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Reconsidering humanitarian advocacy through pressure points of the European 'migration crisis'

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Abstract

This paper contributes to discussions on humanitarian advocacy. The European migration regime as constituted by the Dublin regulation, the EU-Turkey deal and border deals with Libya among others, contributes to generating migration pressure points where migrants find themselves stuck and in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Assistance and protection at these sites, inasmuch as they are available, are provided by a makeshift humanitarian arena of volunteer organizations, activists, national social welfare agencies, human rights organizations, international humanitarian organizations and UN agencies. Drawing on interviews and field research, this article analyses the relations between, and advocacy practices of, various actors within humanitarian arenas in three settings: Calais (France), Lesbos (Greece) and Libya. The article reveals how many humanitarians at these pressure points feel disempowered in the scope of their action beyond the provision of limited services, and abandoned by established agencies, especially the UNHCR. They feel that humanitarian principles are not enough to guide their actions in these cases. Emerging advocacy practices at these sites suggest that web-based humanitarian advocacy based on actor complementarity may be a way forward, making advocacy more effective and contributing to better motivate aid workers who feel disempowered in these contexts.

INTRODUCTION

For the first time in decades, urgent humanitarian situations are playing out in European Union (EU) member states, sanctioned under EU law. Increased migration to Europe has often been chaotic, the socio-spatial evidence of which has emerged at humanitarian pressure points at both internal and external European borders. Migrant people at these pressure points are governed by an assembly of humanitarian actors of different strains and with varying scopes of action, and it is at these points that friction and shifts in humanitarian arenas have become most visible. Drawing on observations of relations between various humanitarian actors at these three key pressure points of northern France (a point of transit in mainland Europe), the island of Lesbos (a first point of entry to Europe) and Libya (a departure country at Europe's periphery), this article analyses the state of humanitarian relations at each site and, in particular, explores the dilemmas surrounding the role of humanitarian advocacy that each case study reveals.

Existing literature on the migrant crisis in Europe often distinguishes between formal and informal humanitarian actors at these sites. The formal actors would constitute established international humanitarian agencies such as United Nations (UN) agencies (e.g. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) like Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), as well as national welfare organizations. Most work on the European migrant management and reception regime focuses instead on more informal actors, such as solidarity movements and initiatives run by activists and volunteers (Karakayali, 2018; Knott, 2018; Rozakou, 2017; Sandri, 2018). However, while these actors have often been studied in silos, less attention has been devoted to the important question of the relationships and interactions *between* different types of humanitarian actors at pressure points of the European 'migration crisis' (Fehsenfeld and Levinsen 2019). We argue that important insights into the nature of the humanitarian arenas that have emerged in response to the 'migrations crisis' may be gained by scrutinizing the tension, harmony and collaboration between different types of actors at different geopolitical sites. As we will conclude in this paper, looking at relations between agencies reveals how distinctions between formal and informal organizations, which are often perceived to be strict,are in reality rather fluid.

This article aims to analyse relations between different humanitarian actors with a specific focus on how they undertake humanitarian advocacy. Advocacy refers to the various interventions made by organizations on behalf of a collective interest or a given group, in an attempt to better their situation by negotiating with or putting pressure on governments with regards to specific policies, practices, legislations and so on (Clark, 2010; Reid, 1999; Salamon, 2002). For solidarity-based actors supporting migrant people in Europe, advocacy relating to the political climate in relation to migration, human rights and the provision of specific services, are often the central concern. In order to viably respond to changing on-the-ground realities, these organizations develop different styles of advocacy, which can range from accommodating to confrontational.

For established humanitarian actors, advocacy is more complicated. In the humanitarian domain, advocacy was originally associated with *humanitarian diplomacy*, narrowly constructed to focus on maximizing support for operations and programmes, and building the partnerships in order to deliver on these humanitarian objectives (Régnier, 2011; see also Smith and Minear 2007). Subsequent strands of advocacy include the concept of humanitarians needing bear witness to atrocities that violate humanitarian law, a phenomenon triggered by Médecins sans Frontières taking a position in this space. Since the 1990s, humanitarian debates on the boundaries of mandates and whether or not to speak out politically have continued to evolve (de Milliano, 2019). The dilemma centres on the trade-off between providing humanitarian protection and speaking out on behalf of human rights (Slim, 1997; DuBois, 2018). While practices do differ, humanitarian agencies tend to tread carefully when it comes to advocacy.

In the context of the European refugee crisis – more aptly labelled the European solidarity crisis – there has been deep debate within the humanitarian sector, which traditionally refrains from implementing operations within Europe (Philips, 2019). With their foundations, headquarters and donor bases in Europe, many aid agencies have felt their identities shaken to the core by some of the policy responses and deals made by their governments

to stem migration and invest in border securitization. Humanitarian agencies often espouse principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, calling into question what these principles mean in the contemporary European context. Should agencies adopt more explicit and robust political approaches beyond these principles, seeking to influence European policy and the European public, as argued by Scott-Smith (2016) among others? The question of how these established agencies deal with the protection of humanitarian space (i.e. the space required for humanitarians to do their work) also arises. This question has become increasingly relevant over time, as practices and discourses criminalizing humanitarians have grown in strength and salience (see Vandevoordt and Verschragen; Pusterla, 2020).

European policies to deter migration have triggered advocacy by human rights organizations, activist groups and humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR. In contexts where diverse groups of humanitarian actors operate according to different traditions and views on advocacy, this research sought to find out how activities to articulate, advance and protect affected communities' entitlements to protection and assistance were seen from below. As well as how they were enacted by various humanitarian actors close to/on sites of service delivery.

Our focus on aid workers is based on several considerations. First, the conviction that the life-worlds, understandings, and actions of aid workers matter for humanitarian service delivery to migrant populations. Since Lipsky's (1980/2010) seminal work on street-level bureaucrats' discretion in the enforcement of the rules, laws and policies they are tasked with upholding, a stream of research has examined how aid workers' frames of reference and views affect their work attitudes and the services delivered (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010). We therefore set out to ask aid workers how they perceive their room for manoeuvring in helping migrants where dire living conditions are exacerbated by tightening EU policy responses, in turn impacting the nature and scope of humanitarian action. Second, we felt it was important to understand how and to what extent advocacy is (or is not) intertwined with service delivery. Whereas headquarter advocacy is usually a specialized activity carried out by designated divisions or staff members, aid workers at migration pressure points must balance service delivery and advocacy in their everyday work. This raises the question of how this relates to headquarter advocacy practices. Third, we aimed to analyse how different types of humanitarian actors relate to one another on advocacy: do they collaborate, display collegial solidarity, act alone, or even compete or undermine each other's efforts? Proximity between aid workers is closest in settings of service delivery, so we chose this level for our analysis.

This article explores the experiences and perceptions of aid workers at three sites that have emerged as key migration pressure points at the EU borders. We chose these sites because they correspond to three bodies of EU policy which we perceive to have co-created migration crises in these contexts (see also Médecins Sans Frontières 2016). The sites are Calais, Lesbos and the Libyan border, where the Dublin system, the EU-Turkey deal and EU-Libya deals, respectively, exacerbate ongoing humanitarian crises. While the political implications, ethics and effectiveness of these policies have been much discussed, this article views these policies as a backdrop, rather focusing on aid workers' undertakings and attitudes in these contexts.

At each site, we sought to understand views, practices and interactions concerning humanitarian advocacy. For each case study, we aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What does the humanitarian arena look like?
2. How have relations between humanitarian actors evolved?
3. What are the views, practices and interactions of humanitarian actors on advocacy for better humanitarian responses in the context of tightening EU policies?

Discussions of the European migration regime in recent years have tended to distinguish between classic humanitarians and volunteers or amateur humanitarians. We propose more nuanced distinctions between UN agencies, international humanitarian organizations, national social organizations and volunteer humanitarians (see also Sandri, 2018). Considering humanitarian workers in these diverse categories facilitates an exploration of the differences and commonalities between these actors and the agencies they represent. Throughout this article,

we use the term 'humanitarian arena' (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010) to refer to the ensemble of aid providers at our chosen sites. This concept reflects the actor-oriented focus of our approach, and the conflicted or collaborative dynamism inherent to arenas of humanitarian action where multiple actors are engaged in everyday struggles and social negotiation to produce humanitarian assistance. We use the term humanitarian space to denote the physical or symbolic space in which humanitarian agents deliver their services according to the principles they uphold. We use the term 'migrants' to refer to the people benefitting from humanitarian assistance at each study site for the sake of consistency and because, at the crisis points of interest, people tend not to have yet entered an institutional process that might categorize them as 'refugees', 'asylum seekers', 'economic migrants' and so on.

THE EU REFUGEE REGIME AND THREE POLICY CONTEXTS

The European refugee regime is often perceived to prioritize deterrence and securitization over humanitarian action. Well aware of creating frameworks that influence the behaviour of migrant (or would-be migrant) people, EU policy-makers have developed a European agenda that Mann (2016:191) has described as an attempt at 'migration manage-ment with contradictory incentives', where EU policymakers constantly seek to 'square the circle of commitment to asylum and a commitment to deterrence'. The European approach to migration has been translated into many policies with differing impact. These policies show a pattern of EU borderlands being left to host migrants while 'the EU has sought to delocalize, externalize, outsource, off-shore, stretch, export and/or expand far beyond its own external bor-ders' (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017:59; see also Médecins Sans Frontières 2016). Here, we focus on three policy contexts that are part of this agenda: the Dublin system, the Turkey deal and the border deals with Libya.

The Dublin system

The Dublin system was put in place by the EU in 1990 and has existed as the Dublin III Regulation since 2003 (Costello, 2016). One of the main implications of this system is that asylum seekers arriving in Europe must claim protection in their first country of entry, with the goal of 'burden sharing' by dividing asylum claims between EU states. Increasing arrivals from 2015 to 2018 however revealed glaring problems with this regulation which, in practice, dissuades great numbers of would-be asylum seekers from approaching national institutions that could potentially grant them protected status. An overwhelming majority of migrants first enter the EU via Greece from Turkey, crossing the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy, or from Morocco to Spain, placing disproportionate pres-sure on these countries to process asylum claims despite their lack of infrastructure and necessary experience to manage intensified arrivals within the rule of law (Goodwin-Gill, 2016). As secondary movements have increased, many countries have tightened their implementation of returning migrants to the country of entry under the Dublin regulation. As a result, those moving from their country of first entry to another state, face the threat of being sent back, effectively discouraging them from seeking asylum at all.

The negative effects of this system on humanitarian responses have been most visible in northern France since the demolition of the makeshift camp known as the Calais 'Jungle' in 2017. Although accommodation was techni-cally available for people living informally, this shelter came with the imperative of claiming asylum and the risk of being sent back under the Dublin III Regulation, resulting in many choosing to circumvent this process.

The Turkey deal

When the number of asylum-seeking migrants entering Europe informally rose in 2015, frantic attempts to regu-late inward migration led to the March 2016 deal between the EU and Turkey. At the core of this deal was the

stipulation that irregular migrants who had bypassed the asylum process in Turkey and arrived in Greece without authorization, would be returned to Turkey. In exchange, Europe agreed to receive an equal number of people referred for asylum, and to pay six billion euros to assist Turkey in securing its border and hosting asylum seekers and refugees.

The deal has faced significant criticism (Amnesty International 2017; Tunaboylu and Alpes 2017; Batalla Adam, 2017). Its compatibility with international law has been questioned, and Amnesty International (2017) has criticized the fast-track procedures it entails, the assumption that Turkey is a safe receiving country for asylum seekers, and the country's failure to safeguard the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Another key point of criticism is that Turkey operates according to a geographically limited take on the 1951 UN Refugee Convention: only European asylum seekers are entitled to refugee status in Turkey. Therefore, non-European migrants living in Turkey are considered 'guests' in the country and granted temporary protection by the Turkish government which, in practice, means a dire lack of protection and services for these people as well as a permanent sense of insecurity.

Although the number of migrants in Greece subsided after the EU-Turkey deal was introduced (with many migrants opting for other, more dangerous routes), Greece was 'ring-fenced' and left to care for thousands of migrants. At the time of writing, monthly arrivals to Greece continue to outnumber people who begin asylum procedures in the country or are returned to Turkey.

Border deals with Libya

Deals with Libya to stem migration to Europe far predate the 2015 refugee crisis. In 2008, Italy promised to invest five billion United States dollars in Libya in return for tighter border controls. This came as part of their post-colonial Friendship Deal and was widely documented by the press (BBC World News 2010). However, the lack of rule of law following the deposition of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, meant that these agreements were nullified. Italian politicians however started promoting such deals in public discourse again, as a strategy to discourage mass migration. A series of EU member state efforts have been made to implement controversial and legally questionable measures to ensure the security of Libyan borders since the onset of fear around the implications of the so-called migration crisis in Europe in 2015. In 2017, Italy provided the militia-led Libyan coastguard with training and resources to keep migrant boats out of Italian – or EU – waters. Furthermore, Italy instituted controls barring non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from carrying out life-saving efforts at sea in the name of countering the rampant human smuggling trade (Cuttitta, 2018). Additionally, in 2017, the EU adopted the Malta Declaration to counteract smuggling through increased collaboration with Libya. This deal was only made with the UN-backed Libyan government which is not representative of Libya as a whole, and heavily favours border control over migrant safety.

As a result of these deals, migrants intending to travel to Europe to seek asylum are often retained in Libya where they cannot obtain a legal status. In Libya, migrant people are often detained in centres that have been likened to concentration camps, and from which reports and evidence of gross human rights violations have emerged (Philips, 2019). European policy is geared at the voluntary return of migrant people to their home countries from Libya, rather than at enabling asylum procedures.

INTERVIEWS AND METHODOLOGY

This article is based on several pieces of research. The Calais case study draws on six semi-structured interviews conducted by Dorothea Hilhorst and Maria Hagan with multiple aid workers on the questions guiding this study. In addition, this included another five months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out by Maria Hagan in 2017 and

2018, including extensive participant observation with several grassroots volunteer organizations working on the ground and 11 semi-structured interviews with humanitarian workers. The Lesbos case study is based on two sets of semi-structured interviews conducted by Dorothea Hilhorst in Lesbos: 18 interviews conducted shortly after the completion of the Turkey deal in 2016 and 11 interviews conducted in summer 2018.[1.] The Libya case study draws on remote research conducted by Olivia Quinn with actors based in Libya and others serving in Tunis during periods of staff evacuations. For security and logistical reasons, it was not possible to carry out fieldwork on the ground in Libya. Instead, interviews were carried out with humanitarian practitioners virtually. Because of her working knowledge of Arabic and landscape and fluency in English and French, Olivia Quinn was able to interview a variety of aid workers and organization representatives. This case study is based primarily on 13 semi-structured interviews with representatives of humanitarian agencies operating in Libya from June to March 2019, including two UN agencies and five INGOS.

Across the case studies, our semi-structured interviews were guided by a set of questions concerning 1) the humanitarian arena, so the roles of and relations between different types of humanitarian service providers; 2) the perceived effects of humanitarian service provision; 3) the challenges and problems that service providers encounter in their work; and 4) their ideas and actions about humanitarian advocacy to improve the conditions of migrant people in transit to or within Europe. Initial field reports by the authors were discussed to identify the main themes of analysis, which were then analysed for each case study by one of the authors. Team discussions of initial drafts have further sharpened the analysis, enabling a focused comparison of advocacy practices at each site.

This study departed from the observation that the humanitarian arenas that have emerged in response to the European 'migration crisis' at different sites are made up of an amalgam of different service providers. Governments, for example, play a central role, ranging from military and police action to legal-administrative procedures, providing services for shelter, health, and sometimes education. Among non-governmental actors, we can distinguish four categories: UN agencies, international humanitarian organizations, national social organizations, and volunteer humanitarian initiatives established in specific response to the 'European refugee crisis'. We carried out interviews with service providers representing each of these four categories, seeking an in-depth understanding of how the humanitarian arenas at each site operate, namely on advocacy.

CALAIS CASE STUDY

The port city of Calais, a controversial and heavily securitized bottleneck point of clandestine passage to the United Kingdom, is emblematic of migration in France. Migrants began to arrive at this border in increased numbers in the early 2000s. From 1999 to 2002, the French Red Cross operated a reception centre in Sangatte (Rigby and Schlembach 2013) through which an estimated 75,000 migrants passed (Walters 2008). This centre was closed in 2002, perceived by the British and French states as a magnet for migrants, after which people resorted to living in scattered settlements in and around Calais. These were known as 'jungles': makeshift encampments in wooded areas, between sand dunes, or on industrial wastelands. Living conditions were terrible, and, in the absence of state action, aid provision fell to local citizens' organizations who organized the distribution of food and clothing (Rigby and Schlembach 2013). In 2014, the French government designated a site 5 kilometres from Calais city centre as a tolerated space of informal encampment, which gave rise to the notorious 'Calais Jungle', a squalid makeshift camp that was home to an estimated 8,000 people by summer 2016. The camp spatialized the 'violent inaction' of the state towards migrant people at the border; their abandonment (Davies et al. 2017). From the beginning, the humanitarian system in the camp was developed and maintained in large part by informal actors: grassroots organizations which attracted thousands of volunteer humanitarians (Sandri, 2018) who came to help out in the settlement deprived of adequate shelter, sanitation and infrastructure. By summer 2015, conditions were so poor that Médecins du Monde took the highly political decision of deploying its emergency response programme on French soil, in partnership with the NGOs Secours Catholique Caritas France, Secours Islamique

France and Solidarités International (Secours Catholique Caritas France 2015). A Médecins du Monde employee described:

> For the first time in the history of Médecins du Monde, we deployed our emergency response pro-gramme on French soil, with all that emergency response implies in terms of financial investment, security, protocol, procedure... We usually only roll emergency programmes out in international situations like Yemen or Sudan [...] The decision was in part taken due to the political tensions sur-rounding Calais – everything that NGOs or civil society would do in Calais at that time came under international scrutiny. (Médecins du Monde employee).

International outcry at the camp led the French government to tear it down in October 2016, dispersing its inhabi-tants to *centres d'accueil et orientation* [welcome and orientation centres]. These people were promised that the Dublin regulation would not be applied to their cases and that their asylum requests would be processed in France. However, this one-off solution (which was only partly fulfilled) did not resolve the fundamental problem in Calais, where new-comers continued to arrive. These groups were either aware of the threat of relocation to their first country of EU entry according to the Dublin regulation, or were determined to reach the United Kingdom.

After the demolition of the camp, a 'zero point of fixation' policy was introduced: no new encampments at the border would be tolerated. This was enforced through intensive policing operations to routinely detect and de-stroy informal encampments (Hagan, 2020). This action was justified by the existence of a state accommodation system, failing to acknowledge the concerns of those who opted out of this protection because of legitimate fears of removal to their first country of entry (Tazzioli, 2020). Migrant people were criminalized, framed as resentful of the state asylum system, and humanitarian action was undermined. Calais became a vivid representation of how the Dublin regulation could work to deter and prevent some asylum seekers from accessing the institutions and services to which they were entitled.

Humanitarian arena

At the time of our research, three key groups of actors were involved in supporting migrants in northern France: French social and medical organizations, grassroots humanitarians, and international aid agencies. Here, we dis-cuss the humanitarian arena as we encountered it in Calais, especially the various organizations' positions on and strategies for advocacy.

After the 'Jungle' camp was demolished in late 2016, several French medical organizations continued their work on the ground: Médecins du Monde, Gynécologie Sans Frontières and the French Red Cross. However, the scattered settlements generated by zero-camp tolerance policies meant these organizations had to switch to offering mobile clinics along the French coast – a logistically complicated endeavour. Secours Catholique, a long-standing organization invested in migrant issues in Calais for decades, also continued its work. It enjoyed greater leverage compared with grassroots groups but saw its room for manoeuvre undercut. A volunteer describes: 'At the time of Sangatte, we were considered complementary to the action of the state and recognized by the local population. Now, we sense that we are unwelcome here'. In 2018, Secours Catholique operated a day centre set up in a private building in the city centre. Volunteers tended to be local, and many were personally invested, with some even hosting migrant youth in their homes.

Working in parallel with these organizations, grassroots volunteer groups were the most prominent actors offering assistance to migrants in Calais in 2017 and 2018. These were mostly informally trained British and French volunteers who worked to provide daily material and food aid. Several of these organizations worked collaboratively out of a warehouse run by the Auberge des Migrants. These groups were driven by the principles of solidarity and humanitarianism and 'learning by doing', creatively responding to a fast-changing on-the-ground

reality. A Help Refugees field officer explained, 'over 17,000 volunteers have come through the gates of this warehouse over the years, and warehouse operations are the contribution of all of those people's ideas'. By 2018, these organizations had begun to professionalize, building up more extended experience and knowledge of the field.

During the research, UNHCR was the only international aid agency present in Calais, with only one employee on the ground. The agency did not consider basic material and aid provision for migrants their responsibility. A UNHCR protection associate and field officer explained, 'I don't see it as a crisis. Most refugees go to countries in the region, so Europe is not a crisis'. Although this associate recognized the valuable services provided by grassroots organizations, she described the strategic reasons why UNHCR would not want to provide that aid themselves:

> We are in France, and this is why I really insist on the coordination role of UNHCR here. We really have to bring all of the actors who are *supposed* to provide these protections and services into the game. The state. Or when the state is not acting, the associations [...] You know, a humanitarian camp is in a *failed* country. You cannot have a humanitarian camp in a country that is capable of providing accommodation. (UNHCR representative).

Humanitarian relations in aid provision

As described above, over two decades, a shift occurred in state policy towards migrants – from humanitarianism (symbolized by the French Red Cross) towards greater securitization. This shift complicated the position of aid agencies, caught in the uncomfortable position of seeking to define their role within a system of governance hostile to the very provision of basic aid. It also affected their relations with other humanitarian actors.

These actors met and coordinated their work in weekly meetings, but differences in style continued to divide them. Traditional organizations like Secours Catholique played an interesting role, switching from collaboration with to keeping a certain distance from some of the grassroots organizations considered confrontational and unwilling to engage in dialogue with institutions. Beneath the dynamism of the volunteers lingered a certain continued resentment towards both the state and professional aid agencies. On this topic, a Help Refugees field officer said: 'Often, volunteers say 'We shouldn't even have to be here; where are the big aid organizations?'' However, the different agencies often tried to work together despite 'cultural differences', and the major gap was considered to be between the agencies and UNHCR.

Advocacy

Secours Catholique has long been active in advocacy for better living conditions and service provision for migrants, working collaboratively with other humanitarians:

> We get together with other organizations weekly to defend the rights of refugees, to work on advocacy. For example, we fought so that the state would provide access to showers for migrants. We collect information, facts, encourage people to file complaints when violence against them occurs, write reports of things we see for ourselves... These things can be useful for the Legal Shelter who try to legally defend these people. (Secours Catholique volunteer).

Whereas Secours Catholique's long-established pedigree ensured a certain cordiality in its relations with the municipality, grassroots organizations, by virtue of their informality, were less respected by state officials, but also faced fewer limitations on their voice and actions. The grassroots organizations emerged in direct response to the Calais

crisis and did not fear the potential repercussions of speaking out on other sites of activity, for example. They were thus able to take a confrontational approach, playing a leading role in bringing legal action against the state on human rights grounds, working on advocacy and human rights monitoring by documenting police violence and other misconduct (Auberge des Migrants 2018). Official complaints and court cases were pursued in reaction to police harassment of volunteers, violence against migrants, the destruction of personal property, and the lack of water and sanitation infrastructure. Grassroots organizations were outspoken in criticizing police violence and the failure to provide basic services for survival. Established NGOs such as Médecins du Monde also participated in this advocacy and documentation of misconduct, but they did so in a less confrontational way. Médecins du Monde is positioned between grassroots organizations and UNHCR, taking part in legal action while advocating for the state to fulfil its duty of care. Collaboration with Médecins du Monde was important for grassroots organizations because it lent them a certain legitimacy. Established French agencies focusing on health-related activities inhabited a less politicized role as primary aid providers. They were recognized by the state and communicated relatively easily with authorities. Working with grassroots organizations, these established agencies tried to encourage human rights organizations to visit the border zone and bear witness, successfully calling on the national ombudsman and international human rights observation organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. By contrast, the French Red Cross did very little work with other organizations on the ground, sticking to service delivery as opposed to advocacy.

UNHCR prioritized monitoring and advocacy work in France at this time, often relying on smaller organizations to facilitate their interactions with communities and appreciating these organizations' aid provision: 'because they are informal [organizations] they can be closer to persons of concern and more informed about their situations'. However, UNHCR also tended to frame grassroots groups as counterproductively hot-headed in their interactions with authorities or unprofessional in their management. Although UNHCR saw the Dublin regulation as largely responsible for the need for humanitarian assistance for migrants in Calais, it took a different approach: instead of openly criticizing political shortcomings and misconduct, UNHCR sought to work with state actors, national institutions, and other organizations, putting pressure on them to fulfil their responsibilities and find long-term solutions for the most vulnerable cases. For example, a UNHCR field officer we interviewed described often putting pressure on the state to use its discretion under an addendum of the Dublin agreement to admit asylum seekers in exceptional cases of vulnerability. UNHCR thus focused on advocating for admission of individual cases, rather than pushing for structural shifts. Many smaller, non-profit organizations perceived this as inadequate or insufficient behind-the-scenes advocacy work, and were frustrated by the agency's failure to, for example, publicly criticize police abuse of power and violence in Calais:

> You get to a certain point where it's *political*, and that's why they're not making statements about policies, the crisis of response in *policies* for dealing with this. How much do you want to rub the government the wrong way? We don't really mind doing that, but the UN does, and they're constantly tip-toeing on eggshells around everything. [...] But those statements are so important to us because at the end of the day *they're* the people who are being listened to. (Help Refugees field officer).

This frustration with UNHCR expressed by smaller organizations with less clout positioned the agency as an outsider on the ground. Because they engaged in behind-the-scenes advocacy with the state, UNHCR's intentions were unclear to the non-profit organizations, which tend to take pride in their own trustworthiness (Clear, Paull, Holloway, 2017; Helmut, 2014). Their trust in the agency undermined, they were often hesitant to collaborate or share information.

Overall, humanitarian actors in northern France broadly agreed that the main shortcomings in migration response lay with the French state and the EU, as illustrated by the problems with the Dublin regulation that were so visible on the ground. However, different actors' ways of combating these shortcomings varied. The landscape of humanitarian advocacy in Calais may best be described as a web in which each group of actors contributes according to the parameters of action available to them: pooling information and observations at weekly meetings,

employees/volunteers strategically overlap their spheres of action to push jointly identified key issues of concern; they then speak out as advocates – publicly or privately, depending on the issue and the nature of their organization. Crucially, the Calais case highlights how, in reaction to state neglect and violence against migrants, many humanitarian actors, whether employees or volunteers, came to collaborate closely and in ways that blur the identity boundaries between formal and informal humanitarian structures, keeping monitoring and advocacy work active.

Any frustrations mainly occurred in reaction to the more formal position of UNHCR, the sole international agency with a presence in Calais, which had limited scope of action. Whereas grassroots organizations and NGOs shared information and openly advocated for better protection of migrants, UNHCR stuck closely to parameters set by the agency's headquarters, engaging in less information-sharing and operating behind the scenes, focusing on case-specific advocacy to resolve individual, dire cases, with seemingly little scope for publicly denouncing broader state misconduct.

LESBOS CASE STUDY

Lesbos can be seen from the Turkish coast, and its proximity, at only 10 kilometres, makes it a main landing site for migrants. However, the short distance is deceptive: the sea can be very rough, and attempts at crossing have resulted in a high death toll. Arrivals to Lesbos have been ongoing for decades, and the local population has assisted newcomers in finding a way onward to other European countries, as few of those arriving aimed to ask for asylum in Greece. As a result of protracted conflict in Syria, migrant numbers began to rise, reaching a peak of 6,000 daily arrivals in 2015. Reception was initially mainly provided by the island population. This was soon followed by international volunteer initiatives, while state and international humanitarians were largely absent. By late 2015, there were an estimated 250 organizations and thousands of volunteers contributing to the humanitarian effort in Lesbos. The facilities for migrant reception were all operated by Greek actors, with a variety of humanitarian actors performing significant auxiliary roles.

In March 2016, the Turkey deal was signed and the Greek border with Macedonia was closed, leaving migrants effectively stuck in Greece with no choice but to request asylum there. Moria, the main reception centre in Lesbos, became a designated hotspot – an EU mechanism introduced to identify, fingerprint, and register incoming migrants, which has often been condemned as a euphemism for a detention centre (Vradis et al., 2019:8). Some of the main agencies that had previously been active in the Moria camp, including UNHCR and MSF, refused to work in this detention-like context, creating a humanitarian deadlock pending the implementation of more relaxed conditions for residents. Several months later, Moria residents were granted the freedom to leave the camp and travel around Lesbos, but they were still prevented from leaving the island, effectively making the hotspot a capture-and-circulation mechanism (Vradis et al., 2019:10). UNHCR considered this compromise satisfactory and returned to operate in Moria, whereas MSF provided support to migrants from outside the camp.

The humanitarian arena

Many actors were involved in the humanitarian arena in Lesbos, defying crude categorizations. The actors who made up this arena ranged from state authorities to UNHCR, international and national NGOs, international and national volunteer humanitarians, and island organizations known as 'solidarians' (loosely understood as agencies providing assistance out of solidarity) who were involved in activism pre-2015 following to the Greek financial crisis and its devastating repercussions on Greek society (Papataxiarchis, 2016; Rozakou, 2016; Cabot, 2019). The volume and roles of the different agencies changed over time. When the EU decided to channel its response solely through government actors in mid-2017, many NGOs and INGOs closed their programmes. The flow of international volunteers also began to wane, and the humanitarian arena shrank.

The hotspot in Moria continued to be the main reception area for refugees in Lesbos. Originally designed to host 700 people and considered adequate for a maximum of 3,000, actual residence reached 8,000 in 2018 and camp conditions were terrible. People lived in cramped, partitioned spaces with poor hygiene and sanitation facilities, and insecurity was a constant concern. Such an inhumane environment heavily affected the mental health of residents and of many humanitarians seeking to assist them (Eleftherakos et al., 2018). The hotspot was too crowded to allow space for schools or other services. This was exacerbated by the argument that residents' stay was supposed to be brief; each arrival was meant to be quickly processed and either registered for asylum on the mainland or returned to Turkey. In reality, residency in Moria often lasted up to two years (UNHCR 2019). Although most migrants should have been eligible to move to the mainland on vulnerability criteria, thresholds were much higher in practice, and asylum procedures were restricted to people in states of 'extreme vulnerability'.

In 2017, Moria was overseen by the central government, with the military playing a large role in food distribution, for instance, and KEELPNO (a government agency) taking responsibility for medical and pharmaceutical care provision. UNHCR took on an advisory role, and its actual activities were poorly understood by the humanitarian community on the island. Several research participants expressed concern at the involvement of Eurorelief, an American Christian volunteer group, in the core management of the hotspot. Eurorelief volunteers were young people who came to Moria to help out for a few weeks, but they were given authority to make major camp procedure decisions, including where new arrivals would be placed. A number of agencies, including MSF, which operated a mental health support programme, maintained offices just outside the camp. Spillover from Moria had led to the emergence of a spontaneous tent settlement known as the Olive Grove, where several agencies provided further services including paying rent for and terracing the land.

In contrast to Moria, Kara Tepe was considered a 'model camp run by the municipality of Lesbos in cooperation with humanitarian agencies' (Rozakou, 2017). In the spirit of Greek hospitality, this camp's management chose to refer to residents as 'guests' instead of 'refugees'. There were many agencies operating inside the camp, including professional humanitarians who had evolved from volunteer initiatives begun in 2015. Although the camp continued to receive help from international volunteers, the camp manager explained they were now more selective, only accepting volunteers 'with special skills, such as a student delegation that organizes a solar panel system'. Kara Tepe received refugees based on referral. As the manager continued to explain, 'In 2016, it was different and we accepted everybody. Turning people away breaks my heart, but it's the only way to force the [central] government to address the situation in Moria'. The latter remark points to the dilemma involved in the reception of migrant people. In order to maintain standards in service delivery, the number of people serviced needs to match the resources. This works out differently in Moria, where numbers have vastly outgrown the available space and resources, and where political solutions are needed to expand reception centre capacity.

Pikpa was a small-scale facility that was in every way the opposite of Moria. Located in an abandoned summer camp near the beach and initiated by local organization Lesbos Solidarity as an alternative to Moria, Pikpa was grounded in an ethics of solidarity and sought 'egalitarian and lateral relations' with residents (Rozakou, 2017). In 2018, the initiative was expanded with a refugee-run restaurant in the city. Limited by municipality rulings, resources, and neighbourhood resentment, Pikpa also had to compromise on its value of unconditional solidarity and be strict regarding admissions, only accepting people in need of special care, who were usually referred by UNHCR. Pikpa operated under the constant threat of closure, partly because of pressure from surrounding hotels.

Humanitarian relations in aid provision

At the height of arrivals in 2015, relationships of care were highly antagonistic. When the government finally stepped in, it criminalized care, making it illegal to transport refugees, a crucial service that had to be performed by 'sanctioned humanitarians' (Alexandrakis, 2019) such as UNHCR. After some initial arrests, protests and court action succeeded in turning this around, but it set the tone and underscored the hierarchy between different

strands of humanitarians. Tensions continued to play a role in the relations between 'solidarians' and international humanitarian agencies, especially regarding different styles of aid delivery and what solidarians considered the arrogance of official humanitarians.

Compared with the first days of chaos and improvisation, the reception of migrants in Lesbos had to some extent become routine by 2018. All actors came together for weekly coordination meetings. Many strands of collaboration had emerged, with coordination and respect binding different categories of actors together, resulting in overlapping networks rather than response silos. Volunteer organizations were professionalizing and occasionally managed to obtain funding, training or material support from larger agencies. Many staff members at humanitarian organizations on the island had started out as volunteers, and some agency staff members even volunteered with activist organizations.

Nonetheless, the situation remained deeply unsettled in many ways. Most unsettling was the continuous growth in numbers of arrivals. This also affected some agency staff members mentally (Sifaki-Pistolla et al., 2017), who found working in Lesbos more strenuous than working in war-affected areas. One participant from MSF said, 'The situation in Moria is so bad, and it is depressing to treat people and then have to send them back into the camp'. The reality of witnessing immense and large-scale suffering on a European island where tourists frequently vacation took its toll, and, as another participant from the same agency said, 'I preferred working in my previous job in Yemen where at least I knew what the situation was like'.

Advocacy

The spirit of advocacy on Lesbos changed from 2016 to 2018. In 2016, agencies focused on scrutinizing European policies, seeking to influence the recently signed Turkey deal and protect migrants in Greece. By 2018, agencies had mainly turned their advocacy to local level, seeking improvement to everyday living conditions for migrant people on the island. The manager of Kara Tepe, who was very vocal on European platforms in 2016, explained this shift: 'Aaah, EU politics, I stop caring. I cannot think about them anymore. I just try to focus on the community here'. Similarly a humanitarian stated, 'At the second anniversary of the Turkey deal, we thought, 'Why would we do something? Our messages are the same and nobody listens.' Instead, we focus on achievable goals, just here'.

The main lobbying target was local government, with the goal of improving KEELPNO's performance and advocating for additional camp facilities to reduce pressure on the hotspot. A second lobbying target was UNHCR, which appeared to be set apart from the rest of the humanitarian community. The UNHCR office had no signage and was quite hidden in the city. As observed in Calais, the agency was considered to fall short in terms of speaking out for migrants and those helping them. Attempts to influence UNHCR were mainly made during weekly coordination meetings.

The different actors continued to engage quite separately in advocacy activities. For example, when the EU decided to channel all funding for migration through the Greek government, 14 agencies engaged in lobbying work suggested a roadmap for the transition. Eleven of these were INGOs, including only two Greek humanitarian agencies and one human rights organization. It is unclear whether this was a deliberate strategy or a reflection of divisions within the humanitarian community.

Relations on advocacy became more strained when the political situation became more volatile in 2018. After years of facing the consequences of thousands of migrants going without proper accommodation on the island, solidarity from the local population dwindled. Just before the fieldwork for this study, the mayor of Moria went on a hunger strike to alert authorities to the nuisances and disruptions brought to the island by these migrants. The atmosphere on the island was shifting, and a group of hotspot residents had just been attacked and beaten by a group of right-wing populists. The complex political situation resulted in heightened tensions among humanitarians. International humanitarian agencies, especially UNHCR, were criticized by many solidarians and humanitarian staff members for not speaking out publicly to condemn the violent attacks on refugees and for their failure to openly side with Pikpa when the camp was threatened with court cases.

Humanitarian relations and advocacy on Lesbos have clearly changed over time. Whereas relations were initially strained, collaboration and coordination around and across the main migrant facilities increased and organizations fell into a routine, with different types of agencies adopting some of each other's approaches, partly because of the circulation of staff between the different types of organizations. Advocacy, however, remained rather siloed, with UNHCR operating in a rather invisible way, established agencies focusing on concrete advocacy issues, and some Greek 'solidarian' organizations contending with increasing resistance from the local population against migrants and the humanitarian spaces they occupy. These Greek organizations were disappointed by the lack of support from international agencies in terms of defending their humanitarian space.

LIBYA CASE STUDY

At the time of the research (2019), Libya had an estimated population of 6.6 million people, which included well over half a million migrants (Libya Humanitarian Response Plan 2018). Hundreds of thousands of people across the country were suffering, including high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with 823,000 to 1.3 million people needing humanitarian assistance (Libya Humanitarian Response Plan, 2018). Libya has a history of attracting migrants, with many seeking employment during the height of the Libyan economic oil boom and others using the country as a transit hub on crossing into Europe via Italy. Italy.

Since the Libyan revolution in 2011, the country has been in a state of constant crisis. Starting in 2014 with Islamist groups' unsuccessful attempt to take over the elected government, militias have fought for control, with many seeking to become the recognized government of Libya (Reitano and Shaw 2017). Importantly, no single authority can be referred to as the Libyan state. For humanitarians working on migrant response, this can mean aligning with a militia or working within a specific holding centre. Migrants and IDPs transiting through the country often get trapped in Libya and are in urgent need of almost every kind of humanitarian assistance. A recent International Rescue Committee report reveals the conditions, human rights violations and lack of legal status for migrants and asylum seekers in the country (Philips, 2019).

Humanitarian arena

Compared with Calais and Lesbos, Libya represents a more 'classic' humanitarian crisis, considering the lack of rule of law, warring factions, internal displacement and migrant flows. We selected Libya for analysis because, like Calais and Lesbos, Libya is an important case study for examining the challenges and trade-offs that established humanitarian workers face in conducting advocacy (locally, within the humanitarian sphere, and with European policymakers and funders). The humanitarian arena in Libya is very different from the other cases, less ground-level, more agency-led and, considering the vast area of interventions, more scattered. A major dilemma aid workers faced is that they refer to humanitarian principles in their in-country advocacy, yet simultaneously consider European migration policy and response as being at odds with the humanitarian principles.

Humanitarian relations

Humanitarian collaboration in Libya is disjointed at best and partly mirrors the political divisions in the country, as organizations 'claim' areas of land or cater exclusively to specific populations. Humanitarian action in this context, especially in relation to migrant response, is centred on UN agencies and INGOs, which are mainly led by non-Libyans and often non-Arabs. A consortium for humanitarian action in Libya is based in Tunis where regular meetings were held to discuss policy, approach, planning and advocacy, with a high degree of UN input.

Practitioners consistently highlighted that this humanitarian planning for migrant response in Tunis led to unified policies, whereas the actual implementation in Libya is fragmented, and organizations are at times protective and territorial. Moreover, organizations working in Libya take polarized stances regarding the ethics of operating in the country and thus directly or indirectly support the detention regime and its inhumane conditions.

Advocacy

The focus of advocacy in Libya was very diverse in terms of the scope, target and types of actors involved. A Libyan humanitarian advocate and security researcher made the following comment:

> Refugees are a result of war and conflict. I think advocacy discourse has lost sight of that in the Libyan context. The best way to resolve a refugee crisis, ultimately, is to pay attention to conflict resolution. And I feel conflict resolution, when it comes to refugee advocacy, is really on the back burner now. (Humanitarian Think Tank).

This view touched on issues around whether aid should differentiate between migrants and Libyans but went a step further, referring to one of the root causes driving the migration crisis. Whether working within the migration regime or serving migrants outside centres across Libya, conducting principled advocacy for migration issues both within Libya and towards regional and global players, presented a series of politically and morally fraught challenges.

With regard to migrants, advocacy targeted at international governments and aid organizations has been complex in terms of the direct and indirect implications of funding detention regimes and addressing what EU governments/groups stand to gain from containing the flow of migrants into Europe. A research participant from the Danish Refugee Council stated how this organization struggled with the trade-offs between transparency in advocacy for funding and the implications on Libyan politics. The International Rescue Committee, UNHCR and their peers, have conducted a degree of advocacy focused on opening up more legal pathways for migrants to seek asylum in Europe. Some participants voiced concern about an international attitude that Libya should use its oil money both to fix its migrant response and to rebuild its civil society. These participants felt that this attitude was completely unrealistic considering the absence of rule of law, and hence served as a poor excuse for the EU's lack of responsiveness. The advocacy efforts towards the EU have mainly fallen on deaf ears, with the EU instead prioritising the voluntary return of migrants to their countries of origin, leaving individuals and organizations with the dilemma of whether to assist in this process. An interviewee from UNHCR commented on dichotomy, saying:

> We need to do a lot more work as UNHCR in generating collaborative civil society in Europe and in our the MENA region, where we can build on common advocacy messages and design campaigns that appeal to both. We need advocacy that is targeting actors in this region [Middle East and North Africa], and of course our colleagues on the other side of the Mediterranean do the same for their own audience. A very powerful way to influence the dynamic overall is to have something that is a collaborative effort overall, and I think civil society in Europe is influential and strong and has that possibility; it's one of the few places in the world where you can have an influence and you can change direction and you can shift policy in a particular way. (UNHCR representative).

European policy around containment rendered humanitarian assistance for returning migrants highly political, further complicating the positioning of advocacy versus implementing services that run counter to humanitarian principles. A research participant at IOM touched on the topic of well-funded return operations. This agency provided financial incentive packages to encourage migrants, predominantly from sub-Saharan Africa, to return to their countries of origin. Although this could be legitimated in terms of decreasing overcrowding in detention centres and providing

a pathway out of the poor conditions in Libya, there remain troubling implications around humanitarian principles regarding paying migrants to return home and whether this can be deemed truly voluntary. This brand of 'aid' could be seen as prioritising EU border security over the actual well-being or rights of migrants to apply for asylum. Despite technically coming under the auspices of humanitarian funding, such programmes beg important questions on the choices humanitarian practitioners make when squeezed between EU border securitization and competing factions on the ground.

The primary target for advocacy in terms of permission to operate, however, remained the Libyan authorities, and the interviewees touched on how complicated this is compared with advocacy in Europe. In Libya, these humanitarians are operating in a country that is not part of the Convention on Refugees, that lacks a unified functioning government, and does not have a clear or publicly available set of legal standards for migrant reception, processing and relocation. Concepts like asylum, responsibility-sharing and family reunification, which frame advocacy in Europe, are largely meaningless in the current Libyan setting.

Another complicated question regarding advocacy was to what extent agencies should speak for migrants as a separate category. A Danish Demining Group (DDG) employee commented: 'Every time we write proposals and ask for money, we don't segregate who our beneficiaries are. Of course, we segregate in terms of sex, gender, age and all that because it is logical, but we don't care if it's a Libyan or a foreigner; this has to be for everyone'. In the Libyan context, humanitarians who focused on migrants also faced domestic hurdles because advocating towards any one faction grants political legitimacy to a non-elected entity. Humanitarian action for migrants was further complicated, if not compromised, by the deals that organizations and individuals are often confronted with when seeking to gain access to beneficiaries. Interestingly, service delivery around demining and explosive clearing played a role here, as these desired services extended legitimacy to the humanitarians and opened doors for dialogue and access to local leaders. Although most participants did not mention specific trade-offs, they expressed being unable to calculate whether their efforts were achieving net good for the refugee response, or implicitly supporting and condoning armed or political groups.

A final advocacy-related issue concerned transparency. Detention centres and other migrant facilities were run by various local groups and conceivably received a significant amount of international funding. In terms of actual funding lines and transparency, the participants – especially those from UN agencies – were understandably tentative about discussing the gaps in tracking humanitarian funding, including how much (if any) ends up funding detention centres, smugglers and political factions. One interviewee noted that it would be economically naïve to assume that humanitarian funding does not, even indirectly, leak into all areas in Libya, including arms, illicit trade and questionable border control. Humanitarian, researcher and media advocacy for more stringent funding tracking had not resulted in changes on the ground.

In sum, aid workers in Libya highlighted the nuanced advocacy approaches associated with humanitarian diplomacy; they carefully navigated restrictions imposed by authorities to provide services to assist vulnerable Libyans and migrants alike. However, this was done with reservations about the unhumanitarian nature of EU policies, compounded by their own perceived lack of influence over policy making itself. Humanitarians working in Libya cited a growing challenge of their headquarters moving away from the humanitarian principles, leaving aid workers themselves to struggle with questions concerning the role of the individual in carrying out these principles in the field.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The point of departure for this article was the observation that the humanitarian crises at key migration pressure points within and on the fringes of Europe – in Calais, Lesbos and Libya – are profoundly political. This is exacerbated by EU policies on migration management where deterrence plays a key role, namely the Dublin regulation, the Turkey deal and the border deals with Libya. Drawing on interviews with a broad range of humanitarian actors

working with migrants, we have explored and analysed how somewhat improvised responses to the so-called migration crisis at these sites have brought about a new and complex sphere of humanitarian action, prompting a reshuffling of the humanitarian arena for service provision and advocacy. The high visibility of the pressure points we selected as case studies to EU populations, through mass media coverage and their use in political campaigning, made them of immediate concern to citizens and many types of local NGO, as well as to social welfare organizations and humanitarian agencies headquartered in but operating outside of the European continent. In the encounters and negotiations between these different actors, we glimpse productive advocacy at each site. Although the interactions range from harmonious to grating, they are profoundly political. Frictions in seeking to collaborate or coexist invite structural reflections and reconsiderations of what contemporary humanitarian landscapes look like and how they should operate.

Humanitarian relations

To understand different humanitarian advocacy practices, it was essential to establish who the humanitarians were and how their relations evolved at each of the selected pressure points. The concept of 'the humanitarian' defies simple categorization. Especially in Lesbos and Calais, agencies with different pedigrees operate alongside one another, with different mandates, possibilities and parameters for action. Although agency representatives may be critical of one another's priorities, modes of operation and strategies, a certain level of everyday complementarity and collaboration persists, cobbling together a more or less operational humanitarian arena. In both Calais and Lesbos, organizations and agencies refer aid recipients to each other where appropriate. In Libya, the humanitarian landscape consists of UN agencies and INGOs, with little documentation on volunteer efforts or the engagement of Libyan community-based organizations. Despite the existence of a consortium for humanitarian action in Libya meeting in Tunis, organizations on the ground are dispersed both geographically and, in many cases, according to political affiliation.

The distinction between volunteers and NGO workers is more fluid in Calais and Lesbos than we had anticipated on the basis of existing literature; for example, overlap and the circulation of actors between various types of humanitarian structures are fairly common. Because of the fast-changing dynamics at these pressure points, social capital harboured by less formal actors is essential for keeping track of developments at a given site and of recipients' core needs, informing the advocacy agenda (Clear, Paull & Holloway, 2018). This social capital means that individual, long-term volunteers are often invited to sit in on and take part in strategic NGO or agency meetings – and even local or regional government meetings – because of their intimate knowledge of the terrain of action. Some even gain employment with the NGOs they were previously working alongside, subsequently bringing a certain vision and strategy to that NGO. This can in turn influence their approach, reworking traditional boundaries between the two forms of humanitarian structures.

Advocacy

Relations between volunteer organizations and established agencies in Calais and Lesbos ranged from respect to collaboration to critique, and differences were visible in their advocacy practices. However, this article has highlighted how the advocacy efforts of these organizations overlap at the migration pressure points; often in chaotic contexts co-created by bodies of EU policy. This emphasizes the value and importance of studying advocacy as it is forged and negotiated within a humanitarian arena itself, rather than studying humanitarian actors' advocacy efforts in isolation. In all three contexts, humanitarians felt disempowered – and often frustrated – in addressing the European policies that created many of the problems they encountered in their work. In Libya, humanitarians had to manoeuvre carefully to be able to support migrants at all, and they reluctantly lent their often-disjointed

services to migrants in detention or repatriation programmes. They viewed their work as a pragmatic choice, usually working independently from other agencies to relieve suffering created by political forces they felt they could not change or, in many cases, even navigate. While some felt abandoned by their headquarters' lack of guidance on how to conduct principled action in these conditions, this remained an individual experience and did not, for many reasons, result in joint action towards the aid establishment. In Lesbos and Calais, advocacy efforts were mainly geared towards achieving tangible improvements in the everyday lives of migrants, such as the provision of shelter and access to showers. A sense of disempowerment adversely affected the motivation of humanitarian workers in each of the contexts. It was for many a source of stress that individual aid workers coped with by focusing on practical issues and achievable improvements.

Key differences in advocacy concerned insider/negotiating vs. outsider/confrontational strategies. In Calais and Lesbos, a continuum was apparent, ranging from volunteers in Calais and local solidarians in Lesbos who adopted 'confrontational tactical positions' (Clear et al 2018:861). Whereas more traditional and humanitarian agencies tended to adopt 'cooperative tactical positions' (ibid: 860), characterized by dialogue-oriented approaches or an 'insider tactical position' (ibid: 861), as illustrated in the invisible, behind-the-scenes diplomacy of UNHCR. In both settings, antagonism towards UNHCR's approach was particularly pronounced. At the level of international advocacy, UNHCR promotes the protection of humanitarian subjects and humanitarian space where agencies can provide services in a principled, needs-based way. The agency is, for example, highly critical of the criminalization of rescue at sea. However, the nature and expression of such criticisms by UNHCR at the local level are quite different, as our case studies demonstrate.

The selected case studies reveal that UNHCR is implicit in processes through which only the extremely vulnerable are protected. In Calais, the agency presence consisted of a single staff member charged mainly with advocacy work on individual cases of extreme vulnerability. Similarly, in Lesbos, the agency ceded to an erosion of vulnerability criteria that effectively excluded many migrants from protection, while keeping them in Moria for prolonged periods. By working with narrow definitions of vulnerability and within the confines of the Dublin regulation and the Turkey agreement, UNHCR can be seen as contributing to a politics of abandonment by leaving it to other agencies and volunteers to speak up for and address the humanitarian needs of large parts of the migrant population. This was exacerbated by the fact that UNHCR was not seen to speak out on behalf of fellow service providers such as volunteers experiencing police brutality, welfare agencies that were denied permission to offer shower facilities to migrants in Calais, or the organizations running Pikpa camp when it was threatened with closure; hence UNHCR was seen as failing to – visibly and outspokenly – protect humanitarian space.

As a result, many service providers from other organizations felt abandoned by the UN establishment and were disillusioned with their inability to act or have an impact at their sites. Volunteer agencies in Calais and Lesbos felt they were more successful in mobilizing the support of human rights agencies like Amnesty International or national ombudsmen to protest against intrusions into humanitarian space, than they were in mobilizing the very humanitarian agencies who symbolize and have the greatest stake in the humanitarian space.

In Libya, advocacy was more complex in that it was necessary for operations, requiring individuals and organizations to align and work with varying political factions. Service providers did not feel abandoned by the UN as they did at our other two sites, but they raised concerns regarding the involvement of UN and INGO headquarters in advocacy and in guiding the discussion of what this meant for aid workers on the ground.

Discussion

Since the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the humanitarian community has aimed to take humanitarian advocacy more seriously, work towards the localization of aid, and better bridge the nexus of peacebuilding and development. The findings presented in this paper have significant implications for established humanitarian agencies and approaches to advocacy. Called upon and challenged by new humanitarian groups – volunteers,

social agencies, and other civil society actors – the conventional roles of large agencies are often revealed to fall short, inviting reassessment. Focusing on advocacy, our findings call on international humanitarians to rethink their advocacy strategies and consider the extent to which advocacy could become more 'web-based'; whereby the complementarity of different forms of advocacy might enable more fruitful collaboration between different actors in the humanitarian arena.

The situations observed in Calais and Lesbos can be seen as evolving models of such web-based complementarity in advocacy. In these areas, we found that agencies had formed an 'advocacy web' in which each group of actors contributes according to the parameters of action available to them, speaking out publicly or privately depending on the issue and nature of their organization. Similarly, in Libya, research participants expressed the need for more complementary advocacy, and some expected their headquarters to become more proactive in this domain. The dynamism of the advocacy landscape revealed by the case studies in Calais and Lesbos demonstrates the increasing importance of strategic collaborations between humanitarian actors of different types, highlighted by how a variety of actors – professional and grassroots – were attracted to migration pressure points, where they found themselves engaging in an unanticipated yet fruitful conversation.

Our findings raise four main points in relation to humanitarian advocacy moving forward.

First, to what extent can humanitarians advocate for policy changes when those policies themselves contribute to generating or exacerbating human suffering? Should agencies adopt a more explicit and robust political approach beyond the humanitarian principles and seek to influence European policy and the European public, as argued by Scott-Smith (2016) and others? European policies that deal with migration and the criminalization of humanitarians restrict the space for principled humanitarian action. Humanitarians fearing to step beyond their boundaries and beyond principled humanitarian diplomacy may need to reassess which humanitarian principles they truly stand for. The core principle of humanity – the desire to relieve suffering and protect dignity – may fruitfully be invoked to criticize policies without undue politicization. Moreover, the question of whether behind-the-scenes humanitarian diplomacy is always preferable to overt and confrontational strategies may need to be reconsidered. MSF, one of the main humanitarian agencies, has proven for decades that open advocacy, which the organization refers to as 'witnessing', can be appropriate and effective for humanitarian diplomacy.

Second, agencies must consider their role in the enlarged humanitarian arena, where assistance and advocacy for people in need are carried out by many actors in addition to established agencies, including local agencies and organizations with different pedigrees, such as human rights organizations. For migration in and around Europe, humanitarians and human rights advocacy messages largely overlap, but different agencies continue to operate in their own spheres, raising the question of the conditions under which it would be more effective to join forces.

Third, our findings call for reflection on the question of whether the humanitarian community should become more protective of humanitarian space. The humanitarian community recognizes that many, often local, service providers constitute a humanitarian arena at a given site and extend humanitarian assistance. Should humanitarian agencies speak out more for service providers experiencing hindrances or even brutality? Should humanitarian agencies more explicitly acknowledge the interrelation between different strands of humanitarian actors within a given arena, using their influence to speak out for the protection of humanitarian space and stand in solidarity with other service providers?

Finally, if humanitarian agencies were to reform their advocacy policies, this might contribute to bridging the gap between fieldworkers and headquarters, and to restore a sense of purpose to these agencies' staff in the field. Providing more space for advocacy may be important for humanitarians who feel disempowered in situations where they are confronted with the humanitarian consequences of policies, but feel their critical voices are not heard.

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ENDNOTE

1. The research in Lesbos was carried out with the assistance of Iana Hilhorst.

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