases, see Vosyliute and Conte 2019). After a few days of internal debate, DiH decided to resume boat spotting, but with greater vigilance. Acting pre-emptively, one of our coordinators visited the local police to assure them that we were not using any prohibited equipment or doing anything illegal. However, questions of what constitutes humanitarian aid vis-à-vis migrant smuggling remain legally uncertain and incoherent (ibid), which made it difficult for volunteers to know our rights and obligations. By late September, DiH's leadership decided that they could not continue exposing volunteers to the risk of being arrested and so put boat spotting on hold.

Image 16: Boat spotting on Lesvos August 2018.

Negotiating with the state

In Greece and elsewhere in Europe, volunteers assisting migrants have not only been policed through formal criminalisation, but also in more subtle ways, ranging from harassment and intimidation to legal restrictions and administrative penalties (Carrera et al 2019; Fekete et al 2017). During my fieldwork, several DiH coordinators and volunteers were interrogated by the Greek police, causing anger and distress. The organisation's humanitarian space was also constrained by bureaucratic measures imposed by the Greek state. For instance, it took DiH over two years to be officially approved as an NGO assisting refugees in Greece due to what several staff members described as unnecessary and unreasonable requirements and delays.[30]

While some attributed such bureaucratic hurdles to the overburdened Greek state, others interpreted them as strategic acts to delimit the influence of foreign NGOs. An alternative way of understanding these bureaucratic measures is to view them as tactics in humanitarian negotiation, conventionally understood as interactions and transactions aimed at establishing or maintaining presence, access, and delivery of protection and assistance (CCHN 2019; Grace 2020).

When discussing DiH's relationship with the Greek state, however, it is important to remember that states are not bounded and coherent entities with consistent and uniform attitudes and motivations (Mitchell 1991). Conversely, states consist of different organs and

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[30] An example was that Greek authorities returned DiH's application after several months because the documents were not translated into Greek. Later, the organisation was informed that the translation had to be done by a special agency DiH could not access.

factions, and therefore exercise many and sometimes conflicting forms of agency (Aretxaga 2003; Herzfeld 2016). In addition to DiH's official negotiations with Greek bureaucrats, most of the organisation's negotiations with the Greek state were also everyday personal encounters between coordinators or volunteers in the field and various representatives of the Greek state, such as local police officers, members of the coastguard. or camp personnel.

The different factions or "faces of the state" (Navaro-Yashin 2002) help explain both coordinators' and volunteers' various experiences with Greek authorities and DiH's mixed success in negotiating access and legitimacy. However, coordinators' agency should also be recognised. When accompanying them at work, I saw them negotiate trust and access through various means, ranging from expressions of heartfelt sympathy with the plight of Greek people to what Hilhorst (2016) calls "ignorancy": a deliberate feigning of ignorance or display of naivety as a tactic to smoothen relations or appease audiences. Like the bureaucratic measures imposed by the Greek state discussed earlier, these behaviours should also be recognised as tactics in everyday humanitarian negotiation.

Finally, the Greek state not only appeared in different guises but also often seemed remarkably elusive. Greek scholars have written about the common and widespread "there is no state" discourse, arguing that it reflects local discontent with national authorities (Kalir and Rozakou 2016) or a "deep legitimization crisis" (Kallianos 2018). From the perspective of DiH volunteers, the elusiveness of the Greek state—combined with the fragmented and overlapping authority and collaborations between different state, non-state, and supra-state actors—made it first and foremost difficult to pinpoint the state. While the Greek state sometimes appeared mysteriously absent, it also frequently happened that volunteers—myself included—mistook camp personnel and other actors as government workers, later finding out that they were actually employed by NGOs, volunteer organisations, or private corporations. Such incidents added to existing confusion about the division of labour and responsibility, a point I will return to in the conclusion to this chapter.

As I discuss below, DiH's relationship with the Greek state also raised a different and more controversial dilemma, relating to what Agier (2011: 4–5) describes as the "functional solidarity" between humanitarian governance and policing.

Negotiating local acceptance

Besides negotiating access and legitimacy with INGOs and national and local authorities, DiH also had to earn the acceptance of the local population, who rightfully questioned their ambitions and legitimacy. Again, this was especially tricky on Lesvos, where it rented a building (later two buildings) in the main street of the small and traditional Moria village, less than a fifteen-minute walk from Moria camp. After a challenging start characterised by friction and misunderstandings, DiH sent their best diplomat, Elena, to help smoothen relations with the villagers in August 2018. In addition to being a young and charming woman with good people skills and a gentle manner, she was half-Greek, spoke the language fluently, and knew the culture and customs well from having lived in the county until she moved to Norway at the age of 17.

However, as she told me when I first arrived on Lesvos a few weeks after her, the odds were still against DiH. Several organisations had tried to establish presence in similar neighbourhoods on Lesvos and Chios, but gave up after facing repeated threats and intimidation. Given Moria village's proximity to the most infamous camp in Greece and reports of growing local tensions and resistance, none of the humanitarian workers Elena had spoken to believed that DiH would be accepted by the villagers. Eager to prove them wrong, she spent many days and evenings in Moria village, drinking coffee or ouzo with the residents and listening to their concerns and grievances. Like a good anthropologist, she thus managed to build rapport and trust with several local villagers. She also held several meetings with the mayor of the village to clarify the purpose of DiH's activity centre and negotiate mutual expectations.

Notably, many villagers in Moria were descendants of boat refugees from Asia Minor and sympathetic to the plight of contemporary refugees. Before their island became populated by foreign volunteers, many had also offered aid and hospitality to refugees arriving on nearby beaches or walking through their village. In contrast to the conventional narrative presented by international media, I also learned that some of the villagers benefitted from the influx of refugees and volunteers (see also Afouxenidis et al 2017). For instance, at least one resident had secured a well-paying and, in his words, "meaningful" job for a large humanitarian organisation in Moria camp, while others rented out overcharged buildings to volunteers, or

saw a sharp increase of customers in their shops. Nevertheless, most villagers said they were sick and tired of having the scandalous camp in their backyard. As Katerina, the owner of the café next to DiH's centre, complained in our interview, "We are carrying the whole burden of Europe's humanity on our shoulders" [translated from Greek by a Greek volunteer].

Image 17: Katerina's Cafe in Moria village.

Many villagers also expressed anger or frustration over increased vandalism, garbage, and crime in their village, including livestock theft. These grievances were often accompanied by nostalgic longing for a supposed peaceful and idyllic village life prior to the 2015 "refugee crisis", when I was told that residents did not have to lock their doors or be worried about their children playing in the streets. The problem with DiH, according to the mayor in the village and most of the other residents I spoke to, was not that we supported refugees, but that our centre attracted so many foreigners, and especially young men, into their village. As Katerina put it bluntly during one of our many conversations, "People don't mind the women and children, but they don't want so many foreign men roaming around in the streets."[31]

Some villagers also complained that volunteers behaved disrespectfully, for instance, by parking their cars in the narrow streets of the village or not bothering to learn a single Greek word to greet the residents. During my fieldwork, I further learned that many villagers were offended by having the proud name of their village used synonymously with the infamous

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[31] Conversely, some villagers described DiH's presence in the village as "civilising" or "entertaining."

refugee camp. The villagers had been particularly hurt when Pope Francis made a highly mediatised visit to Moria camp without paying tribute to the village's ancient Roman Aqueduct (see image below).

Image 18: The Roman Aqueduct in Moria village.

While DiH could not address all of these grievances, Elena and the other coordinators generally tried to accommodate the villagers' complaints and concerns. Most notably, they decided to begin carefully by only inviting women and children to the centre. While later also inviting men, coordinators sometimes tried to prevent them from roaming around the village by turning off the centre's Wi-Fi or driving them back to the camp. Upon Katerina's recommendation, DiH also started to keep the centre closed during national and local holidays and sometimes accepted her invitation to participate in these celebrations. Moreover, volunteers occasionally organised "trash patrols" to clean up the streets in the village. To counter widespread rumours that volunteers were profiting from the crisis or stealing local jobs, DiH also hung a poster on the front door of the centre, where it stated, in Greek, that DiH was a "non-profit organisation run by unpaid volunteers."

Furthermore, whenever new volunteers arrived, Elena made sure to inform them about the precarious situation in the village. They were also instructed to not park their cars in the main street and taught some Greek words they could use to greet the villagers. Coordinators and long-term volunteers like myself also encouraged new volunteers to spend money in the village by buying lunch and drinks from the local bakery, café, and shops. To honour the village's history, we also regularly brought new volunteers and sometimes refugee students to visit the Roman Aqueduct, and later praised its beauty with the villagers.

However, coordinators did not always agree about how far the organisation should go to please the villagers. As Adrianos, a coordinator from Athens, often said when the topic was debated: "We are here for the refugees, not the villagers". Conversely, Elena suggested that DiH spend some of the organisation's funds to support the local community whom, she often reminded us about, "was also struggling" (cf. Cabot 2018). As mentioned above, Elena and some other DiH staff had also more ambitious goals than establishing their presence and being accepted in the village: they also wanted to foster integration or build bridges with the local residents. One of the steps coordinators took to facilitate this was to recruit two female residents as volunteers. The women were tasked with teaching Greek and managing the sewing machines, but also invited members to join other activities and were compensated with a modest stipend. During my fieldwork, we also regularly invited villagers to stop by the centre for coffee or birthday celebrations and participate in activities like yoga classes and chess tournaments. However, with a few exceptions, these efforts were unsuccessful, as villagers hesitated entering the centre during activities and seemed largely uninterested in participating.

In general, the relationships between villagers and refugees, and villagers and volunteers, were also fragile and characterised by linguistic and sometimes cultural barriers and misunderstandings. As one volunteer commented: "How can we expect to facilitate integration here when the refugees want to leave and the locals are afraid they will be outnumbered?" However, during my fieldwork, there were some moments when the goal of building bridges seemed less illusory. To give one example, Christmas Eve 2019 started awkwardly with the mayor threatening to shut down our Christmas party and neighbours complaining about the noise, but ended happily when Katerina invited the attending refugees to join her in dancing a traditional Greek dance in the streets, prompting many villagers to watch and smile. I also witnessed many gestures of mutual respect, such as elderly villagers and refugees stopping to greet each other outside the centre, a local Greek orthodox woman helping sew hijabs, and refugees greeting villagers in Greek or helping clean the streets.

Nevertheless, it is questionable whether a foreign NGO like DiH can foster local integration in Greece. Regardless of how sensitive volunteers might act towards local residents, DiH's vision of making the drop centre a home or breathing space for refugees also seemed to be directly opposed to locals' desire to restore peace and harmony in the village.

Image 19: Local holiday celebration in Moria village.

While not the main focus of this chapter, it should also be stressed that DiH's work and legitimacy also depended on at least partial acceptance from the refugees they sought to support. As indicated, one of the measures DiH took to ensure such legitimacy was to involve refugees of different ethnicities and nationalities in their work as regular volunteers or interpreters. Coordinators also regularly consulted with the elected leaders of the communities in the camps and occasionally carried out informal surveys to identify residents' needs and priorities. In November 2019, DiH also began an expansive evaluation to assess refugees' satisfaction with their services.

However, while this evaluation concluded that "DiH activities, in general, provide successful support to people living in Greek refugee camps," the many conversations I had with refugees volunteering for DiH or attending the organisation's activities made it clear that its work and presence were not unanimously appreciated. For instance, DiH was regularly accused of favouring certain nationalities or ethnic groups (typically Syrians or Kurds, but sometimes Afghans) and failing to listen to or consult the refugee populations about their needs. Some refugees also complained that volunteers acted paternalistically or Eurocentrically (e.g., by refusing to serve their children tea or cutting down on sugar), were policing them during distributions (see also Knott 2018), or otherwise overstepping their boundaries. Again, these critiques reveal how colonial and missionary legacies influenced DiH's humanitarian work, despite the organisation's efforts to "think outside the box" and treat refuges with dignity. As I discuss below, several refugees also vocally disagreed with DiH's guidelines and priorities, thereby challenging the organisation's legitimacy.

Two dilemmas

As examined earlier in the chapter, DiH's desire to help refugees in Greece required the organisation to carefully navigate its relationships with Greek authorities, INGOs, and local populations. Functioning as gatekeepers in the humanitarian field, these actors had strong disciplining effects on volunteer organisations like DiH that sought humanitarian access and legitimacy. However, DiH's role and identity vis-à-vis these actors were not uncontroversial, but raised several internal debates and dilemmas, of which I will highlight two.

Dilemma 1: Becoming professional?

The first dilemma relates to DiH's level of professionalisation. Put crudely, we might say that the question was whether, or to what extent, the organisation should emulate or become like the more established INGOs they collaborate and compete with in the field. To consider DiH's response to this dilemma, it is useful to distinguish between the professionalisation of the administration and that of volunteers in the field. Concerning the former, DiH underwent a gradual and partial professionalisation from the organisation's birth in 2015 to the end of my fieldwork in January 2020. For instance, while DiH had only two full-time and paid employees in 2016, the organisation hired a dozen former volunteers and new workers on full- or part-time contracts during 2018 and 2019, including a few employees with considerable experience in INGO work and diplomacy. The organisation also launched an internship programme to attract current or recently graduated students seeking to gain credit from their university or gain experience in the humanitarian sector. Still, throughout my fieldwork, DiH continued to depend on a large number of volunteers circulating in and out of the administration, shaping the organisation's practice and aspirations.

As suggested above, DiH also undertook several measures to formalise the organisation's structure, including establishing a board, local chapters, and recruiting regular members and donors. It further invested in more accountability and transparency by, for example, complying with the requirements of the Norwegian Control Committee for Fundraising (*Innsamlingskontrollen*), becoming ISO-9001 certified, and registering as a Greek NGO. Some of these measures were taken in response to new and stricter demands from Greek authorities, which made it more challenging for foreign NGOs to work in Greece. However, most of the measures DiH undertook to formalise the organisation's structure were considered necessary steps to ensure legitimacy and provide more comprehensive and sustainable assistance to refugees in Greece. Indeed, DiH staff and volunteers were not nearly as

suspicious of "NGOization" as, for instance, the solidarity groups studied by Greek anthropologists (Rakopoulos 2016; Rozakou 2016; Papataxiarchis 2018) or humanitarian scholars like Barnett (2011; 2012). While the latter warns that the "institutionalization of ethics" can lead to centralisation of power, technocratic decision-making, or even indifference (2012: 256), DiH staff stressed the importance of having enough organisational capacity and resources to respond swiftly and efficiently. Moreover, by employing people responsible for specific tasks, such as social media and fundraising, DiH was able to improve their outreach and advocacy work, organise several successful fundraising campaigns, and recruit more regular donors, which in turn increased the organisation's revenue and minimised financial uncertainty. As mentioned below, Trude and Mette also appropriated some of the managerial practices they knew from the corporate sphere and considered this part of DiH's strength (cf. Chouliaraki 2013).

Nevertheless, all staff members stressed the importance of not becoming too bureaucratised. Sometimes framed as a choice between flexibility, on the one hand, and increased predictability and accountability on the other, the underlying assumption was that too much bureaucracy would lead DiH to lose what they described as the organisation's biggest strength: its flexibility. Some coordinators were also worried that more bureaucracy would mean that the staff in Oslo—already geographically removed from the organisation's humanitarian projects in Greece—would become even more distanced and disconnected from the people they sought to help.

One long-term domestic volunteer further told me she worried that the professionalisation of DiH's workforce had led to an internal hierarchy between employees and volunteers and shrinking respect for the latter's contributions. Lastly, some volunteers and coordinators were sceptical about DiH's administrative expansion and introduction of salaries, suggesting that it diverted focus and money away from the cause, or that "being a humanitarian was a calling, not a job" (see also Papataxiarchis 2016: 6; cf. Malkki 2015: 38). Professionalisation thus created a dilemma and communication challenge for DiH, who knew that many of their members chose to support and donate money to them—rather than the big INGOs—precisely because of their volunteer-based identity and low administration costs.[32]

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[32] In DiH's strategic plan for 2019-2020, the organisation pledged that a "minimum 91% of their revenue shall be channelled directly to the cause." This percentile corresponds with other Norwegian humanitarian organisations like Save the Children and Norwegian Refugee Council.

DiH also undertook several steps from 2015 to 2020 regarding the professionalisation of volunteers in the field. Perhaps most notably, years of experience working inside official refugee camps and collaborating with professional INGOs led DiH to gradually revise their guidelines in accordance with more professional codes of conduct. This entailed stricter requirements for volunteers, including a minimum age (23-25 years depending on previous experience), a criminal record certificate, and sterner guidelines concerning the use of social media, photography, attire, and socialising with refugees. In 2019, DiH also introduced a mandatory online training programme for volunteers prior to their arrival. It entailed information about the situation in Greece and DiH's work and guidelines, and a test to prepare volunteers for ethical dilemmas in the field. From the organisation's perspective, these actions were necessary to protect not only the refugees they interacted with, but also DiH's legitimacy and reputation. Notably, the online training programme also involved a consciousness-raising component encouraging volunteers to reflect upon their hierarchical relationship to refugees (cf. Knott 2018), however, nothing was said about whiteness or race.

Coordinators in Skaramagas and Nea Kavala also created weekly schedules, manuals, and role descriptions with the intention that short-term volunteers could easily and quickly step into their designated roles. "By systematizing volunteers' roles and responsibilities, we reduce the time required for training to the absolute minimum," a coordinator explained to me. "We also ensure continuity," another said. Because volunteers come and fill specific roles, nobody was, in theory, irreplaceable.

While many volunteers applauded these new systems and guidelines, they were not unanimously welcomed. For instance, some volunteers who had worked for DiH during the organisation's formative years in 2015 and 2016 complained that it had become too complicated or time-consuming to register as volunteers. Both new and old volunteers also complained that DiH would not, or no longer did, accommodate their special requests, such as starting work on the day they arrived or only engaging in certain activities. Other volunteers objected to specific rules, for instance, discouraging volunteers from hugging children or prohibiting them from entering refugee camps outside of DiH-led activities. However, the largest point of contestation was the so-called "socialisation rule" introduced in 2018 to regulate volunteers' interactions with refugees. While I found that the interpretation and

implementation of this rule varied considerably depending on location and coordinators on site, it generally included a prohibition against visiting or hanging out with camp residents—including refugee volunteers—outside the camp or DiH-led activities. Volunteers were also prohibited from consuming alcohol in the presence of refugees and giving gifts or money to individual refugees, including buying them lunch.

Significantly, the introduction of the socialisation rule was in response to several incidents and rumours of inappropriate behaviour involving romantic relationships between coordinators or volunteers and refugees, or social gatherings involving excessive alcohol and partying. It was also partly a reaction to charges of favouritism. The purpose of the rule was to prevent such misconduct and thus protect both refugees and volunteers, as well as DiH's reputation.[33] However, many volunteers and coordinators opposed the rule or disagreed with its rationale. During my fieldwork in Skaramagas, some volunteers even accused DiH of infantilising refugees or being racist. Complaining that she was no longer allowed to visit her refugee friends in their containers during the lunch break, an Arabic-speaking political science student also criticised DiH for "extending the securitization logic of the border apparatus."

While most volunteers seemed to accept and understand the rules prohibiting romantic relationships and alcohol, many also objected to the prohibitions against visits and gift-exchanges. Like the Arab-speaking volunteer, many complained that it was frustrating or unethical to not be permitted to accept or return camp residents' hospitality. Lacking legitimacy, the socialisation rule was thus frequently stretched or broken, even by some coordinators.

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[33] My conversations with professional humanitarian workers in Skaramagas revealed that several considered volunteers to behave inappropriately or naïvely when interacting with refugees. This was especially the case with young female volunteers, who were accused of flirting with or leading on male refugees, causing unwarranted expectations or heartbreaks. However, some aid workers also complained that the guidelines of their organisations were too strict and said they envied DiH volunteers' opportunity to socialise with refugees.

Image 20: Lunch prepared by a refugee volunteer in his container in Skaramagas.

Significantly, many refugee volunteers also contested the socialisation rule. For many, developing transnational friendships and connections was a key motivation for working with DIH. Several refugee volunteers also told me they cherished the opportunity to participate in social events outside the camp, or demonstrating their hospitality or cooking skills to volunteers they invited for lunch or tea in their containers, as this "made them feel human again."

Typically working for DiH for many months or even years, refugee volunteers were also confused or annoyed by the shifting interpretations of the rule and frequently objected to its logic. The fiercest critic was probably Afran, a multitalented Syrian baker in his late twenties who arrived in Greece in March 2016 shortly after most European countries had closed their national borders, sealing off migration routes. At one of our weekly team meetings in Skaramagas, Afran, who had volunteered for DiH for nearly a year, argued that the socialisation rule violated its key value of equality and made him feel "inferior to" and "less worthy" than the so-called "international volunteers."[34] While his comment was initially met with an awkward silence, his intervention received massive support and attention in the wake of the meeting. Following extensive criticism, the socialisation rule was eventually adjusted to allow volunteers to meet with refugees in groups as long as no alcohol was involved.

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[34] Unlike the Greek solidarity groups Rozakou (2016) has studied, DiH did generally not attempt to create egalitarian or horizontal relationships with the refugees attending their activities. However, the situation with refugee volunteers was different as they were considered to be fellow drops and colleagues.

However, many volunteers were still displeased with the organisation's rigidity and therefore either violated the rule or chose to volunteer for other organisations.[35] Some also returned to Greece as independent volunteers following their own moral compass.

In response to their growing responsibilities and specialisation, DiH also started to recruit volunteers with specific skills, including nurses and people with experience teaching or working with minors. To ensure continuity, DiH also encouraged volunteers to stay longer and become team leaders or coordinators in exchange for subsidised accommodation or car rental services. Nevertheless, DiH continued to rely predominantly on short-term volunteers with limited or no experience in humanitarian fieldwork. Except a few roles and activities that had special requirements, DiH only required volunteers to commit to ten days of work. This was partly a question of feasibility. Like most volunteer organisations, DiH did not have the financial means or employee benefits to attract specialist aid workers or rely exclusively on long-term and trained volunteers. But relying on volunteers was also a matter of choice. Indeed, one of DiH's central premises was that it is not necessary to be a professional humanitarian worker to do good. The organisation also described itself as a "*lavterskeltilbudd*" (low-threshold offer) for ordinary people who wish to help refugees.

Furthermore, DiH did not want to simply emulate or become like their more professional colleagues in the field. Conversely, the organisation wanted to preserve its volunteer-based identity and emphasised its ability to learn from more established organisations without being fully domesticated (Papataxiarchis 2018) or give into the world of big aid bureaucracy (Pascucci and Jumbert 2021). Illustrating this attitude, DiH employees regularly emphasised that volunteers bring with them other skills and creative ideas that might help the organisation think and act outside the box. Moreover, a statement on DiH's website reads: "Thanks to volunteering, the organisation has evolved and become what it is today."

As I discuss in Chapter 5, part of the rationale of working with short-term and inexperienced volunteers was also that volunteering was imagined as a transformative experience that might change volunteers' perspectives and attitudes and inspire them to engage in further volunteer

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[35] For example, the two Norwegian volunteer organisations started by former DiH volunteers on Chios did not insist on such rules and regularly socialised with refugees. Unlike DiH, these organisations also refrained from using vests during distributions and activities as they believed this created unnecessary divisions and hierarchies.

work or advocacy once they return home. Following this logic, relying on volunteers was, therefore, not simply a necessity but also brought organisational and societal rewards.

Nevertheless, many DiH employees underscored that not all of their projects were suitable for short-term and inexperienced volunteers. The organisation's work with unaccompanied minors in Moria camp was frequently highlighted in these conversations. Given minors' need for stable reference persons and a secure environment, DiH tried to recruit long-term and skilled volunteers for this project, but only succeeded partially. Stressing that volunteers were merely there to facilitate games and play—and not to act as psychologists or social workers— DiH nonetheless chose to continue the project. While most of its projects were subject to healthy debate and disagreement among coordinators and volunteers in the field, this decision was particularly controversial. While many expressed happiness and excitement, it left several feeling doubtful and uneasy. When preparing for our first day of work inside Moria camp, one volunteer confessed to feeling ill-prepared for the task. Proclaiming his concerns about the risk of DiH overreaching its capabilities, he asked me: "Does the absence of qualified actors necessarily legitimize the presence of underqualified actors?"

Other volunteers questioned DiH's motivation, suggesting that the decision to work inside Moria was mainly taken to gain organisational status and recognition, and both please and attract funders and volunteers. Some also feared that the organisation and volunteers' eagerness to access and work inside Moria were being prioritised above the needs and interests of their vulnerable beneficiaries. For instance, a long-term volunteer said she was shocked by the organisation's decision to work with unaccompanied minors, suggesting that it did not take seriously the humanitarian imperative to do no harm. On a few occasions, she even proclaimed that, "If there were a humanitarian court[36], I would consider reporting them!"[37]

On the other hand, many coordinators and volunteers strongly believed that supporting unaccompanied minors in Moria was the most important and meaningful work DiH (and they

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[36] At the time of writing, no humanitarian court exists. However, recent allegations of corruption and sex abuse involving prominent organisations like Oxfam have spurred renewed calls for an organisation or mechanism to hold humanitarians accountable.

[37] When I talked to this volunteer on the phone about a year later, she had not changed her opinion. While emphasising that she "still cared about the organisation," she described DiH's decision to work with minors in Moria as a "sign of the organisation's immaturity."

personally) did. Some of those who had initially been sceptical also changed their opinions after learning about volunteers' confined mandate or the praise DiH received for their work from the camp management and several INGOs on the island. Most notably, one prominent INGO worker said that, according to his figures, violent brawls and episodes inside the section for unaccompanied boys had decreased with more than 80 % since DiH started its recreational activities there in the evenings. Not surprisingly, Trude and other DiH staff were very satisfied by this praise and made sure to share the INGO worker's astonishing (though not verifiable) statistic in many of their speeches and social media posts.

Image 21: Sign hanging at the bathroom in the section for unaccompanied boys in Moria camp.

Dilemma 2: The risk of de-politicisation and normalisation

The second dilemma concerns DiH's relationship with the Greek state and the risk of de-politicisation. As discussed, humanitarian actors in Greece, as elsewhere in Europe, have faced increased policing and criminalisation. The Greek government has also been accused of severe mismanagement and rights violations (Fili 2018; Rozakou 2019). Several NGOs have thus taken a confrontational stance toward the Greek state by speaking out against its actions and policies or even trying to take the government to court. On the flip side, DiH chose a more dialogic and collaborative approach. As one staff member explained to me, "It does not mean that we agree with everything Greek authorities do, but if we disagree, we tell them directly, rather than going publicly."

This approach was primarily a pragmatic choice taken in the interest of gaining access, protecting volunteers and, ultimately, helping more refugees. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, DiH also expressed sensitivity towards Greece's predicament. Whether discussing the issue in public or private, Trude emphasised that the Greek people had demonstrated exemplary hospitality, particularly during the first years of the crisis, but also in the years that preceded it, when asylum seekers arrived more erratically and in smaller numbers (Cabot 2014; Papadimitriou and Papageorgiou 2005; Papataxiarchis 2016; Rozakou 2016). From Trude's perspective, which echoed the attitudes of many local actors (Dixon et al 2019), Greeks had thus done their part but suffered unjustly due to the lack of intra-European solidarity. Rather than criticising Greece or claiming to be apolitical, DiH chose to be a vocal critic of the EU and European leaders. As a Norwegian NGO, it was particularly critical of the Norwegian state, typically arguing that Norway has both the capacity and space to accept many more refugees and that the country's restrictive asylum policies violated its humanitarian traditions and self-image as a "humanitarian superpower" (see Chapter 6).

Yet, DiH's decision to collaborate with the Greek state, and particularly agreeing to work inside the notorious Moria camp, also provoked doubt and criticism both inside and outside the organisation. Chief among many volunteers' concerns was whether DiH's work absolved the Greek state and the EU of their responsibilities to provide proper care and protection. Crucially, this is not only a question of the quality of aid but also of rights and accountability. Even when performing state-like functions, NGOs are not formally accountable to the people they help. The practice of outsourcing responsibility to NGOs thus leaves refugees at the mercy of these organisations and their donors, and they do not receive access to basic necessities as a political right (Dromi 2020; Dunn 2012; Redfield 2005). Outsourcing responsibility to volunteers can be particularly problematic, as "the nature of volunteering itself is that they may at any point choose to withdraw from their designated tasks" (Guribye and Mydland 2018: 15).

Concerning accountability, it is also important to note that refugees on Lesvos generally directed their political claims and critiques of European leaders and intergovernmental organisations and agencies such as UNHCR, Frontex, and the EU. Rather than asking "Where are the big INGOs?"—as DiH staff and volunteers typically did—or requesting more help from volunteers, the questions I heard refugees in Moria ask most frequently were "Where are my/our human rights?" and "When will I/we be able to leave?" These questions, and

volunteers' lack of accountability and authority to address refugees' political claims, highlight some of the problems with NGOs seeking to fill humanitarian gaps.

A related concern was whether DiH's work and presence in refugee camps, and particularly the notorious Moria camp on Lesvos, contributed to normalising—or even legitimising—the EU's politics of containment and encampment. This is a well-known critique of scholarship on humanitarianism. While humanitarian organisations and state actors have different mandates and agendas, the former are frequently accused of participating in the same "illegality industry" (Andersson 2014), thus allowing humanitarian assistance to go hand in hand with surveillance and repression (Agier 2011; Dunn 2018; Fassin 2005; Rozakou 2019). While couched in less academic language, this way of thinking was also expressed by many humanitarian actors, refugees, and locals on Lesvos. As mentioned, several big INGOs, including MSF, halted their operations in Moria camp in 2016 in opposition to the EU's harshening border regime and the concurrent transformation of Moria into a facility of containment and detention (Rozakou 2019). I learned from speaking to other humanitarian workers and volunteers on Lesvos that several believed that volunteer organisations should react to the progressively worsening conditions in 2018 and 2019 by following suit. From their perspective, organisations that filled humanitarian gaps in Moria legitimised the camp as a solution to the refugee problem and thereby also political inertia of European leaders and the EU. Some volunteers on Lesvos were also strongly against all forms of collaboration with the Greek state, arguing that NGOs and volunteers should not do "the state's dirty work," as the founder of a popular volunteer organisation from the UK put it.

The refugees I spoke to during my fieldwork had different opinions. For some, DiH and other volunteers represented a welcome face inside the "living hell" of Moria camp. Others accused volunteer organisations of colluding with the state, abusing their power as service-producers, or not consulting camp residents about their needs. Notably, several refugees also questioned volunteers' priorities, suggesting that our time would be better spent mobilising for political and structural change (cf. Brković, 2016).

One of the refugees who argued this was Ghafar who I introduced in Chapter 1. From the very first day I met him in November 2018, he talked about the importance of holding European politicians accountable for the suffering they imposed on refugees in Moria and other Greek refugee camps. However, during my fieldwork, Ghafar also developed a more critical perspective of the NGOs on Lesvos, including DiH. In a series of Facebook posts, he accused

volunteer organisations of "experimenting with refugees" or "turning refugees into their projects." "I appreciate your desire to help, but nothing will change unless we put pressure on the political leaders in Europe," he argued in a less confrontational post. Ghafar's Facebook posts gained considerable traction in volunteer groups on social media, prompting reactions ranging from support and introspection to counter-arguments and militant self-defence.

With the help of a volunteer, one of Ghafar's lengthiest posts was also translated and published by a left-leaning Norwegian newspaper. In it, he accused volunteers of appearing "more concerned with taking selfies and sharing tear-dripping stories than finding solutions to the refugee crisis." The headline of the article was "tourists in hell." DiH's name was not mentioned, but the leader of its board nevertheless wrote a response in the same newspaper, where she described Ghafar's frustration as understandable but insisted that DiH did their best to convince politicians to take responsibility and action.

Finally, the permanence of Moria as a place to "manage the undesirable" (Agier 2011) was strongly contested by many local residents on Lesvos, who often described Moria camp as a "concentration camp," or "the Dachau of our time," as the mayor of the island put it. As described above, the population in Moria village was particularly affected by its proximity to the camp and increasingly vocal in its resistance. For instance, in June 2018, the mayor of the village went on a public hunger strike for several days to protest the conditions in the camp and its detrimental impact on the health and safety of the nearby village residents. During my fieldwork, I also learned that Moria camp was a central issue in the local election campaign, as the mayor's main contender—a representative of the conservative party New Democracy— had promised to close the camp and restore peace and harmony to the village.

Media and scholarly analyses of the growing local resistance on Lesvos have generally emphasised the economic costs or socio-cultural threat refugees supposedly posed on the islands' inhabitants. Some have also referred to the island's history and memory (see e.g., James 2019). As described earlier, Lesvos is forged by a long history of movement and many of the island's inhabitants are themselves descendants of boat refugees from Asia Minor. However, Lesvos was also occupied by the Ottoman Empire for over four centuries. As a Greek humanitarian worker explained at a seminar I attended, "Many people see the refugee crisis as history repeating itself. Yet this does not only lead to empathy. There is a fear inside every Greek person that we will be occupied by Muslims again."

However, to understand the widespread local resistance to Moria camp, it is also important to consider Western countries' long-term guardianship over Greece (Herzfeld 2002; 2016; Theodossopoulos 2013) and the concurrent tendency of Greek citizens and state officials to view foreign NGOs as "being closer to colonialists than humanitarians" (Howden and Fotiadis 2017). As Rozakou (2019: 76) explains, "the humanitarian is often seen as a despised figure and an outsider who claims authority over local territory." As observed by Papataxiarchis, refugee camps like Moria, which are largely administrated by NGO personnel, are also "strong indices of the limited powers of the state and municipal authorities." During my fieldwork on Lesvos, local discontent with foreign NGOs grew increasingly explosive, but was also directed toward the national authorities in Athens, which, before Christmas 2019, announced their plans to establish new and closed camps on the Greek Islands. Angry at foreigners and politicians alike, islanders thus took to the street and protested. Echoing the claims of protesting refugees and their advocates, they demanded the immediate closure of Moria camp and the transfer of all refugees to the Greek mainland or other European countries. At the centre of this demand were claims to local sovereignty but also a return to life as they once knew it. As a popular banner during local demonstrations read, "We want our island back."

Image 22: Mytilini harbour.

Crucially, DiH was not oblivious to the hardship endured by refugees and locals in Moria. In public statements and interviews, staff and coordinators repeatedly emphasised that the camp was not a durable solution. Echoing the complaints of many refugees, they stressed that the camp "is not a place for human beings" and warned that the inhumane conditions in the camp

were also hurting the local community, which had reached a breaking point. Trude and other DiH staff also repeatedly urged politicians in Norway to stop throwing money at the problem and rather help alleviate the pressure on the Greek Islands by evacuating asylum seekers. Nevertheless, DiH did not wish to stop their projects and distributions in Moria camp, arguing that this would result in immediate and intolerable suffering.

This attitude is illustrated by a comment made by one of the organisation's coordinators during the winter of 2018, when it was suggested that distributing sleeping bags to residents in Moria would absolve the Greek state of its responsibility to winterise the camp. "Maybe that's true," the coordinator replied, "but we cannot risk that anybody freezes to death because we wish to take a political stance." Such statements were not rare. During my fieldwork, I regularly heard staff and volunteers from DiH and other volunteer organisations suggest that refugees would suffer or die if volunteers withdrew from the camp or stopped distributing essential items. In a 2020 article in *Time Magazine* focused on the enduring presence of "voluntourists" in Greek refugee camps (Godin 2020), Trude defended volunteers' presence, stating that, "Without volunteers, the camps would have been prisons." Similar arguments were also used concerning DiH's work with unaccompanied minors in Moria who, in the eyes of many staff and volunteers, were the "most vulnerable of the vulnerable" and needed all the support and care they could get.

As alluded to above, DiH's belief in the organisation's importance was also affirmed by the camp management, who prized volunteers for their "professional attitudes" and said that incidents of violence had significantly decreased after DiH started to "activate" the unaccompanied boys in the evening. Based on these convictions, the organisation thus arrived at an uneasy compromise: continuing their humanitarian projects and distributions in the camp while advocating for political change at home. As Trude summarised in a Facebook post defending the compromise, "Without a common European political change, all we can do is to continue covering the huge needs, putting pressure on the decision-makers, and showing the people in the camps that they are not forgotten."

Concluding reflections

This chapter traced DiH's organisational trajectory from Trude's spontaneous trip to Lesvos to "NGO-ization." Following DiH through time, I have shown how the organisation relocated and reinvented its work in response to changing humanitarian gaps and needs. Some of these

gaps emerged from the absence or withdrawal of state authorities or more professional INGOs, leaving vulnerable populations without critical support. Others were identified or constructed by the organisation itself in response to political developments as well as discursive trends and innovations within the humanitarian field.

Notably, DiH's projects not only varied across time, but also had different temporalities. After an initial focus on emergency assistance, most DiH activities moved beyond this frame and sought to provide psychosocial support and community cohesion and restore a sense of normalcy and dignity for refugees stuck in overcrowded camps. Following Feldman (2015), we might describe these activities as humanitarian "endurance projects": activities that do not seek to change people's condition, but enable them to live differently with them. However, other projects were based on alternative and more future-looking imaginaries as they sought to support refugees' language skills and professional development and foster local or European integration. Moreover, DiH never entirely stopped addressing basic needs like food, clothes, and diapers, but rather experimented with humanitarian design and systems to ensure dignified distribution. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the organisation also responded to the worsening conditions on the Greek Islands by recruiting trained nurses and donating medicines, sleeping bags, and blankets to the authorities and organisations responsible for distribution. To use the lingo of well-known humanitarian scholars like Fassin (2010; 2018) and Redfield (2005), we might hence say that DiH simultaneously attempted to rescue and preserve refugees' "biological lives" and recognise and care for their "biographical lives" (cf. Brun 2016; Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan 2021).

This chapter also examined DiH's uncertain efforts to negotiate humanitarian access and legitimacy. I have focused mainly on its ambivalent but symbiotic relationships with the Greek state and more professional INGOs that, as I have argued, work as humanitarian gatekeepers in Greece (Rozakou 2019). As other scholars have pointed out, the proliferation of volunteer- or citizen-led humanitarian organisations in Europe has received considerable scholarly attention, yet "analyses of the relationship between the world of professional aid and citizen humanitarianism are still rare in the literature" (Pascucci and Jumbert 2021:10; see also Ishkanian and Shutes 2021).

Another topic that has received scant attention among humanitarian scholars is ethical decision-making in humanitarian negotiations (Liden and Roepstorff 2020). According to Claude Bruderlein, the Director of the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiations

(CCHN), humanitarian negotiations have traditionally been understood as involving interactions and transactions between humanitarian organisations (governed by principles) and parties to a conflict (governed by interests). However, more recent theories of humanitarian negotiations have emphasised the importance of building and managing trust and relationships with various relevant actors.[38] My ethnography affirms the importance of relationship-building but challenges the assumption that humanitarian practice is necessarily a form of principled action.

In negotiating access and trying to fill humanitarian gaps, DiH has grappled with some of the enduring dilemmas that aid organisations face in their work, including questions of overreach and accountability and humanitarian actors' uneasy relationships with sovereign power and biopolitics. I have argued that these dilemmas were most pressing regarding DiH's work with unaccompanied minors inside Moria camp, which prompted both internal and external disagreements and doubts. However, these dilemmas were also present at other times and in other contexts, when the Greek state, EU, INGOs, or other actors considered more accountable and qualified than DiH failed to rescue or care for asylum seekers on Europe's doorstep.

To conclude, I want to suggest that DiH's decision to support unaccompanied minors inside Moria camp serves as a limit case that highlights the perhaps inevitable impurity of humanitarian assistance in a context where responsibility is outsourced to volunteers and care is entangled with a politics of containment. As indicated, DiH staff was not oblivious to this impurity. As one of DiH's coordinators on Lesvos often reiterated, "What we are doing here is good, but of course it is not ideal. In an ideal world, we [volunteers] would all be superfluous." This attitude can partly be explained by the fact that DiH is relatively unconstrained by any official ideology or commitment to abstract principles. Unlike ideal-typical organisations like the ICRC and MSF, or the local anarchist and solidarity groups studied by Greek scholars (Papataxiarchis 2018; Rozakou 2016), DiH is rather guided by pragmatic or consequentialist ethics, where the "central idea is that the rightness of an action

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[38] Bruderlein made this argument during a Policy-Exchange seminar between researchers, policymakers, and humanitarian actors that I attended at the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) on March 8th, 2019 (see also CCHN 2019: 19).

is determined by whether it helps to bring about a better outcome than its alternatives" (Barnett and Weiss 2012: 44; for a different take on the relationship between purity and pragmatism, see Greenberg 2016).

DiH's solution to the above-examined dilemmas also reflects distinct logics. For instance, when discussing the relationship between aid and politics, it is often assumed that humanitarian organisations must choose between denunciation and silence, or political advocacy and neutrality (e.g., Barnett 2011; Bridges 2010; Liden and Roepstorff 2020; cf. Scott-Smith, 2016a). However, DiH's humanitarian-political compromise fits uneasily with these positions. Conversely, their compromise can perhaps best be described by recourse to the political philosophy of Noam Chomsky, who argues that people should focus their political critiques and actions on the sphere of their own nation-state. Chomsky believes so partly because he thinks citizens carry personal responsibility for the actions of the states they belong to, as well as because he considers this to be the only arena where people actually have the power to make a tangible difference. As he famously put it, "It is very easy to denounce the atrocities of someone else. That has about as much ethical value as denouncing atrocities that took place in the 18th century" (Chomsky 1987: 51).[39]

Most DiH staff and volunteers also expressed a different understanding of the relationship between state repression and humanitarianism than many of the scholars and other actors mentioned above. Briefly summarised, they did not consider their care and support to be entrapped in the institutionalised violence that permeates Moria camp, but rather believed it acted as important correctives to this repression and inhumanity (James 2019). This view differs from that held by many scholars and activists, but has some affinity with feminist and postcolonial scholars who explore care as contradictory, as "intertwined with cruelty but not reduced to it" (ibid: 2473).

Finally, I argue that DiH's trajectory is telling of the increasingly fluid and fragmented humanitarian landscape on Europe's southern border and Lesvos in particular. As this chapter has shown, DiH proved remarkably apt at navigating what my interlocutors often described as an "unpredictable and incomprehensible humanitarian regime." However, I also suggested

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[39] When I mentioned this quote to a long-term staff member on the phone in the spring of 2020, she laughed and told me this was precisely what she believed. In her eyes, DiH had, as a Norwegian NGO, first and foremost responsibility and power to influence the Norwegian state and public to "do our part." Like Chomsky, she believed that criticising Greek authorities had little practical and ethical value.

that considerable confusion existed among volunteers regarding the status and affiliation of the actors they engaged with and the broader division of labour and responsibility. For volunteers and researchers—myself included—navigating this "fluid governing assemblage" (Kalir and Rozakou 2016) was often frustrating and perplexing. However, for the residents of Moria and other Greek refugee camps, the effects were far more precarious. In contexts where sovereignty and responsibility are fragmented and diffused, accountability is easily evaded and often untraceable (Rozakou 2019; see also Dunn 2012). These conditions exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and reinforced the European borderland, and Moria camp specifically, as a zone of impunity and rightlessness (Balibar 2004).

Chapter 4:

Becoming a drop

*"I think that all of us have this sense of inner shame
over how much stuff we have, like what Trude felt that day."*
-DiH volunteer

*"Although we cannot help everyone, we can be a
drop in the big ocean. Provide care and affection to
our 'medmennesker' who are less fortunate than us"*
-DiH volunteer

From DiH's birth in 2015 to the end of my fieldwork in January 2020, the organisation sent over 7,000 volunteers from 67 countries to help refugees in Greece. Nearly 40 percent of these were Norwegian citizens. What is it about Trude and DiH that appealed to so many Norwegians from across the country, generations, and with different backgrounds and life situations? This chapter provides several overlapping answers to this question and is divided into three main sections. First, building on anthropological concerns with exemplary figures, I argue that Trude can be characterised as a moral exemplar due to her ability to "solicit attention" and "draw [volunteers] in" (Robbins 2018). The second section shifts the focus from Trude's personal character to her emotional appeals. I first discuss her expression of motherly affection and Europeanism, and then her articulations of personal and collective shame in response to Norwegian affluence and the government's "inhumane" refugee policies. Third, this chapter addresses the appeal of DiH's organisational model and imagery. While the former created new conditions of possibility for Norwegian citizens to help refugees abroad, I show that the latter appealed to volunteers' cultural and cosmopolitan convictions and imaginations

Moral exemplarity

In Chapter 2, I examined Trude's call to help and spontaneous and affective decision to travel to Lesvos to help refugees. Although I showed that this decision was not entirely unmediated but shaped by her prior attachments, socio-cultural circumstances, and personal biography, it nevertheless entailed a significant rupture with her previous life and priorities, as Trude did

not have any prior experience working, volunteering, or raising money for humanitarian causes. Significantly, Trude's story and background are by no means representative of the DiH volunteers I met and interviewed during my fieldwork. For instance, the decision to volunteer to help refugees in Greece was not as sudden, surprising, or transformative for everyone. Conversely, many had wished to volunteer, or contemplated doing so, for months or even years before finding the time, courage, or finances to do so. While only a few interlocutors had prior experience with humanitarian fieldwork, many also came with considerable experience in volunteering, social work, or political mobilisation.

Nevertheless, I was struck by how often my interlocutors mentioned that they had decided to volunteer after hearing Trude's story or watching her speak on TV or videos uploaded on social media. Several DiH staff and volunteers also spoke about her remarkable ability to inspire people to volunteer, and often expressed surprise over "how much the organisation relies upon Trude's personality and story," as a domestic volunteer put it. Attempting to quantify this reliance, a trainee even told me he was "sure that more than 50% of the applications DiH receives is a result of Trude and her engagement." Whether or not this estimate is correct, our shared observation about her influence begs the question: What is it about her personal story and character that convinced so many different Norwegian citizens of the importance and feasibility of helping refugees in Greece?

Building on anthropological concerns with exemplary figures, I suggest that part of the answer to this question can be grasped by examining Trude as a moral exemplar. Drawing on Humphrey (1997) and the philosophers Max Scheler and Alessandro Ferrara, Robbins (2018) argues that moral exemplars are people who mediate between facts and values, between what is and what ought to be. He suggests that they play important roles in society by virtue of being vivid and nearly complete realisations of one or more of its most important values (Laidlaw 2014: 85). Precisely for this reason, they also "exert a force" and "draw us in" (in Ferrera's terms), or "solicit our attention" and provide motivation for people to "strive to realise the values in themselves" (Robbins 2018: 180-181). Moral exemplars are thus not only

people who are admired, but "models to be emulated," as Robbins phrased it in an earlier piece (2007: 34).[40]

While I do not follow Robbins' Dumontian structuralist approach, I believe that his discussion of moral exemplars is helpful to elucidate part of the force Trude exerts upon volunteers. As we shall see, her character and actions represent virtues that many Norwegians—and volunteers specifically—value, and try to embody themselves to some extent. These virtues include being *ekte* (genuine)*, jordnær* (down-to-earth) and *handlekraftig* (resolute). Moreover, many volunteers were inspired by her ability to juggle her humanitarian engagement with care for her children and family at home.

Trude's ability to "solicit attention" and "draw [volunteers] in" (Robbins 2018) can best be illustrated through the use of personal examples. I begin by providing three, all of which constitute what Flyvbjerg (2006: 16) describes as "paradigmatic cases," that is, "cases that highlight more general characteristics of the societies [or groups] in question." I then bring in reflections from other volunteers to provide further support and nuance.

Example 1: Maja is a cheerful woman in her early forties who was born and raised in the Norwegian "oil capital" Stavanger on the west coast. After studying abroad in the UK and Australia, she got married, moved home to Stavanger, and opened an interior design store in one of the city's most popular and fashionable suburbs. She also had three sons who kept her almost constantly busy with cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and driving and picking them up at football and swimming practices. However, on a Monday afternoon in late August 2015, Maja experienced a life-changing event. She was resting on the couch at home and mindlessly scrolling through Facebook on her phone when she accidentally came across a video message Trude had published from Lesvos:

> "It was the same day as I had finished my parental leave and dropped off my youngest child in kindergarten for his first day, and I thought: 'Now I can finally reopen my store. And relax a bit' (laughs). But then I watched Trude's video on Facebook…and

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[40] While drawing on Humphrey's discussion of exemplary teachers in Mongolia, Robbins' theory of moral exemplars differs in at least one important aspect: Humphrey' Mongol interlocutors identify exemplary teachers and use their lives as models to think through their own moral decisions (as opposed to rules), but value different things about them. Conversely, the Urapmins value the same things about their moral exemplars who, according to Robbins, are personifications of shared values in society.

that was it! I thought: 'What is wrong with us?' We cannot just sit here and '*sulle rundt'* (gad about) and think that this has nothing to do with us. That it is all happening over *there* while we are *here*. That video, when Trude is sitting on the beach and talking directly in the camera, I have seen it so many times and it is equally powerful every time. It spoke directly to me. And I thought, 'If she could do this, then all of us can!'"

Acting immediately, Maja started a Facebook campaign and encouraged people in her area to donate clothes and blankets for shipping to the Greek island. Less than two weeks after watching Trude's video on Facebook, Maja was on a plane to Athens with Trude, where they received the trailer and organised distributions of clothes to provisional camps and reception centres on the Greek Islands and mainland. The work was messier and more complicated than Maja had imagined, but it did not matter: she was already "hooked" on volunteering and eager to help more people. Besides returning to Greece as a volunteer, Maja engaged in DiH's work in Norway as an avid fundraiser and leader of the regional chapter.

Example 2: Markus, a tall, easy-going man in his late twenties**,** also decided to contact DiH after watching a video Trude had posted on Facebook. In the video, which Markus only saw nearly three years after it was published, she spoke about the chaotic situation on the Greek Islands and bemoaned the absence of professional humanitarian organisations. While Markus knew the video was old, it nevertheless "solicited his attention" or "drew him in". During our first interview, held at a trendy bar in downtown Athens, he told me that his experience leading a youth organisation had made him acutely aware of the importance of having a leader with a clear vision and genuine passion for the cause. When he watched and listened to Trude speak, he immediately thought that "this is somebody I would like to work for." As he was currently working to pay off his student debts, he initially contacted DiH to find out whether there was anything he could do to help from home. "But then Trude said that one of their coordinators had to leave unexpectedly, and asked if I could step in. And suddenly I was on my way to Lesvos… ." While initially committing to only two months, Markus ended up working for DiH for nearly two years, both as a coordinator in Greece and for the administration in Norway.

Example 3: In addition to the personal and deeply emotional Facebook posts and videos Trude shared during her trip to Lesvos in 2015, a large number of my interlocutors told me they had decided to volunteer for DiH after watching Trude get interviewed on the popular Norwegian talk-show programme *Lindmo* in November 2016. Jorunn, for example, had never considered volunteering abroad before watching Trude share her experiences on the national state channel that evening. A generation older than Trude, Jorunn is 71 years old, tall, and sporty with thick brown hair, sharp blue eyes, and a warm and infectious smile. Born and raised in a small rural town south of Oslo, she worked as a secretary for several years before following her dream of studying journalism at the most prestigious college in Norway. Jorunn's career as a journalist brought her first to northern Norway, and then to a small city in the southeast of the country near the Swedish border, where she met her husband and had three children. Jorunn is now retired and divorced, but continues to live in the same town, where she keeps herself busy writing a book about local railway workers, taking her dog on daily walks in the forest, and being a grandmother.

After Jorunn retired some years ago, she also became a respite carer for a young boy with learning disabilities and started to volunteer at the nearby women's prison where she read books in English, German, and broken Spanish to foreign detainees awaiting deportation. For many years, Jorunn has also been an eager volunteer for the local Red Cross group and participated in the refugee guide programme—a buddy system bringing volunteers and newly settled refugees together for a nine-month guiding period—for many years. Before Norwegian authorities closed down the reception centre for asylum seekers in her area in the summer of 2018, she also organised activities for the local children. However, although Jorunn had heard and read about DiH's work, it was not before she watched Trude address the Norwegian public on TV that she considered volunteering in Greece. As she explained to me during our interview:

> "Trude's words had such a strong effect on me. She spoke directly to my heart. And I thought, if she can go, then I can! She even had children living at home! It is not that I didn't have any commitments myself. But it was such a powerful call and I just knew immediately that I *had* to do this."

The day after Jorunn watched Trude's TV interview, she contacted DiH and signed up as a volunteer. A few days later, she bought a plane ticket to Greece. Notably, it was not the first

time Jorunn had followed her gut reaction like that. When she was younger, she had taken nearly every opportunity she could find to move around, including applying for and accepting a position as a secretary in Germany. However, volunteering in a crisis zone had hitherto seemed unthinkable. Some of her friends warned her that it could be dangerous and that she might not be able to handle it, but she did not listen to them as she had already made up her mind. In January 2017, she travelled to Chios to volunteer for DiH with a close friend who wanted to come with her. Describing the trip as "meaningful" and "addictive," both returned to volunteer twice a year since then. During our separate interviews, both Jorunn and her friend also emphasised Trude's role as "a source of inspiration" and "door opener."

Trude's "force"

What explains Trude's "force" or ability to "draw [volunteers] in" (Robbins 2018), making helping refugees in Greece seem not only important and urgent, but also practically feasible for a wide range of Norwegian citizens? As suggested by the examples above and supported by many other conversations and interviews, there were at least two aspects of her personal story and character that appealed to volunteers, and I argue that they make her a moral exemplar. First, many volunteers highlighted Trude's "genuine" or "heartfelt" *(ektefølte)* engagement and approach. As Markus explained referring to the video message that convinced him to contact DiH, "You could tell that she was distressed, but she did not seem afraid. At the same time, she dared to show vulnerability. It was clear that she was doing this for the right reasons." Similarly, Fredrik, a social worker in his forties who took two months of unpaid leave to work as a coordinator in Skaramagas refugee camp in 2018, emphasised her genuine and impassioned engagement, equating the latter with the former. Fredrik, who brought his wife and two children with him to Athens, also highlighted the fact that Trude was a mother and layperson.

> "Personally, I appreciated that Trude is not a 'big academic' with complex analyses and long speeches, but that she is a mother-of-five who actually went to Greece to volunteer herself. That the organisation was built on a genuine desire to help…and that she speaks a language that everybody can understand, with emotions and anger and sincerity."

Sofie, a regular volunteer who had just turned 70, likewise emphasised Trude's genuineness, describing her with the Norwegian idiom "*hel ved*" (literally "whole wood", the opposite of

shallow or rotten, typically used to describe people who are sincere and reliable).[41] Like Fredrik and many other volunteers, Sofie was also impressed by her pragmatism and resolve, describing her as a "woman of action." She further described her as unpretentious and down-to-earth, a key virtue in Norwegian society (Eriksen 1993; Witoszek 1998). As she elaborated during our interview,

> *Sofie:* I think it's incredible what Trude has accomplished and how DiH has grown as an organisation without any support from the state. It makes me feel proud to be a drop.
>
> *Me*: What do you think it is about Trude and DiH that appeal to so many people?
>
> *Sofie:* First of all, the woman is "*hel ved*"…
>
> *Me:* Many volunteers have told me that her engagement feels genuine.
>
> *Sofie:* Yes, it is precisely that. And she is also 100% "*ujålete*" (unpretentious/down-to-earth). And then she has done it [helped refugees in Greece] herself, she was the one who started it. It was nothing grand or pretentious about it, she just did it. It is wonderful. And credible.

As suggested by the comments above, the fact that Trude was a mother-of-five, acted spontaneously but resolutely, and expressed vulnerability and emotions without posturing were all interpreted by my interlocutors as evidence of her genuine desire to help. Volunteers' emphasis on her genuineness can partly be explained by growing popular critiques of the legitimacy and reliability of humanitarian aid (Sharma 2017) in Norway as well (Reestorff 2015). As Chouliaraki (2013) argues, contemporary humanitarianism is further characterised by distrust of grand vision and narratives, and emphasis of subjective experience and emotions over "objective reality" (see also Fassin 2012).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, spontaneity and immediacy are also romanticised in social and political life, signifying authenticity (Lazar 2018) and perhaps innocence. In view of this, volunteers' emphasis on the fact that Trude had done it herself, acted spontaneously, and displayed emotions can all be read as symptomatic of broader trends or moods. However, she was also attributed virtues or character traits that are important aspects of Norwegian cultural identity and values of self. These include being unpretentious or down-to-earth (*jordnær*) and

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[41] See Gullestad (1991) for an ethnographic discussion of Norwegians' emphasis on "being whole" and "wholeness."

pragmatic, and are intimately connected with the national ethos of equality and informality (Bendixsen et al 2018; Gullestad 1991; 1992). Volunteers' emphasis on Trude's intelligibility, pragmatism, and patos vis-à-vis "big academics" might also be related to what Skirbekk (2002) identifies as a Norwegian tradition of anti-intellectualism linked to the societal ethos of practicalism and egalitarianism.

Second, several interlocutors highlighted the fact that Trude had travelled to Greece to help refugees despite her lack of experience with humanitarian work and having five children, including two toddlers, at home. These decisions to take a plunge and "embrace hitherto unknown thoughts and possibilities" (Humphrey 2008) were often described by volunteers as courageous. As Jorunn proclaimed, "She even had children living at home!" In 2018, the Norwegian women's magazine *Tara* also awarded Trude the prize for "The most courageous woman of the year" because of her "daring decision to quit her job and start a humanitarian organisation." Yet, in the eyes of Jorunn and many other volunteers, her lack of experience and status as a mother-of-five did not make her exceptional. On the contrary, these characteristics made many volunteers feel that helping refugees in Greece was something they could do too. This was primarily because Trude had demonstrated that one did not need any prior experience or qualifications to be a humanitarian worker, a message she regularly reinforced by statements such as, "I think I have proven that everybody can help. That you don't need a master's degree in humanitarian work to show '*medmenneskelighet*' (compassion towards fellow humans) and respect."

Yet, for many volunteers, nearly equally important was the fact that she had shown that she could help refugees in Greece and run a humanitarian NGO while still being a present and caring mother for her five children—as indicated by the posts and images she regularly shared on social media. As one of my female interlocutors, Nora, put it when explaining her decision to volunteer on Lesvos in September 2018 despite having three young children at home:

> "I had always wanted to do something like this, but I thought I had to wait until my children moved out. However, when I realised what Trude has done, and still does, I felt I no longer had an excuse for staying home. After all, I was only going to be away for a few weeks, and my husband can take care of the kids."

Similarly, Maja underscored that Trude had demonstrated how volunteering abroad to help refugees is something almost everyone can do regardless of how busy their everyday lives appear. Reflecting on DiH's popularity during my visit to Stavanger, Maja also emphasised that Trude and DiH had lowered the threshold for volunteering by demonstrating that one did not have to be a particular kind of person to fit in or be accepted as a drop. "It is enough to be who you are. As long as you have some wit and a decently sized heart," she said. Sitting behind the counter of her interior design store, Maja elaborated:

> "I think a lot of people associate being a volunteer with a particular category of human being. But with DiH, you don't have to be an activist or vegan with a Palestine scarf and shoes made of soybeans or whatever. You can be one of those *'fine fruene'* (fine ladies) who go volunteering with artificial nails but give all they have and then get a new manicure as soon as they return home. Or you can be like Trude and myself: a mother-of-three who cares about interior design, but also about refugees and other political issues."

In this comment, Maja portrayed DiH as an inclusive and open-minded community where total commitment and consistency are not required. Both my own observations and DiH's statistics support this assessment: while the requirement of being self-funded creates some class or financial barriers and women are over-represented, DiH has managed to attract a relatively diverse group of Norwegian citizens with different levels and lengths of commitment. Yet Maja also made another insinuation that I wish to highlight: she depicted both herself and Trude as ordinary Norwegian women.

An ordinary exemplar

To conclude this section, I will argue that volunteers' description of, and identification with, Trude tell us something about how moral exemplars might work in specific ways in egalitarian Norway.[42] More specifically, whereas other moral exemplars discussed in the anthropological literature typically stand out from the population at large by virtue of their exceptional skills or qualities, I argue that it was Trude's identity as an ordinary mother-of-five that drew my interlocutors in. How so? On the one hand, I suggest that her self-representation as an ordinary Norwegian mother is a key reason for why so many volunteers

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[42] Note that the Urapamins Robbins (2007; 2018) study are also egalitarian, though not in the same way.

described her as genuine and down-to-earth, especially vis-à-vis the "big academics" or professional humanitarians she was regularly compared to. As Gullestad remarks, "the Norwegian code of conduct, contrary to the American, demands that a person be self-effacing, not boasting, not putting him/herself forward [or] claiming prestige" (1986: 45-46). Conversely, self-identifying as an ordinary man or woman is generally positive, as this signifies being decent and "in the middle" and thus like most other people in society (ibid: 44; see also Skarpenes and Sakslind 2010). Second, and more importantly, I argue that Trude's identity as an ordinary mother-of-five drew volunteers in by making helping refugees in Greece seem not only important, but also feasible, to a wide range of Norwegian citizens. As both Jorunn and Maja put it, "If she can do it, then I can!"

As alluded to in Chapter 2, the nature and structure of DiH's appeal is thus different from many other humanitarian founders discussed by ethnographers. Take, for instance, Cheng Yen, the Taiwanese Buddhist nun who founded Tzu-Chi. As in the case of DiH, Tzu-Chi's identity is closely tied to its founder and leader who, like Trude, is recognised as both an entrepreneurial star and compassionate mother figure (Huang 2008; 2009). As Huang shows, many of Tzu-Chi's followers were also drawn to the organisation by Cheng Yen's "charismatic appeal" (2009: 132). However, unlike Trude, Cheng Yen was perceived by her followers as extraordinary: they referred to her as "the supreme person" and considered her a "bodhisattva figure" (ideal person) likened to Mother Theresa. Huang also points to a "stark contrast between Cheng Yen's life and the lives of women inhabiting the roles normally prescribed to them in Taiwanese society" (2008: 42). While female followers can relate to their master's ordinary upbringing, Cheng Yen inspired them to "transform" and "render extraordinary" their current lives by modelling them on her pursuit of spiritual and humanitarian achievement and female empowerment (2009: 30). Conversely, I have argued that Trude's perceived ordinariness as a busy but caring mother-of-five successfully balancing her humanitarian engagement abroad with familial commitments at home inspired many volunteers because these qualities made her seem both genuine, resolute, admirable, and relatable.

However, it must be emphasised that being ordinary is not an intrinsic quality but an interactional accomplishment (Sacks 1984). More specifically, Trude emphasised or performed her ordinariness in speeches, interviews, interactions with volunteers, and on social media. As suggested, she did this partly by foregrounding her lack of prior experience and

qualifications, but also by sharing pleasures and frustrations from her daily family life. Moreover, volunteers actively interpreted Trude as an ordinary Norwegian woman, for instance, by highlighting her identity as a mother-of-five and her lack of prior experience with humanitarian fieldwork. When discussing Trude's accomplishments, many volunteers also overlooked or downplayed factors that made her less ordinary or similar to them, such as her home and upbringing in one of Norway's wealthiest neighbourhoods and long-standing personal connection to Greece. A final point bears mentioning: whereas Robbins suggests that just about everyone agrees about who qualify as moral exemplars in Upramin society (2018: 187), my fieldwork revealed that Trude's status as a moral exemplar was more contested both among DiH volunteers and other volunteers and refugee advocates in Norway. I give an example of this below. However, it should be mentioned that volunteers who were (or became) critical of or dissatisfied with her leadership often chose to work for other organisations. Some of these volunteers voiced direct or thinly disguised critiques of Trude and DiH on social media where especially the organisation's work in Moria (see Chapter 3) and Trude's salary (around 60 000 GBP) were subject to harsh judgments and accusations.

Emotional appeals

Hitherto, I have examined the widespread appeal of DiH with reference to Trude's personal character and virtues. However, as I will argue in this section, her ability to draw volunteers in also had to do with the emotional content of her story and DiH's discourse. Indeed, during personal conversations and interviews, many volunteers highlighted her ability to "stir something inside them." As Jorunn asserted, Trude "spoke directly to my heart." In an interview posted on DiH's website, Maja likewise proclaimed that Trude's video message had "stolen her heart." Reflecting on why Trude's words had touched her so deeply during our interview in Stavanger, Maja told me that she had brought her closer to the plight of refugees at the European border, that is, bridging both the geographical and emotional distance that had initially allowed her to remain largely unaffected. Like several other volunteers, Maja specifically emphasised the stories Trude shared about the mothers and children she had helped receive onshore, including a heavily pregnant woman and a soaking wet and cold newborn baby (see Chapter 2). Several other interlocutors similarly described feeling compelled to act after listening to, or reading about, Trude's moving encounters with particular individuals, typically families with young children risking their lives on the Mediterranean or unaccompanied minors self-harming or "losing their childhood" in squalid

refugee camps.

As with Trude's genuine desire to help, her ability to (re-)humanise refugees and speak to volunteers' hearts were often contrasted with experts, politicians, or professional aid workers, whom several of my interlocutors accused of "talking about numbers and not human beings" or "using overly academic language." However, care and responsiveness are not merely questions of bridging distances or telling human stories, since not all lives are "visible or knowable in their precariousness" (Butler 2009: 5). Conversely, "our affective responses are invariably mediated, they call upon and enact certain interpretive frames" or "regulatory norms," including those that divide humanity between "[people] for whom we feel urgent and unreasoned concern and those whose lives and deaths simply do not touch us, or do not appear as lives at all" (ibid: 50-55).

As indicated in the Introduction, where I referred to Europeans' selective identification and empathy with Syrian refugees, these regulatory frames and norms are often racialised and class-based (Weheliye 2014; cf. Muehlebach 2018). They are also gendered and age-based. For instance, prevailing understandings of vulnerability generally assume that refugee women and children are the most vulnerable (Sandvik 2018; Ticktin 2017). As argued previously, young children, in particular, constitute the "perfect victims" in the humanitarian imagination because they are considered harmless and innocent, as representatives of a pure and common humanity (Malkki 2015: 79; 2010: 60; see also Burman 1994; Ticktin 2017; Wark 1995).

Motherly affection

I return to and qualify Malkki's notion of children as perfect victims in the last chapter of this thesis, where I discuss DiH's political advocacy. The crucial point here is that Trude and DiH often operated within what Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) define as a visual "regime of empathy." As they argue, this visual regime "privileges intimate snapshots of individuals or couples, such as a crying child or a mother with her baby" (ibid: 1168). It relies particularly on moralising imagery of children, who are depicted as needy, powerless, clueless, and distressed. As discussed in Chapter 2, Trude also regularly spoke from her vantage point as a mother-of-five, stressing her emotional proximity with refugee children and their parents. By doing so, she exposed a common humanity and encouraged volunteers to empathise and identify with people whose life stories and predicaments were distinctive from their own. Yet, she also appealed to more controversial sentiments, including motherly affection or

maternalism.

Significantly, some volunteers were critical of the sentiments Trude appealed to when foregrounding her motherhood and compassion for children. One of the harshest critics in the latter group was Marianne, a former trainee who spent over six months working at DiH's office after finishing her bachelor's degree in political science. Like several other office volunteers, she was startled by how much DiH relied upon Trude's personal revelation story, which she said was recirculated to attract new volunteers and donors. While emphasising that "the story works—it appeals to so many," Marianne was concerned that it appealed specifically to "women of a certain age," or "women with children" and their "so-called motherly instinct." The fact that women are heavily overrepresented among DiH volunteers might support this claim, though conclusions are difficult to draw since women are generally overrepresented in international oriented volunteer work in Norway (ISF 2018).

Perhaps more significant is that many volunteers referred to their own children or grandchildren when narrating their decision to help refugees in Greece. For instance, "It could have been my child/grandchild," many interlocutors said, referring to refugee children drowning or risking their lives in the Mediterranean or being stuck in squalid refugee camps on Europe's doorstep. Like Trude, several interlocutors also spoke from the vantage point of their identities as parents. For instance, when narrating their decision to volunteer for DiH, they often said something along the lines of: "As a mother to young children myself, my heart bled when I heard about the children risking their lives on the Mediterranean/self-harming in Moria camp." Some, including Jorunn, also said that images of frightened refugee children had "awakened their motherly instinct." Likewise, Maja explained the emotional energy and success of the donation campaign she coordinated with assistance from six other women in 2015 accordingly: "We were all mothers with small children (*småbarnsmødre*) who have big lionhearts." Volunteers of both genders also told me, unsolicited, that they were driven by a special affection for children. As one of them put it, "I become desperate to help when I see children suffering."

Marianne was sceptical of these sentiments, not only because she contested the idea that they were natural and universal, but also because she believed that they concealed other and more problematic attitudes. As part of her job for DiH, she had answered hundreds of emails from prospective volunteers, some of whom had requested to work exclusively with children, or

women and children. DiH did not accept such requests, but Marianne nevertheless found them telling of certain volunteers' selective and paternalistic sympathies. She also worried that these attitudes influenced volunteers' behaviour in the field, a worry that my own observations and interviews partially confirmed. For instance, several coordinators told me about volunteers who had insisted on using their fundraised money to buy clothes for refugee children, regardless of what the actual needs in the camps were during their volunteer assignment.

Some aid workers and locals also complained that foreign volunteers in Greece behaved irresponsibly and unethically towards refugee children, for instance, giving out candy, taking selfies, or hugging or lifting children up before asking them or consulting their parents. While DiH tried to eliminate this sort of behaviour by introducing stricter guidelines (see Chapter 3), I did observe some volunteers behaving like this during my fieldwork from 2018 to 2020, though it was considerably more frequent and less problematised during my first encounter with the organisation in 2016. As mentioned earlier, a few refugees also complained to me that some DiH volunteers were taking on parental roles towards their children or even treating or addressing adult refugees as minors. Their critiques echo scholars who have accused humanitarian actors of not only crossing intimate boundaries but also infantilising refugees, thus reinforcing the "colonial paternalism where the adult-Northerner offers help and knowledge to the infantilised-South" (Burman 1994: 241). From Marianne's perspective, DiH's recruitment strategy carried some responsibility for this behaviour, as the organisation's emphasis on Trude's motherhood and suffering children encouraged selective and paternal sympathies.

Europeanism

However, Trude did not only appeal to volunteers' emotional proximity to refugee children. As discussed in previous chapters, she also highlighted Norway's geographical and emotional proximity to Greece, which has been the most popular summer holiday destination for Norwegians in the last few decades. Self-identifying as a European, she also regularly expressed shock and indignation that a large humanitarian crisis (and later squalid refugee camps and human rights abuses) took place on "our continent," "the cradle of civilization". These comments resonated with many volunteers who, like Trude, felt called to help at least partly as morally indignant citizens of Europe. Some volunteers also articulated a very concrete desire to assist and greet boat refugees at the very moment they arrived on European

shorelines. As Knott (2018) suggests about the volunteers she interviewed on Chios, these interlocutors did not conceive of themselves as guests on Greek land, but as hosts welcoming refugees to Europe. Like Trude, several interlocutors also highlighted a personal desire or sense of obligation to assist Greece or the Greek island communities after having spent many vacations there as children, teenagers or adults, or even owning property there.

As time went by, and EU and individual European countries responded to the increase of asylum seekers by militarising their borders and criminalising people on the move (Franko 2020), the hegemonic image of Europe as a normative power and human rights defender was increasingly frayed. Yet, for several interlocutors, their identification as European and attachment to the idea and ideal of Europe remained important. For instance, several volunteers told me they wanted to volunteer to demonstrate that there was still "warmth" and "compassion left in Europe" or "show refugees that there are still people in Europe who care about them" or "want them as their neighbours." In these statements, the idea(l) of Europe as a liberal and normative powerhouse was troubled and contested but, significantly, not entirely abandoned.

Injustice and shame

Trude also regularly expressed two other feelings many volunteers could identify with, namely a sense of radical global injustice (*global urettferdighet)* and shame (*skam).* As suggested earlier, the substance and target of these sentiments shifted somewhat over the years, with implications for both politics and scale. I will start by re-examining her revelation story and show that it not only signified authenticity and feasibility, but also invited listeners to relate to her feelings and reflect over their own privilege.

A described in Chapter 2, Trude was sorting her youngest daughter's overcrowded wardrobe, and already feeling slightly ashamed over how many clothes her daughter owned—some of which she had not even worn before growing out of—when a discussion on the radio about the "refugee crisis" triggered a sudden and overpowering call to do something. As she sometimes explained, and other times left implicit, the huge contrasts between the comfortable lives of her own children (symbolised by her daughter's excess clothes), and the lived realities of refugee children arriving wet and cold with only a few belongings on European shores, felt deeply unjust and shameful. When discussing the appeal of Trude's story during our interview, Maja suggested that most Norwegians could easily relate to

Trude's feelings, "as we know, deep down, that it is not fair that we live in this surplus, while others struggle to survive." From Maja's perspective, the recognition of these massive global injustices and accompanying feelings of shame were both latent in many Norwegians' consciousness and came to the fore in late summer 2015, when the image of Alan Kurdi pricked the world's conscience and Trude started DiH.

As she elaborated:

> "I think that all of us have this sense of inner shame over how much stuff we have, like what Trude felt that day. Most of it is just crap or things we don't need! The fact that our children have four sweaters that all have the same shape and colour, for example. It is bullshit. In Stavanger, we made a joke that people's sudden obsession with donating clothes or money was an expression of collective guilt for all of the city's wealth. But I think people all across the country felt this sense of shame because we live in a land of overabundance *(overflodsland)*. So, I think Trude just struck a nerve. And only a few days later, the image of Alan Kurdi was published, and then it exploded. People became desperate to do something."

The personal or inner shame that Trude's story invited Maja and other listeners to identify with can be described as a particular form of Scandinavian guilt/shame that commonly arises when they are confronted with global injustices. As described in the Introduction, Oxfeldt and her colleagues argue that Scandinavian guilt/shame is a variant of Western guilt but distinguishes itself by not being directed toward historical wrongdoings or national minorities, but rather the suffering of global others vis-à-vis their own privilege. The authors further suggest that Scandinavians experience global inequalities as particularly shameful, not only because of their egalitarian values, but also because they typically consider their countries to be the richest, happiest, and most peaceful societies on earth (Oxfeldt et al 2016: 13-14).

Supporting Oxfeldt's and Maja's assessments, a large number of my interlocutors told me that imagery and reporting from the European borderland elicited a strong sense of injustice and/or shame for being so extremely privileged vis-à-vis the refugees. Jorunn, for example, openly told me that imagery of suffering refugee children appealed to her motherly instinct. Yet, she underscored that it was first and foremost the uncomfortable reminder of massive global inequalities that made her feel morally outraged and obligated to help. Like Maja and many other interlocutors, Jorunn also referred to Norwegians' "endless freedoms" and

material wealth vis-à-vis refugees fleeing their homes as deeply shameful. Many also highlighted the extreme contrasts between the plight of refugee children in Greece and the carefree lives of their own children in Norway. As one volunteer reflected in a Facebook comment:

> "[Trude's stories from Greece really moved me because] I had children the same age as the refugee children she spoke about. When I learned what these children experienced, and compared it with my own children whose worst experience in life is getting vaccinated, a small abrasion, or being deprived of ice cream, it was extremely eye-opening… "

While Oxfeldt's theory of Scandinavian shame/guilt helped unpack the social history and meaning of my interlocutors' affective responses, my ethnographic interviews and conversations also pointed to other overlapping dynamics. First, the recognition of being exceptionally privileged vis-à-vis others not only elicited a sense of radical injustice and shame, but very often also gratitude for having been born in such a rich and peaceful country, and/or for having Norwegian citizenship. Occasionally, this gratitude was accompanied by expressions of national pride, as other researchers have also found to be the case (Demiri and Fangen 2019). However, gratitude was more frequently accompanied by recognition of extreme personal luck or fortune.[43]

As observed in Chapter 2, Trude also commonly emphasised how grateful and lucky she was to be born and live in Norway, a country that enabled her not only to live comfortably but to travel abroad to help less fortunate others and reinvent herself as a humanitarian worker. Likewise, many volunteers described themselves as "winners of the global lottery" because they were born in Norway and had rights and opportunities as Norwegian citizens. Using words and arguments strikingly like Rawls' famous theory of justice (1971), though applied on the global level and to questions of borders and migration, they further emphasised that their place of birth was neither earned nor deserved, but a result of historical coincidence and luck and, therefore, morally unjustified. Some even described themselves as winners of the

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[43] These discourses are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Demiri and Fangen (2019) note, King Olav V. described, for instance, the increasing affluence in Norway as something "We" should be proud of. However, the king also referred to Norway as "one of the fortunate nations." See also Ahmed (2005)'s analysis of how national shame and pride are entangled in the political discourse in Australia

"social" or "natural lottery," to use Rawls' terms, due to their extra-privileged socio-economic background and/or good health. For many volunteers, what followed from this recognition of extreme personal luck was a moral obligation to help those in the world who, for equally arbitrary reasons, were less fortunate, including refugees.

Second, images and stories of suffering refugees did not only confront volunteers with their privilege vis-à-vis-others, but like Trude (see Chapter 2) and Maja, many were also reminded that they lived in overabundance (*overflod)*. Volunteers specifically emphasised feeling ashamed in response to their personal excess and overconsumption, with several mentioning that the "refugee crisis" had served to highlight this. Building on Oxfeldt's analysis, we might thus say that volunteers' feelings of shame in response to global inequalities and injustices were often accompanied by ecological shame, or "eco-shame." Briefly summarised, eco-shame is a sentiment people feel or express when becoming cognisant of, and troubled by, their environmentally harmful behaviour, or when failing to conform to their environmental ideals (Bruhn 2018; Fredericks 2014).

According to Mkono and Huge (2020), eco-shame and eco-guilt are "emerging global sensibilities, unbounded by geopolitical boundaries." However, my interlocutors' expressions of eco-shame were not unbounded but intimately related to their subject positions as citizens of Norway, one of the wealthiest countries in the world with a huge—and increasingly problematised—ecological footprint (Bruhn 2018; Eriksen 2006). They were particularly related to what Eriksen (2008) calls the Norwegian "society of overabundance" (*overflodssamfunnet)* and widespread notions of "overconsumption" and "consumer-shame" (*forbrukerskam).* As Maja alluded to when referencing her hometown Stavanger—Norway's oil capital—some volunteers also expressed a particular national shame, the "oil-shame" (*oljeskam),* resulting from the fact that so much of the country's wealth and welfare are based on oil and gas resources. Unlike the abovementioned expressions of gratitude and luck, these expressions of eco-shame often involved a recognition of Norway's direct responsibility and hypocrisy as a self-proclaimed environmental champion (Eriksen 2006: 246). Moreover, talking about Norway's role as a leading exporter of oil and gas production led some volunteers to reflect upon their country's responsibility for current and future climate refugees.

Third, Trude did not only express feelings of personal shame when confronted with the plight of refugee children vis-à-vis her own children's comfortable lifestyle, but she later also expressed a more collective and political form of shame in response to Europe and specifically Norway's inhumane refugee policies. Oftentimes, these declarations of national shame were accompanied by heartfelt concerns about the moral health and future of the Norwegian state and society, and Trude expressed fears that her children would "grow up in an increasingly cold and heartless society." I return to shaming as a political tactic in the last chapter of the thesis, where I discuss DiH's political advocacy. The point I wish to make here is that Trude's declarations of national shame spoke to many volunteers who felt indignant or ashamed by the political discourse or government inaction (see also Jumbert 2020).

Indeed, many volunteers narrated their decision to help refugees in Greece as a reaction to Norway's increasingly restrictive refugee politics or growing anti-immigration sentiments in the public discourse or their communities. Anders, for example, said he had decided to volunteer after reading what he described as a "xenophobic" and "racist" op-ed by a controversial but popular Norwegian politician. Similarly, Mathilde, a local politician for the "refugee-friendly" Socialist Left Party in an industrial town east of the capital, signed up as a volunteer for DiH in the spring of 2019 after her political party lost another seat in the local election and their proposal to accept more refugees in the municipality was rejected for the second year in a row. As she explained, volunteering for DiH was partly a way for her to "do something concretely" in the face of political impasses. However, in the context of growing nativism and xenophobia, she also described volunteering as a symbolic and political act.

The examples above suggest that Trude can be described not only as a moral exemplar, but as a social diagnostician, highlighting prevalent feelings of shame and concern in response to Norwegian overabundance and the government's "inhumane" asylum policies. Yet, as I discuss below, she did not only point out what was problematic and worrisome. By establishing DiH, she also provided an opportunity for ordinary Norwegian citizens to address or "move beyond their shamed position" by doing something concretely (Reestorff 2015).

The appeal of DiH's model and imagery

As suggested above, DiH's popularity can partly be described with reference to Trude's personal character and story, as well as her emotional appeals to volunteers' maternal love and sense of injustice and shame. However, there are also other, more practical, reasons for

DiH's popularity that relate to the organisation's model and vision of "making it easy to help refugees" (see also Jumbert 2020). As other scholars studying volunteer humanitarianism in Europe have observed, these initiatives are often tailored to the lives and timetables of ordinary citizens and thus appealing to those who consider that traditional NGOs require "too much unconditional loyalty, involvement and time from their members" (Guribye and Mydland 2018: 347; Gerbier-Aublanc 2018). DiH followed this trend and marketed itself as a "*lavterskeltilbud*" (low-threshold offer) for ordinary people. By only requiring volunteers to commit to ten days, the organisation enabled people to travel to Greece and work intensively for a short time before returning home to their everyday routines and commitments.

Consequently, DiH's model was attractive for people unable or unwilling to change their lives in significant ways but who still wanted to do something concretely to help. To make it easier for working or studying volunteers to give their time, DiH also started collaborating with several institutions and organisations, including labour unions, colleges and universities. It also developed an internship programme to attract students and recent graduates (see Chapter 3) and created a technology and social-media course for more senior volunteers who often needed additional support to use these tools in the field. Illustrating the success of these strategies, several interlocutors highlighted DiH's accessibility, sometimes making comparisons with other humanitarian organisations that require considerably more investment or sacrifice, such as MSF. Several interlocutors also told me that they had always wanted to volunteer somewhere in Africa or the Middle East, but that volunteering for a Norwegian organisation in Greece was more convenient, felt safer, or was a good start (cf. Cabot 2019: 261).

> Reflecting on DiH's low-threshold model, Jorunn remarked sarcastically that DiH "allows everybody to follow their childhood dreams of being superheroes." While there might be some truth to this, most volunteers I interviewed vehemently rejected being called heroes or role models, and rather identified themselves with DiH's name and imagery: as small but meaningful drops in a large ocean of need.

Image 23: DiH's official logo.   Image 24: Painting by a volunteer.

Pål's decision to volunteer for DiH exemplifies how the appeal of its organisational model and imagery sometimes worked together to draw volunteers in. Born in the early 1960s, Pål grew up in a town about 50 kilometres east of Oslo, where his parents owned a horticultural business. As a teenager, he wanted to become a marine biologist. However, he ended up training as a pilot for the Norwegian Air Force before deciding to study theology. In the summer of 2019, I visited Pål and his wife in a small village in the Lofoten archipelago, far above the Arctic circle in northern Norway, where he is a Lutheran priest in the local church. While sitting at a table by the window in his living room, drinking black coffee and nibbling on bits of milk chocolate as the rain poured outside, Pål told me that he had a long-standing engagement with social work and justice.

As a theology student, he had been part of the leftist student movement that supported the struggle against apartheid in South Africa through fundraising and advocacy. After starting to work as a priest in northern Norway, he channelled most of his engagement to the local level, where he helped supporting disadvantaged groups and facilitating integration between local Norwegians and Russian beggars and sex workers who faced both exploitation and stigmatisation in Norway (Sverdljuk 2009). When a group of Syrian refugees settled in Lofoten in 2015 after having crossed the Arctic border, Pål also helped establish a local Red Cross branch to support language learning and create social meeting places.

However, despite his concern with global justice and inequalities, he had never volunteered abroad before going to Lesvos to work for DiH in the spring of 2019. He had contemplated for several years going on a three-month mission to Palestine with the Norwegian Church Aid. What stopped him was the substantial amount of work and travelling the organisation

required volunteers to commit to prior to and after the mission, which Pål worried would be difficult to reconcile with his responsibilities as the only priest in his congregation. Volunteering for DiH, however, was a much easier choice, as it only required minimal preparation and nothing from volunteers upon return. As Pål put it, DiH thus "opened the door for me to do something I had wanted to do for a long time." He elaborated:

> "If you have a humanitarian engagement and are frustrated about the state of the world, and suddenly discover an opportunity to do something, you get what I, as a priest, would describe as a call. A feeling that 'this is right for me, I want to do this.' And when the doors are open for you, why not just walk through? (…) With DiH, I could start quickly and do a concrete job without all the other fuss. It was very hands on, and not a long bureaucratic process. That appealed to me a lot."

Besides being attracted to DiH's organisational model, Pål emphasised that the organisation's name spoke to him:

> *Pål:* Many people describe volunteering as heroic, but it is really not. It's about recognising that the world is out there, and that all of us can do *something*, if only a drop in the ocean. So that name really spoke to me. Because that's really all you can be, a drop.
> *Me*: It is a good name.
> *Pål:* It really is. On Lesvos, you also have the ocean right there and, in a way, both the people who come [the refugees] and those of us who try to help are drops in the ocean. It [the name] feels very right.

It is worth noting that, while the notion of being a drop in the ocean stems from a famous quote by Mother Theresa, Trude was not aware of this when she selected the organisation's name. Nor did Pål or any other interlocutors mention Mother Theresa when they talked about DiH's name and imagery. However, the image of a drop in the ocean appealed to Pål's sense of "being part of the world" (Malkki 2015) and conviction that everyone has a moral obligation and opportunity to do something to alleviate global suffering. As he explained, the name also symbolised the deep relatedness between all human beings who, as Caribbean thinkers like Glissant (1997) shows, have always been both separated and connected by water.

These convictions can be described as cosmopolitan, though, as noted in the Introduction, none of my interlocutors used that label. For instance, while Pål was a priest and devoted Christian, he emphasised that his sense of obligation to help refugees first and foremost derived from his recognition of being a *"medmenneske"* (fellow human) in an interdependent and entangled world. However, he was not an unrooted cosmopolitan or citizen of nowhere. Conversely, he stressed that Norwegians had a particular responsibility to help refugees because of their wealth and privilege. According to him, assisting and welcoming refugees was also to act according to both Christian and Norwegian values of *nestekjærlighet* (compassion) and *medmenneskelighet* (see also Bendixsen and Wyller 2020).

Notably, the idea of being a small, albeit meaningful, force for good in the world resonates with Norway's public self-image as "small and benevolent helper" (Gullestad 2006a; Leira 2013). Indeed, being small is associated with innocence, not only when it comes to children, but also with regard to nations or other collectives (Wekker 2016). To put it crudely, neither Norwegians or "drops" can be colonisers or exploiters as their powers are barely enough to make a difference. During my fieldwork, I spoke to many volunteers who assumed that a small, Norwegian humanitarian organisation like DiH could only be benevolent and harmless. However, the organisation's imagery also attracted volunteers like Fredrik and his wife Ingrid, who were more suspicious of the humanitarian enterprise and Norwegian claims to goodness. Ingrid was born and raised in Kenya as a child of international development workers and particularly critical of images of aid workers and volunteers as heroes or rescuers. Before Fredrik and Ingrid signed up to volunteer with DiH, the couple therefore did substantial research to ensure that the organisation's work and profile aligned with their personal ideals and values. As Fredrik explained when I visited the family at their farm east of Oslo, one of the things they appreciated about DiH was the organisation's lack of grand vision:

> "When I looked at DiH's webpage, it was very straightforward. They did not claim to be saving the world or anything like that. It was much more tangible and *'nøkternt'* (realistic)."

> Ingrid added:

"We travelled to Greece knowing very well we were not going to rescue anyone. But we got the opportunity to do a tiny bit during a limited time for a limited number of people. So, the name 'A drop in ocean' felt very appropriate."

For volunteers like Pål, Ingrid and Fredrik, DiH's name and imagery thus expressed realism, pragmatism, and humility, both on the part of the organisation and of individual volunteers who, by defining themselves as drops, emphasised their limited but meaningful contributions. However, as my interviews made clear, the image of a drop in the ocean not only downplays the contributions of individual volunteers, it also symbolises how much one can accomplish while working together. As Jorunn often put it, echoing Mother Theresa, "As an individual, I can only be a drop. However, together we volunteers make a difference." As Jumbert observes, "the very idea that every little contribution counts then becomes a core value, where the added value is more than the sum of every benevolent act" (2020: 10). Moreover, DiH's organisational model and imagery offered what Tsing (2005:214) describes as a "model of change" in which individual volunteers can imagine themselves as moral or political subjects –or drops– working together to help refugees across national and other borders. As an interlocutor reflected in a Facebook post, using several of the key concepts of this thesis:

"I am a proud drop, and it's incredible to be part of this community of drops from all over the world. We all work toward the same goal: to make the world a tiny bit better for our '*medmennesker*' who are less fortunate than us."

Illustrating the success of DiH's symbolism, many volunteers came to define themselves as drops not only in Greece, but also after having returned to everyday life in Norway. For some, like Line, this personal and collective identity became so important that they even tattooed the figure of a drop on their bodies. Others, like Jorunn and Sofie, bought T-shirts, silver necklaces, or earrings shaped like drops from DIH's online shop (see images below) which they told me they wore with pride.

Notably, volunteers' identification with DiH's name, and eagerness to represent themselves as drops in public, illustrates the organisation's success in developing its own brand. As Chouliaraki (2013) argues, "branding" has become a privileged communication tool for humanitarian organisations. By turning the organisation's name (and thus also their humanitarian cause) into commodities, DiH was able to inscribe itself onto the bodies and

identities of many volunteers and also appeal to funders. Besides increasing attention and revenues, this "commodification of humanitarianism" (Hopgood 2008) further helped to build a collective material identity and community of volunteers who could both express themselves and identify others as "fellow drops" and humanitarians.

Image 25 and 26: DiH T-shirt and jewellery (photos: DiH)

Finally, several interlocutors emphasised other aspects they appreciated about DiH's organisational model and profile. For instance, like Pål, many said they were attracted to DiH by the organisation's hands-on approach and provision of direct assistance. This was partly because they believed that small-scale and volunteer-driven organisations like DiH were quicker, more flexible, and more innovative than their professional counterparts. However, many volunteers also expressed a personal desire to see and experience the border spectacle firsthand, volunteer "on the frontline," or "witness history as it unfolded" (see also Cabot 2019; Knott 2018; Papataxiarchis 2016). Getting a first-hand experience of a boat-landing or life in the notorious Moria refugee camp on Lesvos was particularly sought-after due to the solidified positions boat landings and Moria camp both acquired in the public imagination with regard to the "refugee crisis" (Knott 2018; Papataxiarchis 2016; Rozakou 2019). While neither ethical self-cultivation nor moral experimentation were common themes in my interlocutors' narratives, (cf. Campbell, 2020) some of my interlocutors also said they had been intrigued by the personal transformation Trude and other staff and volunteers narrated upon returning home to Norway. As one volunteer admitted: "I wanted to find out if I would experience this too."

As others have argued, this desire to see and experience the border spectacle firsthand can be understood as a form of self-realisation or crisis-chasing (Cabot 2019; Chouliaraki 2013; Papataxiarchis 2016). As mentioned in the Introduction, it also highlights uncomfortable parallels between anthropologists, volunteers and global tourists (Cabot 2019; see also Rozakou 2019). Notably, some volunteers reflected on this and described their decision to volunteer as largely self-interested or enabled by their Norwegian passport and other privileges. It is also important to recognise nuances and ambivalence in volunteers' positions. For instance, some volunteers told me that they had asked DiH explicitly to *not* work on the frontline, either because they feared not being able to handle it (physically or emotionally), or because they did not consider themselves sufficiently trained or qualified. A Norwegian couple in their twenties also decided against visiting Moria camp and the lifejacket graveyard on Lesvos, describing such visits as "disaster tourism."

Nevertheless, volunteers rarely questioned their "right to help" (Bendixsen and Sandberg 2021: 23) and generally conceived of themselves as hosts welcoming refugees to Europe rather than guests on Greek land (Knott 2018). In addition to helping refugees and supporting local aid efforts (see Chapter 3), many also framed volunteering in Greece as a measure to support the faltering Greek economy and tourist industry. Arguably, underlying these ideas and beliefs were assumptions of both Norwegian goodness and "white innocence": the Norwegian/white self being posited as morally good, harmless, and full of entitlement (Wekker 2016; see also Introduction and Chapter 1).

Several volunteers also said they were attracted to DiH because of the organisation's close work and interactions with refugees, which was framed as both more meaningful and more important than what they heard other organisations were doing (e.g., cooking food or working in the warehouse, which DiH volunteers only did occasionally). Notably, these aspects of DiH's work were also what usually made many volunteers return to work for DiH, sometimes once or twice a year. As Therese, who got a job working at the office of the Norwegian Refugee Aid, explained: "I like my new job and it feels meaningful to do things from home, but it's not the same as *being there*." Like many other returning volunteers, Therese had developed friendly relationships with several refugee volunteers, whom she talked to regularly and were looking forward to meet again. "I'm always looking in the calendar and my savings account, thinking about and planning my next trip to Greece," she told me once we met up in Norway. Many politically engaged volunteers were also attracted by the

prospect of daily interactions with refugees because they wanted to better understand the human costs of the EU's policies or (as the case of Therese) improve their language skills—typically Arabic. In parallel with the introduction of consciousness-training (see Chapter 3), these close interactions and relationships were increasingly problematised. For instance, some volunteers shared the organisation's concern with "too much intimacy," or worried about the risk of re-traumatising refugees when talking about the past. However, none of the Norwegian volunteers I interviewed worried that their humanitarian work and interactions with refugees could reinforce racial or colonial hierarchies.

Finally, volunteers also underscored DiH's prominent and growing focus on political advocacy and "witnessing" (see Chaper 6). Fredrik and Ingrid, for example, highlighted this as one of the features that appealed to them about DiH, and implied that it helped to legitimise their short-term efforts. Like several other interlocutors, they stressed that the impact of volunteering in Greece for a short period was necessarily limited and temporary, "a bandage on a massive wound." Conversely, they believed that being a witness and speaking out against the violence of the border regime was the most important task DiH and volunteers could do because this could help change people's attitudes towards refugees and ultimately promote more inclusive or humane asylum policies. Volunteers expressions of pragmatism and humility were here coupled with loftier but also more political aspirations to enact societal and institutional change.

Notably, Ingrid and Fredrik also stressed that they appreciated Trude's personal connection to and knowledge of Greece and Greek, which they believed lent DiH authority and legitimacy vis-à-vis other international organisations. To return to my discussion about moral exemplars above, this illustrates how people might value different things about their moral exemplars (Humphrey 1997; cf. Robbins 2018). However, it also demonstrates Trude's success in making her personal story and character appeal to different audiences (see Chapter 2).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined DiH's widespread popularity and appeal. I began by arguing that Trude can be characterised as an (ordinary) moral exemplar because of her exemplary virtues and ability to "draw [volunteers] in" by demonstrating, DiH's genuine mission and the feasibility of ordinary people helping refugees in Greece. I then showed how she struck a nerve in Norwegian society by appealing to prevalent humanitarian and political sentiments.

These include, most notably, motherly affection and Europeanism, as well as personal and collective shame in response to global inequalities, Norwegian overabundance and growing nativism and xenophobia. The chapter further highlighted the broad attraction of DiH's organisational model and imagery. Regarding the former, I showed that its model created new conditions of possibility for Norwegian citizens to help refugees abroad without changing their lives in significant ways. Moreover, whereas Trude represented virtues many volunteers admired (including sincerity, unpretentiousness, and resoluteness), the image of "a drop in the ocean" appealed to other—not incompatible—norms and values prevalent in Norwegian society, including humility, cooperation, cosmopolitan beliefs in a shared and interdependent world, and common humanity.

More broadly, the chapter has shown that my interlocutors' decisions to volunteer for DiH were shaped by an interplay of factors, including Trude's character and story, cultural norms and emotions, humanitarian and national imaginaries, and more recent global and national developments (cf. Lazar 2017; Malkki 2015). I have paid particular attention to volunteers' feelings and articulations of shame. As mentioned in the introduction, shame is often portrayed in popular culture and scholarly literature alike, as a paralysing or debilitating emotion. However, the fact that several interlocutors described a sense of shame—whether inner, personal, or collective—when narrating their decision to volunteer indicates that shame can also be catalysing or productive (cf. Iyer et al 2007).

Notably, some interlocutors also made this point during our interviews. For instance, Fredrik described shame as "a useful corrective." While he underscored that feeling ashamed in response to one's personal privilege or (in)actions can be uncomfortable or even painful, he stressed that "we need shame" because it "mobilises us to make the right decisions." His wife Ingrid, who in addition to volunteering for DiH was a zealous environmental activist, likewise stressed the positive function of shame. Reflecting on Norwegian overabundance and overconsumption, she described feelings of shame as a "moral instinct" (cf. Pinker 2008) that works to tell us that we are not living in accordance with our values or ideals. While recognising that shame can be a self-oriented and self-righteous emotion (Chouliaraki 2013), Fredrik and Ingrid thus firmly believed that it can be channelled toward care for others— including refugees—and for the planet (cf. Bruhn 2018).

Chapter 5:
Humanitarian afterlives

How did volunteers experience coming home to Norway after helping refugees in Greece and reintegrating into their everyday lives and routines? Was volunteering a transformative experience, as DiH envisioned? And what can we learn by attending to volunteers' more difficult and unsettling emotions and experiences? In this chapter, I examine their experiences of returning home to their everyday lives, friends, and families in Norway after volunteering and negotiating different worlds and relationships. The premise of the chapter is the basic, but often neglected, fact that volunteers are people with histories and relationships extending beyond the event of volunteering (see Englund 2018). Tracing their ambivalent experiences upon coming home to Norway is, therefore, crucial to get a better sense of the varied potentials and challenges associated with short-term humanitarian volunteerism.

DiH's transformation narrative: The need for evidence

In January 2018, approximately five months before my fieldwork officially started, I presented my research proposal to Trude and Mette at DiH's old office west of Oslo. I was excited, and admittedly, a bit nervous since our previous conversations had left me with the impression that they expected my project to be highly relevant and applicable (cf. Jean-Klein and Riles 2005). Before our meeting, I imagined that they would be mostly interested in my idea of exploring the organisation's humanitarian innovations, as I assumed this would have most practical value, but I was wrong. What captured their curiosity was my interest in studying volunteers' experience of returning home. Suddenly enthusiastic, Mette leaned over the table and asked me if I would be keen on helping them conduct a study to find out whether previous volunteers had experienced any changes in their attitudes and behaviours. They had already recruited one other volunteer—whose professional job was as a quantitative analyst—and decided that they wanted to conduct a cross-sectional survey, but suggested that we could also do personal interviews with volunteers. I accepted immediately, thinking that participating in this internal assessment would be a good and tangible way to give something back to the organisation (Colvin 2015) while also granting me further access and insight into their work and reasoning.

Humanitarian organisations regularly and increasingly collect their own data for purposes of advocacy or evaluation (Redfield 2013). I quickly learned that this study had a specific purpose: DiH wanted to test their transformation hypothesis and measure what they referred to as the organisation's social impact on Norwegian society. Where did this interest come from? As described in Chapter 2, Trude narrated her impulsive decision to travel to Lesvos to help refugees as a profound break with her previous habits and preoccupations. However, she was not the only DiH staff who narrated her experience of helping refugees as life-changing. Mette and Jenny, the two other women part of DiH's core team from the organisation's inception in 2015 to the end of my fieldwork in 2020, also emphasised how working for DiH had altered their lives dramatically.

For instance, in our interview, Mette drew a sharp contrast between her former, more stable, and well-paying job in the corporate sector and her work for DiH, describing the latter as more "meaningful" and "authentic" (*ekte*). Generally, she also emphasised that working for DiH had enabled her to live a life less focused on material wealth and "fancy clothes," and more according to her personal ideals and values. Jenny, DiH's factotum (*altmuligkvinne*) described the organisation's impact on her life in even stronger terms, explaining that "I usually say that it was a life before DiH and a life after." Like Trude, she especially emphasised her humanitarian encounters in Greece, where she led the work to establish DiH's presence in the Nea Kavala camp. Yet, she also stressed how grateful she was for the opportunity to work for the administration and thus "contribute from home." In an interview with a Norwegian women's magazine, she explained that working for DiH had made her "first-world-bubble (*I-landsboblen*) burst." "In fact, I do not live in it anymore, and I appreciate so much more all the small things in life," she told the journalist.

Trude, Mette and Jenny's stories of personal enrichment help explain their personal reasons for sticking with DiH year-after-year despite the fact that the work could be emotionally taxing and unpredictable, and often tough to balance with family and other responsibilities. Indeed, it is worth noting that all three stories were told in a way that defied closure not because they invited different interpretations, but because the stories were constructed as unfinished and ongoing, as having futures. While these stories—especially Trude's—were often shared with the public, the three women's experiences were also subject to personal and organisational reflection and ultimately shaped DiH's belief in the transformative potential of

volunteering.[44] This belief was further strengthened by conversations Trude and other staff members had with volunteers, many of whom told them that helping refugees in Greece had changed their lives and provided them with new friends, meaning, and perspective. After hearing many such stories, Trude and other DiH staff started to talk publicly about the transformative impact of volunteering. Field coordinators did as well. For instance, Elena who we met in Chapter 3, often talked about all the people she knew who had been "completely transformed" by volunteering. Rather than framing this as a positive side effect—as most DiH staff did—she said she believed causing personal transformation in the lives of volunteers was an important aspect of what DiH does: "We are not only helping refugees, we are also changing the people who volunteer with us, so they can go home and change their own societies," she told me enthusiastically the first time we met.

Nonetheless, when attending a conference on social entrepreneurship in London in 2017, Trude was confronted by the fact that DiH did not have any data to support this apart from anecdotal evidence. By the end of the year, she and Mette thus decided to try to map or measure the wider effects of their work, not on the lives of the refugees they were trying to help or the Greek communities where they worked, but on individual volunteers and Norwegian society at large. As Trude candidly recognised, assessing these wider impacts was important not only for the organisation itself, but also for their donors and partners.

My experience of co-producing the survey[45] and writing and presenting the resulting report (Mogstad and Haugen 2019) illustrated both frictions and pleasures associated with interdisciplinary and academic-NGO collaborations. Regarding the former, I was largely unfamiliar with questionnaires and rather uncomfortable with relying exclusively on this data collection method. I was thus pleased to be able to triangulate and nuance the results of the

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[44] Notably, this belief echoes Malinowski's view that successful fieldwork ought to be transformative. As Candea (2018: 6) observes, "this view persists in contemporary anthropological attitudes to the ethnography-theory relation."

[45] We conducted a cross-sectional web-based survey consisting of 41 questions and statements about how volunteering for DiH in Greece had influenced volunteers' understanding and attitudes, humanitarian and political engagement, and networks/relationships. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement using a five-point Likert scale. At the end of the survey, respondents were also given the opportunity to describe how their first-time experience volunteering had influenced their personal lives in their own words (open answers). The survey was published on DiH' Norwegian Facebook page, which has a large follower base. During the course of three weeks, 309 volunteers responded. They consisted of both genders, belonged to different age groups, and lived in all of Norway's 19 counties.

questionnaire with open answers and my own interview data. Second, as is usually the case with commissioned research, the findings were expected to benefit the client. Consequently, both the survey questions and the report focused overwhelmingly on the positive and transformational effects of volunteering. Nonetheless, I do not object to the report's findings, which—regardless of its reliance on the survey and limitations embedded in our particular design[46]—were interesting and worthy of further exploration. Moreover, DiH's interest in collecting and sharing these "wider impacts" was interesting in its own right, as were volunteers' reactions to the report, which I return to below.

Crudely summarised, the report highlighted four positive side effects of short-term volunteer humanitarianism in Greece. First, it suggested that volunteering for DiH in Greece positively influenced many volunteers' attitudes and understanding. For instance, 83 percent of the respondents agreed that their volunteer experience had "increased their understanding of why people flee their homes," while 93 percent affirmed that they had "achieved a better understanding of how European policies affect people on the run." A large majority also maintained that they had become "more emphatic" not only toward refugees, but also "other disadvantaged groups in society." Second, the report indicated that many volunteers have continued their engagement with refugees at home. For instance, nearly two-thirds reported that they had collected money or clothes for refugees upon returning to Norway. In the open answers, several respondents also wrote that they had started to volunteer at asylum centres, language cafes, or other institutions supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Norway.

Third, the report suggested that many volunteers have become more politically engaged after their experience assisting refugees in Greece. For instance, a large majority said they "have been following public debates and news regarding Norwegian refugee and asylum policies closer" (88 percent) and "more frequently discuss refugee and asylum politics with family and friends" (84 percent) and "on social media" (69 percent). Forty-one percent further affirmed that they had "participated in at least one demonstration in solidarity with refugees after volunteering for DiH in Greece." Finally, the report indicated that DiH's volunteer model led

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[46] Apart from the lack of statistical representativity, there were other limitations with the survey, including its reliance on self-recruited volunteers and their self-reported evaluations. Because it was a cross-sectional survey conducted only at a single point in time, we might say that it merely gave us a snapshot of the population being studied (Lavrakas 2008). The inclusion of my interview data helped offset some of these limitations and ensure triangulation, but was mainly referred to in the report to supplement and nuance the survey's key findings. Other limitations with the study are discussed in the report (Mogstad and Haugen 2019).

to the formation of new friendships and networks both within and across national borders. For instance, the majority maintained that they were still in contact with other volunteers and refugees they met when volunteering. In the open answers, several also described participating in a global network of volunteers and refugees emerging through DiH's activities and characterised it as a source of comfort and hope.

Unsurprisingly, DiH was happy about the findings, which largely supported the organisation's stated belief in the transformative potential of volunteering. In fact, the report not only foregrounded volunteers' self-reported experiences of personal change in terms of attitudes, understanding, and humanitarian and political engagement. It also suggested that volunteers both inspire—through the force of example—and seek to influence friends, family, colleagues, and other co-nationals through storytelling, dialogue, and political interventions. As Trude put it in her personal foreword to the report, "We are incredibly proud to be able to show the world that making a contribution that appears to be only 'a drop in the ocean' can actually have large ripple effects, both on the personal level and for society at large." After the publication of the report, Trude and DiH also increasingly referred to volunteers as "*brobyggere*" (bridge builders) and emphasised their role in creating understanding and collaborations across generations, nationalities, cultures, and other borders.

These reactions are understandable. Humanitarian interventions are occasionally romanticised and applauded, but more often the subject of harsh critiques from scholars, popular culture, and media alike (Sharma 2017). As discussed in the Introduction, this is particularly the case with short-term and international volunteerism, which are typically labelled as "voluntourism" and accused of doing more harm than good. The findings in the report do not challenge these critiques but might be seen to qualify or nuance them, or provide an overlapping and complementary narrative (on the need to embrace the possibility of overlaps and simultaneity in our analysis of humanitarianism, see Theodossopoulos 2016). As such, the findings in the report not only granted DiH some evidence to support their anecdotes in public fora, but in the context of growing demands for social impact, political action, and sustainability, they also provide larger justifications for DiH's work and organisational model.

However, the report presents a partial view that leaves out, or only superficially addresses, volunteers' more difficult and unsettling experiences of returning home and negotiating different worlds and relationships. Notably, this was also pointed out by several volunteers

themselves who, both during the launch of the report and on subsequent occasions, criticised it for focusing overwhelmingly on the positive aspects of volunteering. In the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to provide a fuller, more complex, and ambiguous picture by presenting key findings gleaned by my fieldwork conversations and in-depth interviews with volunteers upon their return to Norway.

Common experiences of volunteering

Before I examine volunteers' experiences of coming home, it is important to say something more about what characterised their experiences in Greece. In this section, I will thus highlight five interrelated points that frequently emerged in my ethnographic conversations and interviews. First, a large number of interlocutors described their volunteer work in Greece as a stark and powerful "confrontation with reality." By helping receive boats or volunteering inside and outside refugee camps with varying but often poor standards, volunteers became first-hand witnesses to the EU's violent policies of securitisation and containment. Accordingly, they were also physically and viscerally confronted with extreme global inequalities and the immense human costs of policies and practices that they knew or learned that their own government by and large supported. Most interlocutors also encountered refugees who had been deported from Norway and were now seeking refuge in Europe for the second time, several of whom spoke fluent Norwegian.

Second, my interlocutors often described volunteering as "intense," "all-consuming," and "addictive." Some attributed this addiction to their sense of "doing something meaningful" or "feeling useful," implicitly or explicitly comparing these feelings with their everyday lives at home (see also Malkki 2015: 41-43; Smirl 2015). Several also admitted that they liked being and working in the midst of action and urgency, "where things really mattered." Many also described themselves as "better people" or "better versions of themselves" when volunteering, typically emphasising that they felt stronger, braver, or more caring, humble, generous, social, attentive, or present, that volunteering "kept them focused on things that mattered" or "brought out the best in them."

Third, the majority of interlocutors emphasised their close and interpersonal interactions with refugees. Due to the nature of DiH's activities (see Chapter 3), volunteers' work generally

consisted of direct contact and conversations with refugees who attended the organisation's projects and activities. Many of these had lost or been separated from their loved ones, or were experiencing prolonged immobilisation and deteriorating physical and mental health, what Ghafar described as a gradual death (see Chapter 1). Yet, despite stark asymmetries of power and privilege between volunteers and refugees, meaningful connections and even friendships were often made, especially between long-term volunteers and refugees volunteering for DiH.

Fourth, many volunteers highlighted their strong connections to and fast-developing friendships with other volunteers across generations, nationalities, and cultures. For many interlocutors, this was one of the most surprising aspects of their volunteer experience, and they often emphasised how they "had not come here to make friends" or "did not think it was possible to develop so strong and meaningful friendships so fast," especially not with people seemingly distinct from them. Beyond the issue of specific bonds and relationships, my interlocutors also emphasised the friendly and sociable atmosphere and strong sense of shared purpose and unity among volunteers, sometimes referred to as the drop family. Many also noted their appreciation of Greece's sunny climate and hospitable culture, including late and long dinners with shared Meze and ouzo, or cheap wine and beer. This contrasted starkly with everyday life in Norway, where eating, and especially buying alcohol at restaurants, is exorbitant, and people normally eat dinner with their nuclear families at home. Indeed, volunteering was very much a social experience, and many emphasised that it was much more joyful and pleasurable than they had ever expected.[47]

Finally, and for all of the reasons mentioned above, my interlocutors commonly described their experience volunteering for DiH in Greece as being part of a "humanitarian bubble." This term was also used by other aid workers and volunteers I spoke to during my fieldwork, as well as in the anthropological literature. For instance, in the concluding chapter of *Aidland*

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[47] Of course, there were also internal disagreements, personality conflicts, informal hierarchies, and cliques. Most notably, volunteers typically positioned each other according to how long or how many times they had previously volunteered in Greece, and long-termers occasionally kept to themselves. While DiH attracted volunteers from over 60 countries and the organisation's working language was English, several non-Norwegians also complained that DiH had "too many Norwegian volunteers" and that they tended to speak Norwegian to each other, thereby excluding others. Some volunteers were also critical of others' habits of eating out, drinking alcohol or going to the beach or other touristy activities during their days off, describing it as "too much like summer camp" or "ethically inappropriate." One volunteer even described the volunteer community as a cult, positioning herself as a more distanced outsider. Nonetheless, most described volunteering as a sociable and enjoyable experience and emphasised their feelings of togetherness and shared purpose.

(Mosse 2011), Anthorpe describes the world of professional development workers as a sealed and separate bubble fenced off from the local physical and socio-cultural environment and "strongly resistant to even pricking" (Apthorpe 2011: 214). While DiH volunteers were not as fenced off—physically or socially—from local Greeks or the refugees they sought to help as the development workers studied by Smirl (2015) and contributors to Mosse (2011), the humanitarian bubble my interlocutors described was definitely fenced off from life at home. In this bubble, volunteers often felt completely absorbed in their work. Friendships were made fast and, not infrequently, volunteers or coordinators also started to have romantic feelings for each other. However, most importantly, volunteers experienced intensity and meaning they could not find in their everyday lives in Norway (see also Malkki 2015: 8). As one volunteer explained, being in the humanitarian bubble was a bit like virtual reality, yet it simultaneously felt more real and important than life at home. For this and other reasons, several interlocutors also described Norway and the place they volunteered as "different worlds." In fact, Pål even described Lesvos as an "entirely different planet."

Image 27: Volunteer on Lesvos (photo: DiH).

Coming home

How did volunteers experience leaving the humanitarian bubble, coming home to Norway, and reintegrating into their normal everyday lives? As suggested above, the in-depth interviews I conducted with volunteers after they returned to Norway lend at least partial support to DiH's vision of volunteering as a transformative experience. In fact, several interlocutors described volunteering for DiH in Greece as a life-changing event. Like Trude,

they typically said that helping refugees in Greece had made them discover new meaning or purpose in life, or fundamentally reoriented their focus and priorities. Others described more subtle shifts, but maintained—like Mette—that volunteering had inspired them to live more in accordance with their personal ideals, or provided their lives with "new perspectives," "greater depth" (*mer dybde*), or "value."[48]

How this newfound value or meaning manifested itself in volunteers' everyday lives varied. A couple interlocutors followed Trude's example and quit their jobs to return to Greece as long-term volunteers or coordinators. Others applied for jobs or internships in the humanitarian sector in Norway or started their own organisations to help refugees in Greece or elsewhere. Many more became regular or seasonal volunteers, returning to Greece once or several times per year to volunteer for DiH or sometimes other organisations.[49]

Like the respondents in the survey, the vast majority of my interlocutors also said they had continued or increased their engagement with refugees in their local communities in Norway. Some became regional coordinators or domestic volunteers for DiH, offering regular or intermittent support or *pro bono* work. Others volunteered at asylum centres, language cafés, or other institutions supporting refugees and asylum seekers, or became refugee guides or legal guardians for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Norway. Many more organised their own fundraising events, or knitted and collected clothes and other donations. As with Trude, the need to "do something" thus developed into a need to "do more." Many volunteers also told me stories about how they had encouraged or inspired friends, family members, or colleagues to volunteer for DiH or otherwise engage with refugees at home or abroad. As a female volunteer from northern Norway who had inspired many of her family members and friends to get involved aptly put it, "volunteering is contagious" (*hjelpearbeid smitter*).

Like Trude and the majority of the survey respondents, several interlocutors also maintained that they had become more interested and engaged in politics. Many followed news and

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[48] Significantly, some interlocutors also maintained that volunteering for DiH had not changed them much or at all. For most of these, volunteering for the organisation in Greece was not the first time they had been exposed to radical global inequalities or worked in crisis zones. However, I also spoke with some volunteers who were disappointed by their experience. This was often because they did not find their assigned tasks to be important enough or meet their prior expectations or due to low attendance at DiH's activities, impinging on volunteers' desire to feel useful.

[49] A few volunteers also moved on to seemingly more dangerous or exotic crisis zones, like the Beqaa valley in Lebanon, where they heard there were greater needs and fewer volunteers.

debates more carefully and described a need to learn more or stay updated, especially on the situation in Greece and the Mediterranean. Many volunteers also sought to influence people and collectives who did not share their humanitarian sensibilities. Characteristics of contemporary activism, much of volunteers' public and political performances took place in "the fleeting world of online interactions" (Chouliaraki 2013: 198; see also Frosh and Pincheski 2009), especially Facebook, where volunteers shared their experiences from Greece and commented on political news. Such digital performances or e-testimonies have been characterized as self-promoting (Papataxiarchis 2016) and politically inefficient –and even accused of destructing public action and discourse (Han 2017).

While I share some of these reservations, social media was not only a space for my interlocutor to witness and perform, but also a space to learn and engage in public debate. Moreover, many volunteers combined online activism or e-testimonies with offline actions to raise awareness or influence people who did not share their humanitarian or political sensibilities. Several volunteers did, for instance, write op-ed articles for local or national newspapers or accepted invitations to be interviewed by local papers or magazines. Many also held talks or lectures for associations, schools or congregations.

Further, nearly all of my interlocutors told me they showed pictures and shared their experiences with friends and family to engage or educate them or even change their political views. During my fieldwork, I also met volunteers who used more unconventional methods to raise awareness. The most notable example is Sigurd's solidarity march which I helped DiH organising as part of my fieldwork in Norway. After retiring as a pre-school teacher in the summer of 2019, Sigurd spent four months walking from the coast of Southern Norway, through the Balkan route, and to Moria camp on Lesvos. In the words of Sigurd, the purpose of the solidarity march was to "wake up Europe," whom he believed had "closed not only their borders but also their eyes, ears and hearts for refugees."

Notably, many volunteers described a direct link between their first-hand experiences in Greece and the urge to speak out or engage politically, thus affirming what Theodossopoulos describes as the "politically empowering potential of humanitarian solidarity (2016:180; see also Sandri 2017; Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan 2021). For instance, Wenche, one of DiH's regular volunteers, told me that witnessing the deteriorating conditions for refugees in Greece over the last few years had prompted her to become a vocal refugee advocate in Norway. In

addition to running a knitting and needlework solidarity project, which she described as a purely humanitarian initiative, she also got involved in the political campaign mobilising for the evacuation of children in Moria (see Chapter 6). Moreover, she started sharing political reflections and articles on her private Facebook page, which she had hesitated to do beforehand. In the spring of 2020, at the age of 62, she also wrote her first opinion piece in a newspaper. Identifying herself as a humanitarian volunteer and "proud *godhetstyrann"* (do-gooder-despot—originally a derogatory term appropriated by some refugee activists), she wrote that she was "not only ashamed but furious" and called on Norway to immediately evacuate all children from Moria camp. When sharing the publication on her Facebook page, she offered the following explanation: "I have written my first political commentary ever in a newspaper this weekend. Because *I had to*, I could no longer sit still in the boat. I even got my picture on the cover of the newspaper! Why did I write this? I have ten grandchildren and I cannot stand the thought of them asking me in a few years: Grandma, why didn't you do everything in your power [to help the refugees]?" Like Fredrik and Ingrid (see Chapter 4), Sigurd and Wenche also framed witnessing or speaking out as a moral duty or obligation (*plikt*) (cf. Sontag 2002[1977]).

As mentioned above, volunteering in Greece also led to the formation of new friendships and networks across nationalities, cultures, generations, and other boundaries. In personal interviews and conversations, volunteers regularly expressed happiness and gratitude over having made new friends and conversation partners who shared their humanitarian values and engagement. Whether they met physically, called each other on the phone, or kept in touch via social media, these friendships were commonly described as therapeutic. However, I also learned that they facilitated continued humanitarian and political engagement.

Many volunteers also stayed in touch with refugees they met or befriended while volunteering in Greece. This contact could be both sporadic and regular, and involved everything from friendly conversations to emotional support and exchange of information or money. Unlike a generic humanitarian care *for* abstract strangers, this contact was characterised by what Brun (2016:405) describes as a "feminist ethics of care"—care *about* (rather than caring *for)* specific persons and relationships (see also Malkki 2015: 33). I further suggest that their sense of obligation to refugees "thickened" over time in response to these ongoing contacts and relationships (Slim and Bradley 2013).

While some volunteers were already active in humanitarian or activist circles in Norway, many also found themselves participating in new communities and support networks consisting of volunteers, activists, and refugees in Norway and around the world. My interviews and participation in these networks indicated that they not only provided volunteers with a sense of comfort and hope, but were also commonly used to exchange information and assist refugees stuck in Greece or navigating through Europe without papers.[50]

Like Trude, several interlocutors also told me that volunteering had impacted their lives and sensibilities beyond increased engagement for refugees and other migrants. For instance, several explained that volunteering for DiH had affected their choice of education or career trajectories, typically prompting them to seek more meaningful jobs. Others said that volunteering had helped them clarify what was important in life, and that they consequently had become more concerned with how they prioritised their time and money. Like Trude and Mette, many volunteers also stressed that they had become less materialistic and more concerned about their environmental footprints.

Notably, while I have here focused on my Norwegian interlocutors, it is significant to note that they were not the only ones who narrated volunteering as a life-changing or transformative experience. Conversely, several refugees volunteering for DiH also said that the experience had a transformative impact on their outlooks or ambitions. Furthermore, several local Greeks I met on Lesvos and Chios told me that assisting refugees who arrived on their islands had given their lives new meaning or perspectives, challenged some of their stereotypes, or turned them into better or more generous people. I also regularly heard—or read—stories about volunteers from other organisations who had changed their career trajectories or started a new life after helping refugees in Greece. Notably, several other scholars studying aid workers or volunteers have also identified such "self-transformation" narratives (Larsen 2018; Malkki 2015; Sandri 2017; Vandevoordt 2019; see also Bakalaki 2008; cf. Campbell 2020). However, questions remain not only regarding how long this self-transformation endures (Malkki 2015: 42), but also whether it can best be analysed as an

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[50] While research on migration has demonstrated the importance of social and transnational networks for refugees' mobility, the focus has typically been on the connections that refugees have to other migrants, diasporas, or people in their countries of origin. However, as Rabe (2018) argues, ongoing contact and assistance between Norwegian citizens and refugees elsewhere in Europe also points to other migration networks that ought to be recognised.

effect, performance, or discourse—or perhaps all at once. As Theodossopoulos (2016: 177) notes, he "heard so many variations of this idea [during his fieldwork that he] began to suspect that it was a self-perpetuating narrative."

Furthermore, my in-depth interviews revealed that this "(self-) transformation narrative" was only a partial or selective rendering of what most interlocutors had experienced and felt upon their return to Norway. An illustrative example is the story of Anders, who was a volunteer and later coordinator for DiH on Lesvos during the height of the "refugee crisis" in 2015. "The first boat I received changed everything," he told me over a coffee and raw-food cake at his favourite vegan café in Oslo.

> "We got a message that a boat was approaching the lighthouse on the very north tip of the island. We waded into the water to help stabilise it. The second I got a grip on the boat, a woman handed me her baby before collapsing in the boat. I was later told that the baby she handed to me was only fourteen days old. When I stood there, holding the little child in my arms, I remember thinking: 'These are the refugees, *the others* who people say come to steal our jobs or take advantage of our welfare system.' And just like that [Anders snaps his fingers], everything changed."

Like Trude and Jenny, Anders constructed his life story as divided between life before and after volunteering:

> "Before Lesvos, I was not really engaged in anything. I only cared about myself and my life, and planned to become rich. Yet working in situations of life and death made me realise that my old life was empty. After having helped to save human lives and experienced so much meaning, I could never go back and be my old self again."

Embracing his new self, Anders returned to Greece in 2016 and established his own humanitarian NGO with the mission of providing aid and recreational activities for refugees in northern Greece. While previously studying business management "with a plan to become rich," he also started to study International Development with the ambition of developing his skills and understanding of the NGO world and emergency relief. "Through volunteering, I discovered a more meaningful and engaged life," he summarised. However, returning home to Norway after volunteering was not just a positive and empowering experience. During one

of our later meetings at another coffee bar close to the University of Oslo, Anders talked about what he called "the darker sides of volunteering." He told me about the immense responsibilities placed on untrained volunteers who had to "learn by doing" and did not have a logistical or medical team to support them, about being mentally and physically exhausted, and self-medicated to the point that he was not sure if he could make the right decisions. He also discussed vivid memories of boats that capsized and adults and children who died in front of his eyes because the medical personnel arrived too late or they did not have enough life-saving equipment. Reflecting on his experience of returning to Norway after volunteering, he also told me about suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, and struggling to find meaning with life at home. He mentioned being threatened, distrusted, and ridiculed after writing opinion pieces in newspapers and on social media, and how he lost childhood friends and others who disagreed too strongly with his politics or found the new Anders to be too serious or moralising.

As he finished his last sip of coffee, Anders emphasised that he is much better today, four years after his first trip to Lesvos. He also underscored that he did not regret going. Despite what he referred to as the "personal costs of volunteering," he said he was much happier with the person he was today. He also emphasised how much he had grown and learned since his first volunteer experience, not only about the world, but also about himself and his potential and limits. Just like Trude, he thus considered a return to what Zigon (2007) calls the "unreflective comfort of the familiar" as both impossible or undesirable (see Chapter 2). While admitting that he was still occasionally haunted by painful memories, Anders also said he had found successful coping strategies, including daily yoga sessions and writing, which he described as a form of therapy. He further highlighted that he knew several volunteers who had "struggled just as much or more" as him, and that it was "nothing compared to what the refugees he had met were going through" –some of whom were no longer alive.

"The dark side of volunteering"
The interviews and conversations I had with volunteers after they returned to Norway indicated that they experienced different kinds and degrees of problems and distress. In addition to Anders, a couple of other interlocutors told me they had faced serious and sometimes long-lasting psychological, issues including PTSD, secondary trauma, and

depression. Some also struggled with recurrent nightmares or insomnia.[51] Based on my own observations and conversations with staff and coordinators, many of the volunteers who experienced severe psychological difficulties had participated in the often dramatic boat-landings on the Greek Islands in 2015. As described earlier, this was a period when professional organisations were largely absent and locals and international volunteers were left with tasks and responsibilities that they were largely unprepared and untrained for. According to DiH staff and coordinators, many of those who had faced psychological issues in the aftermath of volunteering were also quite young and inexperienced. Some DiH coordinators and volunteers also said they knew people who had gone to Greece despite being in the midst of a life crisis at home, "to save the world instead of saving themselves," as one interlocutor put it. Anders said these volunteers were often burdens for coordinators in the field and should have been discouraged from volunteering because of the risks to which they exposed others and themselves. DiH staff and coordinators also emphasised the importance of having a good support network at home.

Yet, while these points make intuitive sense, my interviews and conversations revealed further complexities. First, more mature volunteers with relevant experience and support networks had experienced severe difficulties as well. For instance, Amalie, a female volunteer, was diagnosed with moderate-to-severe depression and secondary trauma after having worked several weeks for DiH in a refugee camp on the Greek mainland. She was a social worker in her late twenties who had experience working with drug addicts and asylum seekers. She explained that her education and work experience proved helpful and reassuring as long as she was in Greece and could be of use. However, after returning home to Norway, she experienced a serious mental backlash: "I barely slept at night and could start to cry at any time. It was a very difficult time and lasted for over six months," she recalled when we met for brunch in her hometown in southern Norway.

Because of her experience and qualifications, Amalie had been tasked with working closely with the children in the camp. When returning home, she found it difficult to stop thinking and worrying about them. Their faces appeared during the night and disturbed her sleep. A few times, some of the children in the camp also called her on the phone through other

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[51] While some had been diagnosed by a doctor or psychologist, others self-diagnosed.

volunteers and begged her to return. Notably, Amalie had what DiH staff characterised as a good support network, including family members who had engaged with refugees in Norway and friends who had themselves volunteered for DiH. However, they could not prevent her from staying awake at night and feeling melancholic and often guilty during the day. Not before Amalie booked a new ticket to Greece did she start feeling better again.

Moreover, regardless of their age, prior experience, and exposure to human suffering, most of the volunteers I interviewed or spoke to during my fieldwork said they were surprised by how difficult it had been to return to Norway after volunteering and reintegrate into everyday life. While volunteers had different experiences, some common themes emerged. First, many emphasised how difficult it was to leave people in a state of ongoing crisis and precarity and return home to their secure and comfortable lives in Norway. This was partly because they had grown fond of the people they had met—volunteers and refugees alike—and felt guilty or bad for letting them down.

As discussed in Chapter 3, DiH's volunteer model is based on the principle that all volunteers should be replaceable to ensure the sustainability of their projects. However, in reality, not all volunteers were easily replaced—or at least felt that way. Depending on the season, there could also be a lack of volunteers, forcing DiH to pause or scale down some of their projects when volunteers left. However, even those who were confident that the organisation's projects did not depend on them often found it difficult to leave. For instance, Pål said he did not want to overestimate his own importance for the organisation or the refugees he had befriended while volunteering on Lesvos. He nevertheless found it difficult to accept that the wonderful people he had met were forcibly stuck in a place like Moria camp, while he could just come to and leave Greece as he pleased. For many interlocutors, leaving Greece on a plane with their "*lille, røde norske pass*" (small, red Norwegian passport) was a particular visceral demonstration of the deeply unequal global mobility regime (cf. Knott 2018; Redfield 2012a; Topey 2000) and caused them to feel deeply ashamed over their own freedoms and privileges vis-à-vis the refugees they left behind.

Volunteers were also painfully reminded of their privilege once they returned home to their safe and affluent surroundings and all the unnecessary things they owned. As described in earlier chapters, many interlocutors had decided to volunteer at least partly in response to feelings of shame regarding global inequalities and Norwegian affluence. They typically

believed that their privileges as Norwegian citizens were morally arbitrary and unjust and thus felt a combination of gratitude and shame vis-à-vis refugees and other "less fortunate" people. These feelings usually intensified when returning home from volunteering in Greece. On the one hand, many felt even more grateful for having been born in Norway and/or having Norwegian citizenship. Several interlocutors also said they felt more grateful for everything they had, including a safe home and enough money to travel the world and volunteer. On the other hand, many found it difficult to return home after volunteering and see this affluence and excess with new eyes. As one volunteer explained, "I felt the injustice even more intensely when coming back home. Seeing all the stupid things I own which I don't need or never use, it's extremely shameful and just feels so wrong." Second, nearly all interlocutors emphasised the massive contrasts between what they witnessed and experienced in the humanitarian bubble in Greece and the "unbearable lightness" (Kundera 1984) of everyday life in Norway. As Pål explained, the contrasts between the two forms of life were so big that it felt like he had been on a different planet:

> "The climate activists say we do not have a planet B, but I experienced Lesvos as planet B. I live on planet A and had been to an entirely different planet, where everything was different: the climate, the culture and, above all, the focus and the problems."

Like Pål, many interlocutors described returning to Norway as arriving to a different planet or world. Others described it as a kind of aftershock following what they had witnessed in Greece. Jorunn, who we met in Chapter 4, described coming home to her city east of Oslo as a "crashlanding." As she elaborated:

> "I find it really hard to come home and return to everyday life. It feels like a crash-landing (*kræsjlanding*). Of course, I appreciate that I have my own apartment and always look forward to seeing my children and grandchildren. But I also feel very empty (*tom*). And when I see all the meaningless things people care about, I become so frustrated and angry. Both at ordinary people who seem so indifferent to the suffering and desperation of refugees in Europe, and at our politicians who do not act (…) And I also know that it doesn't help to talk to people who haven't been there [in Greece] themselves."

Like Jorunn, many of the volunteers I interviewed said they felt empty, melancholic, or apathetic after returning home to Norway. While some described themselves as burned out, others said they missed the good feeling of doing something meaningful or concretely to help. Many volunteers said they struggled sleeping, whereas others said they slept a lot but nevertheless felt at loss of energy. Activities they normally enjoyed felt meaningless, and many said they found themselves smiling or laughing less than normally. Several interlocutors also described a strong desire to be alone and avoid social gatherings. As Stine, one of DiH's regular volunteers, explained when we met up for coffee after her latest trip to Lesvos: "I socialise much less than normally. All I want is to be home and watch TV, something I normally never do. I guess it will be better soon, but my head is just spinning and spinning, so it feels good to just stare at the TV."

As exemplified by Jorunn's comment, nearly all interlocutors also described feeling increasingly frustrated with and ashamed by, or even alienated from, Norwegian society. One of the issues many volunteers found particularly appalling was the extremely local, inward-looking, or navel-gazing focus in Norwegian public and political discourse. This was epitomised by what Pål described as *"bompengerspektakkelet"* (the road tolls spectacle). When I travelled across Norway to visit volunteers in their homes during summer and autumn 2019, there were bi-annual local elections in all the counties and municipalities of Norway. Normally, these elections centre on welfare policies such as schooling, healthcare, and elderly care. However, this year, the elections were dominated by massive popular opposition to increased road tolls, which led to a crisis in government and the creation of a new, single-issue political party: The People's Action—No to More Road Tolls.

In Norway's second largest city, Bergen, where I was invited to visit Åse and her husband in their suburban home, the FNB received 16 percent of the vote. "It is extremely embarrassing and shameful," Åse remarked, clearly exasperated. "I mean, what's wrong with people? Our brothers and sisters on the run are suffering on the doorstep to Europe, and then all people care about is how much road tolls they have to pay! I get so frustrated. Where will this end? Where is our empathy, compassion, fraternity, all the ideals from the French revolution?" Åse asked, while her husband shook his head in agreement. While many other volunteers characterised the focus of the election as shameful or embarrassing, Pål described it as absurd. "This is what it is like on Planet A," he added in a voice that was both sarcastic and mournful.

Many also described Norway's material wealth as "excessive" and "shameful" and characterized the Norwegian society as increasingly cold, selfish and inward-looking: unwilling to share what we were simply lucky to have. Epitomising this sentiment, Sofie wrote the following in a much longer Facebook post criticising Norway's refugee politics:

> "I am ashamed on behalf of Norway. It is sad that we have become so full of ourselves, with so little empathy and willingness to share just a tiny bit of our welfare."

Likewise, Trine said she could barely watch Norwegian news anymore because "the news only focuses on people's selfish concerns." According to Trine's understanding, this focus reflected the current state of Norwegian welfare society, which she said had "developed into an awfully selfish society, where people just want more and more and more, but still complain, and take everything they have for granted. We are the richest country in the world, but also the least generous," she said, echoing statements I heard from several other volunteers.

Interpersonal tensions

As alluded to above, the frustration volunteers felt was also frequently directed toward people they loved or cared about who did not share their political and humanitarian sensibilities. Like Anders, some interlocutors told me they had lost or ended friendships after volunteering as they could no longer see eye to eye. However, more frequently, volunteers described volunteering as "altering the dynamics" of certain relationships, for instance, by inducing increased tension, loss of respect, or strategic avoidance of certain topics, including immigration and asylum politics. As described above, many volunteers returned home with new or sharpened perspectives and priorities. However, while they felt "reawakened" or transformed, the people around them had not changed. Consequently, many found it frustrating or provoking to listen to the complaints and first world problems of their friends and colleagues. Volunteers also commonly expressed disappointment with close friends and family members who were accused of not caring enough or not understanding. As Geir explained when the two of us were boat spotting together at night in September 2018 on Lesvos, "Coming home is always difficult because people back home are just not that interested. They might ask a question or two, but that's it." Like many others, Geir also said

he got easily bored and frustrated by the trivial discussions and conversations he had with his friends or family members in Norway. "We have everything we need and more in Norway," he told me while looking at the dark ocean through his binoculars. "It wouldn't hurt us to share half of our wealth…Yet, people still complain about taxes."

Likewise, Stine told me she got "extremely irritated" and "shocked by how little people cared" the first time she came home after volunteering. The problem was not that people never asked her about the trip, but that she could tell that they were not really interested, as they never asked any follow-up questions. "And you know, I just want to talk about it all the time," Stine said, encapsulating a sentiment shared by many interlocutors. She also complained that her closest friends and family members always asked her about how *she* was doing, which had the unintentional consequence of making her even more frustrated:

> "I tell them, in a sharp voice, that I am doing fine, but the people I have met are not. And they are the people we have to focus on. But rather than listening to me, they express even more concerns about me, which obviously makes me even more agitated."

Some volunteers also told me they felt lonely because they had nobody to talk to. "Not even my husband asks me [about my experience] anymore," one regular volunteer complained. "He just complains that I am cranky *(sur)*." For others, the problem was not only that their friends and family did not want to know, it was also that volunteers felt they could never really explain what they had witnessed and experienced to people who had not been there themselves. Regardless of how much interest or care others showed, they could never understand the situation there nor how bad it felt being back home (cf. Sontag 1994). Often, my interlocutors' deep connection and shared understanding with other volunteers also had the consequence of pushing them further away from friends or family members who had not experienced life inside the humanitarian bubble.

Image 28: The lifejacket graveyard on Lesvos: a popular memorial site for volunteers.

Several volunteers also told me about concrete episodes where they had struggled "not to explode" in conversations with friends or family members. This could be at a dinner party or social gathering, if migration or refugee politics were discussed, or if someone said something racist or xenophobic, but also when volunteers interacted with their own children. For instance, one of DiH's regular volunteers, Stian told me about an incident shortly after he had come home from a volunteer mission in northern Greece, when his son had told him that he "needed a new PlayStation 4". "I had to walk out of the room," Stian said, before adding, "I have to be really careful to not be too hard on my kids. It is so easy to start making comparisons [with the lives of refugee children], but it's not really fair." Several interlocutors told me about similar episodes with children or other family members where they had to "bite their tongue" or leave the room to not snap at their loved ones. However, as mentioned above, the frustration often went both ways, with several volunteers telling me that their partners or family members had described them as short-tempered or moody.

Reintegration

Notably, both the intensity and duration of these feelings and experiences differed significantly. For many volunteers, the first few days or perhaps week or two after returning home were the most challenging. During this period, they were both mentally and physically exhausted after having worked all day—and sometimes night—spent little or no time alone, and absorbed but not yet processed a multitude of stories, encounters, and impressions.

However, after some time, the strongest emotional reactions usually faded and most volunteers reintegrated into their everyday lives and routines.

A female volunteer described the reintegration as a three-stage process. During the first one, which normally lasted for roughly a week or two, she would typically feel shocked, ashamed, and resentful toward Norwegian society and the people around her who did not seem to care about anything other than their own lives or those of their families. During the second stage, she had returned to many of her normal activities and routines, socialised more, and usually felt a bit lighter. Yet, she still often felt frustrated with and alienated from her friends, family, and colleagues, who she found to be hopelessly ignorant, inward-looking, uninterested, or superficial. In the third stage, she had returned to what she sarcastically called the "Norwegian bubble" and no longer struggled so much to be present and at ease in her home environment. However, contrary to Zigon (see Chapter 2), this bubble was not always experienced as good or comfortable, as she regularly felt ashamed or resented herself for "caring about the same trivial stuff as everyone else." Moreover, the "Norwegian bubble" burst every time she received a message or video from the refugee camp, which typically brought her back to stage two.

Some of DiH's regular volunteers also emphasised that it got increasingly easier to come home every time they volunteered. Returning after their first volunteer trip was surprisingly tough, yet after having volunteered several times, they said they had "*blitt mer hardhudet*" (grown harder skin). Having gone through the process before, volunteers were better prepared for what awaited them once they returned home. Like Anders, many had also discovered useful coping strategies, such as taking a few days off from work, logging off social media, doing yoga, or escaping to the forest, and above all, talking to other volunteers who understood and related to what they experienced.

By learning to recognise and predict their own reaction patterns, volunteers also said they were better positioned to control themselves when interacting with others, as well as warn or prepare their partners or family members about their likely reactions. The conversations I had with volunteers' family members indicated that this helped smoothen their return and reintegration into everyday life. As Line's husband explained, "The first time Line came home from Lesvos, I was first really worried about her and later quite annoyed by her behaviour. Yet, now I know it takes about 14 days before she is actively present again and I

have learned to adjust to that."

However, even after seemingly successful reintegration into everyday life, many volunteers continued to speak as if their lives would forever be divided between "there" (Greece) and "here" (Norway). As one volunteer reflected in our interview, "A part of me will always remain in Greece." "You can never really return from Lesvos," another volunteer said at the launch of the aforementioned report, causing many other volunteers in the audience to nod affirmingly. Even months or years after volunteering, several interlocutors also said they "struggled to be present" (*være tilstede)* in their everyday lives and relationships at home. As Susan Sontag writes, "feet are always somewhere, whether planted or running. Minds, notoriously, can be elsewhere" (2001: 330). While volunteers' feet were back on Norwegian soil, their minds constantly drifted back to Greece, thinking about the people they had met or revisiting what they had experienced.

Like many anthropologists (myself included), volunteers also struggled with—or resisted—a clean break from the field (cf. Tengan 2005). Against the formal advice from DiH (more on this below), many told me they spent hours and hours on their phones calling or chatting with other volunteers or refugees they met in Greece, and checking for updates on DiH's Facebook page and other media platforms. Several interlocutors also found it hard to not think and worry about the refugees they had met while volunteering. Both in informal conversations and interviews, they spoke about particular refugees they had met, sometimes several years ago, and said they still thought about them, wondering where they were, how they were doing, and if they would ever see them again. Some had lost touch with refugees they knew while they were travelling illegally across Europe and feared that they had drowned or died while hiding under a truck, rotted in a detention centre, or were deported back to Turkey or their home countries.

Many volunteers were also haunted by painful memories and flashbacks. Thinking or talking about particular episodes could make many tear up even years later. For instance, during a lunch at a fish restaurant on Lesvos in the spring of 2019, Line started to cry when recounting how powerless she felt when standing at the beach and watching the Turkish lifeguard sink rubber dinghies with water cannons through her binoculars in 2015. Many volunteers also teared up during our interviews when recounting specific experiences or encounters. They were specifically affected, and occasionally scarred, by interactions with unaccompanied

minors in Moria who were self-harming or talking about committing suicide. Yet, they could also get overrun by feelings of shame or powerlessness when reminded about the Norwegian-speaking Afghan refugees they had met, who their own government had rejected and sent back to bombs and terror. Even thinking about these Norwegian-speaking Afghan refugees could "ruin her day," Jorunn explained, while adding that "not-thinking about them would mean to relinquish one's responsibility." Their histories also made her – a journalist and writer who normally had no problems expressing herself – at loss of words. As she said over and over again: "It is so unfathomable, embarrassing and shameful. I become speechless."

Several volunteers also told me they could be overpowered by emotions if they listened to a particular song or encountered a specific sound or smell. For instance, Line associated boat landings with a strong and distinct smell. "I think it was a combination of saltwater, vomit and human waste… Whenever I pass a garbage container or public toilet and smell anything like it, I feel nauseous or start crying," she told me. Many volunteers also said that their relationship with the ocean had changed after volunteering. For some, it was only the Mediterranean Sea that felt different: many said they could never swim there again after having witnessed boats disappearing or knowing how many people had drowned. For others, it was their relationship to the sea in general that had changed. For instance, several volunteers said they were unable to gaze at the ocean without unconsciously starting to spot for boats on the horizon (for some, myself included, this was just a temporary affliction). For other volunteers, it was the sound of waves or a remote engine that brought forth strong and often painful memories from their job as first-responders.[52]

While several regular volunteers described themselves as increasingly *"hardhudet"* (hard-skinned), others worried that they had become too attached either to specific people or the cause. On the other hand, many long-termers also worried that they had become too cold or cynical. In fact, volunteers were generally anxious about their own emotional reactions and they worried these were unnatural or inappropriate. As Linfield (2010: 25) observes, "it is hard to get our feelings 'right'" and there is often a feeling that one should, or is expected to, feel otherwise (see also Ahmed 2014). To illustrate this, many told me that they felt stupid or embarrassed when crying because they were not the ones suffering. However, others asked

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[52] This illustrates how sensory experiences mediate affect and can bring out stronger emotional reactions than the medium of sight (Howes 2021:130)

what was wrong with them, since they were no longer crying or reacting so strongly to what they experienced. Some volunteers also struggled with emerging feelings of doubts or self-critique regarding their own role or motivations for volunteering. The source of this uneasiness was often volunteers' realisation that they gained more from their experiences in Greece than the refugees they were allegedly helping. A few of my interlocutors also questioned their personal desire to travel to Greece and "be there," acknowledging that it would have been more effective, ethical or environmental-friendly to donate money or support local or refugee-led organisations. I return to these doubts and self-critique in the Conclusion.

"Political PTSD"

Although I earlier described volunteering as politically empowering, several volunteers also told me they were overwhelmed by feelings of despair and moral outrage over the suffering and human rights abuses they had witnessed in Greece. Others said that learning more about the political situation had made them increasingly cynical and disillusioned with politics. Kristin, a young psychologist who volunteered and worked as a coordinator for DiH in northern Greece in 2019, described this feeling as a form of "political PTSD":

> "Before volunteering, I thought I would find it hard to witness the conditions in the camps, or listen to refugees' stories, but I handled this surprisingly well. It was much more difficult to learn about the political situation and realise that what I witnessed was '*villet politikk*' (intended policy). And after coming home, I felt so distressed and powerless. I think of it as a kind of political PTSD."

Furthermore, while many said they spoke with more confidence and authority in discussions about migration and refugee politics, others told me it had become more challenging. This could be because they were too emotionally involved and thus found it difficult to keep calm and not get agitated or start crying. Some volunteers found it best to avoid such topics or keep quiet because they knew, based on experience, that when they started to talk, they were unable to hold it back. "If I start, I just go on forever," several volunteers told me during interviews, "It just comes out, all at once, like vomit." Some also felt they lacked the knowledge or rhetorical skills to participate in discussions or convey the complexity of what they had seen and learned. Furthermore, while some said they had become more steadfast and uncompromising, others told me they carefully policed themselves in the company of friends,

family, or colleagues. This was often because they were worried about being interpreted as too self-righteous or moralising. As argued in Chapter 4, the Norwegian code of conduct "demands that a person be self-effacing, not boasting" or "claiming prestige" (Gullestad 1986: 45-46). Yet, it was also because they did not want or had promised their partners or family to not "ruin the atmosphere" at dinners or parties.[53]

Moreover, volunteers' experiences of voicing their opinions in public were not only positive. Like elsewhere in Europe, Norwegian public debates about immigration and asylum politics are characterised by high temperature and polarisation (M. Andersson 2018; Bringa and Bendixsen 2016). Like Anders, several volunteers experienced verbal abuse including harassment, ridicule or even threats and hate mails after being interviewed or writing op-eds. While some said these reactions only encouraged them to speak louder, others told me they were reluctant to voice their opinions in public because of the hostile and divisive political climate. Notably, several of my interlocutors were also worried, or tired, of being labelled as naïve idealists, do-gooders or radical leftists (*venstreradikale).* While this did not necessarily stop them from sharing their experiences, it seemed to make them moderate or qualify their political standpoints. For instance, volunteers often underscored that they "knew that Norway could not accept everyone" and that they "did not believe in open borders." The fear of being stereotyped as naïve or radical thus seemed to push many to accept the limiting terms of debate of their political opponents.

However, my private conversations and discussions with volunteers also indicated that these qualifications were expressions of their limited and post-utopian political imagination. Indeed, despite their professed cosmopolitan beliefs in an interdependent world and common humanity, volunteers' political views and aspirations revealed a profound inability to believe in, and articulate, a "borderless world" (Mbembe 2018). Indeed, even when I pushed them on this issue, my interlocutors rejected the possibility of a world in which increased migration (to Europe from the Global South) is not only tolerated but encouraged and normalised.[54]

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[53] See Linnet (2011) for an anthropological account of the Scandinavian emphasis on "hygge," understood as a form of sociality characterised by the expression of egalitarian values and cooperative efforts to avoid divisive and controversial topics.

[54] Notably, this contrasted sharply with some of my Greek interlocutors on Lesvos who, perhaps because of their island's history of movement, described migration as "part of the circle of life" (cf. Hirschon 2007).

Moreover, while meeting and speaking to many asylum seekers who had their applications rejected, only a few volunteers questioned the legal and humanitarian hierarchies of suffering and deservingness that structure European policies and debates of asylum and migration (Cabot 2014). Instead, their political thoughts and statements often accepted, and thus reified, the subject categories of the state, including the problematic refugee/migrant binary (see also Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019; Chapter 6). Two blind spots should further be highlighted. First, while many volunteers became increasingly cognisant of their privileged position within the global mobility regime, their ability to travel and cross borders with ease were linked to their Norwegian passport and socio-economic position –not to whiteness (see Benton 2016). Secondly, the vast majority of my interlocutors continued to imagine themselves as *"medmennesker"* connected to refugees through human essence rather than history and politics (Knott 2018; Malkki 1995). Without questioning volunteers' personal experiences of becoming more empathic and understanding towards people on the move, it is thus important to recognise the political limits of this transformation.

Finally, while some regular volunteers said that it had become easier to come home after each time they volunteered, others said that their last trip was the hardest. Stine, for instance, told me that she had struggled more in the aftermath of her last trip to Lesvos, where she has worked inside Moria camp, than her previous two trips to Athens and Lesvos. As she specified, this was partly because the conditions on the Greek Islands had become progressively worse and many of the refugees she had met had lost hope and gotten increasingly apathetic. However, it was also because of the increasingly hostile political climate in Europe and seeing people at home caring even less than before. Several of DiH's regular volunteers also described feeling increasing powerlessness and hopelessness regarding the situation of refugees in Europe and the prospect for tangible political change. As Parla (2019:53) argues, political hope is not necessarily a useful energy for radical thought and actions (see also Greenberg 2014). However, coupled with powerlessness, the lack of hope in political projects and struggles risk leading to inaction or the acceptance of status quo.

Two points on mobility injustice

Before I conclude, two crucial points must be made. Firstly, while I here focus on the experiences of Norwegian volunteers, the "refugee crisis" has also left deep marks on many Greek citizens and communities. For instance, on Lesvos, several islanders explained that

repeated confrontations with death and suffering had caused psychological trauma and melancholy –including a desire to withdraw from social and political life (see also Afouxenidis et al 2017). Likewise, a hotel owner in northern Greece told me that housing and helping refugees during 2015 and 2016 had been a great privilege, but had left him broken and pessimistic about the future. In these conversations, some Greeks also stated explicitly what we both knew was true: whereas I, and other Norwegian volunteers, could come and go, and return home to a prosperous country that were hardly affected by the "crisis", they were stuck, and the future looked even bleaker than before.

Secondly, whether discussing the transformational potential of volunteering or its "darker sides," it is crucial to recognise volunteers' and refugees' differential possibilities to reinvent themselves or change the direction of their lives (Brkovic forthcoming). During my fieldwork, I encountered several refugees who said that their experiences volunteering for DiH or other humanitarian organisations had made them discover new sides of themselves or changed their future dreams and career goals. One example is Reza, an asylum seeker from Iran in his early twenties who volunteered for DiH on Lesvos for more than a year. While initially searching for autonomy and independence, Reza told me he found friendship and meaning through volunteering and said he was happy to stay on the island as long as he could get out of Moria and find a job in the humanitarian sector. Like Anders, he described his new dream to become a professional humanitarian worker as a "180-degree change."

But contrary to Anders and most other Norwegian volunteers, structural barriers prevented him from realising this ambition. Like many other refugees on Lesvos, Reza was stuck in Moria for over a year while waiting for his first asylum interview. Meanwhile, conditions in the camp deteriorated rapidly. In December 2019, his application was rejected again, sending him into a depression. Comparing Anders and Reza's shared but diverging experiences highlights fundamental global inequalities in rights and opportunities. These inequalities include highly differential possibilities to make decisions about what type of life to lead, rather than just what kind of person to become. While both Anders and Reza could choose to cultivate a moral and humanitarian identity, only Anders was in a structural and legal position to realise his newfound ambitions and values. Conversely, Reza and thousands of other asylum seekers in Europe have been, to paraphrase Arendt (1958), denied a new home and therefore also a proper chance to reinvent themselves, or to "begin anew" (cf. Horst and Lysaker, 2019).

While both Anders and Reza told me they experienced depression, we should also be careful not to equate their experiences. As Munoz (2006) argues, it is not only that depression is experienced differently by different people, but is also "formed and organized around various historical and material contingencies" which, in this case, include factors such as citizenship and nationality (2006: 675; see also Cvetkovich, 2012). Also, Reza's experience was, of course, far from unique. At the doorstep of Europe, there are thousands of refugees whose dreams and hopes for a new life on the continent have been crushed by a delayed, overburdened, and increasingly restrictive asylum system. Whether they seek to reimagine themselves as citizens of Europe or strive for some form of "descent to the ordinary" (Das 2007), they have been structurally prevented from reaching these goals by policies implemented or supported by Norway and other European countries. As highlighted by several reports, they also have very limited access to psychological care, exacerbating what MSF and others have referred to as a mental health crisis on the Greek Islands (MSF 2018).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have both examined and complicated DiH's transformation narrative. I started by describing the background of the organisation's belief in the transformative potential of volunteering and my own experience helping DiH to test their hypothesis and collect data—or evidence—to support their anecdotal stories. I also described the uses of our report and how it was differently received by staff and volunteers. Finally, I relied on my own interviews and fieldwork data to demonstrate further layers and complexities.

Unlike the narrative presented in the report I co-authored for DiH, I focused specifically on what some interlocutors described as the darker side or personal costs of volunteering. While a minority of my interlocutors were diagnosed with psychological problems like PTSD, secondary trauma, or depression, most described a variety of unsettling reactions of different durability and intensity, including feelings of melancholy, irritability, loneliness, powerlessness, apathy, shame, and guilt. I especially highlighted volunteers' intensified sense of injustice and shame, and feelings of alienation or estrangement toward Norwegian society. While having a good support network at home was described as important, I also showed that close friends and family members were frequently the targets of volunteers' frustrations and disappointment, challenging the intimacy and strength of these relationships. However,

volunteers' inability to let go or be present also often frustrated their partners and family members, and this was often the source of arguments and conflicts.

Notably, these more unsettling effects of humanitarian work have hitherto received little attention in scholarly literature (though see Malkki 2015; Larsen 2018). However, in recent years, humanitarian organisations and media have increasingly foregrounded aid workers' proneness to burnout and other mental health problems, as well as the challenges they face when returning home and reintegrating into society post-deployment. Many humanitarian organisations have also invested in more follow-up support, including therapy, mindfulness, and self-care. As alluded to above, DiH also became increasingly aware and concerned about the personal difficulties many volunteers faced when returning home and took steps to remedy this. For instance, one of the reasons it introduced a minimum age limit was the stories they heard about young volunteers struggling after coming home. In 2016, DiH also established dialogue sessions for volunteers led by psychologists in some of Norway's largest cities. During my fieldwork, volunteers and coordinators were given the opportunity to talk to psychologists via Skype should they feel the need. However, as far as I was told, very few volunteers made use of this opportunity that especially targeted long-term volunteers and coordinators. While DiH did not have the capacity or resources to follow up individual volunteers upon their return home, the organisation also tried to prepare volunteers for what awaited them by sharing information about "normal reactions to volunteering" at recruitment meetings, volunteers' exit interviews held on their final day in Greece, and through email and other channels.

Nevertheless, several interlocutors complained that the more distressing aspects of volunteering received insufficient attention. Some also argued that DiH should invest in more follow-up or reintegration support, as they had learned that MSF and other professional organisations had done. Others maintained that a certain amount of personal hardship was a natural or expected part of volunteering in the context of massive inequalities and need, or did not want DiH to spend their limited resources on supporting volunteers. As exemplified by Anders and Stine above, many also downplayed their personal difficulties by comparing them with the plight of the refugees they sought to help, or suggested that the solution was more "self-care".

Further, while comparing suffering should not prevent volunteers from seeking help and support (Frantzen 2019), not all of the negative emotions and reactions I have highlighted in this chapter were experienced as equally or singularly harmful. For instance, one of the emotions I have highlighted, which has been a key theme of this thesis, is volunteers' sense of shame in response to Norwegian affluence and privilege. As discussed previously, shame is conventionally seen as unpleasant or even destructive. However, a closer reading of my fieldwork notes and interview transcripts reveals more tensions and ambiguities. On the one hand, shame was often associated with personal discomfort and self-judgment. Yet, on the other hand, feelings and expressions of shame could also be self-affirming or even self-congratulatory—a sign of human decency and character.[55] As Ahmed puts it, "[I]f we are shamed, then we mean well. The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good'" (Ahmed 2005: 81; see also Every 2013; Probyn 2005). In fact, in the face of massive global injustices, it was the absence of shame that was truly shameful (ibid; Woodward 2009).

Notably, this view of shame as a morally appropriate and perhaps self-righteous feeling is not foreign to the Norwegian society. In fact, in Norwegian, there is an expression that recognises shame as a sensible and decent feeling, namely "*skamvett"* (literally "shame-wit"). While not part of everyday discourse, this concept regularly appears in political and social commentaries and illustrates how feelings and expressions of shame are considered culturally appropriate or "politically correct" in certain situations. However, as suggested previously, my interlocutors' expressions of shame in response to the "refugee crisis" were not unanimously accepted as correct or appropriate but rather morally and politically contested. Building on this recognition, how can we understand these ugly feelings (Ngai 2005) and their effects on volunteers' relationship to Norwegian society, friends, and loved ones?

Following Ahmed (2014), the question is not what emotions are or represent, but what they do. We might thus think of volunteers' feelings of meaning, connection and shared purpose in response to volunteering as moving them toward some bodies and objects (other volunteers,

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[55] This illustrates Ahmed's point that shared feelings might both heighten tensions and be in tension. As she argues, having shared feelings might not entail feeling the same: even when people have or express the same feeling, they do not necessarily have the same relationship to that feeling (Ahmed 2004: 10-11; see also Introduction).

refugees, DiH and various volunteer/activist networks). Moreover, volunteers' melancholy, and inability to forget, particular refugees they met or befriended in Greece might indicate something more intersubjective, specific, and powerful than compassion or humanity in their "potential loftiness" (Malkki 2015: 33).

Conversely, volunteers' feelings of shame, frustration, irritability, and estrangement worked to move them away or further away from other bodies and collectives (Norwegian society, friends, family, and co-nationals who failed to understand or share their humanitarian sensibilities). Contra scholars like Nietzsche and Spinoza, this implies that ugly feelings like estrangement or alienation are not necessarily politically inefficient (Ngai 2005). In fact, as Gilroy suggests, "a degree of estrangement" from one's culture or society might be essential to what he calls a "cosmopolitan commitment" which involves both exposure to and valuation of difference or "diversity within sameness" (2004:132-134). Estrangement, in other words, might lead to "de-emphasising of the familiar in ethics by integrating otherness" (van Peski 2012: 220; see also Butler 2009: 443-447) thus challenging the Norwegian emphasis on equality as sameness (Gullestad 1992; 2002).

However, as we have seen, these movements were rarely straightforward or complete, as volunteers often oscillated between feeling attached and detached, grateful and ashamed, alienated and at home. More generally, feelings like shame, embarrassment and frustration can also never result in full detachment or alienation as they require a prior investment, identification or attachment (Ahmed 2014; Wilson and Anderson 2020). When volunteers expressed these "ugly feelings" towards (or on behalf of) the Norwegian nation and society, their investments and attachments were thus paradoxically both challenged and affirmed, compromised and reinforced.

While "negative feelings" might not necessarily be harmful or paralysing, we might also question their potential to generate meaningful care and action for others (see Chapter 4). As Chouliaraki argues, emotions like shame and indignation are predominantly self-oriented and carries the risk of "producing a narcissistic solidarity obsessed with our own emotions rather than the suffering of others" (2013: 79; see also Chapter 6).[56] Similarly, Ahmed notes that

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[56] Berlant (2004) makes a similar point about compassion.

expressing shame in response to being privileged does not automatically lead to an *unlearning* of that privilege – "it can even function as an exercise of privilege" (Ahmed 2014: 120-21).

Finally, for many volunteers, their strongest and most rebellious reactions receded over time, as they felt drawn back into the "Norwegian bubble". While speaking out against the border regime, or Norwegian culture and society, many volunteers also moderated or qualified their claims to avoid being labelled and rejected as naïve, utopian or radical, and they commonly policed themselves in the presence of friends and family members. On the one hand, this can be read as a symptom of Norwegian cultural norms and emphasis on conformity or sameness (Gullestad 1992; 2002). From a more critical perspective, one might also argue that it illustrates how little is at stake for Norwegian volunteers compared to the refugees they sought to help and advocate on behalf. However, as suggested above, I believe it also shows how difficult it can be to challenge the humanitarian and national "(b)order of things" (De Lauri 2019; Malkki 1995) and detach from the social world and relationships that both create and sustain us (Berlant 2011). I elaborate on this point in the next chapter, where I consider DiH's efforts to "wake up" or "shame" Norwegian politicians and public into action.

Chapter 6:
Waking up Norway

"One of our goals this year is to have a larger impact on public debate and policies," Mette told me during one of my pre-fieldwork visits to DiH's old office in western Oslo in early 2018. "We are the only Norwegian organisation working inside Greek refugee camps. Nevertheless, we are rarely asked to comment on the situation of refugees in Greece or invited to participate in political debates," Trude added. Their comments did not surprise me. First, I heard Trude and other DiH representatives talk about the need to engage politically multiple times since my first encounter with the organisation in September 2016. Second, for humanitarian actors to engage in politics is not—or at least no longer—unusual. While some humanitarian actors still believe that mixing aid and advocacy leads to "moral overreach, or even hubris" (Rieff 2002: 85; see also Bridges 2010), the "old internalized requirement for being apolitical is more and more overtly challenged" even by organisations that previously refrained from voicing their views or criticising state (in)action (Kynsilehto 2018: 188). By turning to politics, DiH also followed in the footsteps of many new volunteer organisations across Europe that have unsettled the traditional division of labour between humanitarian organisations and politically engaged social movements (see Chapter 1).

DiH had not been entirely silent regarding Norwegian refugee politics before 2018 either. Trude often used her personal Facebook page and interviews to criticise Norway's restrictive asylum policies and to call upon the Norwegian government to "demonstrate European solidarity" and "share responsibility" for those stuck in Greek refugee camps (see Chapter 2). After Sylvi Listhaug, Norway's former Minister of Immigration and Integration and member of the right-wing Progress Party, paid an official visit to Lesvos and Moria camp in April 2016, DiH also regularly invited Norwegian politicians to visit the organisation in Greece so they could show them "*den usminkete sannheten*" (the unvarnished truth) as opposed to the selective and whitewashed picture they believed politicians were presented on official visits.[57]

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[57] During my fieldwork, I heard many stories about how Greek authorities "cleaned up Moria camp" when foreign politicians or prominent figures like Pope Francis and Hollywood star and UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie visited (see also Rozakou 2019).

Yet, since my conversation with Trude and Mette in January 2018, DiH's political engagement took new forms and gained increasing focus and visibility. This political turn was primarily a consequence of the organisation's growing recognition that humanitarian assistance was only a temporary and limited solution, a means to "fill urgent gaps" and make the everyday life of refugees caught in limbo "a bit better" or "more bearable" (see Chapter 3). As discussed, DiH was especially concerned about the many refugee children stuck in precarious conditions on the doorstep of Europe. In both public appeals and private conversations, Trude and other staff members persistently underscored that "a refugee camp is not a place to grow up for children." The organisation's recognition of the limited and temporary value of humanitarian assistance was further accompanied by a firm conviction that the "refugee crisis" was actually a crisis in European solidarity and humanism that ultimately required political solutions—a view shared by many refugee advocates in Scandinavia (see e.g., Jensen 2018). According to DiH's theory of change, political change was again preconditioned on the moral awakening or education of the European public, which was perceived as either ignorant or indifferent, if not outrightly xenophobic, toward refugees on their continent.

Humanitarians abroad, advocates at home

As I explained in Chapter 3, DiH focused its political interventions on the Norwegian state and society. This was partly a pragmatic choice, yet also reflected the organisation's Chomsky-an belief that, as a Norwegian NGO led by Norwegian citizens, it carried both a special responsibility and opportunity to promote political change at home. As exemplified by Trude's comment above, DiH often highlighted that it was the only Norwegian organisation presently working inside Greek refugee camps. Given this, it argued that it had a particular duty (*plikt)* to speak out and inform the Norwegian public. As Trude and Mette revealed in the aforementioned meeting, they also wanted to participate in public debates and be recognised as "expert witnesses" alongside their more professional—but largely absent—humanitarian colleagues in Norway. Resonating with the argument made earlier about volunteers' multifaceted motivations, moral conceptions of obligations thus interacted with organisational interests and desires, in this case, recognition, influence, status and the need for continued funding.

Significantly, DiH's increased political engagement was also a response to tightening asylum regulations and growing anti-immigrant sentiments and welfare chauvinism in Norway (see Chapter 1). As discussed in previous chapters, staff and volunteers expressed deep and growing concerns about these developments, which they typically described as violating Norway's proud humanitarian traditions and threatening society's moral fabric and humanity (*humaniteten*). Rather than viewing DiH's political engagement as driven exclusively by other-oriented concerns to help not-so-distant strangers, this chapter foregrounds these concerns and reflects on the domestic stakes and projects that converged in DiH's political interventions.

My analysis is inspired by Shoshan's (2016) ethnography of the governance of right-wing extremism in Germany. Exploring the German state and social workers' efforts to "manage the hate" expressed by young neo-Nazis, Shoshan argues that Germany's post-war nation-crafting project has "increasingly defined itself as a campaign against insidious nationalism itself" (2016: 226). Similarly, I suggest that DiH can be understood as an affective public mobilising against what staff and volunteers perceived as an illicit nationalism and government violating the country's proud humanitarian traditions. The chapter also examines how DiH staff and volunteers interpreted and responded to "political stuckness" (Givoni 2021) or inertia.

Political strategies

DiH's political work can be divided into three overlapping strategies that reflect the organisation's understanding of the "problem space,"[58] the history of Norwegian refugee activism, and the so-called special relationship between Nordic states and civil society (Bendixsen and Wyller 2020; Vike 2018): 1) raising awareness about the plight of refugees in Greece, 2) mobilising for more positive public orientations toward refugees through public campaigns and storytelling, and 3) advocating for immediate political action, specifically the evacuation of children and families from Moria camp. Below, I first examine each of these strategies and then discuss how the content and rationale of DiH's political interventions

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[58] For Scott, a problem space constitutes "a context of argument, and, therefore, one of intervention," and hence "from within the terms of any given problem-space what is in dispute… is not itself being argued over" (2004: 4).

changed in response to its experiences with political inaction and disregard.

Raising awareness

The first strategy—raising awareness—received the most attention and was frequently highlighted as one of DiH's primary responsibilities. From 2018 onwards, the importance of awareness-raising was also reflected in the organisation's official mandate and self-presentation and institutionalised in various documents and reports. Most notably, DiH's board voted for an amendment to the organisation's mandate in May 2018, adding "spreading information about the plight of refugees" to the organisation's initial aim of "providing aid to displaced people." Shortly after, DiH also recruited a political advisor who worked on a voluntary basis to help the organisation achieve this goal.

DiH used multiple channels to raise awareness, including most prominently its own Facebook page and other social media platforms. To reach a broader audience, the organisation also wrote regular op-eds for Norwegian magazines and newspapers, and eagerly accepted invitations to share their observations and experiences on national TV and radio. Trude and other DiH representatives also held regular talks and lectures for various audiences, including schools, churches, organisations, unions, voluntary associations, colleges, and businesses. The information it shared varied depending on the avenue and audience but often contained a combination of statistics and narratives, descriptions, and passionate appeals (cf. Redfield 2013). For instance, the organisation would often share alarming facts and statistics on the current situation of refugees in Greece, typically adding their own voice by describing the developments as "shameful" and the people involved as "*våre medmennesker*" (our fellow human beings). As Trude spoke fluent Greek, she also regularly shared and translated Greek news or policy changes that influenced the conditions of refugees or highlighted local grievances and disappointments with the lack of intra-European solidarity.

However, most of the information DiH shared was based on the personal observations, encounters, and conversations its staff and coordinators had with refugees in Greece. Like some of their more professional colleagues in the humanitarian field, DiH also started producing its own reports on the conditions of refugees in Greece based on data it collected itself. In 2019, its political advisor conducted a study interviewing volunteers who had worked for DiH after the controversial EU-Turkey statement in March 2016 (see

Introduction). The information that emerged from these interviews was then systematised and presented in a report titled *Tidsvitner i Hellas* (Time Witnesses in Greece) (Wærstad and Pettersvold 2019). In the preface, Trude explained that the purpose of the report was to "make visible and plain" the conditions in Greek refugee camps by providing "an honest and authentic description of the situation from our volunteers working with and for the camp residents on the inside."

Moreover, DiH encouraged all of its volunteers to "share what they had seen and learned" once they returned home to their countries and communities. As discussed in previous chapters, the idea that volunteers would be empowered to continue or strengthen their humanitarian and political engagement once they returned home was central to DiH's transformation narrative. This was initially viewed as an unintentional but welcome by-product of volunteering. However, during my fieldwork, the organisation started to explicitly encourage its volunteers to maintain their engagement at home and, in particular, to "act as witnesses." The importance of speaking out was, for instance, stressed during volunteers' exit conversations with field coordinators after they had completed their mission. It was also highlighted in emails and information letters circulated by DiH to former volunteers and members. As an illustration, consider these words of encouragement that accompanied a letter that all volunteers received upon their return home: "Share your experiences with family, friends, acquaintances, and local media. Hold lectures. Let people hear what you have witnessed. Be a drop! Spread the word. Help people understand what is happening in Europe today."

Notably, DiH's emphasis on witnessing resonates with broader trends and terminologies in the humanitarian field and contemporary political life.[59] The most well-known example is MSF, whose tradition and practice of speaking out (*témoignage*) has been duly studied in the seminal work of Fassin (2008; 2012) and Redfield (2006; 2013). However, while these studies remain important, we should not transpose them to other contexts uncritically. First, efforts to witness are embedded in historical, political, and cultural contexts (Givoni 2016; Chua and Grinberg 2021). Witnessing thus takes specific forms and meanings and is shaped

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[59] For historical accounts of the turn to humanitarian witnessing, see Dean (2017) or Givoni (2011). On witnessing in a broader perspective, see Wieviorka (2006), Kurasawa (2009), and Chua and Grinberg (2021).

by contingent political struggles, norms, and aspirations that "inform both the production of testimony and its reception" (Givoni 2011: 157; see also Kurusawa 2006).

Second, the witness' public role and subject positions clearly matter. As Redfield shows about MSF, the organisation's practitioners tend to speak "as doctors"—a figure that he notes "occupies a privileged place, positioned not simply as humane but also *expert* in matters of suffering" (2006: 100, 120-122 (emphasis added)). Conversely, DiH staff and volunteers spoke from different subject positions, including humanitarian volunteers, Europeans, Norwegian citizens, mothers/parents, and "*medmennesker.*" Unlike MSF workers, the truths they spoke were thus not based on clinical knowledge or a doctor/patient relationship, but constituted by a combination of personal observations, affective connections, and incremental knowledge and understanding (Chua and Grinberg 2021). Furthermore, DiH witnesses specifically addressed their co-nationals and elected politicians, thus appealing not primarily to humane values or common decency (Redfield 2006), but to Norwegian ideals and traditions. Finally, DiH staff and volunteers not only positioned themselves as witnesses of suffering and rights abuses in Greece, but as we shall see, also increasingly as social diagnosticians of their home country. Put differently, their testimonies became inward-looking as well as outward-looking and sought to confront their Norwegian audience with the truth about their own state and society.

During my fieldwork, DiH also increasingly sought to cultivate stronger relationships with journalists and politicians. Indeed, according to the organisation's "Strategic plan for 2019-2020," one of its main objectives for this period was to "work strategically with media and government officials to raise awareness and focus on the situation in Greece." To do so, DiH built relationships of trust and collaboration with Norwegian journalists covering European politics, some of whom they invited to attend their activities in Greece and helped set up interviews with. Throughout my fieldwork, DiH also attended various conferences and events, including the week-long *Arendalsuka,* a political festival on the southern coast of Norway, described as "Norway's biggest political meeting place," and I joined them in summer 2019. By participating in this event, DiH wanted to "show its presence" and "help put the refugee cause back on the agenda," which was otherwise mainly dominated by environmentalist concerns and domestic politics.

Public campaigns and storytelling

DiH also launched several campaigns and events to raise public attention and mobilise for more positive orientations toward refugees. Like other humanitarian organisations, it often recruited Norwegian artists, comedians, and other celebrities to front these campaigns, or collaborated with them to arrange concerts or art exhibitions, which worked partly as fundraising events and avenues to raise awareness.[60] DiH's campaigns and events also typically involved the sale of clothes or other commodities with printed slogans or symbols, like DiH's logo of a drop.

The organisation's largest public campaign was the EQUAL campaign, first launched in November 2017 and included several public figures and celebrities. As DiH explained on its website, "the idea behind the EQUAL campaign is to spread an important message: that all humans beings are equal regardless of whether they live in a tent in a refugee camp or a villa in Norway." The belief that everyone is equal (*likhetstankegangen)* is a key value in Norwegian society and something many interlocutors told me they had been raised to believe both at home and in school. While the belief in human equality is expressed in cultures and societies across the world, Norway has also gone farther than most others in institutionalising both socioeconomic and gender equality (Bendixsen et al 2018; Vike 2018; though see Stjernø and Halvorsen 2021) and is proud to be a progressive and egalitarian "welfare paradise" (Abram 2018) with "small differences" and progressive gender politics. However, in public debates about immigration, Norwegian egalitarianism has become a point of contestation, and both the future of the welfare state and the freedom and equality of women are frequently said to be threatened by "the influx" of non-Western refugees (Bangstad 2015; Gullestad 2006c; Eriksen 2018).

Against this (mis)use or politicisation of Norwegian egalitarianism, DiH's EQUAL campaign was first and foremost a principled declaration of the equal worth of all human beings. As the organisation argued, "in a time of prejudices, intolerance, and racism, we believe spreading this message is crucial." However, it also indicated that this belief had political consequences

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[60] Some celebrities DiH collaborated with had volunteered for the organisation in Greece. Others approached DiH to contribute or were recruited by the organisation, often via personal networks. While celebrity advocacy has been subject of harsh criticism by humanitarian scholars (Chouliaraki 2013; Mostafanezhad 2017), these collaborations were rarely problematised by my interlocutors. However, some staff members specified that DiH only collaborated with celebrities with a high moral standing and "genuine commitment" to the cause.

and that it wanted to extend the rights and opportunities ensured by the Norwegian welfare state to a larger number of refugees stuck in Greece. As DiH explained when introducing the EQUAL campaign on its social media channels:

> "In the next two weeks, we will run an Instagram campaign where we post pictures of people from different backgrounds, but with the same sweater. We hope this will make more people aware and willing to help refugees and that we together can influence the government to implement more inclusive and humane [asylum] policies."

DiH also encouraged its volunteers and other followers to "help spread the message and support people on the run" by buying EQUAL sweaters and posting images on social media with the EQUAL slogan and the hashtags #weareequal, #adropintheocean, #drapenihavet, and #equal.

Image 29 and 30: The two collages show a combination of volunteers, refugees, and Norwegian celebrities posing with their EQUAL clothes or holding up a sign with the EQUAL slogan (photos: URL[61]).

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[61] https://twitter.com/drapenihavet/status/937076099808399360?lang=de) and
https://ndla.no/en/subject:20/topic:1:193713/topic:1:193716/resource:1:196792

*Image 31 and 32: Examples of EQUAL apparel sold on DiH's online shop
and occasionally gifted to donors and supporters (photos: DiH).*

In some ways, the EQUAL campaign illustrates what Mostafanezhad describes as a "shift in responsibility for humanitarian assistance from the state to the marketplace via celebriticized sentimentality" (2017: 74; see also Mitchell 2016). The campaign also reflects what Chouliaraki (2013) identifies as "neoliberal" forms of advocacy involving branding, commodification, and "individuated activism" or "lifestyle agency." Central to this trend, Chouliaraki argues, is that people are addressed primarily as individual consumers rather than citizens who may engage collectively and politically. However, as this chapter shows, DiH neither disengaged from the state nor sought to "replace conviction with consumption" (ibid: 180; cf. Rose 1999). Conversely, we might say that they appealed to their audience as citizens and consumers alike, and combined humanitarian commodification and lifestyle activism with collective political opposition and demands on the state (see below).

Moreover, it is important to note that lifestyle activism is not necessarily only about individual self-expression or posturing. For instance, many volunteers described wearing clothing with the EQUAL slogan in public as a both a political statement and conversation starter. Like the drop apparel (see Chapter 4), the EQUAL clothes were also used to identify themselves and others as fellow humanitarians and refugee advocates. For instance, several volunteers described episodes where they had run into people wearing the EQUAL apparel on the bus or other public spaces and used the opportunity to talk purposefully loud about the predicaments of refugees in Greece or Norway's "shameful" or "inhumane" asylum policies. Others described how they had gifted EQUAL clothes to their friends and family members for Christmas, with the double intention of donating money to the cause and raising wider interest and attention. Following Chouliaraki (2013), we might nevertheless characterise the EQUAL

campaign as a "light touch activism" where "solidarity is embedded in a public culture of consumption and an ethos of mutual benefit with minimal effort" (2013: 178).

It is further easy to criticise the EQUAL campaign for merely declaring a belief in the abstract concept of human equality (Arendt 2017 [1951]; Çubukçu 2017; Fassin 2012). However, my interviews and analysis of campaign material also suggest it had a more critical and reflexive message: to expose the gap between abstract values and reality, and remind Norwegian citizens about their extreme privilege vis-à-vis refugees in Greece. This was particularly evident in some of the imagery and videos that accompanied the campaign. As an example, in one of the videos, the first visual depicts a father and daughter camping in the forest, a cherished hobby for many outdoorsy and nature-loving Norwegian families. However, the visual shifts and suddenly, we are in a flimsy tent in Moria camp, where a caring father struggles to keep his daughter warm (and perhaps also safe and healthy). It is worth noting that the refugee girl in the picture is young and light-skinned like the Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi, whose iconic image pricked the world's consciousness in 2015 (El-Enany 2016; James 2019). As with Kurdi's image, one might argue that these features make it easier for a Norwegian audience to feel not only empathy but identification ("it could have been my child"). However, the main purpose of the video appears to be to create distance or disidentification (Chouliaraki 2013). More specifically, it invites the audience to reflect on the massive contrast between their privileged lives in Norway (symbolised by the healthy and happy Norwegian family voluntarily choosing to camp outside) vis-à-vis the insecure and deprived conditions refugees face in under-resourced camps on Europe's southern border.

To elicit more positive public orientations toward refugees, staff and volunteers also regularly mobilised the Rawlsian argument that where you are born is a matter of luck and has nothing do with your hard work or morality (Rawls 1971; see also Chapter 4). As Sofie argued in an article she co-published with another volunteer in 2018:

> "(R)emember that we are all born with the same basic needs for safety, care, love, and self-realization. None of us chose our parents, place of birth, external circumstances, or to become victims of war or bloody conflicts. The difference is only that some of us have had more luck than others, like those of us who happen to live in Norway."

This argument resonates with many Norwegians who, like my interlocutors, typically think of themselves as exceptionally privileged to be born in Norway. As the cherished Norwegian doctor and public intellectual Per Fugelli wrote in a frequently quoted article in 2017: "To be born in Norway is to have won a global and historical lottery." The emphasis on Norwegians' historical luck or fortune also challenges welfare chauvinism and what several volunteers described as their fellow citizens' "sense of entitlement." However, this argument also has limitations: first, it reinforces a version of Norwegian exceptionalism, and second, it displaces more uncomfortable questions on Norway's historical or political entanglement with the border regime and the causes refugees are fleeing from.

To mobilise more positive public orientations toward refugees, staff and volunteers also regularly shared stories about individual refugees they had met in Greece. While analysing this storytelling is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth mentioning that staff and volunteers tended to depict refugees as either "just like us" or even better according to Norwegian norms and standards. For instance, they typically told stories of refugees who shared their values, dreams, and hobbies and displayed secular, liberal, and feminist dispositions. [62] Conversely, refugees' religious practices and occasionally conservative or patriarchal attitudes were typically glossed over (cf. Fadil 2019). Volunteers also commonly wrote or spoke about refugees who invited them to drink tea or have dinner in their tents, "generously sharing the little they owned." They also described refugees who "selflessly volunteered to help others" or "showed immense gratitude despite the little they received. They were also commonly described as exceptionally gifted, hard-working, dedicated, or caring and therefore good and healthy "investments" (Nayeri 2019).

Notably, these stories and representations countered popular discourses and stereotypes framing refugees as either public expenditures or threats to the Norwegian welfare state (Eriksen 2018), or radically different from and incompatible with Norwegian culture and values, including gender and sexual equality (Bangstad 2015). Cognisant of gendered and racialised stereotypes of Middle Eastern or Muslim men, many volunteers were especially careful to describe these refugees as polite and respectful towards women. Yet, they also entailed risks and foreclosures, including the romanticisation and domestication of difference

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[62] In a particularly telling example, Afghan men using the sewing machines at DiH's activity centre in Moria village to repair or mend clothes were described as "better feminists" than Norwegian men at home.

(for excellent critiques, see Bardawil 2019; Boochani 2018; Fadil 2019; Nayeri 2019). Furthermore, while storytelling was often framed as a means to "humanise refugees," these stories humanised only selective figures, hence reproducing "the exclusionary norms by which fields of recognizability are constituted" (Butler 2009: 36). To return to Gullestad and Gilroy, we might say that staff and volunteers adapted to and reinforced the cultural valuation and idea of "equality as sameness" (Gullestad 2001; 2002) rather than de-emphasising the familiar in ethics by integrating or embracing difference (Gilroy 2004).

Evacuate Moria

DiH's third and most concrete strategy focused on mobilising for immediate political action, specifically to convince the Norwegian state to "take responsibility" and evacuate children and families from the infamous Moria camp. Significantly, these calls for evacuation echoed appeals made by MSF and other transnational humanitarian organisations across Europe. They also resonated with claims made by organisations established and run by refugees in the camp, including Moria White Helmets and Wave of Hope. However, these actors directed their political appeals toward supranational collectives like the "international community" or, more commonly, the EU, European leaders, or public. Conversely, DiH's calls for evacuation of refugees from the Greek Islands were specifically addressed to the Norwegian government and its elected politicians, including the Norwegian Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Justice, who were typically addressed by their first names. Accordingly, these politicians were held personally accountable, not merely for the plight of refugees, but also for DiH members making claims on the state as rights-bearing and voting citizens. By making its appeals in public channels and spheres, it also sought to influence other Norwegian citizens whom it believed had silently accepted that their elected politicians violated the nation's core values.

While public calls for evacuations of the Greek Islands date back at least to 2018, a sustained campaign was first kicked off when Trude returned home from a visit to Lesvos in January 2019. Shocked by the deteriorating conditions on the Greek Islands, she, along with two health workers who had worked inside Moria camp, arranged a public press conference calling for immediate political action. Shortly after, DiH and a handful of other humanitarian organisations organised the campaign's first large public demonstration outside the Norwegian parliament in Oslo and seven other Norwegian cities. Dubbed "*Nasjonal*

folkeaksjon for mennesker på flukt" (National People's Action for People on the Run), the purpose of the demonstration was, in the words of the organising bodies, to "demand action and responsibility from our politicians." "We cannot just continue to send money to support a system that does not work or claim that we do more than most other countries. People are freezing, losing hope, and dying," the message read and called on nationwide mobilisation under the banners and social media hashtags #evacuatethecamps and #theirsufferingourresponsibility."

Besides being one of the organising bodies, DiH staff and volunteers gave public speeches in all eight cities. The organisation also started a public signature campaign demanding that "the Norwegian government act as a humanitarian superpower" and "take the initiative to humanitarian airbridge" (*luftbro*) to evacuate the approximately 15,000 refugees currently stuck on the Greek Islands. The 4,500 signatures were later officially handed over to the government by Trude, who also arranged to meet with several state officials and parliamentarians from the political opposition. After many declined invitations from politicians across the political spectrum, DiH persuaded a parliamentary politician from the Socialist Left Party to accompany Trude to Moria camp in January 2020. Several volunteers also sought to influence their local representatives or parliamentarians to support the campaign by writing open letters, emails, making phone calls, or arranging meetings.

The Evacuate Moria campaign continued with regular demonstrations and petitions throughout and after my fieldwork. As illustrated by the pictures below, the demonstrations often sought to bring the plight of refugees—and especially refugee children—closer to the Norwegian public and politicians by displaying material and symbolic artefacts such as lifejackets or children's shoes. However, like the video accompanying the EQUAL campaign, the Evacuate Moria campaign also used juxtaposition. By placing these artefacts in public parks and spaces, the protesters sought to disrupt the safe and comfortable "Norwegian bubble" referred to in Chapter 5 and confront Norwegians with their privilege vis-à-vis refugees risking their lives in the Mediterranean or "losing their childhood" in squalid refugee camps on the borders of Europe.

Image 33 and 34: Two different Evacuate Moria demonstrations in Oslo. The lifejackets were used to dress up famous sculptures in Frogner Park, Oslo's largest public park. The children's shoes represented the number of children currently stuck in Moria camp and were placed in the public square in front of the Norwegian parliament to attract the attention of politicians and passersby alike (photos: URL[63] and Heiko Junge/NTB).

For the many scholars suspicious of the "technologization of solidarity" (Chouliaraki 2013) or social media as a tool for political change (Han 2017), the fact that much of the Evacuate Moria campaign entailed collective "offline actions" in public and physical spaces might itself be grounds for optimism. However, the campaign also had built-in limitations. Most notably, it was characterised by limited political horizons and imaginations. First, while calling for immediate political action, it did so on grounds of a humanitarian emergency without proceeding to challenge Norwegian asylum laws or border policies. As Tvedt observes, such *ad hoc* appeals are characteristic of Norwegian refugee activism, which has often focused on mobilising the Norwegian people to support individual refugees or families and their often dramatic and heartbreaking stories (2017: 133). However, by locating their claims within the realm of protracted crisis and exceptionalism, the campaign diverted attention from "ordinary politics" and the structural and institutional causes that produce and reinforce the exclusion and suffering of people on the move (De Lauri 2019). As Cabot (2019) notes, the emphasis on crisis and urgency also risks replicating logics of securitisation rather than normalising human movement and migration.

Second, while the campaign initially called for the evacuation of all refugees from the Greek Islands, the message was quickly revised to focus specifically on children or children and families. Accordingly, the campaign was haunted by the "present absence" of single adult male asylum-seekers whose precariousness, in Butler's words, was not made "visible or knowable" (2009: 51). While many refugees I befriended or spoke to during my fieldwork

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[63] https://journalen.oslomet.no/2020/11/demonstrerer-flyktninger

supported this prioritisation, others were disappointed and asked why DiH and other refugee advocates did not fight to evacuate everyone.

From the perspective of most interlocutors, this prioritisation was either considered appropriate (given how children were assumed to be most vulnerable and worthy of protection) or a regrettable but pragmatic response to heightening xenophobia and public stigmatisation and fear of adult male refugees—specifically Muslim or black (Gullestad 2004). However, my interviews and conversations also indicated that the campaign's limited demand reflected the staff's and volunteers' post-utopian sensibilities and "sticky attachments" (Ahmed 2014) to national and humanitarian "(b)order of things" (De Lauri 2019; Malkki 1995). This is perhaps best illustrated by my interlocutors' incessant efforts to speak back to popular stereotypes of refugees as "merely young men" or economic migrants by insisting that Greek refugee camps were "full of women and children" and that they were "not migrants" but "real refugees" escaping war or conflict. To counter that idea that refugees were primarily economic migrants or "*lykkejegere*", volunteers also regularly cited the following line from Warshan Shire's poem "Home"*:*

"[N]o one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land."

Although clearly well-intentioned, these statements reinforce the hierarchy of suffering embedded in the 1951 Refugee Convention, where only people fleeing from war or persecution are considered "real" refugees worthy of recognition and protection (Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Ticktin 2020). They also reinforce the popular but empirically unsound and problematic idea that refugees and economic migrants are mutually exclusive categories (Carling 2017; see also Cabot 2014). However, when I confronted my interlocutors about this, they were reluctant to modify their discourse or use a more inclusive vocabulary. Many said they feared that emphasising greater mobility justice for all migrants would compromise their political cause or refugees' special status and rights. Others suggested that making such inclusive appeals was utopian or a luxury only academics in their ivory tower could afford.[64]

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[64] Notably, our disagreement echoed similar debates I have listened to between and amongst scholars and refugee advocates in Norway and elsewhere. While undoubtedly a challenging issue with high stakes involved, these debates have often left me thinking that Mbembe (2018) is right: that we in "the West" lack a conceptual vocabulary and resources to imagine and articulate a borderless world.

Shifting content and rationales

Notably, both the content and rationale of DiH's political interventions changed somewhat during my fieldwork as a response to shifting humanitarian and political conditions. When I officially started my fieldwork in 2018, the situation of refugees in Greece received little public attention in Norway. For different reasons, including decreased arrival rates, the encampment of refugees in Greece following the EU-Turkey deal, and the logic of crisis-chasing (see Cabot 2019), the media spotlight moved on to other crisis zones, and politicians and journalists in Norway generally spoke about the "refugee crisis" in the past tense. The widespread belief that the "refugee crisis" was over was also reinforced by the fact that Norway received fewer asylum seekers in 2017 and 2018 than since the 1990s. However, these low numbers did not reflect lesser protection needs, but were instead a result of the EU-Turkey deal, closed migration routes, and violently policed borders across and even outside of Europe (Franko 2019; Skribeland 2018). Frustrated by the lack of media attention and the widespread popular presumption that the "refugee crisis" was over, DiH tried incessantly to remind the Norwegian public that this was not the case. An example of this effort is the slogan *"det kommer fortsatt båter"* (boats are still coming), which was printed on many DiH banners and used as the headline or key message in multiple speeches and op-eds between 2016 and 2018. During this period, DiH's advocacy work was thus based on the belief that the main barrier to political action was Norwegians' lack of awareness.

The same rationale was also initially behind DiH's prolonged efforts to expose the human costs of Europe's asylum policies. As Trude reasoned, "People must know how Europe treats people on the run. Because if they don't know, they cannot do anything about it either." However, following sustained political neglect, several interlocutors began to question whether appealing to what Redfield describes as "the morality of facts" (2006: 112) was sufficient. Conversely, many argued that Norwegian politicians and citizens had to be emotionally shaken or pricked. Like Sigurd (see Chapter 5), many staff and volunteers described this as a process of "waking up" (*vekke)* the Norwegian public. Significantly, this expression should not be conflated with the now popularised African-American slang "woke," as my interlocutors did not mean that Norwegians had to undergo a transformative

learning/unlearning process or become more vigilant.[65] Nor did they mean that Norwegian politicians and people had to wake up to new ideas and knowledge, as is the idea of the Enlightenment. Rather, the expression reflected staff's and volunteers' widespread belief that most Norwegians were neither morally defective nor completely ignorant, but in some sort of moral slumber.[66]

What would it take to "wake up" the Norwegian public? As illustrated by the report, DiH's political appeals and testimonies generally focused on describing the multifaceted suffering refugees had to endure while trapped in legal and existential limbo in Greek refugee camps. Following Givoni's discussion of politicised testimony, we might say that DiH sought to render the conditions in the camps "disturbing rather than merely tangible" (2011: 147). To accomplish this, its discourse often resembled what Robbins (2013) dubbed "the suffering slot anthropology." DiH staff and volunteers also regularly mobilised concepts and imagery Fassin (2012) and others have described as depoliticising and de-historicising, including suffering, trauma, (mis)fortune, and vulnerable and distressed children.

However, contrary to Fassin's (2012) seminal critique of "humanitarian reason," my interlocutors did not displace all political questions of rights and accountability. Conversely, blame and responsibility for the predicament of refugees in Greece were, in most cases, clearly and unambiguously attributed to Europe and the continent's violent asylum and migration policies, which were said to violate not only the ideal of Europe but also European countries' international and human rights obligations. Furthermore, contrary to Fassin (2012) and Robbins (2013), staff and volunteers did not only try to foster empathy and compassion or the recognition of shared humanity and vulnerability, but to "wake up" Norwegians from their moral slumber, they also sought to elicit moral outrage (Lazar 2018) and shame people into action.

To accomplish this, DiH staff and volunteers often described refugees as physically, emotionally, and sometimes even morally broken by the Greek asylum system and European border politics. For instance, DiH witnesses often described encounters with refugees who

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[65] See Romano (2020) on how the concept of "woke" has evolved and been co-opted.

[66] As such, the expression has closer affinities with First Corinthians 15:34: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not," and provides another example of how Norway's Christian heritage deeply influences its colloquial language (see also Chapter 2).

had fallen sick or destitute due to the unsanitary conditions in the camp, or because they had not received basic medical care. Another common theme was that refugees had "lost hope" (*mistet håpet)* or grown disillusioned or apathetic due to enforced conditions of prolonged waiting and uncertainty. DiH also regularly spoke about refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors and other children, who self-harmed or tried to commit suicide because of the re-traumatising conditions in Moria camp.

Significantly, refugees' brokenness was described as conditional. Indeed, as argued above, DiH was careful not to frame refugees as problems or burdens, but rather described them as "unused resources" (*ubenyttede ressurser*) who would flourish in Norway or other European countries if they only got a chance. Pace Fassin (2012), refugees were also described as subjects with rights, rather than merely subjects of pity or compassion. Nevertheless, DiH did not abandon all aspects of "humanitarian reason" (ibid). By foregrounding refugees' physical suffering and trauma, they still represented refugees in recognisable humanitarian terms: as innocent, suffering bodies (Tickin 2011).

Often, my interlocutors' testimonies were also characterised by a "confessional intimacy" (Chouliaraki 2013) involving declarations like *"Unnskyld"* (I am sorry) or *"Jeg/vi burde skjemmes"* (I am ashamed/Shame on us). When performed in public, these were also frequently accompanied by bodily expressions: a broken voice, tears, or the display of anger or despair. The expression of these emotions signified both authenticity and commitment, and invited their readers and audiences to join in DiH's affective community and struggle (cf. Antonsich and Skey 2020; Shoshan 2016). However, on what grounds they apologised or felt ashamed were rarely spelled out. As mentioned, DiH staff and volunteers generally attributed blame and responsibility to the EU or Europe, which were accused of both violating their international obligations and normative ideals. However, who exactly was part of this guilty and responsible Europe was often less clear. Conversely, questions of Norway's complicity were commonly left ambiguous or displaced by moral appeals for Norway to "take initiative" and be a "*foregangsland"* (pioneering country), and hence live up to the country's public image and tradition as a "humanitarian superpower."

When addressing the Norwegian public, staff and volunteers also commonly highlighted the massive contrast between their personal comfort and security in Norway and the daily hardship and risks refugees faced in seeking asylum in Europe. Like the visual strategies

examined above, they thus sought to remind Norwegians about their extreme privileges vis-à-vis refugees and shame them into action. Scaling up this argument to the level of the nation-state, my interlocutors also frequently described Norway as one of the "richest and safest countries in the world" with both "capacity" and "space" to accommodate many more people than it presently did. However, they rarely made causal connections between Norwegian affluence or security politics and the plight of refugees in Greece. To return to the distinction made in the Introduction, Norway was thus constructed as morally responsible but not complicit.

Finally, DiH staff and volunteers constructed Norway's restrictive asylum policies as a shameful violation of the country's heroic and humanitarian past and traditions. For instance, Trude and other DiH staff regularly referred to Germany's occupation of Norway during World War Two, which caused many members of the Norwegian resistance movement— including Trude's grandfather—to flee to Sweden. As she commonly phrased it, it was not only that "it *could* have been us [who had to flee and seek protection in a foreign land], but *it was actually us* only a few generations ago." Given Norway's recent experience during the Second World War, she and many others asserted that the fact that Norway did not accept more refugees was "deeply shameful." Several interlocutors also referred to Norway's earlier humanitarian efforts to assist and accommodate refugees from the Balkans or boat refugees from Vietnam. "We have done it in the past, and we can do it again," many professed. "Nansen [Norwegian diplomat and humanitarian hero] would roll in his grave if he knew how little Norway currently did to help refugees," others declared and underscored that Norway could and must do better.

Besides mobilising historical events and narratives, staff and volunteers also regularly appealed to the future and the idea of "history as the ultimate judgment" (Roitman 2014: 8). As Trude and one of her colleagues wrote in an op-ed calling for an evacuation of the children in Moria: "When history shall be written, would it not be good to know that we, as a nation, did what we could? That we did not close our eyes but were able to save children and families from Moria, while helping to implement smart and sustainable solutions for Europe's challenging refugee situation?" In the Facebook post sharing the article, DiH added: "Let us write history so those who come after us can be proud. Let us not allow this to become our shame. We can do it—it is all about political will."

While emotionally and rhetorically powerful, these efforts to shame Norwegian citizens and politicians into action relied on and reinforced narratives of Norwegian exceptionalism. Rather than grappling with difficult questions of Norway's complicity and state violence, they also reproduced a hegemonic and whitewashed version of Norwegian history defined by innocence and goodness (see Chapter 1).[67] Moreover, the discourse of national shame is, as Ahmed notes, contradictory: while exposing the nation, it ultimately seeks moral recovery or redemption. In doing so, it mobilises and reproduces a romanticised national ideal even as it announces the current violation of that ideal (Ahmed 2005; see also Browning 2021).

Political stuckness

In the previous section, I discussed DiH efforts to "wake up" the Norwegian public and politicians by eliciting moral outrage and shame. Notably, shaming was done in at least two overlapping ways: first, by making uncomfortable comparisons or juxtapositions (both between Norwegians and refugees and between the past and the present), and second, by constructing the ongoing "refugee crisis" as a shameful event requiring national reflection, change, and ultimately reparation and redemption. Unlike the earlier appeal to the "morality of facts," these shaming strategies evoked dominant Norwegian values and narratives. However, toward the end of my fieldwork, DiH staff and volunteers had to acknowledge that their efforts to mobilise these values and narratives had largely failed.

The limitation of DiH's political strategies became particularly evident from summer 2019 onwards, when the situation on the Greek Islands again captured headlines following increased arrivals and reports of new human rights violations. Despite increased attention in the media, DiH and other refugee advocates were unable to convince Norwegian politicians to

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[67] While most interlocutors seemed to genuinely believe that the government's current policies constituted a radical break with Norway's "humanitarian past," a few said they knew about the historically abusive and discriminatory policies of the state, but mobilised the hegemonic narrative of Norway as a "country of peace and compassion" (Gullestad 2006a) for strategic reasons. Influenced by the work of Nordic postcolonial scholars (e.g., Keskinen et al 2019), I believe and sometimes suggested that it was important to challenge sanitised versions of Norwegian history. However, those who disagreed with me find support in the work of the American philosopher Rorty, who argued that "you cannot urge national political renewal on the basis of descriptions of facts (…) You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one to which you wake up every morning. Unless such loyalty exists, the ideal has no chance of becoming actual" (1998: 101). In a recent publication, Browning (2021: 15-6) offers an alternative interpretation: he suggests that Nordic people hold on to their (tainted) national narratives and ideals because they provide "self-esteem and status, but also ontological security and agency."

take responsibiliy and evacuate children and other vulnerable refugees from the Greek Islands.[68] The problem, according to most interlocutors, was not witnessing or shaming as political strategies (though a few also questioned these), but rather that too many Norwegians, and politicians in particular, "had no shame" or displayed what they variably described as "deliberate neglect," "reckless irresponsibility," or "wilful indifference." As Trine, one of DiH's politically engaged volunteers, said in a public volunteer meeting at a café in downtown Oslo: "We have been telling them what is happening for many years now. The problem is not that they do not know; it is that they do not care."

Similar sentiments were expressed by many DiH staff, first in private conversations and later in public. For instance, in an op-ed discussing the deteriorating conditions on the Greek Islands in October 2019, a DiH worker concluded soberly:

> "…we could have continued with horrible stories, asylum interviews that are postponed until 2023, children who have become apathetic and lost the will to live. But it does not serve any purpose as long as there is no political will to address these problems and create change."

While politicians' failure to listen or respond to their appeals and testimonies resonates with grievances expressed by citizens and activists elsewhere in Europe (Greenberg 2016; Krøijer 2019), my interlocutors generally found it shocking. This can partly be explained by Norwegians' particular imagination of the state and the so-called special and porous relationship between Nordic states and civil society (Bendixsen and Wyller 2002; Vike 2018). First, like many other Norwegians, my interlocutors generally expected the Norwegian state to be guided by ethical rather than (merely) pragmatic or realist principles, another version of Nordic and Norwegian exceptionalism (Leira 2013; Tvedt 2017).[69]

Second, contrary to classical liberal ideas and theories of democratic sustainability (Habermas 1987) and most anthropological renderings of the state (Das and Poole 2004), the Nordic welfare states are generally not viewed as enemies or suppressors of civil society and citizens,

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[68] Like several other European countries, the Norwegian government said they waited for a joint European solution.

[69] Notably, Weiss (2014) and Wekker (2016) make similar claims about Israel and the Netherlands.

but rather "enablers or facilitators" (Bendixsen and Wyller 2020: 6). Describing Norway as a "low level gravity state," Vike (2018) further argues that Norwegian popular movements have historically had and continue to have a large influence on the state even relative to their Nordic neighbours. Accordingly, most interlocutors expected to influence the government and pressure it to change course. When these expectations went unmet, my interlocutors not only expressed disappointment (cf. Greenberg 2015), but also increased distrust and contempt of the ruling government and politicians, whom they accused of failing to represent and take seriously the opinions of ordinary Norwegians. This is noteworthy in a country that is often characterised by exceptionally high levels of trust in the state and public institutions (Vike 2018; Østerud 2005). Moreover, while such complaints are normally attributed to the traditional schism between Norwegian cities and countryside, or the rural population and cosmopolitan elites, this was not the political division here. To the contrary, DiH staff and volunteers across the country articulated cosmopolitan ideals and aspirations to help and accommodate non-citizen others, while accusing the Norwegian government of being nativist and inward-looking and thereby violating Norwegian values and traditions.

Notably, while many interlocutors blamed the ruling government and politicians, others believed Norway's large and generous welfare system was at fault. While it is often highlighted as a source of pride and model for other countries to follow (Abram 2018), these volunteers believed the Norwegian welfare state had made Norwegians increasingly complacent and selfish. As Beate, a volunteer and nurse in her late sixties, concluded in our interview: "The welfare state is a big paradox. It has made us one of the world's safest and richest societies, with equal rights and services for all. But it has also made us unwilling to share and thus undermined our humanity."

Reflecting on their limited political impact, many staff and volunteers also pointed to the increasingly hostile and xenophobic political climate. As Tvedt argues, Norwegian activists have historically succeeded in framing refugees as vulnerable and destitute and thereby "clients" of the Norwegian state (2017: 127-135). However, during my fieldwork, this was challenging, even regarding refugee children and unaccompanied minors. Often described in the humanitarian literature as "perfect" or "pure" victims (see especially Malkki 2010; 2015), these figures were no longer conceived as innocent or even children at all, but rather young men lying about their age and potentially radicalised or violent toward Norwegian women. Regardless of their age and gender, refugee children were also commonly depicted as future

terrorists or welfare scroungers threatening Norwegian security and equality (cf. Kotef 2015). Moreover, refugee advocates' appeals to Norwegian humanitarianism or "goodness" were regularly portrayed by politicians and media commentators as naïve or misplaced in the face of current or future "unstoppable" or "uncontrollable refugee flows." The most vocal critic was the former Minister of Immigration and Integration, Sylvi Listhaug, who, in November 2015, said that "the tyranny of goodness rides the Norwegian society like a mare." According to Listhaug, who represents the populist and anti-immigration Progress Party, refugee advocates were not only naïve and self-righteous, but irresponsible and dangerous, as their suggested policies threatened the the future of the Norwegian welfare state.

Besides challenging both refugee advocates' personal goodness and cause, these political developments were identified by many volunteers as threatening. As Åse said in our interview: "I am so worried about what is happening with our country: the blindness to history and xenophobia…I thought we said 'never again,' but now these sentiments are resurfacing again."

However, DiH and other refugee advocates were also met with resistance from more mainstream voices, including representatives of the Labour Party, journalists and academics. Citing both utilitarian and deontological principles, these actors argued that Norway should focus on *"støtte nærområdene"* (providing local or regional support) and prioritise quota refugees selected by UNHCR and commonly described as more needy and vulnerable.

Confrontations

How did my interlocutors' experiences of political stuckness and inertia find expression in their political advocacy and subjectivities? While DiH did not stop witnessing and mobilising for political change, its political discourse and visions both changed in part. Regarding the former, its language became more confrontational as it developed an increasingly subversive relationship with the Norwegian government and society. This is illustrated by its reframing of the "refugee crisis" as a "crisis in Norwegian humanism." It is also exemplified by staff and volunteers' frequent evocation of affective phrases from famous Norwegian World War Two political poetry, most notably the following lines from Arnulf Øverland:

"du skal ikke tåle så inderlig godt, den urett som ikke rammer deg selv" (You should not tolerate injustices that fall upon others).

and

"*tilgi dem ikke, det vet hva de gjør*" (Forgive them not—they know what they do).

Following Lazar (2015), we might understand the frequent evocation of these phrases as a form of intertextuality intended to mobilise the symbolic and affective power of Norway's struggle against Nazism and the German occupation during the Second World War. Notably, a similar motive was behind DiH's increasing depiction of volunteers as "*vår tids tidsvitner*" (the time witnesses of our age). In Norway, the term "*tidsvitner*" gives immediate associations with World War Two and the Holocaust, especially Norwegian Jews and political prisoners who survived German concentration camps and later provided testimonies or engaged in public education work. In Norwegian public discourse, "*tidsvitnene*" from World War Two are described as moral symbols and bearers of historical consciousness and frequently highlighted as having a critical and irreplaceable function in society, as evidenced by the current widespread concern that they will soon all be gone. By calling their volunteers for "the time witnesses of our age," DiH partly sought to highlight the moral gravity of the contemporary situation of refugees in Greece, comparing it with the "incomparable." However, the term also alluded to DiH's emerging and more future-oriented vision of volunteers as narrators of the "shameful" history unfolding in the present. As Trude put it in a Facebook post:

> "All of DiH's 6,500 volunteers are witnesses to how Europe is treating people on the run. This is a story that has not yet been written, but which drops will contribute to tell and write."

Like Anders and Mathilde (see Chapter 4), many volunteers also came to (re)define their humanitarian work and identity in political and increasingly oppositional terms. Jorunn, for instance, described being a drop or a "*medmenneske*" in Greece as an antipode to what she perceived as an "increasingly cold, selfish, and materialistic Norwegian society." Likewise, Åse was initially motivated by a simple desire to "do something concretely." However, she increasingly came to view and portray her volunteer work as a "counter-weight" (*motvekt*) to nativist and xenophobic sentiments at home. During one of our many conversations, she also said that she hoped to socialise her children into being kind and tolerant human beings and

citizens. More specifically, she said that by helping refugees, she hoped to "demonstrate for my children that we are all human beings and that it is extremely important to take care of each other." Several other volunteers expressed similar sentiments. As Maja explained at the end of our interview:

> "I think it is important for our children to hear that 'someone fought against the darkness.' If not, it becomes easy to think that the world is evil and one can do whatever one wants. Hence, volunteering is partly about creating hope. For my own sake, it is also important to be able to tell my children that 'I did something.'"

For her and many other volunteers, being a volunteer and refugee advocate was thus not only about addressing suffering and injustices in the present, but also instilling a sense of hope and tolerance in future generations of Norwegian citizens. For many volunteers, this reflected a sincere hope that Norway would eventually rebuild its humanitarian image and praxis. Yet, as illustrated by Maja's last sentence, many volunteers also expressed a personal and redemptive desire to be "on the right side of history." Extending themselves into the future, many argued that Europe and Norway's response to the "refugee crisis" would be a *skamplett"* (source of shame) in the history books. Like Wenche (see Chapter 5), they thus wanted to be able to tell their children or grandchildren that "I was amongst those who stood up for our values" or "tried to help refugees," as my interlocutors variously put it. "#notmygovernment" or "they do not represent us/me," others declared in social or mainstream media, thereby expressing both their disapproval of the government and a personal desire for detachment or withdrawal (cf. Wilson and Anderson 2020).

New argumentations

In addition to become more confrontational and articulate redemptive desires, staff and volunteers also responded to political stuckness and inertia by engaging more forcefully in political debates and arguments. This was especially evident in the Moria campaign, where critics asked why Norway should assist refugees from Moria and Greece when there were so many other, equally horrendous or worse, humanitarian crises elsewhere in the world. As mentioned, DiH had previously highlighted the importance of European solidarity and responsibility-sharing. However, the organisation was now pushed to articulate, with increased force and clarity, Norway's more direct political responsibility or complicity as a

party, donor, or official supporter of many of the EU's highly criticized migration policies and structures, including the Dublin regulations, the EU-Turkey deal, and Greek refugee facilities like Moria camp.

Notably, this emerging emphasis on Norway's complicity focused specifically, and somewhat narrowly, on the immediate causes of refugees' suffering. However, on some occasions, DiH staff and volunteers also referred to Norway's participation in the wars and conflicts refugees were fleeing from, particularly the NATO-led invasions in Afghanistan and Libya where Norway was at the forefront and dropped 588 bombs "in the name of humanity" (Tvedt 2016; see also Heier et al 2019; cf. Çubukçu 2017; Feldman and Ticktin 2010). A few volunteers also highlighted Norway's role as one of the world's largest exporters of oil and gas, as well as of weapons to countries engaged in refugee-producing conflicts, such as Saudi Arabia. Unlike the moral appeals examined above, this "complicity discourse" thus foregrounded Norway's direct responsibility for refugees' hardships in Greece and also alluded to Norway's implication in the conflicts and other crises (e.g., climate change) refugees were fleeing from. While not questioning the country's whitewashed and sanitised history, they thus confronted and undermined narratives of Norwegian exceptionalism and innocence.

Finally, DiH staff and volunteers responded to political stuckness and inertia by foregrounding the threat posed by their political opponent: an illicit, inward-looking nationalism characterised by welfare chauvinism or an "unwillingness to share." This political discourse is illustrated by the following extract from Trude's speech at a public demonstration in the western city of Trondhjem in 2019:

> "'There is no chance,' our Minister of Justice responded, when he was recently asked if Norway could accept some refugees from the Greek Islands (…). 'If we accept more refugees than the very few we are committed to help through the Dublin agreement, it will be the end of our warm welfare society,' his party colleague said a couple of days later. But do we really live in a warm welfare society? A welfare society yes, but is it warm? Or has our wealth and well-being made us close our doors and hide within our cold bubble to keep it all to ourselves? (…) 'Our rich nation cannot do more to help, because our welfare society will be destroyed,' they tell us. Unfortunately, too many people accept this logic, which is based on xenophobia and unfounded fears. [Because] our welfare society will not break if we help some more people; it simply

will not. After all, there are human resources we are talking about: people who can support our welfare or even expand our narrow understanding of it. And *so what* if we were to become a tiny bit less wealthy if we got richer in solidarity and compassion? (…) A truly warm welfare society can only be built by people who care about others."

At the end of her speech, Trude handed the microphone over to her seven-year-old daughter, who she said had a message to the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg. Significantly, a few weeks earlier, Solberg used the Prime Minister's annual New Year's speech to encourage Norwegian women to have more children to ensure the sustainability of the welfare state. Responding to this controversial plea, Trude's daughter spoke loud and clearly:

> "Dear Erna. Like you, I also want Norway to have more children, so we can build a good country for the future. But children are children, no matter the colour of their skin. All children have the right to live in safety. And all children have the right to go to school. So, help the children who are freezing in refugee camps in Greece NOW!"

Image 35: Trude and her daughter giving a speech during a public demonstration in 2019. Note that Trude's daughter is wearing a fake lifejacket, which Trude explained she had brought home from Lesvos (photo: URL[70]).

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[70] https://www.facebook.com/folkeaksjonmotflyktningkrisen/community/

Like the storytelling above, Trude and her daughter here directly addressed public concerns about the future of the Norwegian welfare state. They did so partly by suggesting that youth and children in Greek refugee camps provided the solution to the Prime Minister's call and Norway's widely anticipated elderly wave *(eldrebølge)*, thereby also challenging the common tendency to view refugees as "superfluous" (Bauman 2003; Mbembe 2019). However, Trude also challenged the widespread tendency to frame refugees as threats to the Norwegian welfare state by suggesting that the latter was rather threatened from *within,* from "the part of the national body that lets itself harden, becoming xenophobically inhumane" (Oxfeldt 2020: 40), selfish, and parochial.

Like the complicity discourse, this critique of inward-looking nationalism and welfare chauvinism has subversive elements. First, as exemplified by the speech above, it can both expose and challenge the government's implicit vision of a racialised and exclusionary welfare state defined by ethnic boundaries or shared descent (Fuglerud 2005; Gullestad 2006a; 2006c). Second, unlike the previously discussed colonial desire to empower and civilise refugees, we can read Trude and DiH as attempting to civilise Norwegians, or hold them accountable to their humanitarian and cosmopolitan values. Third, it is worth underscoring that Trude not only made her case for refugees by portraying them as resources or investments (cf. Nayeri 2019), but also argued that Norway should accept more refugees "even if we were to become a tiny bit less wealthy." As Carens (1987: 256) argues in his famous effort to extend Rawls' theory of justice to the global level, accepting refugees despite economic or other costs is the logical consequence of believing that where you are born is a matter of luck or coincidence and thus morally arbitrary (as most of my interlocutors stressed). Nevertheless, my interlocutors often failed to make that case, and rather focused on countering discourses of refugees as public burdens and expenditures.

However, like the other political discourses and representational strategies examined in this chapter, DiH's critique against inward-looking nationalism and welfare chauvinism carries its own risks and foreclosures. Perhaps most notably, the inward orientation risks marginalising the predicaments of refugees "in favour of stories about us" (Chouliaraki 2013: 185). Furthermore, while accusing Norwegian politicians and citizens of being selfish and xenophobic, staff and volunteers using this discourse ultimately affirmed their allegiance to the Norwegian state and society that they sought to rescue from turning "too cold" or

inhumane. In other words, they asserted their accountability not only to refugees in Greece but also, or even primarily, to other Norwegian citizens (cf. Weiss 2019).

While challenging welfare chauvinism, and the presumed non-possibility of a black Norwegian (Gullestad 2002; cf. Wekker 2016), they also espoused a colour-blind ideology that fell short of undermining anti-Muslim racism and the logic of "equality as sameness" in Norway. Following Pallister-Wilkins (2021), we might also say that DiH's universalising claims help to perpetuate the notion of humanitarianism as somehow above race (Pallister-Wilkins 2021). Finally, while emphasising Norway's moral obligation to share its welfare with refugees,[71] DiH did not trace "causal connections between the actions of the wealthy and the plight of the needy in order to ground the duties of the former" (Mancilla 2016: 2). To once again return to the distinction I made in the Introduction, they thus neglected structural questions of responsibility and addressed their Norwegian audience as "*medmennesker*" rather than complicit actors or beneficiaries (cf. Pogge 2002).

Conclusion

This chapter examined DiH's political turn and strategies to raise awareness, mobilise for more positive orientations toward refugees, and convince the Norwegian government to evacuate refugee children and families from Moria camp on Lesvos. I have focused specifically on my interlocutors' efforts to elicit humanitarian shame and outrage and also discussed how they interpreted and responded to "political stuckness" (Givoni 2021).

Notably, despite the organisation's growing political involvement, DiH was careful not to define itself as a political NGO. Its *raison d'être* remained humanitarian, and when asked about its political work, the staff often underscored that they were a "non-political, independent humanitarian organisation." Anthropologists, drawing on Ferguson's seminal work on development as an "antipolitics machine" (1994) have often been suspicious of such claims, accusing their interlocutors of depoliticising their work or the suffering they seek to relieve. However, as Candea (2011) argues, we might usefully suspend this suspicion and rather attend to the productive effects of such attempts to demarcate one's identity or actions

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[71] Note that my interlocutors' emphasis on "the obligation to share" clearly differs from Widlock's (2016) assertion that sharing is more about empathy than obligation.

from the political realm. As Candea shows, reflecting on the attempt by a Corsican educational official to separate education and politics, such efforts might also be based on a different cultural logic than depoliticisation. More specifically, he argues that "the consistency of this view for [his interlocutors] is that the school is not so much 'non-political' as it is 'prepolitical'" (2011: 316; cf. Redfield 2012b).

Similarly, I found that the work done to maintain DiH's image as a humanitarian, non-political organisation had instrumental value and was based on a particular cultural logic that cannot be easily reduced to depoliticisation. Regarding the former, maintaining this image of DiH was important to avoid alienating the organisation's donors who, in addition to private individuals, included labour unions, corporations, and businesses.[72] However, DiH's insistence that it was not a political organisation also reflected its sincere belief that Norway's humanitarian values and responsibility lay somewhere above or beyond what it considered as everyday nitty-gritty political struggles based on competing interests or ideologies. More specifically, DiH staff insisted that helping and welcoming refugees was not a partisan issue or a question of being socialist or conservative, but simply about showing "*medmenneskelighet*"—a fundamental Norwegian value that should appeal to members of all political parties, perhaps with the exception of the far-right Progress Party.

However, as described in this chapter, not all Norwegians shared this belief, and the ruling government repeatedly rejected DiH and other refugee advocates' call for a humanitarian evacuation of refugees from the Greek Islands. Rather than simply raising awareness or "waking up" the Norwegian public from a moral slumber, DiH thus became involved in a political struggle against what they described as an illicit and increasingly selfish and inward-looking nationalism. As I have shown, at stake in this struggle were both Norway's public self-image as "humanitarian superpower" and the boundaries of the national body politic. Yet, from the perspective of my interlocutors, this struggle was also about the moral health and future of Norwegian society.

The ethnographic example that best illustrates this is perhaps Trude's repeated remark that Norway's unwillingness to share and help more refugees makes her worried that her children

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[72] Mette explained that negotiating DiH's position as a politically engaged non-political organisation was a balancing act that often involved insisting that witnessing was an objective and morally obligatory form of truth-telling rather than a political intervention.

will grow up in a "cold and heartless society." Notably, this comment is an explicit reference to an earlier statement made by right-wing politician Sylvi Listhaug. While serving as Minister of Immigration and Integration in 2016, she controversially stated that increased migration to Norway made her concerned about her children's future. Listhaug later justified her statement by referencing the threat she and many others assume non-European migration poses to the Norwegian welfare system.

The contrasting views underlying these analogous statements thus illustrate the central argument of this chapter: that DiH's political interventions are not only driven by its (cosmopolitan) care for and sense of obligation toward refugees in Greece, but by mobilising for more inclusive asylum policies and positive public orientations toward refugees, the organisation was also participating in a Gramscian "war of position" over national identity, belonging, and the future (Gramsci 1992; see also Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Talleras and Erdal 2015; Naples and Mendez 2015: 364-70).

On a more abstract level, we might also view DiH's political struggle as reflecting and addressing ongoing conflicts within liberal thought and politics. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Europe's response to the refugee crisis has often been framed as a "crisis of liberalism" (Boyer 2016). Alternatively, some theorists suggest that the rise of "Fortress Europe" expresses contradictions and exclusions embedded in liberalism (Mbembe 2018; Kotef 2015; Pallister-Wilkins 2018). While fundamentally different, both of these approaches treat liberalism as singular and coherent entity (see also Coleman and Goloub 2008; Englund 2017). However, as I have shown, DiH and its political opponents both harness liberal values to justify competing national projects and border politics. Rather than saving or rescuing liberalism, or rejecting it completely, we might thus think of DiH staff and volunteers as negotiating the political meaning and reach of liberal values like freedom and equality.

DiH's struggle against inward-looking nationalism and welfare chauvinism also illustrates one of Appiah's (1997) seminal arguments about cosmopolitanism: that it is not only an argument about globalisation, but equally an argument *within* nation-states about citizenship, rights, and equality. Inspired by Oxfeldt (2020), I suggest that we can read Trude, not as a "postnational mother," but as a cosmopolitan nationalist mother figure: a mother who tends to the future of refugee children as well as her own children and, by doing so, is safeguarding Norwegian values, identity and future.

Conclusion:
Redemptive acts?

On the 1ˢᵗ of January 2021, the remains of a toddler were discovered by a fisherman in the vicinity of Karmøy, on the western coast of Norway. Nearly six months later, the local police identified the child as Artin Irannezhad, a boy of only 15 months who had left Iran with his family to apply for asylum in Europe and drowned when the boat they were travelling in capsized in the English Channel in October 2020. The discovery of Artin's body was described in the Norwegian press as shocking, unlikely, and tragic; however, for my interlocutors, this only confirmed what they already knew: Norway, despite its location in the far-north corner of Europe, was "part of the world," and that refugees were not—or no longer—distant strangers but people "knocking on our door."

In this dissertation, I have discussed the emergence of a new humanitarian geography that took shape in response to the so-called refugee crisis unfolding on the Greek islands in 2015. I have focused specifically on the Norwegian humanitarian volunteer organisation *Dråpen i Havet* (A Drop in the Ocean) and examined the organisation's shifting and contested efforts to "fill humanitarian gaps" in the context of changing needs, EU's containment policies and local resistance. Following Norwegian volunteers across time and space, I have also examined their decisions to volunteer for DiH and ambivalent experiences of returning home and negotiating different worlds and relationships. Finally, I have analysed staff and volunteers' efforts to witness and mobilise for more inclusive asylum policies and positive public perceptions towards refugees in Norway.

Taken together, the chapters in this thesis challenge enduring representations of humanitarian actors and volunteers as rootless cosmopolitans or transnationals motivated by either selfish or altruistic concerns to help distant strangers. Conversely, I have shown that DiH staff and volunteers felt deeply ashamed by Norwegian affluence and their government's unwillingness to help refugees "on their own continent" and worried increasingly over the moral health and future of the Norwegian state and society.

Drawing on a diverse body of work, the thesis has argued that DiH staff and volunteers can be described as "cosmopolitan nationalists," called to help as indignant and shameful Norwegian citizens and mobilising against what they perceive as an illicit, inward-looking nationalism.

As defined and used in this thesis, the concept cosmopolitan nationalism challenges prevalent framings of political divisions in Europe as a schism between localists and globalists or cosmopolitans and nationalists (e.g., Eriksen 2018; Krastev 2017; Piketty 2020). Conversely, I suggest that political divisions over issues such as migration and asylum politics can, at least in Norway (and I suspect elsewhere), be more accurately described as conflicts over national identity, values and future, including the boundary of the national body politic.

On a more theoretical level, the formulation also challenges the refuted but still widespread assumption that cosmopolitanism is necessarily about transcending or denying nationalism. It further questions the popular tendency to define nationalism as inherently parochial, conservative and exclusionary (see e.g., Valluvan 2020). As other scholars have argued, these presumptions privilege particular and largely Eurocentric ideas and visions of both nationalism and cosmopolitanism, associating the former with isolationism and nativism and the latter with a Kantian desire for a political morality beyond the state (Fardon 2009; Prakash 2015). Conversely, this thesis has demonstrated that cosmopolitan and nationalist sensibilities and visions might not only co-exist but be perfectly aligned, though persuading others on this is a matter of moral and political work (Prakash 2015; see also Appiah 1997; R. Werbner 2009).

While the dissertation has discussed a plurality of affective grammars and experiences, I have focused particularly on shame (*skam*), which is both culturally and politically contingent, expressed on personal and collective levels and simultaneously *on behalf of* and *against* the nation. By discussing shame as a central feature of volunteers' moral and political subjectivity, I have both challenged and expanded the current scholarly focus on volunteers' personal desires or self-cultivation. I have also brought ethnographic specificity to analyses that have highlighted European citizens' "need to help" or "do something" in response to the "refugee crisis." By discussing shame and shaming, I have further built upon work that has studied the fraught but sometimes productive relationship between "negative" affects and political action (Ahmed 2014; Greenberg 2016; Wright 2018). Contrary to popular and scholarly assumptions, I have shown that feelings of shame might catalyse humanitarian and political engagements. However, while my interlocutors described their feelings of personal and national shame as morally appropriate and productive, it risks being largely self-oriented or self-affirming. Analysing shaming as a political discourse and strategy, I also argued that its political force is hampered by its redemptive aspirations and reproduction of a hegemonic

and whitewashed version of Norwegian history. More generally, I have shown that shame can move us in different directions, but also keep us "stuck": it can separate and estrange us from what is familiar and exclusionary, but also redraw social and national boundaries or (b)order of things.

The dissertation has also provided windows into the changing and increasingly hostile and fragmented humanitarian and political landscapes found on the fringes of Europe. Based on my fieldwork in Greece, I have described how DiH has filled critical roles both inside and outside of refugee camps, but also contributed to local tensions and inadvertently increased illegibility and rightlessness. Despite the organisation's focus on human dignity and equality and sensitivity towards Greece's predicaments, I have also highlighted neo-colonial desires and attitudes towards refugees and Greece as not-properly-European. Compared to ideal-typical and ideologically-driven organisations, I have shown that DiH is mainly guided by pragmatic or consequentialist ethics, but also a "Chomskyan conviction" to focus their political critiques and actions on the sphere of their own nation-state. While much has been written about the humanitarian desire to help or encounter "authentic" and "innocent" refugees (see e.g., Ticktin 2017), the thesis has also foregrounded volunteers' emphasis on Trude and DiH's authenticity, and their deep-seated presumptions of Norwegian innocence.

Turning my gaze towards Norway and my interlocutors' political advocacy, I have identified "sticky attachments" to national and humanitarian frames and imaginaries. For instance, I have shown how DiH staff and volunteers often reproduced gendered and racialised hierarchies of vulnerability and worthiness, failed to challenge the cultural logic of "equality as sameness," and perpetuated narratives of Norwegian innocence and exceptionalism. I have further highlighted their narrow and post-utopian political demands and imaginations, evasion of race, and repeated failures to trace causal links between their Norwegian privilege and the hardship of refugees and other migrants. However, the dissertation has also identified cracks and openings, including emerging concerns with Norway's complicity and promising efforts to challenge welfare chauvinism.

While many questions are left unasked or unanswered, the question I was posed most frequently when presenting chapter drafts or talking about my research was whether my interlocutors experienced volunteering as a redemptive experience. Several of the arguments I have made in this dissertation point in this direction. For instance, as I argued in Chapter 4,

DiH provided an opportunity for ordinary Norwegian citizens to move beyond their shamed position by doing something concretely. As described, DiH also offers a "model of change" (Tsing 2005: 214) where volunteers can imagine themselves as moral and political subjects working together to help refugees in Greece while demonstrating their personal commitment to both global equality and Norwegian humanism (cf. Every 2013). As discussed in Chapter 6, many interlocutors, whether volunteering in Greece or serving as refugee advocates in Norway, also started to define themselves as antipodes or counterweights to nativist policies and sentiments at home. Finally, we have seen that both DiH and individual volunteers expressed redemptive desires to be on "the right side of history."

However, did this mean that my interlocutors experienced volunteering and mobilising politically at home as redemptive? I have discussed previously in this thesis works by scholars who have made such claims. For instance, Knott suggests that "being there" and "doing something" to help refugees in Greece alleviated volunteers' guilt. She writes: "volunteers travel easily and cheaply in order to 'help' those who aren't allowed to move in the opposite direction, before returning once again to their own countries, comforted in the belief that they have 'done what they could to help'" (2017: 262). Writing from a more balanced perspective, Theodossopoulos (2016) warns that humanitarian work can be a redemptive or self-exonerating practice for people looking to redeem their privilege.

After reviewing interview transcripts and fieldwork notes, I identified both more nuances and large individual differences. At one end of the spectrum, some volunteers indicated that they felt that their humanitarian and political work did, at least to some extent, atone for global injustices or their privilege. However, they did not describe volunteering as redemptive and were careful to reject labels like "heroes" or "saviours." Conversely, they emphasised that volunteering in Greece and witnessing at home were their ways of contributing, and that they had come to accept that this was all they could do at this point in their lives. Exemplifying this stance, Line stressed that she had "learned to accept that she cannot help everyone" and that she is "only a drop." Similarly, Wenche remarked as follows: "I feel ashamed over Norway's asylum policies, but not on a personal level. Because I do what I can, what I am capable of doing. I have chosen these ways of contributing, and I tell myself that it is enough." Like several other volunteers, Wenche also cited her familial obligations at home: "I am not only a drop. I am also a mother and grandmother. One of the reasons I am only volunteering for two weeks at a time is that I am trying to be there for my family in their

everyday lives." While this comment can be read as an effort to exonerate herself from collective shame or guilt, one can also read it as an ethical stance resonating with philosophers like Williams (1985) and Appiah (2006), who have argued that one's obligations to foreign others do not supersede the obligations one has to people near and dear.

Other volunteers felt nothing redemptive about their experience. As described earlier, volunteers travelled to Greece to do something ethical and useful; however, after returning home, many described feeling even more ashamed. Besides expressing personal and national shame over Norwegian affluence and selfishness, several interlocutors said they felt guilty about not doing *more* to help, whether this meant volunteering for longer periods or working harder to promote political change. One example is Emma, who I volunteered with on two separate occasions in Lesvos. A teacher and mother of two adult children, Emma took a year's leave from work to volunteer for DiH on Lesvos.

Like many other volunteers, she initially described her experience as both meaningful and surprisingly joyful. However, when I met with Emma again during her last week on Lesvos, she described herself as an "emotional wreck." We talked over coffee in Mytilini town, and she told me that not only was she emotionally and physically exhausted after volunteering for nearly a year, she also felt guilty about her decision to take a year off from volunteering to prioritise her career and self-care:

> "It is the epitome of white privilege. If I wanted to, I could go home and see my children tomorrow. I could forget about all of this and move to Finland and apply for that PhD that I told you about. But even though I am starting to run out of money, I do not really have a good reason to leave, as I could always find a way to stay longer. If I just sold my house, I would have enough money to live here [and volunteer] for at least ten years."

Reiterating some of Emma's points, Maja underscored that "volunteering does not make you feel less ashamed or guilty; conversely, you come to realise how much more you are capable of doing." However, unlike Emma, Maja emphasised that volunteers should not beat themselves up. "Feeling a bit ashamed or guilty does not hurt anyone, but too much becomes paralyzing," she argued. Maja also said she tried to convince herself to "accept that we are responsible for something, but not everything, and that there is a lot we can do, but it will

never feel sufficient." At stake here are different moral views regarding the limits of one's personal obligations to strangers or non-citizens. While Wenche accepted Appiah's and William's belief that one is primarily obligated to assist those near and familiar, Emma was not so comfortable with this idea, especially now that her children were old enough to take care of themselves. Maja expressed more ambivalence and admitted that she struggled to accept her own limitations.

For some of my interlocutors, the potentially redemptive effect of volunteering was also unsettled by emerging feelings of doubt and self-critique. As mentioned in Chapter 5, some volunteers started to question their own motivations for helping refugees or come to believe that volunteering in Greece was mostly a selfish (*egoistisk*) practice. Like some of the scholars I criticized in Chapter 1, the volunteers who called volunteering selfish tended to assume a rigid division between self-interested and other-interested concerns. However, this remark also reflected volunteers' uncomfortable realisation that had they gained more from their experiences in Greece and interactions with refugees than the refugees they were supposedly assisting. Volunteers' experiences of meaning and self-transformation (see Chapter 5) were thus marked by a bittersweet taste.

In personal interviews and conversations, some volunteers also expressed growing concerns about their own, or DiH's, role in Greece. Some, like Fredrik and Ingrid, felt ambivalent about their decision to travel to Greece because of their environmental footprints. Petter and Stine, on the other hand, said that they wondered whether it would have been more effective if they had simply sent over money or if DiH had only hired local workers and refugees. At the end of my fieldwork, a few of my interlocutors also questioned the legitimacy of foreign volunteer organisations in Greece. While some worried about the frayed reputation foreign NGOs had on the Greek islands, others started to question how well-appreciated volunteers actually were in the refugee communities they worked in. One of the sources of this doubt stemmed from Facebook posts written by former refugee volunteer Ghafar, which I discussed in Chapter 3. In these posts, Ghafar accused volunteer organisations of "experimenting with refugees" or "turning refugees into their projects." While my interlocutors did not agree with everything Ghafar wrote, reading his posts and the different comments they generated left many of them feeling uneasy. As one interlocutor told me, "I ask myself: Should I really allow Ghafar's posts to impact my engagement? But I can't help it. He has planted a seed of doubt in mind."

Finally, the redemptive potential of volunteering was sometimes tempered by unsettling questions of volunteers' personal responsibility or complicity. Notably, however, only a few volunteers seemed to struggle with such questions. As argued previously, the majority of my interlocutors focused only on their moral obligations as "exceptionally lucky" Norwegians or "*medmennesker*," thus failing to consider their connection to refugees via politics and history. Like Wenche, many volunteers also scaled up or redirected their feelings of shame and responsibility to the ruling government and politicians, thus detaching the recognition of national wrongdoing from their own position as humanitarian volunteers and refugee advocates in Norway and protecting their innocence (cf. Ahmed 2005). However, a few volunteers told me that they wrestled with questions of their own complicity. These volunteers were often students of political science or development studies, or volunteers who were active in leftist political parties and environmental movements.

Yet I also spoke to volunteers who had started to reflect on their personal complicity after being confronted with Norway's inactions or wrongdoings and asked to give an account of themselves by refugees or local citizens they encountered in Greece. As mentioned in Chapter 5, many of my interlocutors were also unsettled by their meetings with Afghan refugees who spoke fluent Norwegian after having lived in Norway for several years before being deported to Afghanistan. Describing her encounters with these Norwegian-speaking refugees as a "punch in the face," Jorunn told me that "learning how *we* have treated them make me feel responsible on a more personal level."

In some ways, these emerging doubts and reflections affirm James's argument that the "caring space" can also be a "learning space," prompting volunteers to re-examine both national and personal narratives and assumptions (2019:2474-5; see also Chapter 1). However, as people who voted for refugee-friendly parties, mobilised for political change and spent time and money supporting refugees, volunteers often seemed to lack a vocabulary to assess their personal complicity. As Jorunn reiterated, when reflecting on her country's treatment of Afghan refugees: "It is so unfathomable, embarrassing and shameful. I become speechless."

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Appendix:

Postscript

Since the end of my fieldwork in January 2020, DiH has once again relocated and reinvented their operations in response to shifting humanitarian and political conditions. First, in February 2020, after months of escalating tensions, local discontent on Lesvos culminated in violent protests against the central government in Athens and fascist groups attacking refugees and volunteers on the island. A group of DiH volunteers driving from Moria village was targeted, prompting the organisation's leadership to evacuate volunteers from Lesvos to ensure their personal safety.

In the subsequent month, COVID-19 spread across Europe, prompting Greek authorities to impose nationwide lockdown. To respect the authorities' guidelines and avoid spreading the virus, DiH temporarily paused all of their projects and sent their volunteers home, keeping only a small team of coordinators in Greece to support urgent needs and distributions. A few months later, DiH returned and set up most of their pre-pandemic locations in Greece to organise distributions and other projects. However, COVID-19 forced the organisation to scale down, simplify their projects, and rethink their volunteer model to one which has increasingly focused on recruiting local workers and medium- to long-term volunteers. While some have described the pandemic as an equaliser or suggested that it forces us to reimagine our world (Roy 2020), COVID-19 has also exacerbated refugees' vulnerabilities (Näre et al 2020), created additional delays in asylum procedures (Roussou and Carthaigh 2020), further pathologised people on the move, and legitimised national isolation and welfare chauvinism.

On the 9th of September 2020, the Moria camp burned to the ground in what DiH staff and volunteers described as a *"villet katastrofe"* (intentional/politically caused disaster). Some refugees were relocated to the Greek mainland while others were moved into a new, temporary makeshift camp called Mavrovouni, which was often dubbed "Moria 2.0" because of its conditions that resembled the previous camp and exposed residents to harsh weather conditions, poor sanitation, and appalling living conditions (Mohammed and Al-Obeed 2020; MSF 2021). DiH negotiated access to the new camp, where volunteers have focused mainly on washing residents' clothes to promote health and dignity. As with DiH's decision to work

inside the former Moria camp, the decision to work inside the new camp provoked both internal and external debate and criticism, with some volunteers from other organisations accusing DiH of legitimising the brutality of the Greek state and failing to act as truthful witnesses. DiH rejected these accusations and argued that it was more important than ever to be present and support the refugees stuck in squalid conditions on the Greek island.

On the Greek mainland, DiH has continued to provide services to refugees in a rebuilt Nea Kavala camp in Northern Greece. Furthermore, after the Greek government announced the closure of the Skaramagas camp in April 2021, DiH joined forces with the Catholic organisation Caritas and began to provide integration support and non-formal education to refugees and other migrants in Attica. In 2021, DiH also "followed the needs" outside of Greece and started a new humanitarian project in Bosnia. At the same time, Greek authorities has intensified its criminalisation and policing of NGOs, forcing DiH to spend time and energy on meeting new and even stricter registration requirements for foreign and local organisations supporting refugees.

Following the conclusion of my fieldwork, DiH staff and volunteers in Norway continued to mobilise for a humanitarian evacuation of children and families from the Greek islands. A new signature campaign in the spring of 2020 resulted in more than 46, 000 signatures—ten times the amount of signatures collected in the previous year (see Chapter 6). While the pandemic forced most of the demonstrations to keep to online spaces, DiH and other refugee advocates managed to keep the plight of refugees in Greece on the political agenda throughout most of 2020. After the fire in Moria, the Norwegian government also committed to evacuating 50 refugees from the Greek islands. However, this decision was described by many of my interlocutors as "largely symbolic"; it caused DiH to conduct new protests and make demands, adopting the slogan "*#50 is not enough.*"

Two weeks before the submission of this dissertation, on 13th of September 2021, there was a national election in Norway with the self-proclaimed "red-green coalition" emerging as the winners. However, as elsewhere in Europe, social-democratic parties have a difficult relationship with immigration, and many of my interlocutors fear that the new government will implement equally harsh immigration and asylum policies as the Conservative coalition did when they held power.

Finally, a word about complicity. As I write this postscript, the Taliban is consolidating control in Afghanistan, leading experts to voice concerns on women's rights and economic collapse. As Ghumkhor and Daulatzai (2020) insightfully argue, most of the "Western" coverage of Afghanistan has followed a conventional script: violence appears organic to its landscape, and the US-led invasion is portrayed as an act of care. However, in Norway, the ongoing developments in Afghanistan have also raised unsettling questions regarding the meaning and effects of Norway's long-standing role in the NATO-led operation and pressured the government to reconsider Norway's responsibility for Afghan refugees.

Like other volunteers, I receive nearly daily messages from Afghan friends and acquaintances in Greece and elsewhere, wondering if I have any contacts to help them get their family out of Afghanistan. The messages not only highlight volunteers' and researchers' powerlessness in the face of structural and political violence, but also the utter impossibility of making a clean break from the field when it is saturated with affect, injustice, and ongoing friendships and expectations. As I argued in the Introduction, conducing fieldwork in such settings is inevitably messy and often uncomfortable. However, like many of my interlocutors, I have no choice but to wrestle with difficult questions regarding my own obligations and complicity.