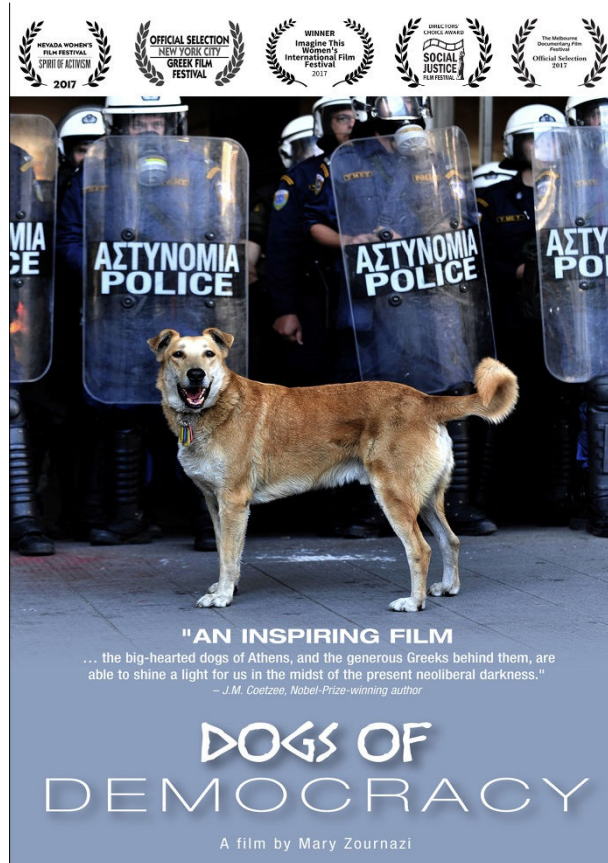




## DOGS OF DEMOCRACY



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**Dogs of Democracy** is a documentary about the stray dogs of Athens and the people who take care of them. Filmmaker Mary Zournazi explores life on the streets through the eyes of the dogs and peoples' experience. Shot on location in Athens, the birthplace of democracy, the documentary is about how Greece has become the 'stray dog of Europe', and how the dogs have become a symbol of hope for the people and for the anti-austerity movement. A universal story about love and loyalty and what we might learn from animals.

## **Director's Statement**

I made my film *Dogs of Democracy* almost by accident. I took my first ever trip to Athens in October, 2014. I had gone for a holiday and in search of my cultural roots. But I had arrived in the middle of the Greek economic crisis. I could feel the tension on the streets, but walking around the city, I also noticed something else, something unexpected and unique. All round the city there were stray dogs, they seemed to occupy the city like 'citizens' – they crossed the traffic lights, they socialized, they were part of the urban life and feel of the city. Immediately I fell in love with them, and I became curious about their 'lives'. In a very short time, I realized that the dogs were looked after by volunteers in Athens, who cared for and fed the stray dogs. I became fascinated by how in the middle of Greece's worst economic crisis people were willing to take care of the animals. I began to consider what this might say about our ideas of love, community and care. That's how the story began: a love of the animals, and the love of the city and its people

The film also took somewhat unexpected turns: I travelled to the island of Lesbos and documented not only the economic crisis but also aspects of the migrant crisis as it unfolded in Greece. The film is a story about the stray dogs of Athens, but it is equally a story about peoples' courage and dignity in times of crisis. The film is my love letter to Greece: to its people and to its stray animals.

Mary Zournazi

## **About Greece**

Greece is located in southeastern Europe. The country has a population of about 10.7 million people. About one third of them live in and around its capital city, Athens. Greece has Europe's longest coastline, and along that coast are hundreds of small islands.

The nation has a long tradition of democracy. It was in the city of Athens, in the 5th century BC that the idea of a democratic society was first created, and as a result Greece is often referred to as the birthplace of democracy. The country's first democracy did not survive long though, and it was followed by a succession of powerful individuals and groups. Greece has survived several wars, including its own Civil War in 1946-1949. In 1967, a powerful group of military officers overthrew Greece's government, and established a military dictatorship. For the next six years Greeks lived under this repressive and brutal regime. It wasn't until 1974 that the dictatorship was finally overthrown, and Greece established the democratic government that it has today. This government is known as a parliamentary republic, and has both a president and a prime minister. Legislative power is held by a parliament.

## **Greece and the European Union**

Along with many other European countries, Greece is a member of the European Union (EU), a powerful political and economic union. It joined the EU in 1981, and is one of twenty-eight member nations. According to the EU's website, the organization's goals are to promote the well-being, security, and justice of its citizens, foster technological and scientific progress, and promote economic growth and stability.<sup>1</sup>

In order to help achieve these goals, the EU created a common currency called the euro in 1999. Nineteen of its members, including Greece, have given up their own currencies and adopted the euro. Greece did so in 2001. Those nations that have adopted the euro are also known as the Eurozone.

### **Financial Crisis**

Despite its membership in the EU, Greece has been in a financial crisis since 2009. The Greek government owes more than 300 billion euros to various European creditors, and it is widely believed that the country's debt is so high that it is unsustainable.

Numerous factors contributed to this high level of debt, including the global recession of 2007 and 2008, and the policies and spending habits of the Greek government. Over years, these factors caused Greece's government to continuously spend more money than it had, and it was forced to turn to other European countries for loans. The rest of the world became aware of just how bad the situation had become when George Papandreou became prime minister in 2009. After his election, he revealed the country's financial difficulties to the world, reporting that its budget deficit would be more than 12 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) that year.

### **Bailouts and Austerity Measures**

There is widespread disagreement over the best way for Greece to move forward. Some people believe that it should leave the Eurozone, and revert to its own currency. However, critics worry that doing so would only make the country's economic problems worse. There is also debate over whether or not Greece's creditors and the IMF should continue to provide the country with financial assistance.

As a condition of receiving these bailout packages, Greece's government has been forced to take a number of actions in order to reduce its budget deficit. These actions, also known as austerity measures, include reforming the pension system, reducing tax evasion, and cutting social programs and other types of government spending.

Austerity measures have been very unpopular with the Greeks. Many people have publicly protested them through demonstrations and strikes. Even Greece's government has been reluctant to accept austerity measures, but it has ultimately been forced to do so in order to avoid default and to remain in the Eurozone. In 2015 the government came close to rejecting austerity measures when an anti-austerity government headed by Alexis Tsipras was elected. Tsipras held a public referendum on proposed austerity measures, and the majority of Greeks voted "Oxi," or, "No." However, in order to obtain the bailout money that it needed to avoid default, the country was ultimately forced to accept the unpopular austerity measures.

<sup>1</sup> European Union, "The EU in Brief." [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en)

## A Continuing Struggle

Despite three bailout packages and numerous austerity measures aimed at fixing its finances, Greece is still struggling financially. Its economic growth remains slow, and unemployment and poverty are high. In a 2017 Congressional Research Service report, researchers estimate that Greece's economy has contracted 25 percent compared to before the crisis. In addition, they estimate that in 2017, one in five Greeks was unemployed, and 50 percent of youth were.<sup>2</sup>

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## Migration Crisis

There is widespread disagreement over the best way for Greece to move forward. Some people believe that it should leave the Eurozone, however others worry that this would only make the country's economic problems worse. There is also debate over whether or not Greece's creditors and the IMF should continue to provide the country with financial assistance.

In addition to economic problems, Greece is dealing with a migration crisis. Every year, hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants seek refuge in Europe. These people are fleeing from war, violence, or repressive governments in their home countries. Greece is one of the primary gateways into Europe for many of them. Every day, large numbers of migrants and refugees arrive at the numerous islands along Greek's coastline, where they are placed in detention camps until they can be processed and moved elsewhere. Unfortunately, many other nations in Europe have refused to accept any of these refugees, or have only accepted small numbers of them. As a result, many refugees remain stranded in these detention centers for months. I think it is important here to mention that there was a critical period in 2015, 2016 of refugees due to the Syrian War, and this led unprecedented numbers of people fleeing Syria.

Lesvos is one of those Greek islands that has struggled to deal with the constant influx of migrants and refugees. It receives thousands every year. For instance, Amnesty International reports that in June 2017 alone, 940 refugees and migrants arrived on Lesvos.<sup>3</sup> The residents of Lesvos have tried to help these newcomers, but have been overwhelmed by the constant influx. As a result, many refugees find themselves in overcrowded facilities with poor hygienic conditions and a lack of food, clothing, and other basic supplies. In 2017, Human Rights Watch reported that some refugees had been held in detainment camps in Greece for almost 19 months.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca M. Nelson, Paul Belkin Analyst, and James K. Jackson, "The Greek Debt Crisis: Overview and Implications for the United States," *Congressional Research Service*, April 24, 2017. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44155.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, "Lesvos: Symbolic Protest from Refugees Caught in The Net of The EU-Turkey Deal," July 21, 2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/lesvos-symbolic-protest-from-refugees-caught-in-the-net-of-the-eu-turkey-deal/>

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Greece: Asylum Seekers in Abysmal Conditions on Islands," October 23, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/23/greece-asylum-seekers-abysmal-conditions-islands>

## Glossary:

- **Athens:** The capital city of Greece.
- **austerity measures:** Actions taken by a government in order to help reduce a budget deficit. Austerity measures can include tax increases and spending cuts.
- **commodification:** To treat something as a commodity.
- **democracy:** A system of government where the people choose their government by voting. Athens is believed to be the birthplace of democracy.
- **Lesvos Island:** This Greek island is a landing point for refugees looking for asylum in Europe. Thousands of refugees are currently living in detention[ I'm not sure they are called detention centres, they are called camps – but perhaps this could be checked centers on Lesvos and other Greek islands.
- **libertarian:** A person who believes in individual liberty and free will.
- **Angela Merkel:** Merkel is chancellor of Germany, one of Greece's primary creditors. She has expressed opposition to writing off any of Greece's debt.
- **Moria refugee camp:** A refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesvos.
- **Mytilene:** The capital city and the main port of the island of Lesvos.
- **Oxi vote:** In 2015 Greeks voted on whether the country should accept additional austerity measures in order to receive further bailout money. The majority voted "oxi," or, "no." However, the Greek government ultimately decided to accept the austerity measures.
- **parliament:** A legislative body of government created by election.
- **Pericles:** A famous Greek statesman who played a major role in the development of democracy in Athens.
- **philoxenia:** A Greek word that means hospitality, or kindness to strangers.
- **Syntagma protests:** Syntagma Square in Athens has been the site of numerous protests against proposed austerity measures.
- **Syriza party:** A left-wing political party in Greece that won the country's 2015 elections.

## Timeline:

- **1940:** Italian dictator Benito Mussolini demands that Greece allow Axis forces to enter the country. Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas says, “oxi,” or, “no.” As a result, Axis forces invade, and Greece is forced to enter World War II.
- **1944:** Greece is liberated from German occupation.
- **1945:** World War II ends.
- **1946-1949:** There is civil war between Greek’s government and communist forces. Communist forces are defeated.
- **1967:** A group of military officers overthrow the government in a coup, and establish a military dictatorship.
- **1974:** Greece’s dictatorship collapses, and the country becomes a democracy.
- **1981:** Greece joins the European Economic Community, the forerunner of the European Union (EU).
- **1992:** The European Union is established.
- **1999:** The European Union introduces a common currency called the euro. 11 countries in the EU adopt the euro.
- **2001:** Greece gives up the drachma, and adopts the euro as its official currency.
- **2004:** Greece hosts the Olympic Games, on which it spends billions of dollars.
- **2007-2008:** Greece’s economy suffers as a result of a global financial crisis.
- **2009:** George Papandreou becomes prime minister after winning the national election. He reveals that the country’s budget deficit will be more than 12 percent of its GDP. Global credit-rating agencies downgrade the country’s credit rating.
- **2010:** To prevent Greece from defaulting on its loans, the EU and the International Monetary Fund offer to give Greece 110 billion euros in bailouts. In order to receive this bailout, Greece must agree to austerity measures including increases in taxes and cuts in spending.
- **2011:** Additional austerity measures are approved, provoking public protest. The anti-austerity Indignant Citizens Movement demonstrates in numerous cities. Papandreou then surprises the world when he proposes a referendum on the proposed austerity measures. Plans for a referendum are later dropped due to intense pressure from European leaders. Papandreou steps down, and is replaced by Lucas Papademos.
- **2012:** Austerity measures are expanded, provoking public protests. Antonis Samaras becomes prime minister. As a result of government spending cuts and recession, the unemployment rate surpasses 20 percent. A second bailout is approved for Greece in the amount of 130 billion euros.
- **2013:** The Greek parliament approves the new austerity measures that are a condition of the bailout. The measures are extremely unpopular with the public.
- **2015:** A record number of migrants and refugees arrive in Greece. Alexis Tsipras becomes prime minister of Greece, and holds a public referendum on proposed new austerity measures. Greeks vote against the measures, but the Greek parliament ultimately approves them. Eurozone countries then agree to provide a third bailout, of 86 billion Euros. The money will be dispersed through 2018.
- **2016:** For the first time since its financial crisis began, Greece has a small budget surplus.
- **2017:** After negotiations with its creditors, Greece agrees to further spending cuts, allowing it to receive its next disbursement of bailout funds. Human Rights Watch reports that some refugees have been held in detainment camps in Greece for almost 19 months.

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