Transforming humanitarianism: precarities at work in the new activist volunteer sector

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The crises driving new social movements

In recent years, a number of social and political crises have required large-scale civic responses that have proved uniquely challenging in their scale and complexity, and in the demands they have placed on those who committed to act - and whose commitment may have begun as voluntary, but for many ended as a full-time, unpaid, long-term labour. (Clayton, 2020). Here I argue that such events as the 2015-2020 European 'Refugee Crisis' that left hundreds of thousands abandoned in Europe with no support; the 2017 London Grenfell Tower fire which left hundreds homeless and inadequately supported by government; and the 2019-2021 Covid-19 pandemic which has caused severe poverty and hardship: all of these have all required civic responders to engage in very different kinds of care humanitarian values, politics and action. While this mobilisation by many thousands of new 'humanitarians' who felt compelled to intervene, has been positive in many ways in terms of widened social awareness, and the skilling up of many into new roles, it has also pushed many of these actors into positions of economic and personal precarity. Referencing in particular those volunteers working in context of refugee aid, I will look at the already compromised backgrounds and contexts from which many came, and which almost all went on to face, in financial, legal and societal, and personal psychological frameworks. I will consider how this new humanitarian workforce, which began as emergency aid and has developed into a permanent *de facto* care army, continues to operate at some cost to those who were caught up in this historic social change. (Hughes *et al*, 2020). And at a broader level I will argue that while theorists of 'the precariat' such as Standing and others have indeed considered that volunteerism in its conventional sense "should be called work and be built into our sense of occupation" (Standing, 2021), there

has not as yet been a full understanding of the unprecedented role that the new generation of activists volunteers has filled, and how they have now become defined as part of what Standing calls the 'dangerous' precariat - not only performing key functions outside the established workforce, but also as I will describe here, in the process laying foundations for a radical shift in alliances between a number of other disenfranchised cohorts and communities.

A new definition of humanitarianism

Humanitarian aid as a term has tended to be historically associated with the operation of western NGOs and charitable organisations in the global south. More recent scholars (Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2011) have argued that much of its underlying rhetoric - the 'us and them' and other notions it embodies of separation and difference - have their roots in neo-colonialist attitudes. Robin Vandevoordt argues:

> "No matter how benevolent its intentions, [traditional] humanitarian support always carried with it an element of repression. As benefactors are assumed to have the resources and expertise those receiving aid are lacking, the latter tend to be reduced to bodies that need to be fed, cared for or represented by others." (Vandevoordt 2019, p 246).

By implication, while poorer or war-ravaged countries have been seen as suitable recipients of this kind of aid, the inhabitants of affluent western donor countries have been considered to be 'above' the need for this kind of intervention (- hence the reluctance of Europe to allow INGOs to set up 'camps', with the word's seemingly shameful connotations, within its own borders). But in recent years as western governments have signally failed to fully respond to crises at home, and traditional aid agencies more used to operating in the global south struggled to adapt and function in their home states (Borton, 2016), it was left to a mass mobilisation of ordinary citizens to step in - and the manner in which they did this, I argue, has changed the values of the term: because these new humanitarians not only provided aid, but equally sought to question the establishment on its failures, and act, as Vandevoordt describes (ibid.) in solidarity with those they sought to help - hence he calls

them ‘subversive volunteers’, and in my recent study (Clayton, 2020) I call them ‘activist volunteers’. As I will detail below, their innovative approaches to humanitarian work expanded the base of civic volunteering to include more diverse groups and communities - but at the same time, increased the precariousness of the task. While these factors can be seen at play in all the events cited above, they are particularly clear in the case of the ‘Refugee Crisis’ where nearly two million people reached Europe to face in many cases extreme neglect and abuse by state actors, and would have perished if this humanitarian force had not exerted itself in radical new ways.

The European Refugee Crisis

From the summer of 2015 to spring 2020 (when the Covid-19 pandemic slowed numbers), conflicts in Syria and crises in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Eritrea and elsewhere brought almost 2 million asylum seekers on perilous journeys to a Europe which, far from offering them safety and security, in large part proved unwilling or unable to accommodate them. With the main exception of Angela Merkel’s Germany, the official line of many other European states ranged from indifference to open hostility. The new arrivals, having in many cases already faced war and violence, abuse by traffickers and near-drowning at sea, were met on arrival by closed borders, police aggression, the abuse of many of their human rights, and lack of the most basic food or shelter. Subsequent EU deals with Turkey and Libya, along with the peremptory closing of borders to refugees in many Balkan states and between for instance Italy and France, led to hundreds of thousands of forced migrants remaining trapped to this day at European borders or in city ghettos without support.

But set against this harsh (and frequently unlawful) regime, and against a great deal of mass media and party-political hostility, there was in equal measure a broad public reaction of concern, triggered particularly by media images of mass shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, and of children such as 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, who drowned off the coast of Turkey in September 2016. This concern translated into an extraordinary mobilisation, described in my book *The New Internationalists: Activist Volunteers in the European Refugee Crisis* (2020) as the largest civic mobilisation since the Second World War. The mobilisation embraced a

wide spectrum of individuals, breakaway groups from existing organisations, and new grassroots formations, and included initiatives by many of the new arrivals themselves.

As an example, mobilisations in the UK included self-organised faith groups from local churches, Quaker and Jewish communities and mosques; it included those from professional groups who formed their own breakaway organisations like Doctors without Borders and Social Workers without Borders. Trades Unions such as NEU (National Education Union) formed refugee support groups, many under the banner of Stand Up to Racism, an organisation active in many unions. There were groups based on specific political ideologies, like the anarchist group No Borders. Other initiatives formed out of solidarity movements with particular countries, like Are you Syrious which was concerned with issues faced by Syrian refugees. Some were at the intersection of several concerns - like Dirty Girls of Lesvos, a UK women's group that also focussed on environmental issues (- witnessing UNHCR distributing single-use blankets to those sleeping outdoors on Lesvos, Dirty Girls set up laundries to re-use such a vital supply, and minimise waste in the makeshift camps). Beyond hundreds of such collective initiatives, tens of thousands of UK individuals, like their European counterparts, simply showed up and found their way into actions on the ground, or formed their own associations via the burgeoning social media networks that sprang up, like People to People Solidarity, Donate4Refugees and Mobile Refugee Support. It is estimated (Clayton, 2020) that over two hundred thousand European citizens organised to rescue those at sea abandoned by official EU Frontex 'rescue forces'; or to greet the new arrivals, provide emergency medical care, and find or make them shelter and food - often dealing with thousands of new arrivals a day. They fundraised at home, sourced food, tents, medical aid and supplies, and ferried these to the camps and borders. They built whole settlements, medical centres, schools and creches, and set up legal advice centres and many more support services and activities. And increasingly they campaigned along with the new arrivals to secure their rights and a sustainable future, when none seemed possible. Researching this topic, I gathered hundreds of volunteer testimonies which provide insight into the precarity of their work. I was able to elicit particularly nuanced and considered responses because I myself was also engaged in volunteer practice, and that connection fostered a sense of trust and solidarity. Below I quote from these testimonies, as well as my own direct experience of the camps, focusing not so much on what their stories tell us

about the refugees themselves, but on the volunteers' own practices - looking at what this unique social mix of people generated, what challenges they faced, and how exploring these challenges and dangers, might help us better understand this movement and might consolidate its work to remain sustainable in the longer term.

First responders: Facing the unknown

The suddenness of the crisis - its intensity and scale, and the way it was instantly politicised by European governments and media - meant that from the beginning, those 'giving aid', whether in person or by donating, had to operate in a different frame of reference: one that was considerably more complex and demanding than the conventional donating or joining established groups. The first wave of volunteers were local citizens who responded to those arriving quite literally on their doorsteps. Greek island resident Yannis translates the contribution of his mother Katina, who lived in a village on the island of Samos, a popular crossing point from Turkey. Like many of the of these early responders Katina was an older person, living a very isolated rural life and without emergency aid infrastructure, but as a former refugee herself (- her military father had sought sanctuary for his family in Syria in the years after the 1948 Greek civil war-) she considered herself compelled to respond. Katina went daily to the beach to find greet the arrivals, she did first aid, she cooked, she had people stay in her home. She had to process a great deal of death and distress, but was shunned by many in her community, and her work went all but unrecognised by local authorities.

" In 2015, 2016, it was a lot of people. One time, 22 boats came in one day. My mother Katina always had an open heart, and would offer welcome to whoever came. When they would come in the night-time, the boats would overturn coming in, they were crying for help, so it was also traumatic. One night in a storm, a small boat came in and many died. One little girl was left alone, calling for her mother, who never came. Eleven people survived the wreck but thirteen died, most of them women and children… Katina would go down to the beach every day and bring the new arrivals whatever she could - milk, water, cake, biscuits. In the beginning she would try the police, the Coastguard, but they usually never came. Nobody asked her, 'Do you need help?', nobody asked her anything. Since Doctors Without Borders came to the island, she got their number and she called them to pick up

people. She doesn't get any other support, so she always helps alone, not from the neighbours either because they are afraid."

On the small remote Italian island of Lampedusa - nearer to the shores of North Africa than to Italy itself - Lillo Maggiore had a similar experience of being disregarded by Italian authorities as he offered aid.

"I will tell you about Bakeri. I met him on the main road of Lampedusa. He was alone, he was ten years old and came from Eritrea. He had a throat infection and struggled to speak. I said 'Come home with me, you need warm liquids, my wife will make you tea and a soup.' He accepted right away. For about 20 days, he came daily to our house. He was showing affection and the feelings were mutual; so we asked him whether he would consider staying to live with us. He was thrilled; a life with a family and the possibility to go back to school… We contacted social services to become his foster family; we presented our case to the Tribunal of Minors of Agrigento. We managed to stall his transfer from the Hotspot [holding-place for new arrivals] to the mainland to buy time, while waiting for the court to process our application. But one morning he was forced to board a ship; witnesses reported his resistance and desperation. The authorities ignored his protests. He was taken away from us without a word; we never knew what went wrong or where he was taken."

Local responders on the Greek and Italian islands were later nominated for numerous humanitarian awards (UNHCR, 2016; Africanews 2017) but such citations rarely acknowledged the overwhelming commitment local people had made in terms of their working time and physical resources, and the hostility they experienced from both within their own communities, and from state authorities.

Those at distance from the points of arrival of arrivals also encountered political opposition as they struggled to find their *modus operandi*. Jess and her family began a large-scale donations operation from South West England.

"My mum and I decided to get some donations together to send to Lesvos. We ended up sending containers out, my mum raising funds and me setting up our social media , and

arranging donation collection and shipping. We send containers to Lesvos and to Syria. The word 'volunteering' doesn't quite encompass the nose-to-the-grindstone graft that went on. And the backlash from British people towards us on social media was horrific - complete hatred directed at us through Facebook and on our message board. We were accused of funding terrorism, of being responsible for deaths that occur because of terrorism and (as far as I can gather) the downfall of British society… Later I went to Lesvos with more aid and visited the Moria camp. That was very difficult because of how hopeful everyone is when they arrive, how happy they are to be in Europe. As by then I had seen people at the other end of their journey in Calais, how they had been battered by our European nations, and I really struggled knowing what was in store for everyone. I found the whole situation extremely challenging."

As we shall see, the challenges were not only structural and physical, but psychological too.

New organisations: On the front line

Countless new unofficial organisations - like Sea of Solidarity, Peope2People, the Pipka camp on Lesvos and Lighthouse Relief - formed in great haste to meet the overwhelming demand as thousands upon thousands arrived to the Greek islands during this period. Further north, national borders became congested along the Balkan route as borders began closing; and the impromptu, officially unrecognised, Calais camp - known as 'the Jungle' - was at its height in 2016-17 home to 10,000 displaced people. Some heard about groups like Refugee Youth Service (RYS), Refugee Community Kitchen (RCK), and Refugee Women's Centre in Calais through social media, and went to join. Others headed to these places of danger alone. Shakir, himself originally a refugee, talks about the vital but entirely unofficial and unregulated role he chose to fill as an independent volunteer in the Jungle:

"I am a nurse from Pakistan with eight years of professional experience. I was living in the Calais Jungle and providing a medical service for the people who were living there. There were several medical charities, including Médecins Sans Frontières, who provided services for refugees from 9 am until 5 pm. After they had finished their working day, there was no one available to help during an emergency and so this is when I was most needed. I normally did this work alone, without professional assistance. Regarding the police, there

were many occasions when they used tear-gas against the refugees, and even rubber bullets. Tear-gas is indiscriminate and spreads over hundreds of metres. Every time it is used, it affects many people in the vicinity, including families with children. This was an unacceptable use of force against innocent people. If the wind had blown the tear- gas partly away, rubber bullets would be fired… I have treated people who have been injured in the head and in the face, and who have been beaten with sticks by the police, who have been pepper-sprayed, and who have been bitten by police dogs. The police and the CRS (French riot police) have become hardened and are blind to the suffering of the refugees, and behave with aggression and force as a routine. The injuries I have seen are not part of peacekeeping, crowd control or self- defence: I would describe them as grievous bodily harm. I was at personal risk when I helped people in these situations, and I often had to move through the gas myself. I was also hit with a rubber bullet in my chest."

I will discuss later how state forces came to target the volunteers themselves as they stood increasingly in solidarity with the new arrivals. Meanwhile we see how the new grassroots organisations developed the best they could, as volunteers struggled with the numbers and the seeming impossible scale of their task. Pru Waldorf arrived in Samos in 2015:

" Samos had thousands of people arriving each month and the there was no official provision of anything; a small team of local women had been doing their best to feed and clothe everyone, but the situation had escalated beyond their control. We arrived in the midst of this. Thousands were being forced to sleep on the concrete floor of the ferry port. Many had no coats or shoes, and the temperatures were dropping and there was torrential rain most nights. It was filthy and completely shocking. Small children slept on the hard concrete with no shelter. There was no government-funded provision of food, water, or shelter, and no medical care. Just a handful of volunteers, some who stayed for months, others who came for a matter of days or weeks. I was in a team co-ordinating distributions of clothing and essential items to people arriving on the island. Numbers were building up as the ferry failed to leave and arrivals kept coming. We also helped with food distribution: thousands of people queued in the worsening weather long into the night to receive a bowl of stew and bread. It was a truly terrifying time. My initial two- week "recce" became three months before I had even realised that the time had passed. I arrived in September and

reluctantly went back home for a break in December to organise a large collection of aid. By January 2016 I was back on Samos again and I was there for the rest of that year."

Waldorf's commitment - she has now completed years of further work since that first Samos visit - is a common pattern in this new sector (Berry-Hart, 2018). There is no doubt that many shared moments - cooking and eating together; engaging the children in play and games; the sense of achievement in collectively building shelters and bringing some normality and hope to people who sorely needed it - has had huge rewards and a sense of collective achievement for all who committed to do this work. Spirits were often high, and there was a constant adrenalised rush of activity around aiding survival, that became to many of us almost addictive. But in the context of our topic here, it is also important to reflect on the drawbacks, the dangers and the precarity of the work, to ensure that it can be more sustainable in the future.

The long haul: economic, domestic and psychological challenges

For those who committed be permanently based or do regular stints at borders and in unofficial makeshift camps, living and working conditions were, and remain, extremely irregular. Firstly there was a lack of basic accommodation, with many sleeping in tents and trailers through all weathers. Most volunteers heavily subsidised their own travel and living costs, and lacked any level of pay, and especially the early years, training or structured work conditions. Many were also juggling family and other commitments back at home - particularly as it was estimated that around 80% of volunteers were women, likely to have greater childcare responsibilities and less long-term career security (New Humanitarian, 2019). In addition, as I have discussed elsewhere (Clayton 2017), women tend to be regarded especially by the younger arrivals as mother figures or mother substitutes, and so they feel an additional burden of responsibility - one that is hard to discharge given the constant flux and chaos of the unofficial camps. All these tensions inflected the development of the new volunteer work in complex ways, both social and psychological. Sarah, who went to volunteer at the Grande-Synthe camp near Dunkerque, says:

"You have to understand, I am no one special - no real skillset, quite a judgemental and very bad-tempered person! ... but I do believe in right and wrong. When not physically at

Grande-Synthe I was permanently attached to my phone organising aid, donations, meetings, volunteers, sorting food aid, packs of toiletries and so on. My entire family was being neglected but not deliberately... my kids were proud of me but resentful too. They were quite young but I felt guilt when I wasn't at Grand-Synthe. The people's lives in camp became mine - their despair, their joy, their pain - all became mine. I stopped sleeping. Mild panic attacks started - immense guilt and the feeling I was not good enough. Not a good enough mum, wife, daughter, friend, volunteer, translator… it started to get worse. My family were getting cross. Old neighbours in France who I thought were friends, unfriended me on Facebook - cute dog stories were fine, but real pain and anguish in northern France - oh no! I was living and breathing the worst situations I couldn't even imagine happening to human beings in Europe. When the Grand-Synthe camp was moved from Basroch to La Linière [and a local French grassroots organisation formally appointed to run it], I made the decision to take a step back. It was the hardest decision of my life. One of my girls was presenting with serious mental health issues, we were broke, and my youngest started to get separation anxiety."

Sandra Uselli, working with the Italy Refugee Crisis Database, talks about the effect of income insecurity and how it began to undermine her. Clearly with huge regret, she writes:

"I can't spend any more time on unpaid activities. If we, the volunteers, become as hopeless as the refugees we support, we can't be of any help any more. Most independent volunteers work full-time, not just eight hours a day but a lot more, so they don't have time to do other work to cover their costs. As nation states and NGOs step back, we now represent the new humanitarian stakeholders, and we have for several years now - those who get involved no matter what, who totally dedicate themselves, are not afraid of stepping on important people's toes, but also those who inevitably will end up like me…"

Those who kept going faced high levels of stress. D.E, a young woman volunteering independently in the Calais Jungle, describes many moments of achievement and comradeship, but she also emphasises how conditions affected her ability to function:

"Last night a volunteer's van was broken into during the night. This van was parked exactly where I usually park my van… I realise quite a continuous feeling I have here, is feeling

trapped in my breathing. I don't know if this is something environmental, because of the unhealthy air (plastic burning, asbestos in the ground, factories on either side and regular tear-gas showers), or because it is something emotional and internal - I feel anxious a lot of the time here."

Polly Martin, a volunteer from Denmark who has worked with many groups including Calais Action and A Home For Winter, further considers issues of mental and physical vulnerability, and the need for internal support within the new organisations.

"There is a lot of emphasis put on the fact that we're working 'for a greater good'. To that end, many people keep on working in situations that are mentally damaging to them and lack the support of senior staff or from mental health professionals. There is a sense that one should not complain if one is struggling, as the refugees and asylum seekers we are helping have it worse than we do. This is an overarching theme that I have seen time and time again whilst working in London, Calais and Athens with various different organisations. Many volunteers push themselves, both mentally and physically, meaning they then render themselves ill and unable to do their jobs to their full capacity. It is very rare that volunteers have a mental health support worker to whom they can turn to in times of need. I have found this to be the biggest challenge within this field and ultimately many volunteers suffer from anxiety, depression, PTSD and other illnesses. Many go untreated for long periods of time and many self-medicate with alcohol and drugs amongst others. I realise this is a very bleak outlook, however for grassroots organisations to function there needs to be better support for its volunteers. If we are unable to help ourselves we are not best placed to help others and it leads to a psychological vicious circle which is difficult to escape."

As the initial 2015 mobilisation consolidated over the following five years, some grassroots groups did respond to the need for better working conditions, volunteer training and welfare. For example, Calais Action developed a 'buddying' system where volunteers talked and listened to each other every day. The Auberge des Migrants appointed a volunteer welfare support worker, and pioneered sessions with the Refugee Resilience Collective, a group of volunteer therapists who visited Calais on a rota basis from the UK. But the reality remained that the 'rescue' task put onto these volunteers - or the task they elected for

ideological and moral reasons to take on - was so large that it always threatened to take priority over self-care and support. This level of public crisis, with nearly two million new arrivals in five years, was historically unique; and not only did the established large NGOs find themselves unable to operate by their old rules (due to lack of nation states' support; overwhelming numbers, and increasing police violence), but also the guidelines their sector had established around wellbeing and sustainable practices, could not always be embraced or applied by these newer mobilisations. For instance, the traditional overseas NGO practice of regular paid respite time off was not an option for those in Europe not paid at all; and the collective nature of most of these new ventures meant that many volunteers also bore the constant burdens and risks of shared management, as well as fulfilling demanding daily work or 'employee' functions. But more than that, as Tess Berry-Hart writes (Berry-Hart, 2020), the new solidarity to which I referred earlier, has changed the landscape of inter-volunteer, and volunteer-refugee relationships, and blurred many traditional working boundaries. For instance as Berry-Hart describes, in the Calais Jungle some volunteer aid groups chose to wear tabards to make themselves recognisable in camp, and possibly protect their own safety, while others thought wearing a uniform of any kind contributed to an unhelpful 'us and them', a sense of 'othering' the new arrivals. She also discusses how many volunteers thought it was 'othering' to keep a professional distance and to decline to be involved in personal relationships with the arrivals. And she describes how many, as we shall see in the next section, took larger political actions in support of the arrivals, contravening old laws and challenging new ones: they chose to expose themselves to extreme precarity in ways that no traditional governmental or NGO paid employee would or could ever do. So we see that the collapsing of many traditional boundaries between 'us and them' helped set the stage for broader and very necessary political change, and a re-appraisal of some 'first-world' values around aid. But it also brought about difficulty and confusion in finding new working practices, and in protecting both the new arrivals and those on whom they came to depend for care and support.

The context of trauma, and finding resilience

A novel insight I discovered during my research - something also echoed in Good Chance Theatre's *verbatim* play The Jungle (Murphy and Robertson, 2018) which was the result of grounded research in the camp - was an understanding of just how many of those who

responded to the refugee crisis, did so from a position of being themselves marginalised in some way: including those who were or had been refugees themselves, or who had unsecure citizen status; those who identified with trauma and suffering because they had parallel experiences; or had suffered discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion or race. Sarah Mardini, discussed further late in this chapter, is one of the most celebrated volunteers. A Syrian refugee-turned-rescuer, she is celebrated because of her bravery both in the rescues she effected (Al-Jazeera, 2021), and her decision to return to the Greek islands as a volunteer rather than enjoy settled status and a University education in Germany. Mardini exemplifies this drive for many who have been through precarious and traumatic stages in their own lives, to work through their own feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness as they come to the aid of others, and fight to resist the brutality they all suffered.

Like Mardini, Majida was also a refugee from Syria who then became a volunteer. She arrived first in Samos and lived in the newly-established Vathy camp, where she began to volunteer with the group Friendly Human and later the Red Cross. Majida was inspired by collective moments and the coming together of diverse groups. She says:

"Every day is challenge for me, to learn how I can became stronger and I don't lose my mind or my life, for my mother's sake, before everything in my life… The worst challenge was in Syria when I was taken to the jail and I met somebody who was torturing prisoners; he was absolutely unforgettable. What made me want to help was my craving to heal from what I had been through when I was in Syria. Pain, grief, scarcity… to feel that I even still had a life. When no one and nothing can help me, only myself, then giving the others what they need helped me to carry on living. Because I identify myself with them. We came from the same pain, the same wars. We are mirror of each other."

It is clear how vital the human-contact side of volunteering was to Majida's own sense of survival, as well as others'- and how the dissolved boundaries between volunteers and refugees was for her extremely important and liberating. Majida goes on:

""I offered translation services, and to teach the children in the camp, and I did entertainment for children… My best activity was coffee night where all people sat and talked to each other in a friendly way, with a cup of tea or coffee. They listened to their favourite music. We made a creative project with Max, an artist from America. That was very amazing and creative experience for me, because I was equal to them and we gave to the people some power."

Again we see the importance here for those with little to anchor their lives, in forming these bonds; where they may risk re-traumatisation, but despite this, opt for a continued attempt to engage with the very conditions that cause their own trauma. Majida, like Sarah Mardini and a number of other refugees after they finally get status, chose to stay on the islands and continue the work she began there when still an asylum-seeker; she works as a translator and supports refugee families. From her and others' wisdom, many of us working as volunteers learned to focus not on the victimhood and suffering of the new arrivals, but on their resilience and their deeper understanding of the significance of their journeys. So while volunteering may have exacerbated the trauma many had already faced in whatever form, perhaps the seeds of resilience, and hope for a more sustainable future can be found in this practice too. Initiatives such as the Refugee Solidarity Summit (2020), which in January 2020 brought together over 800 international volunteers who had worked across Europe during the previous five years, made a long-term commitment to prioritise not only self-care for volunteers, but also to find ways where refugee voices and views can be given greater authority in steering volunteer activities and processes. Marta Lodola, who has worked across Europe and particularly in Athens, describes her progress of marginality as follows:

"The biggest challenge for me was with myself. On multiple occasions what I heard and saw upset me deeply, and I had to learnt to listen and at the same time to be able to process this information without wounding my spirit. Wounding indeed, because every time I listened to certain experiences of inhumanity it was as if part of me could not accept that men could do this to fellow men. The other side of me was totally wrathful, unable to think… I believe that the first year forced me to confront this shortcoming, this sensitivity of mine which then turned to strength, witnessing in the activation of the project something unique and

unrepeatable. To be able to create a more heterogeneous community of people who can share these things, was for me a great victory."

State violence: The price paid by volunteer communities

As well facing the challenges outlined above, the volunteer workforce has found itself subject to increasingly harsh legal penalties for its activities saving lives at sea and at borders, or offering food, shelter and support to people on the move (Amnesty, 2020). A report by the Institute of Race Relations cited over 250 cases across Europe of the criminalisation of volunteers, the majority being cited as human smuggling crimes (IRR, 2018). Perhaps the most concerning of these from a legal and human rights perspective is the issue of sea rescues. In 2014 the EU's maritime rescue force Mare Nostrum was replaced by the more punitive Frontex mission, whose job was more to repel arriving boats than to rescue those in distress (Heller and Pezzani, 2017). In response, fleets of volunteer rescue boats run by groups like Jugend Rettet and Médecins Sans Frontières began patrolling the Mediterranean coast, and have since been responsible for saving many thousands of lives, while fighting off legal attacks by European states (The Guardian, 2020). In 2019 Carola Rackete, captain of the volunteer ship *Sea-Watch-3*, was refused permission to land in Italy with 40 rescuees on board. As the ship ran short of water and supplies she feared for the survival of her passengers, and docked at Lampedusa, where she was convicted of people-smuggling and faced a 20-year jail sentence. (This was ultimately overturned on appeal.) Two further cases are currently being brought - in Italy against the crew of the *Iuventa*, another volunteer rescue mission, and in Greece against volunteers Sean Binder and Sara Mardini (discussed earlier in this chapter) - all of whom face up to 20 years in prison for effecting rescues at sea (Reuters, 2021). EU and national European laws are meant to uphold the United Nations' 'Declaration on Human Rights Defenders' adopted in 1998, but many EU states have sought to make an example of the sea-rescue missions, calling them the 'Libyan taxi service' as they're accused of aiding the passage of those leaving the torture camps of Libya. Volunteer ships are now frequently impounded in Italy, Spain and Malta, while the Frontex ships remain in port.

Land-borders within Europe have also become sites of precarity for both refugees and their volunteer supporters, as many European states closed their borders to migrants - several in breach of EU protocols - which led to people attempting highly dangerous crossings. The support group La Roya Citoyennes have been regularly harassed by police and arrested for leading people safely through the lethal Alpine mountain passes, where many had previously got lost and died of exposure. (Al-Jazeera, 2017). In 2017, local farmer Cedric Herrou was arrested in and heavily fined for leading eight people to safety and shelter, though as in Rackete's case, the court upheld his appeal, claiming that the principle of fraternity in the French constitution specifically "confers the freedom to help others, for humanitarian purposes, regardless of the legality of their presence on national territory." (New York Times, 2018). In Calais, UK volunteer 'M' was concerned that many refugee minors had a legal claim to UK protection, but paradoxically their case could only be heard if they were present in the UK, which would involve them making the perilous illegal crossing by stowing away, or by sea, risking injury and death. He made the decision to transport several young people when he travelled back to the UK by car. He faces a jury trial and likely long jail sentence in the UK in 2021 for trafficking charges 'for gain', even though the evidence shows he was clearly not exploiting the young people or benefitting financially.

As well as effecting rescues, the new movement has what in the end may turn out to be its most significant role - but again one hedged with danger from a legal and human rights point of view. This involves their role in witnessing and reporting day-to-day abuses and using these to challenge the law. Grassroots evidence has time and again reported the regular abuse of human rights principles and obligations that are supposed binding upon European states (Guardian, 2021). In Greece, the volunteer group Disinafux documented state's failure to provide food or shelter after a fire destroyed the Moria camp on Lesvos in 2020, when thousands of families including young children were banned from the town and forced to sleep for days outdoors in a graveyard: In this process thirty-three NGO workers and independent volunteers were indicted for supporting a the protest against this (BBC, 2020). In the Balkan states, volunteers also monitor illegal border pushbacks, where police and army forces in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina use extreme violence on refugees. Volunteers are prevented from recording these incidents, are attacked by police and have had cameras destroyed. In Calais, the aggressive regime used against refugees by

the town's Mayor Natacha Bouchart, and the French riot police (CRS) was extended to volunteers: in 2017 Bouchart made it a criminal offence to offer food or shelter to an undocumented migrant, and the CRS and local police have both attacked volunteers and held them in detention for recording this violence. The fact that the UK government part-funds this security operation at Calais should be of particular concern. Volunteer protests against increasingly draconian asylum policies in the UK have been met with harsh sentencing - as in the case of the 'Stansted 15' whose peaceful anti-deportation airport protest resulted in them being found guilty in 2018 of a terrorist change that carried a maximum of 20 years in jail. It took over two years for their sentences to be commuted and their appeal to be upheld in the High Court (Amnesty, 2021).

Facing the Future: The need for intra-community support and care

In sum, the refugee volunteer community - which intersects and has much in common with other new forms of humanitarian activism - has faced challenges which are not widely evidenced by the European governments or populist mainstream media: it has suited both to continue "othering" the "foreign invasion" of refugees (Baker, 2020) and render invisible, or play down the vital and challenging support role that the volunteers fulfil - a role that many argue should have been assumed by governments themselves. I hope here I have begun to identify some of the characteristics of this new kind of care that volunteers both offer, but ultimately need to provide for themselves too, in order to sustain both communities. I have also indicated that many involved in such caring movements, already had vulnerabilities themselves, whether around legal statis, past trauma or economic or political discrimination on grounds of their gender or ethnicity.

While such work has had in many cases critical effects on many as individuals (and on their families and dependents) there is no doubt that many benefitted from the challenges, the learning of new skills and creating of new organisations - some of which, like Help Refugees, have now become established as large-scale institutions. And there has since the initial crisis, been a period of reflection and re-grouping, where lessons about personal precarity are, as far as is feasible, being applied. Thus the notion of self-care, and claiming respect and recognition for this work as a 'job' (- a job that, after all, many argue that nation states should have been doing -) is now more widely acknowledged in this movement, and will

greatly aid its long-term sustainability. And the taking on board of a notion of collective resilience (Hughes *et al*, 2020) which I argue here was learnt in many ways from the new arrivals themselves, has been a positive force for change. In addition, while groups have been geographically very separated and isolated, online platforms such as Volunteer Support Group and People2People Solidarity have provided valuable support and discussion, which has helped de-stigmatise commonly- held feelings of survivor guilt, vicarious trauma, stress and burnout that has dogged this mobilisation. In these practices, there are important connections and parallels with movements I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. For instance, the 'refugee volunteers' were among the first to respond to the London's 2017 Grenfell Tower fire, and provided holistic support for survivors - including immediate material aid, and listening, and support in the ensuing campaigns for an investigation. The climate change movement Extinction Rebellion has also shown concern for the well-being of those involved in effectively full time activity (Clayton, 2021) . Concerns around survival and sustainability have also been raised in the Black Lives Matter movement, and in those protesting the UK government's Covid-19 policies and providing vital voluntary services during the Covid crisis. Perhaps as a result of all these initiatives of the last five years, 'care' as a critical term has been widely taken up in new contexts, as evidenced in a spate of new critical writing (Care Collective, 2020; Santos, 2020). It is clear that this wider attention to the concept of care, in both the personal and societal sense, has been both informed by - and informs - the future of real social change, and needs further work and critical investigation. In the context of the wider political framework, the volunteers' challenges to state and EU immigration policies have a better chance of success as these diverse new movements increasingly work together, to establish common interests and goals around race, ethnicity, environment, asylum, human rights and progress towards a fairer and more robust democracy where all, including marginalised, voices can be amplified and heard.

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