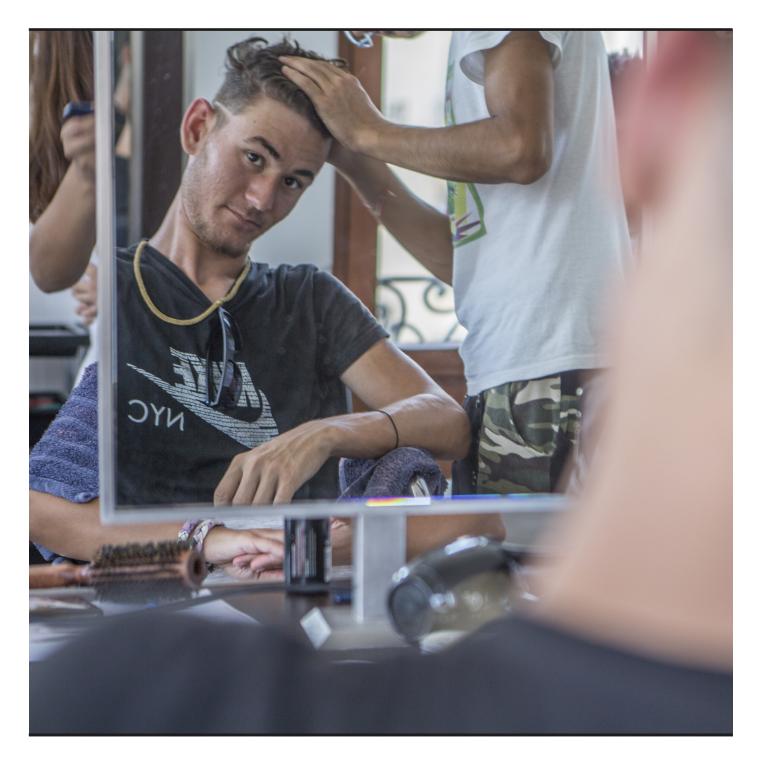# the
Humanitarian Leader

The 'New Humanitarians': Vernacular aid in Greece

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THE HUMANITARIAN LEADER:
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Acknowledgements

Editorial Office

The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.

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Cover image: A young refugee learns hairdressing in Greece in 2017. He was one of more than 62,300 people stranded in the country at that time © Anna Pantelia / Save the Children

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Abstract

Since 2015, the 'refugee crisis' in Greece has turned the Eastern Mediterranean migration route into one of the main entry points to Europe. In response, a grassroots solidarity movement has emerged in the Aegean islands that has become instrumental for boat-rescue at sea, and for camp service provision. These local and international volunteers, as well as refugees, identify as 'New Humanitarians'. This paper presents the emic aspects of the 'New Humanitarians', and focuses on vernacular actors and how they challenge the humanitarian landscape in Greece by examining their principles, practices, and discourse.

A key finding is that the 'New Humanitarian' principles that they model revisit the existing ones—i.e. solidarity, hospitality, equality, and agency. Other findings show that the 'New Humanitarians' are reproducing governing technologies imposed by the government and other agencies. They do so while trying to contest mainstream humanitarianism and pleading for much-needed change in the European border regime and refugee management systems.

Leadership relevance

The solidarity movement in Greece and the vernacular actors who participated in this research teach the reader about agency and innovative solutions for service provision. In addition, the discourse and practices of those activists showcase how humanitarians can create more inclusive environments and a hands-on way of working. It lies in their lived experiences as refugees and NGO founders, but also as first and primary responders in the field.

Introduction

The movement of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle and Near East has increased significantly since 2015. Over 800,000 people have passed through the Eastern Mediterranean migration routes, crossed the Aegean Sea from Turkey, and travelled through Greece enroute to Europe. About 90% of arrivals come from the world's top refugee-producing countries—namely Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Other nations represented include Iran, Pakistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (International Medical Corps, 2016).

Since the European Union (EU)-Turkey Deal in March 2016 and the closure of European borders, thousands of asylum seekers have been stranded on five Greek islands: Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros, and Kos. The islands functioned as detention centres, since geographic restrictions applied upon arrival, and people were unable to continue their journey until their asylum applications were handled, a process that previously took a few years (Save the Children, 2017).

There has been a movement of refugees to Greece for several decades, however the 'crisis' that started in 2015 was a turning point, with the emergence of the solidarity movement and the beginning of a new field of research and interest (Cabot, 2019; Papataxiarchis, 2016). As Rozakou wrote (2017, p. 102-103): "Lesvos became the focal point of reconfigurations of humanitarianism and the emergence of vernacular humanitarianisms".

The emergency in Greece was comprised of two crises (Cabot, 2019)—the refugee flow and the economic recession, which posed challenges to the host community, local authorities, and aid agencies. Rozakou (2017) criticised calling the refugee flow a 'crisis', since the movement to Europe through Greece was relatively new and incomparable with other refugee-hosting countries in Asia, Africa or the Middle East.

The response to the 'refugee crisis' consists of traditional actors such as United Nations (UN) and aid organisations, yet informal grassroots groups and independent volunteers served and continue to serve as key responders in boat rescues, food distribution, and the provision of non-food Items. This solidarity movement is distinct from the humanitarian world—it is anti-hierarchical, anti-bureaucratic, and managed according to cultural traits. Members of this movement identify as 'New Humanitarians'.

The 'New Humanitarians' include the local community who took part in the response before the establishment of camps, and whose moral imperative to assist people in need is hospitality, which is part of their culture, tradition, and DNA. Cabot (2019) called this form of aid "Humanitarian Citizenship", whereby common people support both locals and refugees in need. The second group of 'New Humanitarians' is made up of local and international volunteers, known by scholars as 'Solidarians' (Papataxiarchis, 2016; Rozakou, 2017). The third is refugee-led NGOs and associations. The last group is not mentioned in the literature about the 'refugee crisis' or the Solidarity Movement.

This paper's objectives are twofold: to portray the 'New Humanitarians' in Greece, and to rethink the humanitarian principles and humanitarianism. The main question is this—how do the 'New Humanitarians' challenge the humanitarian landscape in Greece? In order to unpack the dynamics and tensions that are created by vernacular aid vis-à-vis professional humanitarians, I will focus on the principles that guide the 'New Humanitarians' in their everyday practices—solidarity, hospitality, equality, and agency—and the ways in which those values shape the response.

The main question is this—how do the 'New Humanitarians' challenge the humanitarian landscape in Greece?

The findings show that the 'New Humanitarias' are reconfiguring humanitarianism to a certain extent, without completely changing the power structures of the aid world. They operate in sites of transnational governmentality (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002) that were created by the Greek authorities in accordance with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and adhere to policies and refugee management frameworks. Despite rejecting the power and governance of the UN and the local systems, and developing 'New Humanitarian' principles, they reproduce governing technologies, by having to work in "refugee-scapes" (Papataxiarchis, 2016). This situation creates unique dynamics—contesting power structures but also being limited by them.

Methodology

This qualitative research included participant observation, in-depth interviews with different actors in Lesvos and in Athens, and informal conversations that reveal the ethos and practices of the 'New Humanitarians'. Papataxiarchis (2016) emphasised the importance of being 'there' in a specific moment in history for the solidarity movement, and I was able to take part in this response and examine it from an anthropological prism as a humanitarian practitioner.

I spent four different periods of time in Greece. I arrived in Lesvos for the first time in April 2017, as Head of Mission. I later went to Greece as an independent volunteer in October 2017, to work with a search and rescue initiative and spent many 'night shifts' boat-spotting on the southern shore of Lesvos. In 2019, I spent three months in Athens, helping out with food distribution for homeless refugees, and shadowed an Iranian refugee and activist who formed his own initiative. I returned to Greece as a researcher in January 2020 to conduct fieldwork and formal interviews with informants I have met during my previous stays—people on the move from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, Greek camp managers, and one of the Directors of the Christian organisation EuroRelief.

To amplify the informants' voices, I chose to adopt the terminology used by the 'New Humanitarians'—an almost Pidgin English dialect which was widely understood by 'Solidarians'. For example, I refer to Lesbos island as Lesvos, and I prefer the terms 'people on the move' or 'refugees', rather than the words 'irregular migrants', or 'people of concern', commonly used by UNHCR.

Humanity and refugee-inclusion

Feldman and Ticktin (2010) argue that the emergence of sentiment is the core of humanitarianism—caring about the suffering of others. This tendency shifted the physical existence of a 'human' to a 'humane' ethical subject. Moral sentiments make us act and help people in need whether they are close to us—the poor, the immigrant, or the homeless—or far from us—those affected by famine, epidemics or war (Fassin, 2012). It is action in the name of a shared humanity and its goal is to assist all human beings regardless of race, class, religion, and ideology. This assistance is provided where and whenever people are perceived as needing help (Fassin, 2010).

In 2015, austerity-ridden Greece's own local population was in need of assistance—not only its refugees.

Humanitarianism is a discourse of needs which focuses on saving lives and has three signifiers: help beyond borders, transnational action as contributing to the greater good, and governance of activities aimed at improving the health and welfare of others who are perceived as incapable of helping themselves (Barnett, 2011). It is the latter description that the 'New Humanitarians' have contested. Cabot (2016a) describes how in 2015, austerity-ridden Greece's own

local population was in need of assistance—not only its refugees. According to her, the situation in Greece was challenging the idea of who receives aid and who provides it. In this research, the 'New Humanitarians' reconfigured helplessness when refugees took the lead and helped themselves while serving others.

Vernacular Humanitarianisms

Brković (2017) coined the term "Vernacular Humanitarianism" for humanitarian aid provided by diverse local actors according to their specific ideas of humanity and humanism, as a reaction to emerging needs that were not sufficiently addressed by the big aid agencies. Vernacular aid has three features: it considers the local histories and traditions that create different types of local responses (as opposed to the Christian European narrative); it can be chaotic, improvised and uncoordinated (as indeed the international agencies' work often is), and it is based on a universal notion of humanity, despite being local (Brković, 2017).

Those characteristics are reflected through 'New Humanitarian' principles—solidarity, hospitality, equality, and agency. Vernacular humanitarianisms have been differently labelled by various scholars; for example, "Solidarity Humanitarianism" (Rozakou, 2017), "Volunteer Humanitarianism" (Sandri, 2017), "Humanitarian Citizenship" (Cabot, 2019), and "Citizen and Grassroots Aid" (Fechter & Schwittay, 2019).

What is similar in these concepts is that the volunteers do not necessarily have the skills to address refugees' needs (McGee & Pelham, 2018; Sandri, 2017). In addition, grassroots NGOs are privately funded, and the response is made close to home, which allows locals to connect to the suffering of not-so-distant 'others' (Fechter & Schwittay, 2019; Sandri, 2017). Moreover, although the motivation to help was not inspired by political activism, volunteers engaged in campaigns calling for a change in asylum policies and treating refugees in a more humane manner (Sandri, 2017).

The difference between these researchers is the definition of who is the 'Humanitarian', and the setting in which 'Volunteering Culture' has emerged (Tsoni, 2016). In Greece, due to the absence of the State and the inefficient response of the UNHCR (Rozakou, 2017; Tsoni, 2016), immediate humanitarian assistance was carried out entirely by volunteers despite the improvisational nature of their work (Tsoni, 2016). Papataxiarchis (2016) distinguished between the local Greek response, and the 'foreign' response—and within the 'foreigners', he separated out the tourist-volunteers and NGO workers. However, scholars have not analysed the role of refugees and Greek 'civil servants' in the response. Local aid in Greece is identified with leftist groups and even

with anarchists, in what was named by Cabot (2016a) 'Contagious Solidarity'.

Governing the "refugee-scapes"

Many researchers associate humanitarianism with governmentality (Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2010; Feldman & Ticktin, 2010). In the last two centuries, humanitarianism has become institutionalised, internationalised, and has increasingly influenced global governance due to the intervention of states in crises (Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2010). However, states do not have a monopoly on governance. Any form of intervention, even that with good intentions, is a performance of control. Ferguson and Gupta (2002) called the situation in which NGOs and other international agencies become central to governments of different localities "transnational governmentality". They argue that governmentality can also be found in grassroots coalitions, volunteer and activist networks, and transnational civil society. Following this statement, I suggest examining the 'New Humanitarians' through the lens of transnational governance.

The predominant instrument created by governments, UN agencies, and NGOs to respond to political and ecological instability is the refugee camp. It is a form of containment, but to maintain order in chaos does not solve the problem (Redfield, 2005). Billaud (2020) analysed the mandate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to humanise wars. She describes the symptom that the humanitarian system suffers from: "The limited ability of humanitarians to change the conditions in which they operate in, whereby the goal is not to end wars but to maintain minimal 'humanity', and to 'master disorder'" (2020, p. 97). In that sense, the 'New Humanitarians' are the "alternative masters of disorder".

The commitment of aid actors to maintain the physical existence of people's lives often causes failures to offer more than that. Redfield (2005) described this as "minimalist biopolitics". Agamben (1998) named this state "bare life"—it is the state of being, as opposed to the state of "bios", which is qualified life. The 'New Humanitarians' have enabled qualified life via various methods: by helping themselves and others through a practice called 'working with the people', by implementing an inclusive community-based approach, and by creating supposedly 'equal' scapes. Unfortunately, those actions do not change the "inequality of lives", nor the limbo situation. Therefore, I argue that the "refugee-scapes" (Papataxiarchis, 2016) produce different governing modalities, which cause the 'New Humanitarians' to reproduce governing technologies.

"We are the new humanitarians"

Images of massed refugees represent the archetype of human suffering that triggers humanitarians to take action (Malkki, 1996). In Greece, the infamous, heartbreaking pictures of overcrowded rubber dinghies, and especially the little child Alan Kurdi, who died on a Turkish shore, brought the world's attention to the 'refugee crisis' and triggered the solidarity movement. Most involved in this movement planned to volunteer only for a short period, but those experiences changed their lives, and many have moved to Greece, or continue to come back often, turning humanitarianism into a way of life. Some of them established NGOs, whereas others refused to be officially and locally registered. The novelty in their work is having principles and ways of service provision that are different from professional humanitarians—having direct interaction with the 'target population', and creating working environments where everyone is perceived as 'equal', whether they are refugees, local, or international volunteers. They are the 'New Humanitarians'.

Arash was a photojournalist in Iran, recording atrocities committed by the regime and eventually having no choice but to leave his country. Once in Greece, he formed the 'Our House' project, as well as Café Patogh (a hangout place in Farsi), which operated as a community centre that served mainly Irani refugees and locals in need. The Café offered food to homeless people, responded to COVID-19 during lockdowns, operated a free shower and washing machine scheme, and provided emergency shelter to single women. Arash organised countless hunger strikes and demonstrations resisting the inhumane conditions in the camps, illegal detention in the prison inside Moria camp, and the 'Voluntary Return' deportations program. His perception of independence is different from the mainstream one: "We as activists believe that we don't need papers [formal registration] for our humanitarian activities. When it becomes systematic it changes, when we have power we lose ourselves". Once established and institutionalised, the humanitarian quest is contaminated by bureaucracy and management constraints.

Samir (pseudonym) is a long-term independent volunteer since 2015, and often returns to Lesvos and Athens. He is originally from Iraq, but escaped after the Yazidi genocide committed by ISIS and gained official refugee status in Germany. As he mentioned in our interview:

"I decided to go to Lesvos because I wanted to help on the ground, and I keep going there with different NGOs. If you can be part of change physically, you travel to help. There is a network of refugees in Germany connected to volunteers from all around the world. We were from different countries, working with

the boats in Greece. We helped almost 2,000 boats. The thing that made me work in rescue was to do humanity. I feel that I have to do this, [it is] part of my humanitarian duty".

He embodies his duty of helping others, and showcases that refugees are more than cultural ambassadors in humanitarian operations.

Another example of 'New Humanitarianism' is the NGO, Movement on the Ground, which was founded in response to the crisis in 2015, and has continued to scale-up since then, although their yearly budget is less than modest. The founder, Adil, is a volunteer from the Netherlands, whose family emigrated from Morocco. The NGO is known for providing quality shelter and smart camp management, even in informal sites. Adil talked about their ideology:

"The system needs to change. The humanitarian world is not sustainable... it's an outdated model. We are the 'New Humanitarians'. Our way of work is a blue print. Minimum standards? We give people what they need".

Their philosophy relies on the entrepreneurship of refugees, and their operational model is called "from Camp to campUs", which reads Camp Us, but also Campus, and "outlines the process of transforming refugee camps into dignified, stimulating and safe environments for people on the move". They do not follow the international guidelines and offer an added value to camp living.

Salam is a 'New Humanitarian' who founded an NGO called Team Humanity, which started in 2015 with boat-rescue. His family escaped from Iraq in the 1970s, then lived in Libya for a few years and later on arrived in Moldova. They relocated again and settled down in Denmark, where he grew up. Coming from a multiple-refuge background was the main motivation for him to act. He recounted why he came to Lesvos:

"I had to do something. I arrived in Lesvos on 5th September [2015]. I came to Skala [Sykamnias] and saw all these life jackets, it was the whole coast. Boats were coming, this was insane. There was nobody, no police, no UN officials, no one. I realised I was saving lives... that week changed my life... we needed to call ourselves something—Team Humanity, it was not an organisation or anything, we used our own money. For 3.5 months we weren't registered or received donations".

During this time in 2015, there were as many as 6,000 new arrivals to the Greek Islands per day.

Salam, like other 'New Humanitarians', emphasises the non-establishment and private funding aspect of the movement, which strives for independence, but ends up governed by powerful agents. Despite the countless lives that he saved, he was arrested with other Spanish lifeguards by the Hellenic coast guard in January 2016, and charged with people-smuggling. Their case made headlines and became an example of the politicisation and criminalisation of vernacular actors and the humanitarian objective of saving lives. It also set a precedent in Greek court when they were eventually found not guilty.

"The system needs to change. The humanitarian world is not sustainable... it's an outdated model. We are the 'New Humanitarians'. Our way of work is a blue print. Minimum standards? We give people what they need".

EuroRelief is a grassroots Christian organisation which was formed by volunteers in 2005, and arrived in Lesvos in 2015 to assist with the 'refugee crisis'. According to Andrea, a long-term volunteer (who like many others ended up staying in Lesvos for over two years), EuroRelief started with cooking food for camp residents and scaled up. The organisation is in charge of shelter allocation and the distribution of essential items to vulnerable groups in Moria camp, and after the camp burnt down, in the new settlement Mavrovouni. Andrea spoke about the inherent strain that working in Greece entails: "We are the 'New Humanitarians', so it's a tension that we live with—we are part of the system, but I would find it hard to work for the system".

This Faith-based Organisation (FBO) is a hybrid vernacular actor—on the one hand, the volunteers work closely with UNHCR, the local authorities, and other agencies inside the camps, but they are also acting as 'new humanitarians' in that they are part of the grassroots landscape in Greece and follow the same approach of direct contact with refugees, while maintaining a unique identity within the solidarity movement.

During my last visit in Lesvos, I met with Philippa and Eric, a native UK couple, in the recreational space and distribution centre they had established. They had been based in Molyvos village in the northern part of the island for 20 years before they started responding to the arrival of boats in Eftalou, turning their house into an operations and volunteer centre. They are

known to be uncompromising, direct and critical towards the refugee response, especially with regards to the insufficient action of the state, UN and other aid agencies:

> "We are doing this response since 2015. We thought that by now help would come, but its 2020 and we're still waiting, we're exhausted and tired. The big players and agencies are filling in gaps, Cluster meetings are useless. Small NGOs are adapting and changing, but what they do is firefighting, there is no planning. What we lack is predictions of the crisis".

Philippa echoed the common discourse of vernacular actors, and pointed out the weaknesses of the system as a whole, the international NGOs, as well as the smaller NGOs. The humanitarian space in Greece is ineffective, and lacks clear policies, preparation and predictability. Both Philippa and Eric are supporters of 'Safe Passage', which according to the solidarity movement, is a policy that ought to be implemented across Europe. It would enable migrants and asylum seekers to gain work permits, so that they could travel without risking their lives being smuggled through borders or at sea. According to the 'New Humanitarians', all people should be able to move freely beyond borders, and to enjoy the same freedom of movement and rights. It is a solution to the worsening sanctions, to the safety of migrants, and to ensuring human rights for people on the move. It does not, however, deal with conflict, military aggression or with governance and containment.

Towards 'New Humanitarian' principles

The humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence play a significant role in the charter of humanitarianism, although they became widespread in the 1960s, many years after the Dunantist organisations were created (Barnett, 2011). However, the solidarity movement developed a new set of principles which included more comprehensive moral sentiments and new ways of working.

The Island of Solidarity

Lesvos is commonly known as the 'Island of Solidarity', where one can feel a sense of belonging. Solidarity is a universal overarching theme, whereas other principles are more local. It encompasses feelings such as trust and care, and themes such as unity, humanity, and responsibility. It also includes operational aspects of community building. According to Arash, care overcomes lack of funds and the state's inaction:

> "Even as refugee I act with my empty hands. I have no money, no contacts, you just need to care. People say we don't have to have responsibility to each other, and that the government should do it, but they don't

care. I don't need bureaucracy, I just need to feel responsibility". —Arash

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The moral sentiments that inspired him to become a humanitarian correlated with the values at the core of the humanitarian project—caring about the suffering of 'others' (Fassin, 2010).

Solidarity and the need to be together function as 'pull factors' for both international volunteers, as well as for refugees—many of the volunteers go back to Greece because they want to be part of this humanitarian community, and many refugees go back to Lesvos after spending some time in urban places in Greece. As Arash mentioned:

> "The reason I started with this is to make a community, bring people together, to create friendships. There is loneliness in the big city, so I am making people feel less lonely. It's hard to be together in a city of five million people. In Lesvos you had a community, people were together".

His aim is not only to provide essential items, but to build a community. In Athens, it was an attempt to cure loneliness, which affected peoples' mental health and wellbeing. This prerequisite is not normally addressed by humanitarians, but it shows that humanitarianism should not necessarily just aim at covering the basic needs of people on the move. The social aspect of being a refugee—that is, the loss of familiar communal structures—should also be taken into consideration.

Solidarity is known as 'standing with refugees' in the common language of the 'Solidarians', or as 'supporting the local community'. It showcases the interconnectedness of aid providers and recipients. Samir talked about this theme in our conversation:

> "What we try always is to stand with each other, to support other refugees or volunteers, it doesn't matter. We don't call them 'refugees', we call them 'humans'. There is no discrimination or difference, [we are] also helping Greeks and locals, supporting local business".

The concept of togetherness and connection is dealt with caution. As Andrea reported in our interview:

> "Our motto is treating people with dignity, and our main value is solidarity, being with the people, and making them feel that they are seen, that they are not forgotten. We reach out to people, and we develop a personal connection. We are close to the people, and at the same time we need to keep distance".

According to her, solidarity is conveyed through direct and close contact with 'people', however she also presents a safeguarding policy of maintaining distance to prevent attachment and harm.

"The first line of hospitality"

The second principle is of local hospitality. The camps in Lesvos and around Athens represent different views of governance—Greek authorities call them 'Hospitality Centres' or 'First Reception Centres', while the UNHCR use the term 'hotspots'. This terminology denied the limbo-like situation of refugees, and the restrictive nature of camp living. The 'Solidarians' often use the term 'concentration camps'.

Stavros, a former Greek military officer, was the First Commander of the Hospitality Centre for Asylum Seekers from the Municipality of Lesvos. According to him, accepting and helping refugees is influenced by tradition and by a genetic disposition:

> "We can't forget our history, there is population move between here and Turkey, and it has always been like that. It is part of our DNA to support other people, it's not just about human rights. There is a difference between government camps and UN camps, between people who are 'operationals' [Greek camp managers], and 'technocrats' [UN staff]". —Stavros

The 'technocrats' don't have a moral compass to direct their work and they operate on behalf of a different mandate—a legal one instead of a moral one, whereas refuge and accepting refugees is part of the apparatus of Lesvos. It is not a principle without precedent. The war with Turkey resulted in a massive population exchange around the Aegean Islands, and in 1921, there were one million Greek refugees. Out of them, some 30,000 Greeks sought refuge in Syria.

The criticism of the UN system contrasts with the fact that Greece is known for its bureaucratic procedures, legislative complications, and for geopolitical pressure to control border crossings into Europe and the movement of people within the country (Cabot, 2012). Thanassis (pseudonym), another camp manager that I interviewed, mentioned that "Greece is the kingdom of bureaucracy", and that appointing more staff to deal with asylum procedures or improving camp conditions is held back due to bureaucratic matters such as signing more contracts.

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The notion of hospitality is central to understanding Greek culture as a host country of refugees, and especially the biopolitics that this philosophy involves. Hospitality is mobilised by local authorities to contain and govern the 'refugee crisis', and reconfigures forms of power, but doesn't change them. Hosting is not allocated equally—there are "worthy guests" (Rozakou, 2012)—educated people from urban environments who fled conflict. The "less desired" refugees are economic migrants from lower income countries, families with small children, medical cases, or political asylum requests. The local point of view produces inequality since it juxtaposes hosts and strangers, but also differentiates between varied strangers and how they are perceived (Kiryakidou, 2021).

According to the local perspective, the Aegean Islands are perceived as the 'first line of hospitality'. This cultural value serves a dual purpose—it is a mechanism to accept refugees into the country, but is also the first line of 'defence' and a governing method. It created ambivalent feelings—on the one hand, people in Mytilini did not appreciate that the island changed its demographics. As Thanassis told me in 2020 while Moria camp was highly over-populated: "Moria camp alone is another Mytilini—Sparta was a city of 20,000 people!" On the other, this complaint contradicts the local moral obligation to help Syrian refugees. Locals did not hesitate to help refugees and children coming out of the water, serving them food and drinks, and thus fulfilling their social roles as women or as fishers who are obliged to follow the maritime rule of assisting people in distress (Papataxiarchis, 2016). Saving lives even granted some citizens in Skala Sykmnias a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in 2016, whereas other vernacular humanitarians were criminalised.

"In the name of equality"

The third principle is equality. Equality entails non-hierarchal discourse, belief in justice and inclusion, and is practiced through working together with people

from varied nationalities, regardless whether they are officially registered or not. According to this perception, there are no hierarchies of aid distinguishing between 'expats' or 'local staff' (Fassin, 2010). This practice is different from the common concepts of 'participation' or 'localisation'. In addition, refugees and migrants can fill any role in the response, whereas in other settings, refugees would usually be employed as cultural mediators or interpreters, and undocumented people would not even be considered as suitable candidates. However, equality is multi-faceted and hard to achieve in humanitarian settings.

Various scholars have discussed the dual nature of the intersection between sentiment and material inequality, and how inequality in humanitarianism generates hierarchies of lives (Fassin, 2010; Feldman & Ticktin, 2010). Barnett (2011, p. 6) described humanitarianism as a "feel-good ideology that helps maintain global inequalities". Fassin (2007) claimed that there is a contradiction between the goals of this sector and how it operates: "Humanitarianism is founded on an inequality of lives and hierarchies of humanity" (Fassin, 2010, p. 239). Even when humanitarian action is inspired by ideas of human association, it reproduces hierarchies among human beings (Feldman & Ticktin, 2010). The humanitarian hierarchies in Greece determined not only who was entitled to receive help, but also who is considered a 'Humanitarian' and whose actions are outlawed.

The humanitarian hierarchies in Greece determined not only who was entitled to receive help, but also who is considered a 'Humanitarian' and whose actions are outlawed.

Hierarchy prevailed even among the volunteers, since the 'volunteering culture' created symbolic hierarchies related to the type of work that volunteers did (i.e. search and rescue, shore watching, food or clothing distribution, and legal or medical aid), the length of stay, and the organisational culture of the NGO or initiative they were linked with (Tsoni, 2016).

The hierarchies of humanity create a distinction between 'expatriates' and 'nationals'. Expatriates are the ones who come almost exclusively from Western countries, whereas Nationals are local agents who are considered as plain employees (Fassin, 2007). Who are the 'Nationals' in this context? The refugees? The Greek volunteers? Greek officials? The host community who is also in need? Are refugees with official status, especially the ones who travel to Greece in order to volunteer considered as Expatriates? The majority of the 'New Humanitarians' are volunteers, and are different from other professional

humanitarians and 'Expatriates' who get deployed in the deep field for a temporal mission in lower income countries (and thus embody the classic power structure rooted in humanitarianism). And yet, the call for equality when some people are in a limbo situation, while others can move freely may produce power blindness.

The imagery of community that the solidarity movement nurtured was characterised by transnational individuals who talk about statelessness and borderlessness, however those notions contradict the freedom of movement of European nationals and volunteers, a right that is revoked from refugees who are static.

Moreover, creating agency opportunities for refugees to actively take part or lead different humanitarian projects reproduces inequalities between camp residents and the ones who have the necessary resources and ability to travel to engage in vernacular projects, and to dedicate their time to helping others.

The making of Change-makers

The last principle is agency, which is performed by role modelling—that is, volunteering or forming independent initiatives and collaborations. The meaning of agency was to treat refugees as 'people with skills'. Thus, engineers, electricians, teachers, personal trainers, and cooks were able to find a creative outlet for their talents and capabilities and to serve others via many projects.

The idea of agency and change-making, coupled with activism (direct and online) contrasts the notion of minimalist biopolitics (Redfield, 2005), and proves that one can help others with very minimal resources while being in a refugee state and facing homelessness. Vernacular actors show how the narrative of "bare life" (Agamben, 1998) is reconfigured by refugees. It is resistance to the governing methods used by Greece in the camps, and a reclamation of responsibility through solidarity and care. Nonetheless, there is an inherent tension in vernacular aid, since acting instead of the government and filling in gaps replaces a more formal response and reproduces biopower (Cabot, 2019). The response should not rely only on activists, since the solution to refugee-homelessness is linked to asylum and refugee laws in Greece.

Agency relies on participation and the creation of more change-makers and networks of refugee-humanitarians. It enables people to be busy, to gain new skills and knowledge, to meet and connect with like-minded peers, and makes people feel important and dignified by working shoulder to shoulder with other international volunteers. The people who were kept busy during the draining limbo-waiting had positive coping mechanisms, better social networks, and it gave them meaning and a reason to wake up in the morning. Adil talked about the importance of participation:

"We use a participatory method, and we believe in agency. People are involved in decision making, [they] work as volunteers in levelling the ground, creating areas, spacing tents, graveling, creating a sewage system".

This form of participation is utterly different from the common power distribution. According to UNHCR, "a community-based approach is a way of working in partnership with persons of concern during all stages of UNHCR's program cycle" (UNHCR, 2008, p. 14). In this model, the agency is the owner of the program cycle, and "persons of concern" are consulted, however might not be the ones delivering the solutions.

In the Movement on the Ground model, as well as in other grassroots groups, refugees and camp residents created communal and safe-spaces, managed workshops, taught in schools, led teams and monitored budgets. This way of working (paid and unpaid) required a higher level of trust than one usually encounters in the field in a traditional professional humanitarian setting. It raises the question whether this model should become a standard in other humanitarian settings?

Agency showed that camp-living can become a meaningful and dignified experience, that people can be self-reliant not only with regards to cash-based interventions, and that the 'beneficiaries' can play a dual role as 'Humanitarians'. It created a more equal humanitarian system, and enabled people on the move a more 'qualified life', depending on their level of engagement and leadership within the solidarity movement.

Conclusion

The 'New Humanitarians' contrast mainstream humanitarianism and the power distribution between expat-foreigners and locals. They demonstrate dialectic tensions—they are vernacular actors that are influenced by traditional humanitarianism, but at the same time are different and innovative. They reconfigure aid by creating adhoc methods to deliver services, by developing a different discourse, new principles and ethos, and by how they interpret and demonstrate solidarity according to local values. Despite their clear anti-establishment agenda, the independent funding, the fast response, and the novelty of who is a humanitarian and can reclaim not only this title, but also this power, the 'New Humanitarians' can only partially challenge the notion of 'bare life' in camps (Agamben, 1998), or enable a full social existence and qualified life for camp residents (Rozakou, 2017).

The ethnographic material left a few questions unanswered—what does the future hold for the 'New Humanitarians'? Will the new principles become prevalent in mainstream humanitarianism? Will we see more types of vernacular aid? Will vernacular actors

develop protocols, procedures and other bureaucratic mechanisms? Or as Dunn (2017) noted, will some of those grassroots organisations disappear and cease to exist, like many other refugee associations?

Despite their clear anti-establishment agenda, the independent funding, the fast response, and the novelty of who is a humanitarian and can reclaim not only this title, but also this power, the 'New Humanitarians' can only partially challenge the notion of 'bare life' in camps.

Some of the 'New Humanitarians' depicted here engage in advocacy in either the Greek parliament or in the European Union parliament. Yet, little is done by the State and other powerful actors to eliminate the loss of lives in the Aegean Sea, to change the asylum procedures in Greece, or to find alternative solutions to the refugee camps. In that sense, vernacular actors (as well as professional humanitarians) have limited influence on official matters, and they cannot address the root causes of forced and voluntary migration, nor change the incarcerating reality for refugees and the European border regime.

As argued earlier, vernacular actors unintentionally reproduce governing technologies used by institutionalised actors to contain the "refugee-scapes" (Papataxiarchis, 2016). Nevertheless, grassroots humanitarian aid doesn't fit exactly into the governmentality of the State (Sandri, 2017). The voice presented here is aimed at uncovering the weakness of the Dunantist objective of 'humanising wars'. As Billaud (2020, p. 97) wrote: "Humanitarian operations therefore seek to remain a temporary response, not the basis for a new regime". In addition, the new bottom-up principles are unlikely to become mainstream, unless vernacular actors become more established, or actively take part in harmonisation and alignment processes.

In the meantime, the municipalities in Greece have further contained the new camps in the Islands, and turned them into highly restricted and closed facilities. Those efforts go hand in hand with posing more sanctions on grassroots NGOs and outlawing their sea-rescue operations. Increasing the governmental measures and creating draconian asylum procedures is perhaps not the solution, as Samir concluded:

"No one can control the borders. As long as there are wars—in Syria, in Iraq, in Africa— there will be people on the move, and people will be coming. It will not stop. We just hope that people will find a way to arrive safely".

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