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Humanitarian improvisation: potential and limitations of citizen solidarity in the migrant camps in Calais and Paris

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Summary

In recent years, the European crisis in migration policies has produced and made visible the migrant camps; as attested by, in France, the history of the slum-camp in Calais and the Parisian street encampments. The survival of migrants in their midst mobilises a plurality of actors with distinct logics. Recent studies point to the renewal and the extent of civic solidarity in these camps but few studies analyze practical implementation. In order to nourish the understanding of this phenomenon, this article puts into perspective two citizen initiatives born in 2015: the “Espoir” (Hope) association and the “Ensemble” (Together) collective. The aim is to shed light on their similarities in order to identify the potential and limitations of humanitarian improvisation in this highly politicised field. The data presented are drawn from socio-ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Calais during the autumn of 2016 in immersion in the “Espoir” association as well as from a series of interviews and exchanges with independent Parisian “support people” or those affiliated with the “Ensemble” collective in the winter of 2017. The results are based on the reconstitution of observation sequences and the trajectories of twenty volunteers and support people articulated with the thematic analysis of the coordinators’ interviews. These initiatives are carried out by “ordinary citizens”, which were little connected to public life before, and are located in the gap between specialised humanitarian action and public (in)action. Citizens improvise daily responses to migrants’ unmet primary needs by means of an organizational handiwork based on the flexibility of commitment and the intensive use of social networks. The recognition of migrants as subjects of their existence and holders of agency supports the ethics of this improvisation. However, citizens’ initiatives involve limitations that call their sustainability into question and, more generally, raise issues regarding the transfer of public action to ordinary citizens, and the realities of interventions by major humanitarian NGOs.

Keywords: camp, migrants, civic solidarity, humanitarian improvisation, France.

Humanitarian Improvisation: potential and limitations of citizen solidarity in the migrant camps in Calais and Paris

Introduction:

Over the last few years, the renewed visibility of the “jungles” of Europe¹ has made manifest the contradictions and the violence inherent in European migration policy². The existence of the slum-camp in Calais and the Parisian street encampments attests to this. The survival of migrants inside these camps has brought various players into action, each with distinct logics: from State representatives to major international NGOs, from public service providers to small local associations, from activist collectives to independent volunteers... Community mobilisation for aid for migrants is not a new phenomenon³. However the renewal and scale⁴ of this solidarity in Calais and Paris alike since 2015 deserve special attention.

They are called “volunteers” in Calais, and “support people” in Paris. I will refer to them in this article as “ordinary citizens”. In addition to debates concerning anthropological approaches to citizenship⁵, I consider the idea of “citizenship” as the capacity of individuals with different legal statuses to take part in public life. The specificity of the “citizens” presented in this article, aside from some activist cases, is that they took up the cause of migrants without previously having been affiliated to activist circles, and with little awareness of the effects of migration policy and the realities of asylum-seeking in France. It is for this reason that I consider them to be “ordinary citizens”. In this article, I wish to examine the mobilisation logics of these ordinary citizens, and the potential and limitations of the initiatives which they have set up in Calais and Paris since 2015. Their liminal position between public (in)action and humanitarian aid reveals some of the issues raised by the encounter between different players within the migrant camps.

¹SARA PRESTIANNI. *Calais, Patras, Subotica*. In Michel AGIER (dir.). *Un monde de camps*. Paris : La Découverte, 2014, p. 326-339 ; Philippe WANNESON. Une Europe des jungles. *Plein droit*, 2015, vol. 104, n° 1, p. 18-21.

²BABELS, *De Lesbos à Calais : comment l'Europe fabrique des camps*. Paris : Le Passager Clandestin, 2017.

³Mathilde PETTE. *S'engager pour les étrangers : les associations et les militants de la cause des étrangers dans le Nord de la France*. Doctoral thesis in sociology. Lille : Université Lille 1, 2012 ; Johanna SIMEANT. *La cause des sans-papiers*. Paris : Presses de Sciences po. 1998 ; HaydéeSABERAN. *Ceux qui passent*. Paris : Carnets nord, 2012 ; Henri COURAU, *Ethnologie de la Forme-camp de Sangatte: de l'exception à la régulation*. Paris : Archives contemporaines, 2007.

⁴Yasmine BOUAGGA et Mathilde PETTE. *L'aide aux migrants à Calais*. In *La Cartographie 2017 des engagements volontaires et solidaires à l'international*. Observatoire de France Volontaires, 2017, p. 23-28 ; Madeleine TREPANIER, Les Britanniques à Calais: La solidarité européenne à l'échelle locale dans une ville-frontière. *Multitudes*, 2016, vol. 64, n° 3, p. 82 ; BABELS, *De Lesbos à Calais : comment l'Europe fabrique des camps*, *op. cit.* The media coverage of death on the borders of Europe, epitomised by the photograph of little Aylan Kurdi, as well as of the “new jungle” of Calais and the Parisian street encampments gave a new dimension to these citizen initiatives.

⁵Catherine NEVEU. Les enjeux d'une approche anthropologique de la citoyenneté. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 2004, vol. 20, n° 3, p. 89-101.

Research on migrant camps in Africa and in Europe has highlighted the ambiguities of humanitarian aid, especially noting the risks of its instrumentalisation⁶ and drift toward biopolitics⁷. The migrant camps have been considered in France in the light of the politics underlying their resurgence⁸ and the emergence of migrants as political subjects within them⁹. Finally, recent studies have introduced reconfigurations¹⁰ of solidarities within the camps, by highlighting the political tensions inherent in traditional aid associations for migrants¹¹, as well as their methods of absorbing volunteer resources which have become international¹². However, with the exception of M. Trepanier's study on the British in Calais, these studies do not examine the logics of these new solidarities. In addition, an extensive literature has taken shape over the past few years on the transformations of the humanitarian field. A first perspective, combining the sociology of commitment and the workplace, examines the tensions inherent in the professionalisation of the humanitarian field by means of individual experiences and the trajectories of field workers¹³. A second perspective sheds light on power relations in the humanitarian field: issues of governance¹⁴, the instrumentalisation of actors¹⁵, and the neoliberalisation of the social environment¹⁶. The third perspective examines the moral conflicts and ethical dilemmas which the first two perspectives underpin¹⁷.

⁶ Claire ARJUN. De l'humanitaire comme outil de dissuasion en Grèce. *Alternatives Humanitaires*, 2017, n° 5, p. 14-29 ; Marjorie GERBIER-AUBLANC. L'humanitaire instrumentalisé à Calais. *Plein droit*, 2017, vol. 112, n° 1, p. 32-35 ; Marc-Antoine PEROUSE DE MONTCLOS. *Les humanitaires dans la guerre. Des idéaux à l'épreuve de la politique*. Paris : La Documentation Française, 2012.

⁷ Michel AGIER. *Gérer les indésirables : des camps de réfugiés au gouvernement humanitaire*. Paris : Flammarion, 2008 ; Sophie DJIGO. *Les migrants de Calais : enquête sur la vie en transit*. Marseille : Agone, 2016 ; Carolina KOBELINSKY et Chowra MAKAREMI (dir.). *Enfermés dehors : enquêtes sur le confinement des étrangers*, Bellecombe-en-Bauges : Ed. du Croquant, 2009 ; C. ARJUN. De l'humanitaire comme outil de dissuasion en Grèce. *op. cit.*

⁸ S. DJIGO. *Les migrants de Calais, op. cit.* ; BABELS. *De Lesbos à Calais : comment l'Europe fabrique des camps, op. cit.*

⁹ Michel AGIER. Nouvelles réflexions sur le lieu des Sans-État. *Multitudes*, 2016, n° 3, p. 53-61 ; Marc-Antoine PEROUSE DE MONTCLOS. Marges urbaines et migrations forcées : les réfugiés à l'épreuve des camps en Afrique de l'Est. *Autrepart*, 2008, n° 1, p. 191-205 ; Michel AGIER (dir.). *Un monde de camps*. Paris : La Découverte, 2014.

¹⁰ Y. BOUAGGA et M. PETTE. L'aide aux migrants à Calais, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Mathilde PETTE. Venir en aide aux migrants dans le Calais : Entre action associative locale et crise migratoire internationale. *Savoir/Agir*, 2016, vol. 36, n° 2, p. 47 ; Mathilde PETTE, Les associations dans l'impasse humanitaire?. *Plein droit*, 2015, n° 1, p. 22-26.

¹² Y. BOUAGGA et M. PETTE. L'aide aux migrants à Calais, *op. cit.*

¹³ Pascal DAUVIN et Johanna SIMEANT. *Le travail humanitaire : les acteurs des ONG du siège au terrain*. Paris : Presses de sciences po, 2002 ; Ludovic JOXE. Médecins Sans Frontières : to be professional or not to be?. *Journées d'études « Ethnologie des professionnels de l'international »*, Lyon (France), 2017.

¹⁴ Sylvie AYIMPAM et Jacky BOUJU. *Ethnocentrisme et partenariat : la violence symbolique de l'aide humanitaire*, Fonds Croix-Rouge française, 2015 ; Elida CANGONJI. À propos de la coopération humanitaire en Albanie. *Sud/Nord*, 2002, n° 2, p. 149-154 ; Alice CORBET, David AMBROSETTI, Gabrielle BAYLE et Mehdi LABZAE. *Agents de l'État et acteurs humanitaires: enjeux d'une interdépendance négociée. Étude de cas à Gambella*. Fonds Croix-Rouge française, 2017.

¹⁵ M.-A. PEROUSE DE MONTCLOS. *Les humanitaires dans la guerre. Des idéaux à l'épreuve de la politique.*, *op. cit.* ; Fabien DUBUET. Le mythe de l'humanitaire d'Etat. *Humanitaire. Enjeux, pratiques, débats*, 2003, n° 7, p. 53-59.

¹⁶ Boris MARTIN. *L'adieu à l'humanitaire? : les ONG au défi de l'offensive néolibérale*. Paris : Éd. Charles Léopold Mayer, 2015 ; Jérôme LARCHE. *Le déclin de l'empire humanitaire : L'humanitaire occidental à l'épreuve de la mondialisation*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2017.

¹⁷ Jean-François MATTEI. *L'Humanitaire à l'épreuve de l'éthique*. Paris : Les Liens Qui Libèrent, 2014 ; Jean-François MATTEI. Renouveler la pensée humanitaire par une approche éthique. *Revue*

In order to contribute to an understanding of new citizen solidarities with regard to migrants, and to renew reflections on the transformations of the humanitarian field, I propose to put two citizens' initiatives, established since 2015, into perspective: an associative platform of volunteers involved in the camps in the North and in Paris, and a Parisian collective which has become an association. By deciphering the organisational and ethical convergences of these two initiatives, I will show that these citizen solidarities illustrate a phenomenon of humanitarian improvisation at the crossroads between morality and law. This phenomenon introduces a number of complexities that need to be examined. To do so, I will begin by presenting the functioning and positioning of the two citizens' initiatives in perspective. I will then describe the foundations of the aid which ordinary citizens improvise on a day-to-day basis, before drawing out its limitations. The aim here is to shed light on the practical and ethical logics as well as on the tensions underlying humanitarian improvisation, the involvement of ordinary citizens in the liminal space between specialised humanitarian action and public (in)action.

Methodology

For confidentiality reasons, and in spite of the fact that an informed readership would recognise them, the names of the people I met in the field, as well as the names of the associations and collectives, have been changed for the purposes of this article. My aim is neither to promote nor to point the finger at different players' practices, but rather to analyse the logics underlying the aid which is deployed in this field.

The analysis is based on a socio-ethnographic investigation carried out in Calais from mid-September to late October 2016. The study was put in perspective by means of interviews carried out between January and March 2017 with "support people" in Paris. In Calais, in total immersion, I observed the daily life of an association which I will call "Espoir" and which one of its co-founders describes as a "volunteer platform". From this angle, I followed the volunteers of "Espoir" in their daily activities around the camp and took part in them, up until the third day of its destruction. I also shared their meals, events and bungalows for the night. This immersion allowed me to interpret not only the policies of this association and its internal functioning, the ways in which it was involved in the camp and its interactions with other players, but also to understand the experience of the volunteers, their representations and impressions of the field. Contacts with certain volunteers which survived the destruction of the camp informed the analyses developed in this article. The data gathered from this immersion has been analysed in parallel to a dozen interviews with project coordinators, NGO nurses and institutional players, as well as by the reconstitution of observation sequences carried out over a period of 40 days amongst members of small volunteer associations, State service providers and major humanitarian NGOs. This material led to the analysis of interactions between actors and the issues surrounding the involvement of ordinary citizens in the humanitarian field. On the ground, I adapted my position - from simple observation to engaged observation - according to the nature of the activities and people in attendance. In Paris, I met twenty-odd people who identified as "supports" during formal interviews and informal discussion, as well as the deputy director of a State service association. These interviews enabled me to understand, in retrospect, the functioning of a

internationale et stratégique, 2015, n° 2, p. 129-137 ; Michael SCHLOMS. Le dilemme inévitable de l'action humanitaire. *Cultures et Conflits*, 2005, n° 60, p. 85-102.

citizens' collective in Paris - the "Ensemble" collective - and its methods of intervention in street encampments, to retrace its dynamics of progressive structuring, and to understand the issues surrounding its members' involvement in the local landscape and their politicisation. The accounts I gathered enabled me to put the individual experiences of the independent support people and the members of the "Ensemble" collective in Paris into perspective with those of the volunteers of the "Espoir" association in Calais.

The reflections presented in this article are drawn from this time-bound study, and are based on the reconstitution of sequences of observation and the trajectories of twenty ordinary citizens mobilised in Calais and in Paris. These reconstitutions were articulated around a thematic analysis of the interviews carried out with the coordinators of the different initiatives.

Ordinary citizens from varied backgrounds

The people I met in Calais and Paris came from different backgrounds. Most of them mentioned the media coverage of the deaths in the Mediterranean and the Calais camps, as well as their physical proximity to the street encampments in Paris, as sources of indignation and anger which led to a desire to help migrants. These emotions were, however, part of a greater "critical disposition"¹⁸ which explained their translation into action: a sensitivity to social and humanitarian questions rooted in political, intellectual, artistic or religious socialisation, but also in personal experiences of travel or emigration and immigration. In Paris, the presence of encampments "in one's backyard" was a determining factor for the mobilisation of residents, who felt indignation and guilt in equal measure with regard to the survival conditions imposed on the migrants and to the maintenance of social peace in their neighbourhoods¹⁹.

The volunteers from the "Espoir" association were relatively young (under 25): students, on gap years, or seeking employment. There were also retired people from social and teaching professions. A significant number of volunteers were employed, however (nurses, social workers, graphic designers, journalists or tradesmen), some of them undergoing periods of professional transition or seeking employment, and therefore out of work. Regardless of their profile, these volunteers devoted their weekends, holidays, and part of their periods of unemployment to their stays in the Calais camp. These stays lasted from a weekend to several months and in some cases led to people settling in Calais and/or inside of the slum-camp. Volunteers therefore had the impression of going on an "humanitarian mission" to Calais. Unlike what has been observed within other associations²⁰, the majority of the volunteers at "Espoir" were French nationals. In some cases, they were European citizens or citizens of other countries living in France: only two women came from London during my fieldwork.

¹⁸ Lilian MATHIEU. Les ressorts sociaux de l'indignation militante. L'engagement au sein d'un collectif départemental du Réseau éducation sans frontière. *Sociologie*, 2010, vol. 1, n° 3, p. 303–318.

¹⁹ BABELS. *De Lesbos à Calais : comment l'Europe fabrique des camps*, op. cit. ; Isabelle COUTANT. *Au coeur du monde. Les migrants en bas de chez soi*. Thesis for habilitation to direct research studies. Université Paris X-Nanterre, 2017.

²⁰ Y. BOUAGGA et M. PETTE. L'aide aux migrants à Calais, op. cit. ; M. TREPANIER. Les Britanniques à Calais, op. cit.

In Paris, the geographical proximity of the street encampments to the support people's homes or workplaces differentiated their approach from that of "Espoir"'s volunteers. Aid for migrants took place "on one's doorstep" and was adapted to the different day-to-day lives of the support people. Whilst a certain number of them were students, there were also people working in the arts, in the social sector, or in research. In all cases, people had time or significant freedom in their work which they invested in aid for migrants. However, due to the small number of people met in the field, it is difficult to draw up a socio-demographic profile of the Parisian support people. In Paris, the support people were mainly women, whereas this was less marked amongst the volunteers of the "Espoir" association. The gender distribution in aid for migrants can partly be explained by the nature of the tasks carried out, which in Paris referred to areas sociologically assigned to women²¹, including in activist circles²².

Whilst in Calais I was immersed amongst the volunteers of "Espoir", the people I met in Paris identified as independent close supports or as belonging to the "Ensemble" collective. The "Espoir" association and the "Ensemble" collective are two citizen initiatives occupying the interstitial space between public (in)action and specialised humanitarian intervention.

The "Espoir" association and the "Ensemble" collective: an interstitial positioning

Created in January 2016 at the initiative of an indignant family, the "Espoir" association had amassed 3000 members and a total of 20 000 days of volunteering by September of the same year. The arrival of the cofounders of the association, who were novices with regard to aid for migrants, the realities of the camps and migration policy, in the camps in northern France first aroused suspicion on behalf of the local associations, who saw this as competition in a field which they had been occupying with difficulty and without recognition for years²³. The "Espoir" association was indeed rapidly designated to manage a camp for a local authority. In order to circumvent the difficulties linked to the entrance into the Calais field and to pacify local players, the "Espoir" association then mobilised its voluntary resources in two ways. Firstly, it took up a position relative to an activity which had not yet been managed: the manual collection of waste in the slum-camp. Starting in the autumn of 2015, an international NGO was appointed by the State to manage the site. The NGO created "roads", put in place a sewage system in the camp and contracted a private company to collect waste gathered at certain pick-up points, since the city services did not cover waste evacuation from the slum-camp. However, the residents of the slum did not have access to bin bags to place waste at these pick-up points. The volunteers from the "Espoir" association therefore manually collected this waste, whilst simultaneously distributing bin bags, in order to gather the refuse and facilitate its evacuation. At the same time, the association became a labour pool for local players. In addition to collecting waste, the volunteers of the association were sent as reinforcements to help a cooking team in one

²¹ Fabienne BRUGERE. *Le sexe de la sollicitude*. Paris : Éd. du Seuil, 2008.

²² L. MATHIEU. Les ressorts sociaux de l'indignation militante. L'engagement au sein d'un collectif départemental du Réseau éducation sans frontière., *op. cit.* ; Sophie RETIF. Entrer en militantisme par les associations. L'engagement associatif dans les trajectoires militantes féminines. *Modern & Contemporary France*, 2010, vol. 18, n° 4, p. 415-429.

²³ M. PETTE. Venir en aide aux migrants dans le Calaisis, *op. cit.*

of the Kitchens²⁴ which distributed around 1000 meals a day, or to a teaching team in one of the slum's schools, or as support for volunteer nurses in the health caravan. People who so wished could also contribute, outside of the camp, to the sorting of donations for partner associations or animation of the waiting time during the distribution of clothes by major local associations. In the month leading up to the destruction of the slum-camp, the volunteers of "Espoir" seconded the other camp players in carrying out diagnosis, informational and distributive actions. It must be noted that in the autumn of 2016, major internal NGOs were mainly intervening in Calais in the sectors of health or the logistical management of the site. The material needs of the migrants (building of shelters, distributions of food, clothes, shoes, and blankets) were covered in large part by local associations through the initiative of citizens. Public authorities also responded, but in a way that fell short of meeting a number of these needs, via a service-provision association, offering 1500 places to sleep in heated containers²⁵, two food distributions and 500 daily showers. "Espoir"'s specificity was to mobilise its voluntary resources in order to position itself not only in the interstitial space between specialised humanitarian action and public (in)action, but also as back-up for existing local initiatives.

In Paris, the "Ensemble" collective was created in the autumn of 2015 from the spontaneous grouping of residents involved in the encampments on their doorsteps, in order to respond to the emergency material needs of the people there. Unlike the "Espoir" association in Calais, the collective was formed within an area which had not yet been invested. One State service provision association for social action had been carrying out a roaming operation for years in order to identify and supply aid to the most vulnerable. But this association, which lacked human resources, was rapidly overrun by the scale of the encampments by the end of 2014. A major NGO also circulated with a view to responding to health needs. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the daily survival of the migrants, the residents not only took on food provision, and the distributions of blankets, tents and clothes, but also sometimes offered the use of their showers, bathrooms and washing machines. They also accompanied migrants to health centres, set up French classes and came up with practical and legal information material for the migrants. Gradually, by dint of crossing paths every day and seeing the encampments expand, these independent residents grouped together into collectives. It should be noted that several collectives were established, depending on the kinds of actions that they carried out: humanitarian, legal or political. In the Parisian field, the boundaries between humanitarian aid and political action are porous and generate tension in aid for migrants, as has been highlighted in the north of France²⁶. We will come back to this.

The "Espoir" association and the "Ensemble" collective differ significantly in terms of the circumstances surrounding their emergence, their internal organisation, local inscription and political positioning. However, considering these two initiatives together suggests a similar process of collective improvisation and progressive structuring of initiatives carried by ordinary citizens in order to respond to an humanitarian emergency.

²⁴In the Calais camp, restaurants were distinguished from kitchens. The first were part of the informal economy, offering food and drink for a fee (from 2.5 to 5 euros) to people involved in the camp, especially volunteers, whereas kitchens were places where food was prepared and distributed daily and free of charge to the slum residents.

²⁵ Miriam TICKTIN. Calais. Containment politics in the "Jungle". *The Funambulist Magazine*, 2016, n° 5.

²⁶ M. PETTE. Les associations dans l'impasse humanitaire ?, *op. cit.*

Organisational “bricolage” as a tool for improvisation

The functioning of these two initiatives firstly relies on convergent organisational logics: (a) flexible and improvised coordination methods, (b) indiscriminate recruitment processes and on-the-job training, (c) flexible mobilisation and high turnover.

Flexible and “home-made” coordination

In the “Espoir” association, five people - who made up the founding core of the association - were identified as being the public interface for the organisation, but on the ground, the coordination fluctuated according to the length of the volunteers’ stay. Two people, who had been “settled” in Calais for 8 months, ensured general coordination in the autumn of 2016: one managing communications and volunteers signing up by means of an online formula, and the other supervising field missions and coordination with other associations, in a holistic way. In practice, these two coordinators, who were gradually swallowed up by these time-consuming tasks, were often absent from the camp and delegated the management of volunteers to team leaders. The latter were theoretically chosen for their good knowledge of the field, because they came regularly or had been present continuously for several months. In practice, the realities of the turnover often meant that novices, who planned to stay for several weeks and showed capacities for autonomy, became team leaders. In this way, Lili G., in her forties and transitioning between careers, was appointed “team leader”²⁷ after four days spent at the school.

In Paris, the “Ensemble” collective was structured horizontally by activity type (distributions, health counselling, isolated minors, family, etc). These categories were first managed by the founding members of the collective and then, over time, by those wishing to invest themselves more actively. The latter ensured “homemade” logistical management from their laptops and with lean human resources, using Excel spreadsheets and Facebook groups where individuals indicated their availabilities and contacts²⁸. The forenames of these coordinators were available on social networks and people who wished to volunteer their time could get in touch with them in this way.

In both cases, the coordination of field actions was flexible and cobbled together as a matter of urgency. It mainly involved social networking, the Internet, and office tools. In this context, and given the pressing human resources needs, recruitment was not selective and volunteers were trained and brought up to speed on the job.

Indiscriminate recruitment, training on the job

The “Espoir” association rapidly invested in a communications plan targeting various recruitment areas. Firstly, physical ones. Representatives of the association intervened in universities and higher education establishments all over France, and during festive events,

²⁷The association, which mainly relied on volunteer resources, gradually became institutionalised by recruiting young people in “civil service” - low-paid missions reserved for young people between 16 and 25 in fields of general interest - in order to develop communications and operational objectives. M. Petite highlighted the extent to which the recruitment of young graduates, in this framework, enabled associations to make up or reinforce teams of volunteers at a low cost. See M. Petite, *Cherche travailleur précaire, Bac+5 souhaité, 1800€ bruts mensuels*. *Plein Droit*, n°112, pp. 17-20.

²⁸Even if the structure of the association which grew out of this collective ought to be the object of study today.

in order to raise awareness about the association and to collect material donations - tents during festivals, for example. This explains, in part, the significant proportion of young people amongst the volunteers of “Espoir”. Virtual spaces were also used, by means of a website which was regularly updated and well-referenced on search engines, where people could not only obtain information but also sign up for a stay in the field of their choice: Grande-Synthe, then Calais, and finally Paris. The association also communicated by means of two Facebook pages, which included pages intended for volunteers, with Doodles to keep track of volunteering needs and each person’s availabilities. There was no prior meeting between the coordinators of “Espoir” and the voluntary recruits. The simple act of paying for membership and organising one’s trip by means of the online form was enough to be hired. People chose “Espoir” because they had heard of it, or because of the missions on offer, especially the possibility of getting involved in the field directly. In Calais, other associations offered new volunteers activities to sort goods in a hangar several kilometres from the camp²⁹, whereas “Espoir” sent them straight to the camp from day one. For the people I met, direct contact with the migrants enhanced the perceived usefulness of the tasks they carried out, whereas helping from a distance could often be experienced as frustration. One volunteer also explained that she was worried about ending up surrounded by exclusively Anglophone people in other associations, since volunteer activity within the slum-camp in Calais majoritarily involved British citizens. Finally, one of the co-founders of the association wanted to transform “Espoir” into a platform for specialised volunteering (health professionals, legal experts, etc.), but in practice, the indiscriminate recruitment of volunteers instead fuelled the “helping hands theory”³⁰: people finding their place in an existing situation according to what they had to offer. We observed a similar way of functioning in the “Ensemble” collective in Paris, where information was mainly broadcast by word of mouth and on social networks, where calls for “support” according to needs were published and where the logistics of the activities were organised by different types: available people made themselves known by registering in shared files. Facebook pages also contained accounts by support people and sometimes by migrants, comments on recent news concerning migration policy, information about activities for migrants in the town and upcoming events. Social networks were therefore at the centre of the progressive structuring of these citizen initiatives and facilitated meetings between people wanting to take action.

Far from the very selective criteria for recruitment and prior training which exist in major institutionalised NGOs³¹, everyone had the possibility of contributing to collective action. One of the coordinators of “Ensemble”, realising during her first distribution in an encampment that the independent initiatives were not concerted, that the organisation of the distributions was “haphazard” and that the briefings took the form of long-winded explanations “between two plates of rice”, gradually implemented public information meetings in a Parisian café. The weekly meetings quickly became, in her words, “an institution in the Parisian solidarity movement”. They became the opportunity to supply information to people who were interested about the situation of migrants in Paris, and ways of getting involved in the encampments.

“It was relatively superficial because, in two hours... But the idea was to give each person who wanted to do something, without knowing what, to tell them, “Here are all the things

²⁹ M. TREPANIER. *Les Britanniques à Calais*, *op. cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ P. DAUVIN et J. SIMEANT. *Le travail humanitaire*, *op. cit.* ; L. JOXE. *Médecins Sans Frontières : to be professional or not to be ?*, *op. cit.*

you can do, this is why the situation is the way it is, now you have all the information, phone numbers, contacts. You know what you can do, for your part, what you shouldn't do when you go to an encampment - now it's up to you!" Then, in terms of collections, distributions, as long as we had briefed people, we said, "If you are feeling isolated, and you want us to help you reach out to form a team, we can do that. But if you have a group of friends and you're ready to do something, go ahead!". (Luna B., 28, support person in Paris)

The meetings were also the opportunity to give out advice which aimed to align principles for intervention, in order to be as efficient as possible and to avoid the risk of anarchic action such as unmonitored distributions.

"First of all, we told everyone that unmonitored distributions were just a bad idea and that basically, there were two possibilities. Either there was enough to go around, which meant organising queues and being a bit commanding, well, it's horrible to be in that position, but making people wait in queues. You can make several so that it's not an unending queue and so that the person at the back doesn't feel like he'll never get there. Less people jump the queues that way, too. The other possibility is when there is not enough to go round, but it's things like socks when it's very cold, or duvets, and that is to do commando missions. You have to be a group of people. One person stays with the duvets in a street a bit further off and I go to the camp and see who is in need. Around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning is better because the people are still up because they have nothing to sleep on. So I identify them and I say "In 5 minutes, you can find us here". They arrive, we give them the duvets, they go back, and that way, they arrive with the duvets in the encampment but no one knows where they have come from. If there are lots of duvets, you have to keep moving from street to street so as not to be located" (Luna B., 28, support person in Paris)

In the "Espoir" association, volunteers were trained on the job. In the autumn of 2016, a training and information session was held every week, as new volunteers were arriving daily. They sometimes complained of not grasping the stakes of what was going on around them. In the weeks preceding the destruction of the slum-camp, extraordinary meetings took place almost every night in order to take stock of the inter-associative actions implemented in response to this event³². Beyond this circumstantial organisation, the team leaders also reminded everyone of the rules and attitudes to adopt in the camp - do not take photos, do not go into the shelters, keep a distance from the water points when people are taking a shower, do not ask questions - and were quick to correct clumsy volunteers.

The morning of a waste collection operation. The residents of a Sudanese quarter invited us to drink tea in the school which they had built with the help of volunteers. We spoke about the school and then discussed the organisation of life in the camp. As one of our hosts was describing his attempts to cross into England, a recently-arrived volunteer asked: "Did you try to cross by getting into the lorries? How did you do it? How do you know which lorry to choose?" The team leader, who was sitting next to her, discreetly kicked her as the man was answering her questions. As we left, she reminded her not to ask personal questions about the whys and wherefores. (Observation from 05/10/16).

When they signed up online, all future volunteers received a chart detailing "good" behaviours and dress codes adapted to the field. The transmission of these rules was based on the operating methods of local associations who had received the flood of British independents who arrived in Calais in the summer of 2015³³.

³² M. GERBIER-AUBLANC. L'humanitaire instrumentalisé à Calais, *op. cit.*

³³ M. TREPANIER. Les Britanniques à Calais, *op. cit.*

In both the “Espoir” association and the “Ensemble” collective, recruitment was non-selective. Ways of operating were improvised according to the realities of the field and people were trained as they went. Flexibility was at the heart of mobilisation and guaranteed the permanent renewal of human resources.

From flexibility to the strengths of high turnover

Strategies were devised in order to facilitate the participation of everyone who wished to contribute something. The “Espoir” association created Facebook pages dedicated to the organisation of carpooling and offered low-cost accommodation possibilities for volunteers near the camps. This allowed for both short- and long-term stays.

“Because we realised that the problem for the people coming was the cost. So we offered a solution for accommodation for 5€ per day. People wanted to take action. We just needed to give them the means to do so. So when they came, we said “If you come, you’ll make up a car with four people”. Well, it worked! Because when you’re young, 20 or 25, and you’re appalled by this thing, and you know it will cost you 45€ for the round trip, which is cheaper than a weekend on the town, at some point, you’re going to go.” (Stéphane M., associative coordinator).

In addition, every morning, the people chose their mission for the day according to the human resources requirements. What emerged from citizen initiatives was a freedom to “offer hospitality à la carte, without any strings attached”. This was illustrated by the case of Julien D., a support person in Paris. As a foreign student, he was initially asked by a friend involved with the “Ensemble” collective to help out and didn’t want to refuse given the moral value of what was being asked. He then went on to contribute spontaneously to a dozen food distributions on Stalingrad boulevard over the course of his stay, because he was drawn to the fact that “no one asks anything of you, you can come when you want, and give what you can”. He explained that this kind of collective, “without strings attached”, was particularly adapted to people like him. Whilst this “à la carte” way of working sometimes leads to citizen initiatives being accused by public authorities and certain NGOs of lacking the necessary skills and of leaving the door open to “humanitarian tourism”, it does have the advantage of high turnover, ensuring that there are always people relaying others on different missions which no one else is covering.

“It was a rotation system [...]. For example, for food, it could be different people at every stage: one person collecting unsold items, another picking up the unsold items from her house to give to someone else who would cook them. One person cooks, another comes to get what has been cooked, takes it to the encampment, then another person distributes it... There’s yet another person who collects unsold bread and drops it off for the distribution. And then the people doing the distribution are sometimes not the same people who stay on at the end to collect the cutlery and take it back... Well, there’s all the turnover possible, basically! [...] Someone on their lunch break, someone else who says they can cook but they are at home with the kids and so who says “You can come and get it, I’m cooking, but I can’t leave the house”. In fact, the strength of the collective was to offer a kind of framework so that every person, even with only 30 minutes in front of them, could do something useful because they’re not doing it alone and they can do it according to a pre-established method by being in contact with other people. I know who to call if I run out of time to finish what I have started. Well, that thing of putting loads of individuals into contact with each other... Each person on their own couldn’t do much.” (Luna B., coordinator).

The scale of this turnover did imply very significant logistical efforts, based on intensive use of social networks, as highlighted above. The “click” therefore emerges as a particular form of mobilisation, the modalities of which are defined on a case-by-case basis, according to each person’s wishes and availabilities. However, in spite of this flexible way of functioning, which was above all a response to the wishes and availabilities of ordinary citizens, the aid supplied to the camps was governed by an ethics of recognition.

Recognition as the ethics of improvisation

Beyond humanitarian emergency situations, citizen initiatives are part of dynamics of recognition of the subjects, their histories, their singularities and their capacities for action. This ethics of recognition aims to re-humanise people who have been made invisible by the political logics of management, and to reinscribe them into a common humanity. Humanitarian improvisation is therefore based on the maintaining of human dignity, and the creation of familiar links and references, as well as on the attention given to the migrants’ voices and resources.

The maintaining of human dignity, the creation of familiar links and references

Every morning, come rain or come shine, a dozen volunteers (at least) from the “Espoir” association arrived in the slum-camp of Calais in order to clean, equipped with gloves and bin bags, and sometimes rakes and shovels. Waste collection was also the opportunity to repair tents or build “bridges” enabling access to dwellings in the event of flooding. In Paris, the members of the “Ensemble” collective prepared and distributed food to refugees in the encampments for over a year regardless of the day, the weather, or the number of volunteers available.

Maintaining peoples’ living environments and giving them food on a daily basis creates a particular link of solidarity which goes beyond a humanitarian response to immediate survival needs. Waste collection is a difficult task, both physically and emotionally. You have to bend over, carry heavy bags, walk through the mud, be splashed by “jungle juice”, as the volunteers joke, and deal with the smell of days-old waste, the precarity of the living conditions, and people’s psychological suffering. This “dirty job”³⁴ nevertheless brings great riches thanks to the encounters and links which it creates with the residents of the camp, and to the feeling it gives of alleviating the hostility of the environment and contributing to the maintaining of human dignity. The volunteers’ methods shed light on efforts to respect people’s rhythms and intimacy. Volunteers are asked not to enter the shelters, not to make noise in the morning, in order to let people rest, to keep a distance from the water points when people are using them and especially not to take photos. S. Djigo³⁵ showed the extent to which image is a sensitive issue in the camps, publicly revealing the migrants’ assignation to inhumane living conditions.

³⁴ Everett C. HUGHES, *Le regard sociologique: essais choisis*. Paris : Éd. de l'EHESS, 1996.

³⁵ S. DJIGO. *Les migrants de Calais. op. cit.*, p. 42-43.

In the same way, food distributions are a prime example of hospitality³⁶, and recognition of the other as a subject. Volunteers and support people catch up, identify the people needing accompaniment or information and try to respond to them. Even more than waste collection in the Calais camp, distributions are the opportunity to establish a daily routine and create familiar references between migrants and supports people. The methods - making people queue up - made Parisian support people uncomfortable by recalling the power relations at play during distributions. Nevertheless, this “horrible” posture was offset by the migrants’ active participation in the different stages of the distributions, sometimes including the preparation of meals. In the same way, the migrants offered moments of respite to volunteers in Calais by inviting them to take a break and have a cup of tea, or sometimes a hot meal. This kind of action encouraged the creation of links and human encounters between people, and led to attitudes of mutual concern for the other³⁷. Maintaining living spaces and serving food are noteworthy practices of recognition, by means of which ordinary citizens and migrants daily recreated spaces of common humanity, in Calais and in Paris³⁸.

The attention given to migrants’ voices

In addition to missions responding to material emergencies, support people and volunteers also organised French lessons, in Calais and in Paris, on the request of the migrants. These lessons brought together improvised teachers and people with different levels of French and of general education. Some had degrees in their own countries, whereas others had never been to school. In this context, the classes were co-constructed by the teachers and the students according to the questions, preoccupations and desires of the day. For example, in the school where the volunteers from “Espoir” were involved, a sequence of lessons was organised around the teaching of sentences to use in the event of being arrested by the police, in response to students worried by the “policy of secrecy”³⁹ preceding the destruction of the Calais camp. Over the same period, another sequence of lessons was devoted to people’s emotions a few days before their transfer to the “Centres d’Accueil et d’Orientation” (CAO). The following phrases were written on the blackboard, dictated by the students in response to their teacher having asked them “How do you feel?”:

“My stomach is tight.

It’s good to be leaving the Jungle because I’m going to learn to speak French properly.

I’m going to a town for professional training. I am happy.

Today, I am going to pack my bags to go to a town. I am sad to be leaving my friends, and to not know where I am going.

I am sad to be leaving the Jungle, my friends, my teachers.”

The importance given to each person’s concerns and emotions puts the students in the position of thinking, feeling subjects, thereby essentially humanising them. These practices clearly reflect a will on the part of volunteers and support people to reassert the value of people in the face of the alienation which is imposed on them by their living conditions. These teaching methods, cobbled together by the available human resources - the high turnover of teachers and students - and by each person’s demands, was anchored in

³⁶ Julian PITT-RIVERS. The law of hospitality. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2012, vol. 2, n° 1, p. 501–517.

³⁷ Patricia PAPERMAN et Sandra LAUGIER (dir.). *Le souci des autres éthique et politique du care*. Paris : Éd. De l’EHESS, 2011.

³⁸ M. AGIER. Nouvelles réflexions sur le lieu des Sans-État, *op. cit.*

³⁹ M. GERBIER-AUBLANC. L’humanitaire instrumentalisé à Calais, *op. cit.*

people's daily situations in order to allow them to take back control of their existence⁴⁰, by expressing themselves freely and by feeling that they were being heard.

The validation of people's capacity to act

In Calais as in Paris, the involvement of support people and volunteers was also based on the mobilisation of migrants' resources: a strategy by which they completed their limited human resources by giving a voice back to the people in the camps. This approach enabled a rebalancing of the relationship between volunteers and support people, and aid recipients, as Benaissa Assraoui pointed out⁴¹. Thanks to his language skills, he was able to make himself useful to the support people and residents and to impose his legitimacy in settling in the encampment⁴². I previously noted that the "Espoir" association sent certain of its volunteers to help in the health caravans set up in the Calais camp. In these first-aid centres, run by international volunteer nurses, interpreters were required on a daily basis. These were camp residents recruited in different ways because of their mastery of several languages and their spoken fluency. These interpreters were paid daily from a collection taken from the nurses' contributions: between 5 and 10 euros per person. Najib M. is quadrilingual and worked in the centre every day. The nurses saw up to one hundred patients per day on a voluntary basis, from Monday to Sunday. The work not only gave him a daily paid activity and the feeling of being useful, but also the gratitude of members of his community. Najib M. liked to walk around the camp with a stethoscope around his neck; a highly symbolic act which enabled him to publicly stage his social role, generating respect and earning him the nickname of "doctor" from other camp residents. Volunteers and support people therefore aimed to bring practical and symbolic responses validating people's capacity for action, which was often denied by government institutions which reduced them to the status of undesirables and infantilised them⁴³. Nevertheless, these efforts sometimes depended on material resources available for the associations and collectives. This was the case, for example, for the distribution of bin bags, a limited resource and an object of frustration for the volunteers of "Espoir". One morning, when by 11AM there were already not enough bags left to distribute to people, one volunteer threatened to abandon the mission which he deemed useless if "we don't give them the means to keep themselves clean". The validation of people's social esteem is integral to the mission of waste collection and the material impossibility of respecting this principle made the mission particularly tiring for volunteers.

In the same way, migrants were particularly encouraged to participate in activities in defense of their rights. Hence, as the government prepared to destroy the Calais camp, its

⁴⁰These methods called to mind the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". Developed from literacy initiatives for peasants in the 1960s in Brazil, the political perspectives of this teaching method led to its author being persecuted by the Brazilian military government and exiled to Chili. See Paulo FREIRE. *Pedagogía del oprimido*. Madrid : Siglo XXI Editores, 1988.

⁴¹Babels programme workshop, held on January 25th 2017 at the headquarters of Médecins Sans Frontières, dedicated to citizen mobilisations in Paris: « Paris, retour sur le mouvement de solidarité envers les migrant.e.s (2015-2017) ».

⁴²It must be noted that this phenomenon was not specific to volunteers or citizen support people, and was mobilised by all of the non-governmental players involved in the migrant camps in Calais and in Paris.

⁴³Marjorie GERBIER-AUBLANC. Des capacités d'agir révélées par le vécu collectif de la maladie ? Le cas des femmes dans les associations de lutte contre le VIH. In DESGREES DU LOU Annabel, LERT, France (dir.). *Parcours de vie et de santé des immigrés Africains vivant en France*. Paris : La Découverte, 2017.

residents actively contributed to the collection of witness-accounts, supporting the referendum presented by the associations to the administrative court in Lille to try and delay this event. In Paris, activist citizen collectives for the defense of migrants' rights simultaneously translated general meetings, which migrants were invited to and encouraged to take part in, into different languages including Arabic and Pashto. The aim was to enable them to take part in political events and to make their voices heard, even though, as one Parisian support person noted, "it is sometimes difficult to fight against the hegemony of the French language during general meetings".

By seeking to respond in the most dignified way to their sufferings and by mobilising their skills, volunteers and support people enabled migrants to escape, if only symbolically and temporarily, from the liminal situation to which they had been assigned. Present on a daily basis, they took care of the migrants and paid attention to their voices. By recognising their capacity to act, they attempted to restore value to their social esteem and wounded identities. This ethics of recognition goes well beyond the support for the migrants' biological survival, by addressing their need for a social and political existence on a daily basis. We can therefore appreciate the priceless nature of the work that was carried out every day in Calais and in Paris by ordinary citizens. It must be noted that these ethical principles can be found amongst employees of major humanitarian NGOs as well as amongst certain employees of State service provision associations, even though the recognition of people's capacity to act is sometimes at odds with the weight of the organisation, its rules of intervention, and the neoliberal injunctions which are currently affecting both the public sector⁴⁴ and the humanitarian field⁴⁵.

The complex sustainability of citizen initiatives

Ordinary citizens therefore occupy the spaces which are not covered by international NGOs and which are left untreated - or insufficiently addressed, and too late - by public authorities. This interstitial positioning nevertheless comes with certain limitations which call the possible development of citizen mobilisations into question. In a context where humanitarian aid⁴⁶ and "the humanitarian myth"⁴⁷ inform government responses, citizen initiatives are instrumentalised and their politicisation is stigmatised. Moreover, mobilisation leads ordinary citizens to redefine the boundaries of their ordinary lives and exposes them to the risk of exhaustion. Finally, the theory of "helping hands", mobilised on all fronts, calls into question the ethics of humanitarian work.

From humanitarian aid to politics: instrumentalised and stigmatised citizens

In Calais, the destruction of the slum-camp was presented by the public authorities as a "humanitarian" operation. Yet I have shown that the "policy of secrecy" turned out to be a

⁴⁴ Marjorie GERBIER-AUBLANC. *Du care à l'agency: l'engagement associatif des femmes d'Afrique Subsaharienne dans la lutte contre le VIH/sida en France*. Thèse de doctorat en Sociologie. Paris : Université Paris Descartes, 2016.

⁴⁵ B. MARTIN. *L'adieu à l'humanitaire ?*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Didier FASSIN. *La raison humanitaire : une histoire morale du temps présent*. Paris : EHESS, Gallimard, Seuil, 2010 ; Miriam TICKTIN. *Casualties of care: immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 2011.

⁴⁷ F. DUBUET. *Le mythe de l'humanitaire d'Etat*, op. cit.

particularly effective governmental strategy for the instrumentalisation of volunteers who were led to prepare favourable ground in advance, as with transfers to CAOs, for this “humanitarian dismantling”⁴⁸. In Paris, citizens occupied a similar position during the successive evacuations. “It’s a horrible situation where we end up passing on lies”, said Luna B., recalling a friend who asked her worriedly one morning whether there would be enough buses for everyone and to whom she answered “yes” without being certain of what she was saying. Luna B. recognised that the presence of citizen collectives, which benefited from legitimacy in the eyes of the migrants, was authorised in order to pacify the situation. To begin with, this instrumentalisation was accepted in order to avoid police violence⁴⁹ but also, following a logic of politicisation on behalf of the collectives, in order to ensure democratic monitoring, and to report on potential violations. Accepting instrumentalisation during these operations also served the internal logistics of citizen collectives, enabling them to negotiate to recover equipment (tents, duvets) in order to save “millions of euros” in future distributions.

But ahead of this kind of circumstantial instrumentalisation, citizen resources were also used within the camps in order to complement the limited resources of State service provision associations and to alleviate the effects of governmental unconcern⁵⁰ with regard to migrants’ survival. Hence, during meetings between field actors and members of the municipal council, the representatives of the “Ensemble” collective explained how they tried to highlight the insufficient municipal resources deployed in the camps: a team of seven employees who were supposed to cover the whole Parisian field. However, the collective did not feel that they were heard, especially when the coordinators tried to denounce “aberrant practices”. The employees of the State service provision association in charge of the monitoring team regularly called upon the collective in order to find accommodation solutions for the people corresponding to the city hall’s “priority missions” (shelter for women, families, minors). The members of the “Ensemble” collective nevertheless considered that these meetings with the city hall must have played a role in the opening of the centre at Porte de la Chapelle, since the collective essentially represented a “field relay” for the city hall from the time of the street encampments. Having been “instrumentalised by the city hall” in the field to ensure the survival of people in the encampments and thereby to guarantee a kind of social peace in the city, Luna B. explained with “much bitterness” that the collective was not consulted before the opening of the centre in La Chapelle. The collective therefore decided to become an association in order to carry out real political advocacy work, to be heard and to legitimately express another voice from the field. In the case of “Espoir”, the coordination office’s desire to make the association sustainable and to participate in democratic monitoring gave rise to a kind of unconscious instrumentalisation by the volunteers. Indeed, the destruction of the Calais camp coincided with the opening of this “humanitarian centre” in La Chapelle and the transfer towards Paris of some of the voluntary resources of the “Espoir” association. Volunteers from “Espoir” therefore became involved alongside employees of the municipality’s service provision association, accepting, amongst other things, to manage the queues in front of the centre. In this way, volunteers found themselves at the centre of a political game of which they did not know the rules. One year later, the “Espoir” association announced its withdrawal from the centre, justifying its decision with reference to the “Kafkaesque administrative treatment” of people trapped by the administrative procedure which

⁴⁸ M. GERBIER-AUBLANC. L’humanitaire instrumentalisé à Calais, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ S. DJIGO. *Les migrants de Calais*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ Philippe BRUNET. De l’usage raisonné de la notion de « concernement » : mobilisations locales à propos de l’industrie nucléaire. *Natures Sciences Sociétés*, 2008, vol. 16, n° 4, p. 317-325.

“perverted the concept of humanitarian aid”. This experience revealed one of the major limitations of the turnover involving citizens who were not always aware of the political issues being played out in a field which they were only involved in for a short period of time, whereas the structure which they were affiliated to was attempting - based on emotional posturing - to remain in the humanitarian game whatever the cost, without being in possession of all of its codes. Ordinary citizens therefore sometimes found themselves caught up in spite of themselves in a dangerous liaison between humanitarian aid and politics.

Previous research on the cause of migrants in the camps in the north of France has highlighted the tensions, for historical activists defending the rights of foreigners, inherent in the transition between political advocacy and humanitarian action, practical responses to the vital needs of migrants⁵¹. In Paris and in Calais, certain citizen collectives positioned themselves in this sense in an activist manner as soon as they entered the field, rejecting the uniquely humanitarian dimension of food and duvet distributions by considering them as truly political acts, by means of mass communication on social networks, warnings issued to public authorities and physical occupation of the streets⁵². The two citizen initiatives examined in this article experienced a movement in the opposite direction - from humanitarian aid to politics - but which highlights in a particular manner the tensions between these two positions. The support people and volunteers first got involved in the humanitarian field without prior political engagement, before gradually becoming politicised through the progressive discovery of the institutions which humiliated migrants⁵³. This political awareness led them to try to integrate platforms of democratic participation and to begin advocacy work in order to denounce the treatment of migrants in light of humanitarian reason and the boundaries of the law⁵⁴. Nevertheless, when they were not instrumentalised, as shown above, the voices of the support people and the volunteers remained inaudible, if not criminalised.

It was therefore with a mixture of frustration and relief that the Parisian support people received a press release published by a major international NGO in January 2017. They explained that they had been carrying out “a huge amount of work in the field for months” without being heard by the government bodies to whom they had issued the same warnings as the NGO concerning the violent nocturnal evacuations of migrants (use of gas, batons and duvets being confiscated) carried out by police forces during the month of December 2016. The publication of the press release by this major international NGO was immediately followed by a prefectorial extension of the “trêve hivernale” (winter truce) for people living in slums, tents, cabins and makeshift shelters. Indeed, major humanitarian NGOs have historically constructed their “capacity for nuisance” and now enjoy a certain legitimacy in calling out State inaction⁵⁵, even when the State in question is the French State. This legitimacy is not recognised by government organisations in the same way when it comes to

⁵¹ M. PETTE. Venir en aide aux migrants dans le Calais, *op. cit.* ; M. PETTE. Les associations dans l'impasse humanitaire ?, *op. cit.*

⁵² Julie SEBAHOUN. “Et maintenant, on s'installe où ?” *Ethnographie de trois campements d'exilés, entre février et mai 2016, sous le métro de Stalingrad à Paris*. Master 2 dissertation in anthropology. Université Paris Descartes, 2016 ; BABELS. *De Lesbos à Calais : comment l'Europe fabrique des camps*, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Avishai MARGALIT. *La société décente*. Paris : Flammarion, 2007.

⁵⁴ D. FASSIN. *La raison humanitaire*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ B. MARTIN. *L'adieu à l'humanitaire ?*, *op. cit.*

citizen collectives or local associations assimilated to burgeoning social movements, which are particularly unwanted in the current context. Luna B. explained that:

“the prefecture vaguely tolerated us when we got involved in the encampments in support of the city hall, but apart from that, we’re generally considered to be troublemakers. You mustn’t forget that we were the ones who alerted the Regional Health Authority when there were the epidemics of tuberculosis and chickenpox.” (Luna B. 28, support person in Paris).

In the eyes of the public authorities and their operators, support people therefore gradually come to represent the same unwantedness as that attributed to the people they are supporting, especially when, by their actions and discourses, they shed light on the irrational nature of the policy of non-welcoming and its security-based violations, citizens sometimes themselves becoming criminalised⁵⁶. In Calais, N. Bouchard, the mayor of Calais sadly known for the succession of decrees she signed to prevent associations from delivering aid to migrants, was recorded by an Arte journalists saying of citizen associations:

“These are people with nothing better to do with their time who therefore come and disturb public order constantly, provoking institutions for the mere fact of existing, and using people in distress - the migrants - to instrumentalise them but certainly not to help them. [...] (taking a defensive tone) I am against these activists, and especially [Espoir]. They have already shown their colours in other municipalities, they were thrown out of other municipalities, I want nothing to do with them and I have nothing to discuss with them. I would even go so far as to ask them to leave the territory of the city of Calais to go back to their different municipalities, but I do not want any relationship with... [to the journalist trying to intervene] If you think it’s commendable, that’s your opinion.”⁵⁷

Hence, the liminal position between humanitarian and governmental action makes it difficult for the voices of ordinary citizens to be heard, since they are instrumentalised, disqualified or held responsible, if not criminalised. The frustration created by this situation, associated with the feeling of having to make up for a number of deficits in order to support migrants’ survival, leads citizens to regularly push their involvement beyond their own limits, as shown by the controversial position of “Espoir” in Paris. In any event, the ordinary citizens who get involved in humanitarian issues do not tend to escape unscathed.

The redefinition of the boundaries of ordinary life and the risks of exhaustion

Helping migrants gradually leads certain citizens to redefine the boundaries of their ordinary lives. Intervening in fields in which the multiplicity of daily emergencies goes hand in hand with a chronic lack of human resources, volunteers and citizens engaged in solidarity work tend to get involved body and soul in aid for migrants. In Calais and in Paris, the

⁵⁶See, amongst others, the highly publicised summons issued following the meeting organised in the summer of 2016 by two citizen support people in Paris :

<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/081116/refugies-houssam-et-aubepine-poursuivis-pour-avoir-organise-un-rassemblement?onglet=full> ; http://www.lemonde.fr/immigration-et-diversite/article/2016/08/23/migrants-qui-se-cache-vraiment-sous-le-benevole-parisien_4986671_1654200.html ; <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/la-chapelle-en-lutte/blog/161116/tgi-de-paris-9-novembre-2016-l-audience-etait-presque-parfaite-par-aubepine-dahan> ; <https://www.exilesparis.org/fr/2016/08/09/un-long-dimanche-de-garde-a-vue-par-aubepine/> ; <http://www.philomag.com/lactu/passage-a-lacte/aubepine-dahan-ce-quaidier-veut-dire-20377>

⁵⁷Extract (19’20-20’40) from the documentary « France : retour à Calais » broadcast on Arte Info on April 29th 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVWaeUR6g1c>

methods of engagement make it hard to switch off. In Calais, indeed, volunteers came for a limited time but they were totally immersed in the field. It was not unusual for stays to be extended: volunteers forgot their former lives and initial projects. Justine S. had planned to stay in Calais for 3 months before passing the Bar to become a corporate lawyer. After two months spent in the field, she decided to put her project off until the following year, and to spend the entire year in Calais. Several of the people I met experienced violent depressive or inactive episodes on their return. Some of them therefore took steps to return rapidly to the field, explaining that it was no longer possible for them to take up their ordinary lives again. Emma G., who had planned to stay for 10 days in the camps, ended up staying for 2 months.

“So I went for 10 days, I came back to Paris for a festival and once I got there, I got a carpool straight away to go back because, it was impossible... You come back from Grand-Synthe, you arrive at Rock-en-Seine, you think “Oh God, there’s a problem here!” (Emma G. 21, volunteer in the North).

For the people mobilised in Calais, the return to “normal life” therefore created discrepancies which were as violent as those experienced on arrival in the camps, especially when they realised that normal life had carried on in their absence and their close friends and family no longer showed much interest in issues surrounding migrants. In any case, leaving the field proved to be difficult. Several permanent volunteers in Calais took “holidays” to go to other camps in Europe. It is even harder to switch off when you have responsibilities in the field, as one coordinator explained:

“It’s very difficult in the field to experience the things that happen there... We work really hard. We work our asses off. I think I’m getting to the end of my tether. I have to get out, I have to stop, it’s so... Nervously, mentally... I took lots of hits, I really did. And then, you can’t switch off, really. You know, you can’t let go.” (StéphaneM., associative coordinator)

In this case, as well as the shocks provoked by the violence of the field and the perceived responsibility for the migrants, associative coordinators want their organisations to thrive. In the same way as in Paris, as long as the “à la carte” commitment aims to allow everybody to give what they can give their daily constraints, the support people will generally tend to overinvest the encampments of migrants which they set out to protect, especially from police persecution, and which they see as having been abandoned by traditional associations, which are incidentally described as being incompetent in such a field. Another element which contributes to this total absorption of volunteers and support people is the financial cost of such a mobilisation in the absence of any funds other than private ones. Certain people have ruined themselves financially, gradually coming to share the precarious situations of the people they were supporting. In Paris and in Calais, mobilised people sometimes gave up their professional activities and risked their married lives to devote themselves exclusively to the cause. The political treatment reserved for migrants in France therefore has direct repercussions on the lives of citizens who try to respond to it. Some of the people involved in the encampments ended up merging with the cause, putting their personal and professional lives on hold or at least deeply reconfiguring their social lives. “It quickly grabs hold of you and it becomes difficult to find a balance between your life before and your new life”, explained Geraldine V., referring to the trying and time-consuming nature of her involvement with migrants.

“I’ve seen people wavering [...] to begin with, you don’t realise that it’s a difficult thing to manage. In the end, you have no life and your new life is depressing (laughter) [...] In any case, even when you manage to find a balance, it changes your life and the vision you might have had of the world. It can also create a divide amongst your friends, with whom

you no longer share the same perspectives. You change in relation to others. But I'm happy to be doing it and to be where I am. I just didn't think it would change me so much. The only downside is that a rift can open up in your former social life, and you become a bit of an unknown quantity." (Geraldine V. 31, support person in Paris).

The phenomenon described by Geraldine V. results, on the other hand, in a renewal of social life within the encampments. The migrants and other support people gradually make up new networks of sociability, sharing the same preoccupations, references, news cycles, and vision of the world. In this way, in Paris especially, citizen mobilisation has led to the emergence of new networks of sociability at the neighbourhood level but also citywide, between support people and migrants and by means of the establishment of a network of businesses operating for solidarity.

Volunteers and support people are effectively confronted daily with a multitude of contradictory emotions. Whilst indignation and anger are feelings which worsen over time, and explain, amongst other things, the politicisation of individuals, the latter can also be overcome by feelings of excitement and omnipotence when they become aware of the usefulness of their initiatives and the strength of collective action, or when they manage to break an administrative stalemate or resolve a case of complex access to care by becoming the interface between migrants and governmental institutions. Omnipotence, too, when the "Likes" add up on social networks and when the media report citizens' voices⁵⁸. But this is often quickly followed by feelings of impotence in the face of the State apparatus and the indecency of its institutions⁵⁹ which humiliate migrants and stigmatise volunteers and support people. The feeling is exacerbated by the close relationships which are formed with the migrants and the violent consequences of political decisions in the field. Emotionally submerged, frustrated in the face of institutional arbitrariness and tired of being instrumentalised, some burn out from exhaustion. The risk of exhaustion is therefore one of the major limitations to the entry of ordinary individuals in the field. However, exhaustion does not lead individuals to abandon mobilisation, as emphasised by people I met in the field. On the contrary, support people and volunteers remained in a state of chronic exhaustion which weighed on their mental health. It must be noted that the violence of events witnessed in the field and the desire to respond to them at all costs are part of a collective form of organisation which struggles to contain the sufferings of the support people and volunteers. Because whilst new networks of sociability were created amongst members of associations and collectives, the degree of investment in the field was even greater. Whilst aid for migrants became a constitutive element of normal life for the people concerned, the state of emergency and lack of respite made the emotional work of distancing and switching off very difficult.

In order to respond to these situations, a collective of voluntary psychologists was set up in Paris⁶⁰ offering collective meetings or mobile "topical cafés" - since the collective has no fixed base - where support people could discuss their difficulties. Some of the topics included trauma in exile or the impact of mobilisation for support people, and especially the fact of not sleeping. The collective, which did not provide individual consultations, could direct people in

⁵⁸ This feeling was highlighted by Aubépine Dahan during her speech at the Babels workshop, held on January 25th 2017 at the headquarters of Médecins Sans Frontières, dedicated to citizen mobilisations in Paris: « Paris, retour sur le mouvement de solidarité envers les migrant.e.s (2015-2017) ».

⁵⁹ A. MARGALIT. *La société décente*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ The Quid'Autre collective: <https://www.facebook.com/Collectif-QuidAutre-1386693671356730/>

need towards more classical therapeutic options. The “Espoir” association also tried to create spaces for volunteers who were suffering. In the autumn of 2016, the coordinators of the association were trying to set up a “psychological reception unit” with the cooperation of voluntary psychologists. This unit is still not active today. But during my fieldwork in Calais, it was one of the field coordinators, himself overwrought, who was inexpertly overseeing this listening space. At the beginning of October 2016, one of the volunteers who had been in the camp since the month of July and was starting to show signs of exhaustion - repeated crying fits - was put on forced rest by the team leaders. She was told to stay in the bungalow for a few days to recuperate. In order to help her, they called upon the coordinator for distance counselling. The latter forbade her from setting foot in the camp again. Not understanding this violent lay-off, the volunteer broke ties with the association and went to help in one of the camp Kitchens. Whilst the focus groups set up in Paris aimed to give a collective sense to the experience, the psychological support carried out by non-specialist individuals who were themselves in situations of exhaustion often turned out to be counterproductive.

Humanitarian ethics put to the test by the theory of helping hands

Redefining the boundaries of ordinary experience enables us to better understand the difficulties in switching off and the instrumentalisation which this phenomenon can lead to, as illustrated by the case of “Espoir”. Indeed, growing needs, as well as significant symbolic and sometimes financial gratifications received by associative organisations, justified the redeployment of citizen initiatives at all costs on the basis intervention timeframes which were not fully mastered and which the coordinators lacked experience of.

Oscar A., 24, joined the “Espoir” association in Calais and subsequently pursued his engagement in Paris. The young man, who had followed a humanitarian training course beforehand, has an ambivalent view of the “Espoir” association. He explained that it gave him “hope for his generation”, by revealing “the best of current youth”. However, Oscar A. admitted that he was tired of “giving 100-120% all the time” and that all of the volunteers “felt neglected at Espoir” due to a lack of structure and management of human resources in the field. He sadly admitted that the coordinators of the association “want to do too much” without having the skills, which is, according to him, “an ethical problem”. He gave the example of a distribution of sleeping bags which was carried out once the association had arrived in Paris, with no prior briefing of volunteers nor development of a protocol for distribution. The volunteers opened the truck doors wide, causing jostling amongst the migrants, “the strongest” pushing their way to the front whilst the “sicklier” ones were left out and were unable to access the donations. Oscar A. identified “basic errors in good humanitarian practice” in this distribution and “blames himself” for having “let it happen without intervening”. Here, Oscar A. highlighted the problems with the intervention of novice volunteers. According to him, the “Espoir” association preferred to “help more rather than better”, and asked volunteers to take on tasks which they had no mastery of. He regretted that the “Espoir” association had not simply concentrated on managing an initial platform of volunteers in support of other organisations, for which the coordinators would have had “real skills”. Oscar A.’s story illustrates the extent to which the “theory of helping hands” calls humanitarian ethics into question when it is mobilised on all fronts.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to shed light on some of the issues arising from the meetings between different players in migrant camps in France. Indeed, within these camps, the welcome and support afforded to migrants is based on a matrix of public and private players, humanitarian workers and citizens, whose levels of intervention intermingle and who are called upon to interact. The results presented in this article cast light on the eruption of new players in the humanitarian game: ordinary citizens - be they independent, grouped into collectives or affiliated to associations - who intervene in the liminal spaces between institutionalised humanitarian aid and public services. Whilst public authorities alternate between inaction, insufficient responses and targeted interventions for groups which are perceived to be most vulnerable - namely women -, major humanitarian NGOs tend to be more specialised in the domain of health or the management of sanitation and infrastructure, as was the case in Calais. The actions of different kinds of players (NGOs, local associations, citizen collectives, public services) within the camps rarely overlapped. The pluralisation of aid players therefore reveals not only a division in aid work for migrants but also the shortcomings of the existing system: the exclusive intervention of public services and NGOs is not sufficient to ensure the biological and social survival of the migrants. This is why associations and citizen collectives are improvised in emergency situations and with precarious resources in response to a plethora of unmet needs.

The examination of the organisational principles supporting this improvisation reveals the ingenuity of ordinary citizens who encourage an “à la carte” mobilisation of individuals on the basis of new information and communication technologies and recreate networks of solidarity on a citywide scale. One major source of potential of flexible organisations lies in their capacity to benefit from high turnover, thanks to intensive communication. Moreover, this improvisation is part of an ethics of recognition. By taking care of people on a daily basis and valuing their self-esteem, ordinary citizens can support the social existence of migrants who are assigned to inhumane living conditions. This study therefore enables us to grasp the full potential of flexible and improvised humanitarian action in emergency situations. Nevertheless, the sustainability of these initiatives is debatable. Firstly because of the State’s instrumentalisation of citizens’ generosity and their stigmatisation, whilst the boundaries between humanitarian aid and political actions remain blurred in the field. Secondly, because this mobilisation sometimes involves the redefinition of the boundaries of these citizens’ ordinary lives, and exposes them to risks of exhaustion. Finally, transferring aid for migrants to citizens who do not always have the necessary skills raises issues of humanitarian ethics.

Due to the contingencies of the study, the data presented in this article offers a limited view of the complexity of the phenomenon under study. In particular concerning the Parisian field, the interviews carried out amongst independent support people or those affiliated to the “Ensemble” collective failed to reflect the plurality of methods of engagement of ordinary citizens in the field, or their interactions with other humanitarian and governmental players. For this reason, the results need to be put into perspective with those of prior studies and discussed in the context of future studies, in order to generalise their scope.

The results of this study resonate with the literature highlighting the mechanisms of the instrumental relationship between humanitarian aid and politics⁶¹. The political treatment of

⁶¹ M. AGIER. *Gérer les indésirables*, op. cit. ; M.-A. PEROUSE DE MONTCLOS. *Les humanitaires dans la guerre. Des idéaux à l'épreuve de la politique.*, op. cit. ; C. ARJUN. *De l'humanitaire comme outil de*

migrants in the camps in France has clearly updated the “myth of State humanitarian aid”⁶²: humanitarian action is used as a means to political ends which are far removed from the true needs of the population. This research enables us to understand the boundaries of humanitarian aid on two levels. On the one hand, by renewing the study of the mechanisms of its instrumentalisation in a European country which is not at war and where migration policy administered by a democratic state is at the origins of the humanitarian crisis. In this case, humanitarian action is not intervening where the State lacks resources but becomes instead a fundamental dimension of public action, allowing the State to pursue a policy which is hostile to migrants and on the fringes of the law, whilst ensuring that nobody dies on the national territory and responding sparingly to the warning call from humanitarian players. Humanitarian aid is therefore used by the State to respond to contradictions inherent in its own policies. By considering the immigrant as an unwanted guest instead of as a person covered by international legal conventions - namely the right to asylum - the French government suggests that the welcome for migrants should fall within the logics of private hospitality⁶³, based on citizens’ solidarity. In this way, migrants are pushed back into areas of lawlessness and assigned to inhumane survival conditions. Institutionalised humanitarian aid is not sufficient to respond to the increasing vital needs of these people. Firstly because they are currently huge hyper-stratified NGOs whose managerial activities are sometimes disconnected from the realities of the field⁶⁴, subject to a multitude of economic imperatives⁶⁵ and lacking in human resources⁶⁶. They are also organisations specialised in the domain of health or logistical management. Secondly, because these NGOs have an ambiguous relationship with the French State⁶⁷, which destabilises them and redefines their methods of intervention⁶⁸. To close these gaps, new non-professional players - the ordinary citizens - have taken up the tools and imperatives of humanitarian aid. They thereby transpose humanitarian aid into politics. The eruption of these new players in the humanitarian game promotes a deprofessionalisation of its action and renews the debate between humanitarian engagement and professionalisation⁶⁹. One of the major developments in humanitarian aid in the field is therefore certainly the porosity of the boundaries between humanitarian aid, governmental action and political activism. This convergence is all the more important given that the right to asylum comes dangerously close in this field to ethics of hospitality and its public metaphors⁷⁰.

Studying these dynamics therefore suggests their hybridisation for humanitarian aid: players, principles and repertoires for action, which link humanitarian responses and the rhythms of everyday life; logistical rules and moralities of intervention in the field associated

dissuasion en Grèce, *op. cit.* ; M. GERBIER-AUBLANC. L’humanitaire instrumentalisé à Calais, *op. cit.* ; B. MARTIN, *L’adieu à l’humanitaire?*, *op. cit.*

⁶² F. DUBUET. Le mythe de l’humanitaire d’Etat, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Magali BESSONE. Le vocabulaire de l’hospitalité est-il républicain ? *Éthique publique*, 2015, vol. 17, n° 1 ; Mireille ROSELLO. *Postcolonial hospitality: the immigrant as guest*. Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2001.

⁶⁴ P. DAUVIN et J. SIMEANT. *Le travail humanitaire*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ B. MARTIN. *L’adieu à l’humanitaire?*, *op. cit.* ; J. LARCHE. *Le déclin de l’empire humanitaire*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ L. JOXE. Médecins Sans Frontières : to be professional or not to be ?, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ B. MARTIN. *L’adieu à l’humanitaire ?*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Angélique MULLER et Mickaël NEUMAN. MSF à Grande-Synthe : enseignements d’une improbable coalition d’acteurs. *Alternatives Humanitaires*, 2016, n° 3, p. 42-51.

⁶⁹ P. DAUVIN et J. SIMEANT. *Le travail humanitaire*, *op. cit.* ; L. JOXE. Médecins Sans Frontières : to be professional or not to be ?, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ M. BESSONE. Le vocabulaire de l’hospitalité est-il républicain ?, *op. cit.* ; M. ROSELLO. *Postcolonial hospitality*, *op. cit.*

with a flexible, “à la carte” and “clickable” organisation; principles of solidarity, emergency, the creation of social ties, political demands which converge and enter into dialogue in physical and virtual spaces. On the basis of these innovative methods, ordinary individuals take on invaluable work with very few resources, oriented towards the search for practical solutions to the vital and socio-administrative needs of migrants but also thereby recognising the latter’s social existence and capacity for action, co-constructing spaces of hospitality within the hostile shelters. Humanitarian aid here takes on another dimension and gradually enters into the daily lives of a number of players previously unconnected to this field. What has been observed in Calais and in Paris over the past few years has made manifest not only the desire to welcome and intimately support the migrants in their daily struggle for survival but also and especially a collective, unplanned will to reshape the boundaries of politics, to reappropriate public affairs and to rebuild the ideal of a benevolent society. Hence, the citizens’ initiatives developed in response to this humanitarian crisis are redefining the contours of the ordinary course of people’s lives.

In spite of the scope of the citizens’ generosity deployed in the field, this kind of mobilisation has a certain number of limitations which reflect the tensions highlighted by previous research. Firstly, the tensions between humanitarian responses and political advocacy work inherent in the historic activist collectives mobilised for the cause of migrants in the north of France⁷¹. The risks of exhaustion which cast doubt on the sustainability of this kind of citizens’ humanitarian aid also recall the limits of the mobilisation of women migrants in the support of their peers living with HIV in France⁷², as well as the insecurity of social workers intervening in accommodation for migrants⁷³. These studies highlight the extent to which exhaustion amongst people mobilised for the cause of migrants results in a crisis of the social state and a neoliberal restructuring of public services which passes on the responsibility of responding to administratively, socially and politically complex situations to actors with uncertain resources - small associations and citizen collectives. Immigration policy therefore not only mistreats foreigners but also agents of social and administrative institutions and those citizens who try on a daily basis to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and the extreme survival situations which it produces.

Humanitarian intervention amongst migrants in France is inextricably linked to political action. This reality requires the constant calling into question of the ethics of humanitarian interventions⁷⁴ and the pursuit of critical advocacy work. This advocacy work would be more effective if humanitarian workers and citizens united to speak collectively, but that would imply the massive humanitarian machines accepting to decompartmentalise one of their activities and give up part of their sovereignty. Finally, from a less operational, more anthropological perspective, it seems necessary to pursue the analysis of these citizens’ mobilisations and their personal extensions. The study of migrants being hosted in private individuals’ homes would certainly add value to the current state of knowledge.

⁷¹ M. PETTE. Les associations dans l’impasse humanitaire?, *op. cit.* ; M. PETTE. Venir en aide aux migrants dans le Calais, *op. cit.*

⁷² M. GERBIER-AUBLANC. *Du care à l’agency: l’engagement associatif des femmes d’Afrique Subsaharienne dans la lutte contre le VIH/sida en France.*, *op. cit.*

⁷³ Travailleurs sociaux précarisés, étrangers maltraités, *Plein Droit*, n°112, mars 2017.

⁷⁴ J.-F. MATTEI. Renouveler la pensée humanitaire par une approche éthique, *op. cit.*

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