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Bringing Humanitarianism to the Grassroots

Volunteering at the Grande-Synthe Jungle and 'Doing the Right Thing' under the Tensions of Proximity

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Abstract

Throughout the refugee crisis, horizontal grassroots organisations have become an increasingly important part of providing humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, little research has been performed on the experiences of the volunteers active at such organisations. This thesis investigates the lived experiences of the volunteers active at the Refugee Women Centre in the Grand-Synthe Jungle in Northern France. Through an autoethnographic approach this research aims to understand the tensions of proximity and the moral reasoning of the volunteers in trying *to do the right thing* throughout the complex situations they face.

Keywords*:* *grassroots; humanitarianism; horizontalness; relational proximity; phronesis; moral reasoning*.

Acknowledgements

The path towards completing this masters' thesis was a windy and bumpy one. Looking back on it now, this had much to do with the nature of my fieldwork and how it impacted me as a person. The impact was bittersweet. The failing migration policies of Europe at large, particularly the unwillingness for constructive change in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, has caused great misery for many people. I have never felt so enraged and so disillusioned by state authorities as I did during these two months. The violence, the inhumane treatment of people, and the senseless bureaucratic approach caused a feeling of vicarious shame which I never felt before. On the other hand, I have never experienced as much solidarity, togetherness, friendship, and creative cooperation as I did during these two months. This is why I want to dedicate this thesis to the uncountable and irreplaceable volunteers who unconditionally invest themselves into alleviating the misery of the Jungle existence and bringing back some dignity to Calais and Grande-Synthe; and to those residing in the Jungles, whose resilience, perseverance, and kindness never ceased to amaze me.

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With my most sincere gratefulness,

Nina De Cloet, March 20, 2017.

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Preface

Today was my first ‘maraude’, what the French volunteers started to call nightly distributions of tea, food, and blankets. We are cooperating during the nights in Calais with a French grassroots organization, in order to help them cover the increasing demand and explore the women’s needs in Calais. I was put on a team with Julianne and we started driving around. She seemed a bit nervous and explained that distributions could be quite hectic and intense at the train station. While driving there she told me to “be watchful of minors, we need to call the ‘bambino-team’ when we see them. And we also have to write down when we witness police violence and what happened, in order to report it”.

I felt nervous and overwhelmed during the distribution. People were shouting and pulling -“You get used to this after a while…”, Julianne reassured me.

After the distribution at the train station we went back to the warehouse to get tea because Julianne got a call from an Afghani boy – apparently, twenty Afghanis were taking shelter next to the water tower and were cold. It was dark by now. On the road to the warehouse, we saw the CRS riot forces chasing some Eritreans. Julianne stopped the car and once the police left she asked the boys what happened. They had hit one of the boys and pushed him to the ground for no apparent reason. I had to write down exactly what happened in my notebook as well as the driving license of the CRS van. “Overall violence by the police and racist gangs is more common in Calais, the mayor is right wing and really anti-refugees, this seemed to have created a platform where violence is more tolerated. In Grande-Synthe, for example, the mayor is left wing and more things are done for the refugees than here”- Julianne explained.

We made the tea and left again.

The streets were quiet and dark. We had a hard time finding the water tower. Julianne drove into a small narrow path next to the river

and called the boy. I was tense and scared by now. My gut feeling told me that this could be a potentially dangerous situation. What am I doing in the middle of the night with another young girl; in a desolate pathway next to the river; waiting for twenty men who had never seen me and whom I have never seen; while no one knows where we are? I told myself I was overreacting and that I shouldn't be such a scaredy-cat. We waited in the dark and opened the trunk. All of sudden a big group of men came out of the bushes. It was so dark I couldn't see their faces and some were running towards us. I felt intimidated and started to panic a bit. "Julianne I am scared, is this safe?".

Am I being prejudicial here? No no wait, I would never do this on the outskirts of Ghent or Brussels at night.

I felt overwhelmed and started distributing the tea in order to calm down a bit. Focus, focus. My hands were shaking. The men were laughing and talking, I started to feel more at ease. It's ok, it's ok, Julianne must know what she is doing. Once we were back in the car my voice was creaky and adrenaline was still rushing through my body. In a way I felt ashamed, I wondered for a long time if this was a school example of latent racism on my part. I imagined myself on the small path in the night next to river close to my home, waiting for twenty unknown men, and I had to make the conclusion that I would feel equally intimidated and scared. I told Julianne what had been going through my head the whole time and that I was really scared at some point. I asked her if she would do this at home in the night and why the teams weren't mixed in male and female volunteers, just to be on the safe side.

"Shit Nina, t'as raison, t'as raison".

All of a sudden Julianne seemed to be shocked by what we just did. "No really, you are completely right. Normally we only do these things with teams which are female and male volunteers, especially during the night. I am kind of angry with myself. I don't know, I just stop thinking and do what has to be done. It's like I am sucked into

the volunteering and I normalize all the situations, I am so busy that I just forget about my own safety. I would never do this in Bordeaux with only one other girl in the middle of the night. It is stupid and xenophobic to say that all refugees are dangerous people but it is equally stupid and naive to say that they are all good-hearted people. But once you are so involved it feels like you lose your normal sense of safety and you forget your limits, you just focus on helping everyone".

Ok, apparently I was not being completely irrational. I felt relieved.

…

This happened during the second week of my fieldwork. Eventually, I became just like Julianne.

1. Introduction to the Research

This text revolves around the lived experiences of volunteering with the RWC (Refugee Women's Centre)[1], a horizontal grassroots organization active at the Grande-Synthe's refugee Jungle in Northern France. The main aim of this thesis is to understand the tensions of proximity at play for the RWC volunteers through day to day deliberation processes – which are fundamental to the endeavour of *doing the right thing* and *making the right decisions.* At stake is not the moral assessment of whether the *right things are done*, but rather to contribute to a deeper understanding of grassroots humanitarianism, which has gained significant importance through Europe's recent 'refugee crisis'[2]. Throughout this research, I will set aside normative assumptions on how humanitarian aid should be provided and I will focus on how the grassroots volunteers mediate their actions on a day to day basis.

The RWC used to be situated in Grande-Synthe's 'formal' humanitarian camp before a huge fire destroyed it to the ground. Since the fire, and until this day, the women working at the RWC are mainly active at the Grande-Synthe Jungle: an improvised informal camp-like space in the woods; a liminal place of constant flux next to the A16 highway. Grande-Synthe is a suburb commune of Dunkirk city and part of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, an area notorious for its refugee-related issues since the late nineties (Davies & Isakjee, 2015; Fassin, 2005). Since the refugee 'crisis', the amount of

[1] https://www.facebook.com/events/274725809729102/?notif_t=event_invite_reminder&notif_id=1519811498903727

[2] As Ticktin (2016) explains, using the term 'crisis' is problematic since it diverts the attention from a "lager historical context" and implies that the refugee crisis all of a sudden started in the summer of 2014, while the numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean had been rising steadily the years before. Especially when it comes to the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, this 'crisis' has been 'growing' since the late nineties (Fassin, 2005). Nevertheless, for clarity's sake, I will proceed to use this term in the way popular media have approached the phenomenon.

refugees present in this area has risen exponentially. Most of them came with high hopes of crossing to the United Kingdom, many of them became stuck in a constant limbo of trying and failing to cross. The combination of dire living circumstances; the constant violence perpetrated by state authorities and by Mafiosi-like smuggler organizations; and the impasse of French and British government to constructively deal with this issue, has caused tremendous suffering.

The lack of support from the state and big humanitarian organizations has left an enormous gap when it comes to the most basic provisions as well as legal and humanitarian aid. As a result, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region became a space where ad-hoc grassroots organizations, civic initiatives, individual volunteers and solidarians took on the burden of filling this gap - or at least try. An almost impossible all-encompassing task, in which hundreds of volunteers invest their time and energy, often through sheer willpower and with astonishing creativity. It seems that this *space of lack* became a trial and error base for "volunteer humanitarianism" (Sandri, 2017). A space where various grassroots organizations explored the possibilities of alleviating suffering: some flourish, others fail in their attempts, some clash with one another, though, most of them clash with state authorities who constantly thwart their actions. A remarkable similarity many of these grassroots have in common is to provide aid radically different from big humanitarian organisations: *To do the right thing, but differently.*

The people keeping these grassroots organizations alive, against all setbacks, opposition and in the face of constant misery, are the ones who came to interest me during my fieldwork. The willpower, resourcefulness, and stamina of the volunteers I met, astounded me over and over again. Their critique on and aversion of dehumanizing practices of big humanitarian organizations seemed to be an important incentive for the grassroots volunteers, especially when it comes to their humanitarian praxis as well as organizational structure (McGee & Pelham, 2018; Rozakou, 2017).

During my fieldwork, I was constantly concerned and confronted with the struggles of *proximity*; volunteers often became closely related with the refugees, they were very involved and felt so responsible that they had a hard time letting go. The constant aim *to do the right thing,* within this open-ended and informal context, often created insecurities and ethical dilemmas for the volunteers. Due to my deep involvement in the RWC, I decided to perform and write my research in an autoethnographic manner. Before proceeding to setting the scene and clarifying my particular research methods, I will more clearly delineate the tensions at the heart of this research throughout the development of the research questions and the literature review.

1.1 Research Questions of Proximity

"I find the question of proximity to be very interesting. That's something I never really thought about in such an organized and systematic way, but I think you're right to point out how central it is to all interaction, between volunteers within a team, between those who come to help and those who are on the receiving end of that aid, in between organizations themselves etc. […]I had this interesting conversation with Trish from the school project, I was telling her the same thing, that it is hard that the helping never really stops once you have left because you became friends with the people you help and are still in contact with some of them. She told me:'the most useful thing you can do for refugees is to give them your friendship'. And she has a point, you can give clothes and stuff to refugees, basic needs that are useful at the moment; but once they get to the UK or find themselves in an emergency, the most useful thing is that they have contacts and you can help them to find their way, connect them with others. And that is really useful, but then it never really stops"(Alise RWC volunteer, January 28, 2018)

The fragment above demonstrates what is at stake for volunteers at the RWC, the proximity with the people they help brings the volunteers in a position of closeness which makes them feel responsible beyond the actual volunteering. The informal and horizontal structure of the RWC, the absence of protocol, and the importance of spontaneity and improvisation were ways in which the RWC distinguished itself from traditional humanitarian aid organisations. The divide helper or provider vs. beneficiary was one which in its core remained the same, but in the interaction the underlying rhetoric *"we are all human, we are all brothers and sisters"* stood very central. By putting this central, hierarchy was avoided within the organisational structure of the RWC as well as when it comes to the interaction with the refugees.

Proximity seemed to be part of the day to day decision-making processes of volunteers: avoiding distinguishing features such as

fluorescent vests; taking time to talk with people while doing distribution; taking time to understand what the specific needs are; as well as establishing contact with people by exchanging numbers and Facebook accounts. The organizational structure of the RWC, the absence of protocol, allows and facilitates close friendship with the refugees which creates a sense of responsibility. The RWC goes out from the stance that being closely involved with the refugees, getting to know them on a personal basis, allows more humane help and to really understand personal needs.

The RWC wants to differentiate itself by not doing distributions from the stance that refugees *should be happy with what they get* - even just understanding which clothes a woman likes or which milk she would like to give her baby gives back some dignity. As Alise (RWC volunteer) explained to me, the goal of the RWC was to distinguish itself from more hierarchical organizations in their way of dealing with people and situations. She critiqued the fact that organizations on the ground with strong protocol often overlooked the human reality and overlooked the importance of relationships of trust established over time. By working in a horizontal way, she argued, volunteers become closer to refugees and can distinguish important nuances, needs, and understand when, for example, a woman needs psychological or medical support or when they are a victim of violence.

However, this close involvement brings along ethical dilemmas, it creates struggles and constant renegotiations for volunteers and organizations. They constantly question themselves and their approach, which favourably creates room for different views and new input. At the same time, this informality can bring a lot of tensions and insecurities to volunteers who have no professional training as humanitarian aid workers. As other volunteers and I experienced, being invested so intensely into the life of the Jungle feels like fighting against the current, often to no avail, and it takes its toll. The Jungle life overwhelms you, engulfs you completely, and all of a sudden a *selflessness* almost takes you by surprise. A selflessness which many volunteers try to avoid because

they know it is impossible to achieve since *you are there* as an individual with limits and a life outside this reality. As the preface demonstrates, this curtailed selflessness manifests itself in the shape of taking on too many responsibilities, finding yourself in avoidable dangerous situations, the loss of self-care, going beyond your initial limits, and the impossibility of letting go. Not selflessness as we link it to the figure of the heroic altruistic humanitarian, but selflessness "less as sacrifice and more as a kind of self-escape […] a desire to lose themselves in the intensity of sustained demanding work. In those moments they did not have awkward selves to manage […] a kind of pleasurable *self-loss*" (Malkki, 2015, p.11).

Throughout these tensions of being so closely involved, d*oing the right thing* seemed to be a central concern for the RWC volunteers when it came to making decisions; dealing with emergencies; sociality with the refugees; and providing aid as a whole. It becomes hard to identify which decisions are the right ones to make throughout a plethora of situations which volunteers often had never encountered before. They often reminded each other how important it is to take days off and take time for oneself. However, it became clear that once volunteers were *in too deep* and felt very involved and responsible, it was increasingly hard to take a step back. Especially, the constant lack of volunteers and aid on the ground contributed to this issue.

The aim of this thesis is not to pose a set of questions and provide a straightforward set of answers or solutions to the various tensions inherent to the Grande-Synthe volunteering culture. Rather, it should become a tableau which revolves around *proximity* and how it is entangled in the RWC volunteers' experiences at the Jungle. It was not a topic which I anticipated focusing on, nor did I directly conduct interviews on this topic. It came to me in retrospect, when I realized that it was at play at the core of most of my interviews, logbook fragments, conversations with volunteers and my constant self-doubt. In the end, it seemed a topic which entangled itself throughout the whole volunteering experience but only became bluntly apparent when taking *distance* from it all.

The tensions of proximity bring along moral dilemmas and doubts for volunteers: when are you emotionally too closely involved? Are you creating hope for refugees which is not there? Are you making the right decisions? Are you favouring some people over others? Are you going too far when you start sleeping in the Jungle or when you start a romantic relationship with a refugee? When do you assess something as an emergency situation? Do you put yourself first or do you give up your day off when you receive an emergency call? Etc.

In short, w*hat does it mean to do the right thing* in a context where proceeding in line with a fixed protocol is consciously avoided? As I mentioned before, it is not my goal to make a moral assessment of whether the *right things are done*, but rather to understand how the RWC grassroots volunteers conceptualize providing aid against the background of being and feeling so proximately involved. What are the mediation and deliberation processes behind the moral reasoning of volunteers and what kind of subject position is taken to affectively and ethically manage complex day to day issues? By using my ethnographic gaze as a core member of the RWC, I will focus on proximity linked to ethics, deliberation processes, affect management, moral reasoning, and decision-making. Throughout the literature review, I will more clearly explain how I aim to tackle these objectives. Furthermore, through various ethnographic scenes present in this thesis I aim to affectively sketch the tensions which volunteers face in this particular social reality.

1.2 Literature Review

Although, more and more research has been conducted on the grassroots organizations in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region (Briké, 2016; McGee & Pelham, 2018; Mould, 2017; Rigby & Schlembach 2013; Rygiel, 2011; Sandri, 2017; Woensel Kooy, 2016), little exhaustive ethnographic research has been done on the actual volunteering experiences at grassroots organizations (Sandri, 2017). Especially the fairly recent Jungle[3] of Grande-Synthe remains a generally under-investigated research site. I hope this thesis will contribute to the understanding of the overall work that has been written on the Nord-Pas-de-Calais refugee-related topics as well as add to the growing body of work on grassroots humanitarianism

Most of the preliminary ideas for this thesis, as well as the motivation to conduct this research in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, took shape through the Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities Seminar (IMMRC), which I attended at the Catholic University of Leuven. The literature we discussed throughout this seminar lays at the basis of conceptualising refugee camps and humanitarian aid provided at such camps. In a small group we visited and discussed the Jungle of Calais right after its dismantlement, it was then that my fascination was piqued for the grassroots volunteering structure which so intensely had shaped and mapped the Calais Jungle. I will now situate this research within the frameworks of the anthropology of refugee camps and humanitarianism; grassroots and

[3] The word *Jungle* is used to refer to informal spaces where refugees reside. These settlements are often situated in woodlands or in open fields where tents or improvisational shelters are put up by refugees. The expression *Jungle* was introduced by Afghan refugees in Calais, referring to informal settlements in the woods, it is derived from the Pashto word *dzanghal* which means forest (Volk, 2011). The most notorious Jungle was the Calais Jungle, it was situated in a wasteland next to the highway and close the Ferry to the UK. It was dismantled in October 2016 and sheltered around 7000 to 8000 refugees at its peak (BBC News, 2016).

horizontalness; the management of affect; and finally, within the anthropology of ethics.

1.2.1 Anthropology of Refugee Camps and Humanitarianism

Within anthropology, the refugee camp has been thoroughly approached by a multitude of scholars through various angles (Agamben, 2005; Agier, 2002; Brun, 2001; Conquergood, 1988; Malkki, 1990; Ramadan, 2013; Turner, 2005; etc.). Throughout the IMMRC seminar on refugee camps - in this thesis' case the refugee Jungle - the camp was conceptualized through Agamben's (2005) notion of *the state of exception* and the notion of the refugee camp as a *non-place* (Feld & Basso, 1996). The Grande-Synthe Jungle can definitely be described within these concepts: it is a non-place where refugees are reduced to *bare life* and where the mechanisms and rights of the outside world do no longer apply (Agamben, 2005). It is definitely a non-place, in the sense that it is a transit zone in the woods where no lasting structures are set up to accommodate people and which the refugees do not consider as their destination, but rather a liminal space which provides a gateway to the smuggling networks towards the United Kingdom. The shelters which were put up by refugees themselves were battered to the ground on an almost weekly basis due to the authorities' objective to indeed literally turn it into a non-place. As an important member of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais office of immigration and interrogation, quite bluntly informed me: "there is no such thing as a refugee Jungle in France, it does not exist" (Personal communication, May 1st, 2017). Similarly, a local Grande-Synthe pharmacist informed me that, the place where I volunteered on a daily basis, did simply not exist.

As my colleagues and I have mentioned in a blog post on the Calais Jungle, the Jungle might be perceived as a non-place for the outside world, a zone of transit, but it does become a place for the refugees living there and for the volunteers coming in on a daily basis (Cancedda, De Cloet, Lanclus, Negri, & Worth, 2016). Similarly, as we noted for the Calais Jungle, the Grande-Synthe Jungle is a space with its own mapping: "places are being

characterized by stories, experiences or events and become lived spaces" (Cancedda et al., Blog post: *No place like the Jungle,* 2017). Next to the creation of a social reality in the Jungle, the woods were clearly separated into a family space, a single men space, and non-Kurdish spaces. The organizations active in the Jungle also created their own kind of mapping in how and where to distribute, creating an expected rhythm of aid throughout the day.

It is clear that the Grande-Synthe Jungle is a non-place and a space of exception, however, it is as much a place and lived reality mediated on a day to day basis by volunteers, refugees, and police forces. As various writers (Rigby & Schlembach, 2013; Sigona, 2015; Turner, 2016) have criticized, the camp as a space of exception does not suffice for its lived experience. These writers have argued that the space of exception is a useful, but all too limited framework. The distinction between Zoë and Bios, citizenship vs. non-citizenship, should be approached as notions which are constantly blurred and negotiated. Many have shown how refugee camps and Jungles are also spaces of protest (Rigby & Schlembach, 2013), of activism (Rygiel, 2011), of new socialities of solidarity, (Rozakou, 2016b), and as places where politics are at play (McGee & Pelham, 2018). As Turner (2015) interestingly puts, "social life, power relations, hierarchies and sociality are remoulded in the camp […and] refugees and others exposed to the camp are at once excluded and marginalized while simultaneously being able to create new identities, communities and political projects" (pp.144-147). He explains that these complex intricacies and tensions at play in camps deserve thick ethnographic enquiry which complements as well as moves beyond Agamben's conceptualization of the refugee camp.

More at the core of this thesis are anthropology's endeavours when it comes to conceptualizing humanitarian aid, more specifically, aid provided to refugees (Fassin, 2005, 2007, 2008; Feldman & Ticktin, 2010; Harrel-Bond, 2002; Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996; Malkki, 1995, 1996, 2015; Rajaram, 2002; Ticktin, 2014, 2016; etc.). Within these studies, a focus on the potential setbacks of humanitarianism often stands central, such as the risk of

depoliticizing and dehumanizing those it intends to help. Various interesting questions are posed throughout these works. Does compassion lead to exclusion, who is perceived as the innocent and the one deserving of aid? (Ticktin, 2016). What happens when compassion and empathy prevail over the rhetoric of rights? (Fassin, 2005). What is at risk when we reproduce western knowledge and expertise on refugees' lives? (Rajaram, 2002). What happens when the rhetoric of crises and emergency blur the necessity of constructive solutions to refugee-related issues? (Ticktin, 2016). What are the various power relations at play between those providing help and those at the receiving end of it? (Harrel-Bond, 2002). Is humanitarian aid complicit in reproducing the refugee as the *radical other*, and thus substantiating the figure of the refugee as a threat to national security? (Grubiša, 2017).

The research on these complex issues definitely served as an interesting basis of knowledge before leaving to the field. It became even more interesting when I realized that many of my interlocutors were aware of these setbacks and seemed to aim to be *radically different* from the approaches of big humanitarian aid organizations. Before moving on to the management of affect and the anthropology of ethics, I will briefly discuss the research on grassroots organizations and horizontality.

1.2.2 Grassroots Humanitarianism and its Volunteers

The role and emergent character of grassroots organizations have been investigated in various contexts: as first reaction groups in moments of natural disasters or terrorist attacks (Gardner, 2008; Lowe & Fothergill, 2003; Perry, Lindell, & Tierney, 2001; Stallings & Quarantelli, 1985) as well as more recent research on the quick reaction of grassroots organisations during the refugee 'crisis' in Greece (Kitching et al., 2016; Papataxiarchis, 2016; Rakopoulos, 2015; Rozakou, 2017; Theodossopoulos, 2016;). There are some striking similarities between grassroots organizations which are created during disasters and those that came to exist to provide aid during the refugee 'crisis' (Agocs, 2016). Paraphrasing Stallings et

al. (1985), Agocs (2016) explains how refugee directed grassroots organizations have a similar emergent character, which enables them to quickly provide humanitarian aid while being "unburdened by bureaucratic needs [and are] often informal, fluid in their boundaries, and horizontal in decision making" (p.10). Various terms have been used to conceptualise grassroots organizations which aim to help refugees and those who participate in them: '*ad hoc grassroots organisations'*, '*new humanitarian actors'* (Kitching et al., 2016), '*solidarity movements'* (Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016), '*solidarity humanitarianism'* (Rozakou, 2017), '*solidarians'* (Papataxiarchis, 2016), '*volunteer humanitarianism*' (Sandri, 2017), and '*civic activism'* (Ishkanian, 2015). Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the RWC as *grassroots humanitarianism* (McGee & Pelham, 2018) and to those active at the RWC as *grassroots volunteers* (Agocs, 2016).

What seemed to be an important motivational factor for the majority of volunteers I met during my fieldwork, who invest their time and energy in the Jungle situation, was a deep disappointment with the state's failing approach in terms of the migration 'crisis' (Kitching et al., 2016; Sandri, 2016). As the anthropologist John Gledhill (2000) explains, grassroots social movements often stem from people who have lost faith in the politics of the nation-state and consequently seek social justice through this way. In the case of the refugee 'crisis', grassroots movements have of course not been restricted to the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, they emerged throughout Europe where help was needed. As a result, these initiatives can be considered as a form of "transnational grassroots politics" (Smith, 1994), which is inherently linked to activism and idealism.

Similarly to Greece, the Nord-pas-de-Calais region became "a rainbow coalition of anarchists, anti-globalization and radical left activists, 'volunteers' without an explicit ideological agenda, local people who want to help and distrust the NGOs, and various performers of a cosmopolitan version of volunteering" (Papataxiarchis, 2016, p.3). Papataxiarchis (2016) has made the interesting divide between 'solidarians' and 'volunteers'. As he explains, on the one hand, 'solidarians' are informed by strong ideo-

logical imperatives and have politicized motives - this group aims to contribute a utopian project in a horizontal way: "bringing together people from all different quarters in order to stand by the refugees with 'dignity'" (Papataxiarchis, 2016, p.6). On the other hand, 'volunteers' are informed by the 'moral imperative' to help those in 'need' often as a 'civic duty'. Papataxiarchis notes that these motives might intertwine and that the one does not exclude the other.

Papataxiarchis' interesting observations can be complemented with what Sandri (2017) observed on the grassroots organization at the Calais Jungle, coining the term "volunteer humanitarianism". She distinguishes various characteristics which lay at the basis of the grassroots network of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region: Firstly, the grassroots organisations do not operate under the wings or rules of big NGOs and they finance themselves through crowdfunding actions. Secondly, the grassroots volunteers are untrained, have little to no previous experience, and did not go through extensive initiation courses. Thirdly, the geographical closeness for many of the volunteers and the informality of the Jungle permits a low key "occasional participation in humanitarian work" (p.66). And finally, as Sandri explains, grassroots organisations are mostly not political or faith-based: however, eventually many of the volunteers' actions were initially motivated by feelings of compassion and hospitality, which were later accompanied by political activism, denouncing the state and its policies, and demanding dignity for the refugees as well as respect for their rights.

An interesting point made by Papataxiarchis (2016), one which I consider to be often at the core of the grassroots' volunteers actions and motivations, is the *distrust of big NGOs*. It is this particular distrust which leads to the aim of distinguishing oneself from - and providing an alternative - to the "humanitarian machine" (Sandri, 2017, p.66). Becoming a viable alternative, translates into an informal way of organizing, the centrality of improvisation and spontaneity (Dalakoglou, 2012), and the value of consensus-based and horizontal decision-making (Ishkanian, 2015). As Rozakou (2016a; 2017) beautifully puts, these initiatives are "a field of fluid

and open sociality that contravenes the professionalization of volunteerism" (2016a, p.94) and aim to "subvert the dominant hierarchical schemata of humanitarianism" (2017, p.2). This kind of informality and the focus on not becoming part of the dominant humanitarian discourse can be seen as a form of resistance and disobedience (Rakopoulos, 2015). I argue that this also can be linked to a claim of volunteers to be more *authentic* in providing aid and having more *authentic* motivations than big humanitarian organizations. I noted that the construction of the subject position of RWC volunteers was often established in contrast with how other more hierarchical organizations provided aid, a dualism which was central to the observations during my fieldwork.

The observations made above leave us with a quite vague, and individually varying, framework when it comes to the category of the *volunteer* - which is how the members of the RWC referred to themselves. Next to being part of a larger humanitarian discourse (Fassin, 2010), Rozakou (2016a) noted for grassroots volunteers in Greece that they fit the Foucauldian "formation of the volunteer as a new moral citizen, a responsible subject oriented toward the common good" (p.82). Although the RWC volunteers shared the common purpose of helping and supporting the refugees, their individual motivations, ideals, and imaginaries could vary strongly. As a result, as Malkki (2015) noted for humanitarian Red Cross aid workers, the RWC volunteers are "specific persons with homegrown needs, vulnerabilities, desires [...]" (p.4). Such individual characteristics were important when it came to volunteers' motivations and views.

A shared emphasis on humanism, solidarity, horizontality, dignity, equality, etc. is something which brought my participants together and created a sense of moral responsibility towards the refugees, nevertheless, they often conceptualized these terms in different ways. The recent focus on *solidarity* when it comes to the volunteers of humanitarian grassroots initiatives (Rozakou 2016a, 2016b; Theodossopoulos, 2016), brings to the fore an interesting intertwinement between *humanitarianism* and *solidarity* (Theodossopoulos, 2016). As Theodossopoulos explains, a focus on

"humanitarian solidarity" (p.180) is conceptualised by the volunteers as a more active, dynamic socially conscious, and politically empowering approach than the perceived conservative humanitarian approach. Next to that, Grubiša (2017) has noted that many refugee-focussed grassroots initiatives entail and promote a shift from the rhetoric of pity to that of solidarity, this she argues, opens up an approach in which respect and understanding become more central than mere compassion. As it seems, the grassroots volunteer is an exciting category and, as became clear throughout my research, *solidarity* was very central to my participants. Nevertheless, this still leaves us with a vague category of the volunteer who strives to be morally good and is based on a broad set of concepts which is open to individual interpretation. Thus, in this research, the category of grassroots volunteer entails a complex set of motivations mixed with a nuanced interweaving of "ideological arguments" (Rozakou, 2016a, p. 181).

1.2.3 Management of Affect

As I explained in the research questions, my aim will be to understand how the tensions of proximity influence the RWC volunteers in their decision-making process and moral reasoning. An interesting work written on experiences of humanitarian aid workers is Liisa Malkki's *The Need to Help: the Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (2015). Although this work revolves around highly trained professional Red Cross aid workers, the observations Malkki makes concerning proximity and closeness are useful to what I observed during my fieldwork. What makes her observations so interesting, is the centrality of the self and the imagination linked to providing aid, while moving away from the assumption of the aid worker who is "operating from a position of relative strength and anonymous power vis-à-vis ("local" "helpless") aid recipients (Malkki, 1992)" (p.24). Malkki observed, with Finish Red Cross aid workers, especially for long-term missions, that it was often hard for them to manage "social distance and proximity" (p.48). And that once certain social relationships became too close

this would coincide with the Red Cross protocol on neutrality and impartiality. Malkki observes these tensions of proximity within a framework of the *management of affect.* She takes this term from the anthropologist William Mazzarella. Affect, Malkki explains, should not be interpreted as *emotions* as we regularly perceive of them, but rather as something more complex and less classifiable. She quotes Christina Schwenkel to make her point:

> *"to identify not individualized emotions and autonomous states of feeling, but the manifold passions that, Spinoza once argued, manifest intersubjectively and collectively through embodied actions and alliances" (2013:252)" (p.55)*

I will approach the tensions of proximity through the management of affect, however, it is important to make clear that the interlocutors of Malkki's research are exactly what the RWC volunteers avoid to be. Malkki's participants conform to a high level of professionalization and training before going to the ground, which is completely opposite to how RWC volunteers enter the Grande-Synthe Jungle. Protocols of impartiality and neutrality are also not present in the RWC workings, and being emotionally neutral and impartial is not expected from the volunteers.

Therefore, it is important to situate my research alongside, but also in sharp contrast with Malkki's observations. How do the non-professional grassroots volunteers conceptualize providing aid? Rather than professionalism, internationalism, and occupational solidarity (Malkki, 2015) and the importance of neutral and apolitical moral values of big NGOs (Redfield 2012), concepts such as friendship, activism, solidarity, volunteering, gut-feeling, etc. were more at stake for my participants. *Doing the right thing* lays at the basis for the day to day decision-making, and these decisions were often made within a framework of distinction from big humanitarian organizations. The management of affect is an interesting framework to map the passions and emotions which are intersubjectively at play for RWC volunteers and to understand how volunteers deal with the situations they find themselves in.

By placing this thesis in the framework of affect theory, it is an attempt to avoid "conceptual dualisms" which risk to reduce the volunteers' reality and lived experience into categories such as mind vs. body, personal vs. political, etc. (Skoggard & Waterston, 2015). Interestingly, they explain that affect does not only apply to the individual but also to the collective. They refer to, for example, political rallies and concerts - I would argue that there also exists a strong collective affect when it comes to the grassroots atmosphere I address. However, as Skoggard and Waterson warn, affect might end up in vague descriptions which render it a hollow concept. They argue that one can avoid this through evocative writing, where the "emotions and feelings of living, socially situated subjects are conveyed" (p.112). Through ethnographic scenes, I aim to incorporate an evocative facet in this thesis which hopefully adds to the affective understating of the described reality.

1.2.4 Doing the Right Thing: Anthropology of Ethics

"The question is not to examine the ideological purity of solidarity initiatives, but rather to capture changes in the contemporary humanitarian world" - Rozakou, 2017, p.5.

It is interesting to assess the moral reasoning behind the decision-making of volunteers and the deliberation and mediation processes at stake when trying to do *the right thing,* in a context in which volunteers are very closely involved with the people they help. To understand the deliberation processes behind the volunteers' day to day actions, it is necessary to position this thesis within the anthropology of ethics.

In recent years, within the context of the ethical turn, the ethnography of morality and the anthropology of ethics gained importance - in which a focus on "moral subjects and their subjectivities" (p.430) became increasingly significant to anthropological endeavours (Fassin, 2014). Works from authors such as Veena Das (2007) - on ethics of the everyday and everyday suffering; Saba Mahmood (2005) and Talal Asad (2003) - on ethical

self-cultivation; Michael Lambek (2010) - on ordinary ethics; and Karen Sykes (2009) - on moral reasoning; are only a fraction of groundbreaking work within the anthropology of ethics.

As Didier Fassin (2012) explains, the adjective "moral" is troublesome since it can be inherently normative and is historically situated within anthropological endeavours as moral commitments. Paraphrasing Veena Das and Michael Lambek, Fassin explains that it has no use for researchers to define morals and morality a priori but rather to explore "what people do and say in everyday action and ordinary language to make sense of it posteriori […] to apprehend morality in acts and discourses, to understand what men and women do which they consider to be moral or good or right or generous" (p.5-p.6). This is the way in which I tried to understand how the grassroots volunteers mediated what the *right things to do* were.

There are two main paradigms within the anthropological study of ethics and morality (Fassin, 2012): Firstly, a Durkheimian paradigm (based on Kant) in which a more deterministic stance is upheld and where a predefined 'set of values and norms' informs what is right and what is wrong - as something which is exteriorly imposed on a person. Secondly, a Foucauldian paradigm (based on Aristotle) in which a more subjective stance prevails and where ethics and morality are part of a process which develops through what is considered being a *good person* and *leading a good life.*

In order to make sense of the moral reasoning of volunteers behind trying *to do the right thing*, I position myself within the Foucauldian paradigm and will draw, more specifically, on Aristotlean virtue ethics. This paradigm, as Fassin explains, clearly breaks with the "Kantian ethic of duty [and sets forth that] human beings are free ethical subjects even when they appear to follow a moral code imposed by their group or religion" (2014, p.431). By positioning myself within this paradigm I aim to show that humanitarianism within the context of the refugee 'crisis' is "not monolithic and is full of contradictions that make space for the

emergence of new subjectivities and socialities" (Turner, 2016, p.147).

Ethics of Proximity and Sociality

Within the framework of moral philosophy, the ethics of proximity only recently gained renewed attention, although, concepts such as proximity and distance were already at the heart various debates on friendship within Aristotelian ethics (Nortvedt & Nordhaug, 2008). The ethics of proximity have become more central to professional ethics when it comes to, for example, healthcare and social work (Banks, 2012; Nortvedt & Nordhaug, 2008). Nortveldt and Nordhaug (2008) offer an interesting overview of the various ethical perspectives on proximity linked to moral reasons.

Firstly, they set out a phenomenological approach in which meta-ethics are central: *how does one evaluate what is good?* Here proximity is understood as central to basic ethical motivations and is key to "relational interdependence, where basic trust and vulnerability are an inextricable part of any human encounter" (Nortveldt and Nordhaug, 2008, p.3). They argue that *otherness* in human vulnerability is seen as the way to moral responsibility. A second perspective, is proximity within the framework of moral motivation, in which empathy and affective relations towards others are a crucial part of feeling moral responsibility. These views are based on Aristotelian ethics in which "human emotions inspire and enlighten the moral sensitivities that are necessary for human flourishing within relationships based upon friendship and interpersonal ties" (p.2). Thirdly, a more normative approach is set forth in which relational proximity is considered central to humanity and has a normative value and, thus, is not merely situational.

It is the second approach which is more relevant to the scope of this thesis. Here, "human emotion and moral agency, and proximity in a relational, spatial and temporal sense" (Nortveldt and Nordhaug, 2008, p.2) are central concepts. They argue that face-to-face encounters and close interconnectedness contribute to strong

feelings of moral responsibility. The encouraged close relationships between RWC volunteers and refugees definitely enhanced the feeling of moral responsibility. It was not expected to be impartial and considered only natural to establish stronger bonds with some refugees than others, nevertheless, it was crucial to not let this gain the upper hand when it came to distributions and more practical aid. As Nortveldt and Nordhaug paraphrase Bernard Williams, impartiality in relational proximity, often expected in bigger humanitarian aid organizations, runs the risk of underestimating the value of relationships and undermining "a person's integrity, a person's sense of self, and to further distance persons from their humanity" (p.3). This view is interesting when it comes to the RWC's explicit aversion to such practices.

Extending on proximity from the perspective of relational psychology would far exceed the scope of this thesis. Therefore it is interesting to look at a more practical understanding of moral reasoning through the concept of *phronesis* which is central to Aristotelian virtue ethics (Fassin, 2012; Jouili, 2015; Lambek, 2002, 2010) .

From Phronesis to a Deeper Understanding

In her work on how pious Muslim women adhere to their religious principles and practices, Jouili (2015) focuses on her participants' "concern to do the right thing" (p.3) through day to day deliberations processes. Jouili conceptualizes the aim of *doing the right thing* within the context of Aristotle's concept of Phronesis. Drawing on Michael Lambek, she explains that this means "moral reasoning" and doing not only what is "right for the individual alone but what is right for the human flourishing, for the polis" (p.18). As Jouili explains this kind of moral reasoning is inherently praxeological, intersubjective and relational in its nature. It is important to understand that phronesis is inherently linked to "dilemma, uncertainty, and conflict" (p.18). Although her work sets of from a completely different scope, the underlying struggle which

returns in her observations are relatable to the moral dilemmas with which volunteers are confronted on a day to day basis.

Concerning Lambek (2002), dignity, self-respect, and the overall human thriving are central to phronesis. As he explains, phronesis captures moral reasoning as holistic and goes beyond the dualisms of objective vs. subjective, rationality vs. irrationality, and error vs. truth. Rather he explains that phronesis surpasses 'objective knowledge' and is based on *doing* in practice - which is an emergent and reproductive mode of creating knowledge. As Goodale (2012) puts phronesis "is the capability and the willingness to self-evaluate action – or, we might say, practice – in terms of both prevailing social norms and desired ends" (p.470). Jouili (2015) explains that the concept of habitus is particularly useful to come to an understanding of how demanding a transformation of a certain set of dispositions is. This kind reflexivity on one's own dispositions and actions, as will become clear throughout this thesis, is very central to the deliberations which underlie the volunteers' lived experiences.

Nevertheless, in the case of Jouili's application of phronesis one can discern a clear religious moral framework to which her participants adhere. When it comes to my participants however, as I mentioned before, the category of the grassroots volunteer is embedded in a vague framework based on concepts such as humanism, solidarity, horizontality, dignity, equality, gut-feelings etc. Although volunteers find a common ground based on these values, there exists a strong individual factor when it comes to the subject position which is taken by the volunteers. As Fassin (2012) observed for humanitarian aid workers, they are defined by their personal dispositions while defending a set of moral values and adhering to an "ethical sense of commitment and solidarity" (p.8). These moral values and the way in which the volunteers are ethically committed differentiated individually as well as it comes to the modus operandi of the different organisations. The fact that the RWC consciously does not adhere to a strong protocol, adds to the impossibility to discern a clearly delineated moral framework. As a result, I will focus on how volunteers aim *to do the right thing*

throughout the various complex situations they face and how they mediate this specific reality.

The plethora of grassroots organisations on the ground adhere to a differentiating spectrum of what is considered *the right thing to do* and what is considered *a proper ethics of proximity.* As a result, the volunteers base their decisions on a rather flexible set of values and on a vague spectrum which is being developed in an experimental and utopian context (Papataxiarchis, 2016; Rozakou, 2016a). The grassroots volunteers negotiate a way to position and reinvent themselves within the humanitarian framework and are constantly confronted with differentiating and unclear sets moral of codes. The following quote beautifully brings together why phronesis is useful and central to the lived experiences of my participants and how they mediate the tensions of proximity: "Phronesis does not necessarily guarantee that 'the right thing' will always be done 'in the right moment' , nor does it guarantee success. However, what it does promise is that the ethical agent strains to resolve a conflicting situation as best she [he] can by taking all aspects into account and by aspiring to order the goods in a reasonable way" (Jouili, 2015, p.151). Another reason why phronesis is especially interesting within the context of the RWC, being an organisation which consciously avoids the implication of strict protocol, is the fact that it enables us "to grasp modes of deliberation and choice that go beyond the strict application of rules" (Jouili, p.20). Thus, it provides a way of understanding how volunteers mediate a complex reality marked by change, ambiguity and inconsistency; and how they strive *to do the right thing* against the background of a fluid and open-ended set of moral values.

1.3 Brief Chapter Overview

Throughout the next chapter, I will describe the situation of the Grande-Synthe refugee camp before it burned down, the impact of the big fire, the overall workings of the RWC and how the volunteers dealt with the sudden changes. These events are important

to lay out since I spend my time over there in a moment of big change and ongoing chaos.

Chapter 3 will elaborate expand my research methodology. I will clarify why I decided to write this thesis in an autoethnographic manner and highlight the benefits as well as setbacks of this method. Furthermore, I will touch upon epistemological issues, point out some limitations and insecurities concerning my positionality, and place this thesis within the framework of activist anthropology.

Chapter 4 will focus on relational proximity between the volunteers and the refugees. I will address a certain *ethics of proximity* at play in the workings of the RWC and argue that the importance of being closely and personally involved stems from the aim of being radically different from the overall humanitarian discourse and approach. Through the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, I will explain how this particular tendency is central to the volunteers' moral reasoning when it comes to *trying to make the right decisions.*

In chapter 5, I address some intense '*emergency'* situations and show how volunteers create ethical know-how in the midst of these complex and conflicting moments. Through a focus on *affect* I aim to lay bare how this often overwhelming reality impacts the volunteers before they are able to reflexively mediate what is happening.

The final chapter wraps up this thesis through a meta-reflection on the tensions of proximity when it comes to ethnographic research. I will argue that the tensions of proximity which grassroots volunteers face in the Grande-Synthe Jungle bare various similarities with some common difficulties which ethnographers encounter during and after their fieldwork. I will address different aspects such as responsibilities, relationships, leaving the field, and will touch upon the relevance of phronesis for both realities.

2. Setting the Scene: Volunteering at the Grande-Synthe Jungle

This chapter will frame the events which unfolded before I started my fieldwork as well as how the Grande-Synthe Jungle developed after a big fire destroyed the La Linière camp. Since I arrived a day after the big fire destroyed my initial fieldwork site, this impacted and complicated my research greatly. Next to this, I will explain the RWC's general workings as an organization and unfold how they dealt with the intense post-fire situation. Against the background of these developments, I aim to portray the complexity of a fieldwork site in constant change and how the RWC had to find its footing and reinvent itself completely. The old camp and the constant turmoil had always been a big part of the imaginaries of the volunteers as it was where the RWC was founded. Setting the scene of my fieldwork will be a quite extensive part, although necessary since the situations I will describe are important information in order to sketch the unique atmosphere of volunteering at the Grande-Synthe Jungle. Throughout this part I will introduce the various actors present in the Grande-Synthe area.

2.1 A Camp Plagued by Rising Tensions

The first articles about refugees in the Grande-Synthe area jump up in September 2009, linked to a police raid at the notorious Calais Jungle. What is clear, is that the developments around Dunkirk area are very much linked to what happens in the refugee Jungle of Calais, only 35 kilometres apart. In 2009 *The Telegraph* mentioned that "it is rumoured that a new squatter camp is taking shape close to Dunkirk" (2009). From then on some brief mentions of small settlements being created and dismantled around Dunkirk are published (The Telegraph, 2010). It is only from 2015 onward that the newsfeed on Dunkirk increased with news on more informal settlements holding up to 1000 people (Hereford Times, 2015; The Local, 2015; The Telegraph, 2015).

From December 2015 onward, the Grande-Synthe area was estimated to house between 2600 and 3000 people, living in dreadful conditions (British Red Crosse, 2015). As the partial evictions at the Jungle of Calais intensified and more refugees moved towards Grande-Synthe, the conditions worsened intensively. As a result, the humanitarian camp *La Linière* was opened March 2016 in Grande Synthe by Médecins Sans Frontières (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016; Telegraph, 2016). The camp was perceived as a first humanitarian victory and had to be established in sharp contrast with the squalid conditions of the Calais Jungle. This could be achieved by running the camp in a cooperation between Médecins Sans Frontiéres, a private company (Afeji), grassroots volunteer organizations (Utopia 56, Auberge Des Migrants, RWC, etc.) and CRS[4] patrolling (De Morgen, 2017a). The camp had known many grassroots humanitarian organizations, as well as individual volunteers. By the time I started my fieldwork the main grassroots organizations were the Adult Learning Centre, the Children's Centre, the Legal Team, the Woodshed Team and the Refugee Women Centre. An interesting interplay between these various organizations aimed to cover as many needs as possible which were far from fulfilled by the state and the private company running the camp. The city hall had provided the volunteers with an old youth hostel - the Puythouck building - located only 10 minutes from the camp. Here is where the volunteers could spend their nights and where I ended up staying the first two weeks of my fieldwork.

The population of the camp in Dunkirk increased after the Calais and Paris camps were shut down and eventually two of the major organizations, Médecins Sans Frontièress and Utopia 56, pulled out from the organization of the camp (De Morgen, 2017a; The Guardian, 2016). The situation of the "humanitarian" camp of

[4] **C**ompagnies **R**épublicaines de **S**écurité: This is France's national riot and crowd control force. They are in charge of maintaining the refugee camps as well as controlling/dismantling refugee Jungles. They have a notorious and aggressive reputation among refugees and volunteers and will come back throughout this thesis as a big stress factor for the volunteers.

La Linière became as bad as Calais' Jungle and the pending closure was announced on 15th of March 2017 by Minister Bruno Le Roux (Le Parisien, 2017). The 11th of April 2017, the day I planned to leave for my fieldwork, the whole camp burned down during a horrific fire. In the end, I left the next day with the goal in mind to help wherever I could be useful.

What had been described as the reason for the fire by the media were clashes between Kurdish and Afghani refugees (BBC, 2017; CNN, 2017; De Standaard, 2017; Le Monde, 2017). According to Michel Lalande, the Prefect of the Nord region "no one is able to explain how these events could have happened" (CNN, 2017). A remarkable observation by Lalande, taking into account the dreadful conditions of the camp which had been critiqued for a long time. The camp was bursting at the seams, housing refugees at double capacity in the shelters for over 6 months (up to 1500 when only 800 were allowed), which increased the pressure on volunteers and reduced the living quality of the refugees significantly. Sexual abuse, epidemics, exploitation of unaccompanied minors, smuggler's mafia and drug trafficking were myriad in the camp (De Redactie, 2017; Legein – Vzw Humain, 2017; personal communication with volunteers, 2017). On top of that, the camp's overall infrastructure left much to be desired, especially when it came to safe sanitary provisions, and clean and private shelters (The Guardian, 2017).

Médecins Du Monde together with various active organizations at the camp (Auberge Des Migrants, ADRA, etc.) had already desperately called attention to the structural and organizational failures of the camp in February 2017 (Médecins Du Monde, 2017). As many volunteers told me, the camp had become a ticking time bomb. An arson that destroyed the Refugee Women's Centre early January 2017 was seen as a herald for the rising tensions in the camp. The Prefect stating to be unable to explain how these events could have unfolded becomes questionable taking into account the brief observations above.

In hindsight, taking into consideration the refugees and volunteers' experiences, the fire was a very complex event, the actual cause of it often took mythic proportions. Many refugees and volunteers agreed that the fire was in France's as well as the United Kingdom's best interest. The Prefecture had decided to shut down the camp six months after anyways, this often led to the conclusion that the fire was a setup or at least facilitated. Many refugees told me that the CRS was standing by and laughing throughout the ordeal and did not react to the conflict according to standard procedure. Women and children were seen leaving the camp before the conflict even started, normally more CRS forces would be sent into the camp to alleviate and prevent the situation. The 11th of April this was not the case. Moreover, the fire-fighters were not allowed into the camp until two and a half hours after the start of the fire. This, of course, can legitimately be a safety decision but was perceived by many as another proof of a setup.

Figure 1. The physical space of the Refugee Women Centre in the La Linière camp. Only a very small minority of the camp's inhabitant were female, thus, the RWC provided a space in which the women could retreat for a while from the male dominated camp. Image: Nina De Cloet

Figure 2. Only a few days after the fire, the camp of La Linière is bulldozed to the ground and turned into a desolate wasteland. Image: Nina De Cloet

Figure 3. People had lost many personal belongings during the fire and tried to reenter the camp. CRS forces were patrolling the grounds until weeks after the fire, in order to prevent the refugees from establishing a new camp.

2.2 New Jungle Wara Wara

The days after the fire chaos unravelled. People were 'redistributed' in five local gyms as temporary shelters. The gyms were divided into Afghan and Kurdish groups as well as family and single men gyms. Already after 3 days, some gyms were closed, only one small family gym remained open until the 19th of April. Each time a gym closed the intention of the government was to put people on buses towards CAO[5]'s without allowing them to gather leftovers from the old camp (identity cards, personal belongings etc.). This was met with a lot of protest and people were not sufficiently informed on where the buses were leaving to. The other option, which was preferred among the refugees, was to stay out on the streets and in the woods. Many of them had travelled so far and were closer to the UK than ever before, what would be the point in leaving? On top of that, at least ten unaccompanied minors disappeared after the fire (De Morgen, 2017b).

It became clear that most of the volunteers were completely disordered by the situation. A total lack of organization, in combination with very little communication from government instances, made it almost impossible to provide constructive aid in the chaotic situation. After a few days, most volunteers were not even allowed into the gyms any longer. The little emotional support that volunteers could provide, to people they had known for months from the camp, fell away. For many of the grassroots volunteers, the shift from the rhythm of the camp to this emergency situation was very unsettling. Most of the grassroots organizations were used to providing help on a very personal basis and now felt powerless in the face of the crisis and upset with how the authorities dealt with it.

[5] **C**entre d'**A**ccueil et d'**O**rientation: These are first orientation and accommodation places around France in order to asses individual asylum cases and provide temporary shelter and care: http://apsa62.fr/?q=node/38

The main question which lingered for the refugees and volunteers was: *is there going to be a new camp*?. Eventually, the government made it clear that this was not going to be the case. As a result, Afghans and Kurds split up and declared to build their own camps in the woods: *new Jungle wara wara* (Kurdish for *New Jungle, come here, come here*). In an almost comrade-like style patches of the woods were held as camps for the nights, scouts-like structures with cloths were established as shelters, and campfires were lit for the night. The days after the refugees had to leave the emergency gyms, a cat-and-mouse game between the police and the refugees was initiated. The informal new Jungles were dismantled the morning after they were built and police constantly shooed refugees away. On the one hand, the police could not force them on the buses, on the other hand, they did not allow them to settle down either. Often refugees were arrested and brought to detention centres when they could not provide the correct papers, these were attempts to keep people away from the Grande-Synthe area. The aid workers had to become inventive and figure out where the new settlements were established – often the volunteers were informed by refugees with whom they had built a closer relationship. This cat-and-mouse game between refugees, police, and volunteers went on for the coming two weeks.

Some of the Jungles were established only 100 meters from the building where the volunteers were sleeping. Considering that many refugees knew this was a place where they could charge their phones (allowed by some of the volunteers, forbidden by the City hall) was a source of tension among the organizations staying at the building. On top of that, the building could not be locked, which lead to a feeling of anxiety considering the tense situation unfolding only minutes away. The Children's Centre deemed the situation too unsafe and left the building, followed by the Legal Team. Some volunteers could not handle the stark contrast of the building next to the woods where hundreds were sleeping outside in the cold: "*Why can my friend not come in, we are all human, right? Why can't I*

have one beer with him and let him charge his phone, for god's sake?" (RWC Volunteer, Logbook, April 16, 2017).

Only seven days after the fire the number of volunteers in the building had decimated, many felt useless and eventually left. For those who had been in the camp for a long time and got close to the refugees, the change was hard to cope with. I remained in the building with three volunteers from the Adult Learning Centre, some sporadic individual volunteers and the only remaining volunteer from the RWC: Lisa. She was completely burnt out and in dire need of a break from the whole situation. The emptier the building became, the tenser the atmosphere. Some of the individual volunteers were perceived to be going on heroic expeditions during the nights, which Lisa, the Adult Centre Volunteers, and I considered unsafe and foolish. It felt like there was no structure at all and the help was no longer provided in a coordinated way. At this point, we all had serious concerns about our own safety and decided that it was time to leave the Puythouck building, which was also demanded by the city hall. Since Lisa decided to leave, I felt very nervous about suddenly becoming the sole volunteer for the RWC and decided to go back home for a few days until more experienced RWC volunteers were coming back to the ground in order to find out how to re-establish the RWC in this new setting:

"When you came here, the two months after the fire, it was really a period of adaptation for the RWC. Right after the camp burnt down, we went from a small bubble –a physical women's centre – to a huge area where we had to cover an enormous variety of needs. It was kind of a transition period and we really had to try to figure out our priorities. We still have to now, but then it was all about reinventing the approach of the Women Centre and how to tackle the new responsibilities in the best and efficient way possible" (RWC volunteer, personal communication, January 28, 2018).

Eventually, after things had settled down a bit, some Jungles started to hold against the constant pressure and informal settlements weren't demolished on a daily basis any longer. Most Afghans who

used to live in the Grande-Synthe camp eventually left for Calais, where long-term established Afghan Jungles had been abiding for a long time. The Kurdish remained in Grande-Synthe and started to gravitate around the informal Jungle in the Puythouck woods. This Jungle was bound to become the main ground for the RWC as well as my research site. It was a patch of bushes in a park at the outskirts of Grande-Synthe which had become the hub for Kurdish refugees to dwell while trying to cross over to Great Britain. This reality was a very harsh one; when there are no structural shelters, no restrooms, insufficient supplies of blankets and underwear, and no regular access to drinking water, people struggle day in day out trying to carry on. Physically this reality is harsh, emotionally it wears people out. Especially when sporadic set-ups of small tents or improvised plastic bag shelters are battered to the ground by the police on at least a weekly basis. The constant threat of police violence went along with pepper spray attacks and the expropriation of little personal belongings the refugees still had.

Similar to the Calais Jungle in 2016, the Jungle of Grande-Synthe did not receive government support, nor did big international agencies seem to make a priority of this Jungle. It would not be correct to take the Calais Jungle as a blueprint for how the Grande-Synthe Jungle developed. Especially considering that it is considerably smaller, although, there are obvious interfaces between these two Jungle spaces. Similar to the Calais Jungle, it is a space where the consequences of Europe and France's flawed border and migration politics become painfully apparent; a space of exception where notions of rights and citizenship are blurred/neglected; a space where grassroots organizations and individual volunteers take on the responsibility to fill in the gaps of the state– even better so, the complete absence of it – when it comes to humanitarian aid; and, most dreadfully, a space of constant violence performed by state authorities and smuggler's networks (Agamben, 2005; Mould, 2017; Sandri, 2017; Sigona, 2017).

Figure 4. People are waiting for food distribution at the open space next to the Jungle. The woods serve as protection during the nights. Image: Dorothy Saudemont

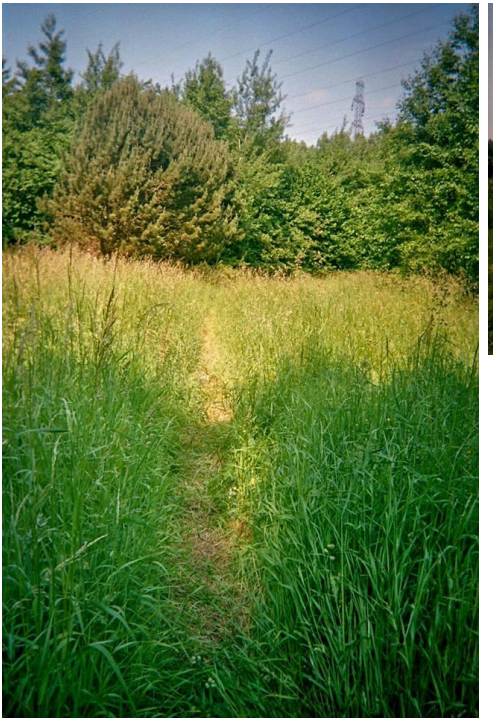

Figure 5 (right). A small path is created towards the woods where the families have put their shelters. Image: Nina De Cloet

Figure 6 (up). Due to the absence of showers and running water, people are washing themselves and their clothes in the nearby lake. Someone has left their pants to dry in the sun. Image Nina De Cloet

2.3 From Square One: The Refugee Women's Centre 2.0

"The Refugee Women's Centre is committed to supporting women, families and minors in and around Grand Synthe, Dunkirk and Calais. We support the specific needs of women, children and vulnerable people, of all ages and nationalities, who have left their homes and loved ones due to war, conflict and persecution" (Refugee Women's Centre website, n.d.).

The RWC is one of the few organizations who returned and remained after the fire. Most other grassroots organizations did not see a way or did not have the means to remain in this very fragile and unpredictable Jungle situation. The Children's Centre and Adult Learning centre left. The Legal Advice team remained for a while but eventually left too. Big NGO's were very sporadic visitors. The only daily visitors were those who provided food and sporadic distributions of hygiene products and clothes (Auberge Des Migrants, Emmaüs France, Salaam Warehouse, Refugee Community Kitchen). And Gynécologie Sans Frontières (GSF) kept coming on a daily basis but provided a limited focus of aid: only providing shelter for mothers with children younger than three years old (if they had space) and hospital care solely focused on the women. Next to this, smaller organisations from the Netherlands or Belgium, such as for example VZW Humain, would drive by with provisions once every two weeks. This fractured provision of aid left a huge gap in the necessary care for men, women, children and vulnerable people on many levels.

Although the grassroots RWC was running since 2015 in the camp, it only became an official independent charity in 2016. Six ladies are at the basis of 2016 redefinition of the RWC in the camp and have voting power for important decisions. The old 2015 RWC used to maintain different approaches and had graffiti saying "No Men allowed", which was stating the obvious in quite a harsh way, almost demonizing the men in the camp. Early on, the redefined women centre understood that it was important to avoid demonizing

the men in the camp since it would not contribute to supporting the women in any way and only incite existing frustrations towards the RWC. They had to somehow include the men in order for them to help the women efficiently. They aimed to create a more inclusive space by also doing male distribution in order to avoid the growing frustrations. Next to that, they renewed the activities and focused on creating a bigger support network around Dunkirk.

The six ladies who lay at the basis of the redefinition of RWC had an in-depth knowledge of the workings of the camp since they had all volunteered there at some point. They organize everything through online communication and originate from different countries (UK, France, United States, and Poland). Opposite to many of the all-UK grassroots organizations in the camp, having a French person as a core member proved to be a great asset since it contributes to the communication with local authorities as well as local networking. The founding members divide tasks into finances, communication, needs, administration, funding, etc. and focus on maintaining a strong horizontal approach and always involving the volunteers on the ground when it came to decision-making. The fundamental core values of the redefined RWC became: “dignity, cooperation between volunteers and refugees, generosity, curiosity, and empowerment ” (RWC website, n.d.). Although the main focus of the RWC is female emancipation and empowerment, it understood that they can only achieve this through an intersectional and inclusive lens.

Becoming active at the Grande-Synthe Jungle after the fire, the RWC was forced to redefine their modus operandi once again while trying to adhere to their core values. During my two months of fieldwork at the RWC, I was working together on the ground with two core members of the RWC who came along sporadically and one other long-term volunteer who was by my side for the full two months: Anka. She had volunteered for 5 months in the camp and was a founding member of the RWC, nevertheless, the situation of the Jungle was completely new to her as well as to me. This time of adaption, with only a few incoming short-term volunteers once in a while, made it an especially demanding period for the RWC. We

were happy to have the constant online support from the six founding members of the RWC who were ready to provide us with advice. During the two months I was there the RWC was in charge of the distributions for women and children as well as regular distributions for men. This used to be done in the camp by a fixed amount of volunteers, allowing other volunteers to focus on moral support. Unfortunately, due to the lack of volunteers, it was hard to combine distribution with moral support, listening to people's stories and acting upon their personal needs. This, however, had always been a priority of the RWC: "we recognize that "basic needs" include mental health wellbeing and, therefore, we do what we can to offer moral support. We have created spaces that are dedicated to helping the women feel comfortable, whether their wish is to talk to someone or to be left alone" (RWC website, n.d.).

Another main task of the RWC was to focus on emergency situations and providing emergency housing for families. Next to acting upon emergencies in the Grande-Synthe Jungle, the RWC was often contacted by Calais volunteers about emergencies concerning female refugees. We always kept a close look on unaccompanied minors in the Jungle and aimed to provide legal help, especially to those who wanted to claim asylum in France. Once people were enrolled in the French asylum procedure they would be placed in social housing and get some money. The money they got was so little that the RWC would go visit social housing buildings to do extra distributions. On top of that, the Gynécologie Sans Frontières (the only physical health team on the ground) did very little to cover men's health, this made the RWC also prioritize bringing men to the hospital on a regular basis. At the beginning of my fieldwork, we were also involved in night distributions in Calais, cooperating with Utopia 56. Luckily, we quickly realized that 14-hour days, combining Grande-Synthe and Calais would be impossible to maintain mentally as well as physically. As a result, we decided to cut off the cooperation until the volunteering pool grew.

In general, our days would start in the Salaam warehouse, preparing the distribution orders and the afternoons were taking

place in the Jungle, the hospital, the social housing or dealing with emergencies. The days were long and the days off became scarce, due to a high sense of responsibility, since the support network for the Grande-Synthe Jungle was almost non-existing. Next to that, the RWC was once again confronted with tensions and frustrations coming from the men. This was not necessarily due to what the RWC was doing but rather due to the complete lack of organizations taking care of the men, men's distribution, and mental health care; which was at least better organized in the time of the camp. It was impossible to do distributions for the families while ignoring the complete lack of care for men. The support network became so absent in the Grande-Synthe Jungle that, as Alise (RWC volunteer) explained, the RWC had to become some sort of a *Human Centre* - an all-round team.

Figure 7. People are creating their own make shift shelters for the night. With sticks, rope, and some canvas the refugees have become quite inventive. Image: Nina De Cloet

Figure 8. Fires are lit to stay warm during the night and make tea. In this case a father was warming water for his daughters in order to let them wash their hair comfortably. Image: Nina De Cloet

Figure 9. Sometimes the refugees are lucky to get hold of some tents during the distributions. Image: RWC website

3. Methodology, Knowledge, and Positionality

"Arriving here post-crisis, I can sense tension everywhere. Tension, first of all, from the refugees who do not know what will happen next and are afraid of a new conflict; tension between volunteers, not knowing what to do or critiquing what others are doing in this state of chaos; and tension between the various organizations on the ground […] Communication within the Women Centre leaves much to be desired at this point. I feel like an outsider and it is hard to find my way in. Although the others too feel like we need to sit down, think and take more constructive action, we are running around uncoordinated. I know this is mainly due to the situation I find myself in, and I should give it more time. I am not sure if I can keep up"(De Cloet, Logbook, April 14, 2017)

As the previous chapter made clear, I found myself in very unexpected circumstances once I started my fieldwork. Consequently, this overwhelming period altered me, as well as my research expectations, profoundly. Before leaving I made broad alignments and expectations on how I would conduct my research. Through beginners experience as an anthropology student, you realize that these expectations will shift, but you consider them to remain within a broad spectrum of possibilities (Blommaert, Dong & Jie, 2010; Robben & Sluka, 2012). A framework, let's say, which is rather flexible due to ethnography's inherent open-endedness (Fortun, 2012).

If the camp would not have been destroyed, I would have been able to outline my research as follows: I volunteered at the RWC in the humanitarian camp of Grande-Synthe at a daily basis from 10 am until 5 pm. As the RWC's volunteer guide describes "The Women's Centre is a safe space for the women of the camp to come with their children for support, relaxation and to create relationships with the other women in the camp as well as the volunteers" (RWC, personal communication, March 19, 2017). I anticipated to be impacted emotionally due to the nature of my fieldwork, however, I presumed

that being an active volunteer rather than a decision-maker would allow me sufficient time to cope, reflect and focus on my research. Nothing I anticipated and experienced came close to these expectations. On top of that, I had planned to concentrate on the refugee women living in "France's first ever internationally recognized refugee camp" (The Telegraph, 2016) and how they experienced the tensions of daily life. Eventually, due to the unforeseen circumstances, I had to reevaluate my research prospects completely.

The situation and position I suddenly found myself in, greatly shaped the scope of this thesis. Therefore, this chapter will address the consequences my deep involvement in the RWC had on my methodology, my perspectives on knowledge, and the insecurities and limitations which I faced as a researcher.

3.1 A Methodology of Deep Involvement

I had not anticipated a strict methodological framework next to basic ethnographic tools before leaving to the field. Considering the circumstances and the unexpected course of the fieldwork I conducted, it became clear to me that the most evident way of bringing this work together was through auto-ethnography, in itself a highly reflexive mode of writing. I had invested myself, my time, my emotions and my anger into this collaboration with the Refugee Women's Centre, more than I could have ever anticipated. I had grown so close to my fellow volunteers, living together for weeks in a tiny ramshackle bungalow, that it became obvious to me that this text should become a relational dialogue between my participants' and my experiences. Most interviews were conducted in English, only one important interview was conducted in Dutch and will be directly translated. To ensure anonymity of my participants, I changed all their names and made sure that situations described throughout this text, concerning refugees, could not harm their anonymity or safety in any way.

I conducted my fieldwork through qualitative research methods with an interpretative approach, this allowed me to gather information-rich cases. Central throughout my stay in Grande-Synthe were participant observation and informal interviews. Participant observation allowed me to establish in-depth connections with those surrounding me, still maintaining good relations and friendships until this day. My informal interviews rarely were scheduled events since the hectic environment did not allow this kind of planning. As a result, I made notes in my logbook, switched my recorder on when conversations were taking interesting turns and had long post-fieldwork Facebook conversations with co-volunteers. This is how the interviews became *a part of* my participant observation and not *apart from* it (Hockney and Forsey, 2012). I quickly realized that planned interviews with a fixed set of open-ended questions were off-putting to my participants. It made them turn and toss their words – I soon realized that a late-night conversation over a glass of wine, after an intense day, brought a more organic and interesting flow. This approach, as Hockey and Forsey explain, creates room for free narrative and passes on agency to the participants. The way I collected my data should allow me to write a text in which layered accounts, interactive interviews, interpretive proof, reflexivity and relational narrative become key features (Eilis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Schnelker, 2006).

My deep involvement in the RWC allowed me to create a snowball effect in my contacts with volunteers from various organizations around Grande-Synte and Calais. Other than my daily volunteering partner, Anka, I was knowledgeable in English as well as French. Unexpectedly, I became the main contact person for English as well as French organizations, city-hall workers, French authorities and the new incoming volunteers. However, this key position in the RWC came along with a high sense of responsibility, which forced me into an intense balancing act between full-time volunteering and focussing on my research. As Anderson (2006) describes this is one of the pitfalls of conducting deeply involved participant observation, which I had a hard time avoiding: "*the*

researcher must exercise extreme caution not to let his or her research focus fade out of awareness in the face of other pressing and enticing engagements in the field. Furthermore, the autoethnographer must not allow herself or himself to be drawn into participating heavily in activities in the field at the expense of writing field notes" (p.389). The following logbook fragment clearly demonstrates this drawback:

> "*Since what happened to Amarinda [refugee] I have not had the strength any longer to write properly for a few days. This event blew me over and it made me realize and witness fully, for the first time in my life, that horrible things happen in the dark to people with no voice and no rights so close to my own home. It makes me wonder how many people have suffered similar faiths the last decade here in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, in the country of 'Egalité'. My whole naïve construct of police being reasonable –whatever that may mean- in France and Belgium is completely fading away. My anthropological reflex to understand their reasoning, motivations and perspective, is fading too. The anger I feel is overwhelming. It feels like I went numb after this moment. As if I cannot find words, only dry short descriptions, for the events that have taken place since then. As if no words will ever suffice to describe the injustice that has happened to Amarinda and that, in the end, nobody really seems to care about it. This event has sidetracked my capabilities to perform my research and has also sidetracked Anka, Elizabeth and me to perform in the same way we used to. It made us numb, we haven't talked a lot about it, we just go on* (De Cloet, Logbook, May 19, 2017).

In one of his articles on autoethnography, Leon Anderson (2006) coined the term *Analytic Autoethnography* and critiques evocative autoethnography for not being compatible with traditional practices in ethnography due to its sensibilities. Although I do find Anderson's observations on analytical ethnography very useful, I consider it less useful to cast it off as a subgenre of the more "traditional" ethnographic practices. I do agree with Eilis and

Bochner (2006) who, in reply to Anderson's article, claim that he is trying to put autoethnography into a straightjacket. I think a balance can be found between different approaches and styles of autoethnography, even within one text. As I experienced in my fieldwork, ethnography is highly unpredictable and complex, and this should be reflected in a text in ways that the ethnographer deems just for the reality presented. Even within the same text, the style can be more analytic and than again more evocative and reflexive. However, for me, Anderson (2006) provides five interesting hooks for writing and doing autoethnography: "(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis." (p.378).

I hope that the preceding five features become apparent throughout this thesis. That, indeed, this text is one in which my full immersion into - and in-depth understanding of - the volunteering culture around Grande-Synthe and Calais becomes clear. Be that as it may, it is important that this thesis does not solely revolve around my experience, but is a relational dialogue of reciprocity between me and my participants - a text in which our shared and interpersonal experiences stand central. Self-understanding within autoethnography, as Anderson (2006) explains, can bluntly be put as "the intersection of biography and society", in which self-knowledge becomes a way of understanding as well as constituting socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, it is essential that my reflexivity is visible in a useful way and "reproduces and/or transforms social understandings and relations" (Anderson, 2006, p.385). Lastly, the entity of this text should be critically involved with a methodological framework and with existing anthropological literature.

However, as Eilis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain, researchers should not only use their methodological framework and research literature to conduct their analysis. They underline the importance of e*piphanies* to autoethnographic analysis; quoting Bochner (1984, p.595) they explain that these "are self-claimed

phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate 'intense situations' and 'effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished' " (p.275). Researchers should use these epiphanies in order to negotiate experiences of the self as well as those of participants in pursuance of making the research understandable for insiders as well as outsiders (Eilis et al., 2011). This is exactly how I will use fragments from my logbook, ethnographic scenes, and interviews to clearly sketch volunteering experiences, volunteering imaginaries, and shared sentiments.

3.2 Perspectives on Knowledge

Throughout my two years as a master's student, one text has always been key to my understanding of anthropology and its innate value. In moments of setting the bar too high and expecting to write game-changing papers, it remembered me to stay grounded and do my best within my own frame of possibilities. It was the anthropologist David Graeber who, for me, illustrated the essence of ethnography in his book *Fragments of An Anarchist Anthropology* (2005). In this book Graeber puts that one of the key roles of ethnographers is "to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts" (p.12). Especially the last part of this quote – *as contributions, possibilities - as gifts* – is what I consider to be the objective of this thesis: to observe an alternative way of organization and cooperation in humanitarian aid and to unravel what it implies for the volunteers involved - as, hopefully, a contribution to the ongoing discussions of this social reality as a whole.

What does it mean to create a *valid contribution* to a research body as well as to the social reality that was observed? In the case of my fieldwork, I decided that it does not take a conventional

ethnographic approach since this simply does not reflect the way the fieldwork nor the writing process evolved. It does not reflect the way knowledge was created on the issues I observed nor would it be honest to the reality experienced during the fieldwork. My aim is to discern how my participants give meaning to the experience of volunteering and what kind of tensions the concept of *proximity* brings along, complemented with my own experiences in the field. Of course, the question arises, how I can gather this knowledge and process it in useful way?

I volunteered in the *objective* situation of the RWC but lived through a messy social reality where constant self-doubt among volunteers stood central. As my methodology stems from highly interpretative assumptions, it is almost needless to say that this needs a clear explanation of my epistemological stance. As I have written elsewhere "*we can observe phenomena such as power, resistance, the state, politics and so on, but subjectively investigate how people are influenced by these forces and how they perceive them. I pose that the reality is knowable and studiable, however through the human interpretation of it [...] and at all times realize that you influence your fieldwork through your own framework and interpretations*" (De Cloet, 2015, p.8-9). These observations lead to an idiographic approach where I would never aim to make sweeping generalizations about the grassroots volunteering culture. As Schnelker (2006) explains, such research creates "idiographic knowledge, descriptions of individual and unique realities that provide readers a deep understanding (Verstehen), or vicarious experience of the individual or event of interest" (p.45). Of course, and as I hope, this research should be useful and relatable for insiders as well as outsiders. So I do not consider *verstehen* as a highly individualized concept but as the result of an intersubjective cooperation between the participants and the ethnographer based on a shared reality. Nevertheless, it is crucial to be aware of the limitations of my own perception and presuppositions, mediated by my personal and cultural schemes of thought.

Gathering data and understanding my participants was not always a straightforward endeavour and certainly not always possible in the way I had imagined. A work that has inspired me was Veena Das' book *Life and Words: Violence and the descent into the ordinary* (2007). The book focuses on violence of the everyday, mainly how it affects women, and is linked to two events: the partition of India (1947) and the assassination of Indira Gandhi (1984). When I read the book I had anticipated to focus on the refugee women in the camp, however, the insights seemed to be applicable to my renewed focus on the volunteers. Das writes in a compelling way, intertwining her observations with those who surrounded her, in a deeply involved manner. Her opinion is that when one tries to understand violence it does not suffice to give historical or psychoanalytic explanations. She argues that to really understand violence, and how it impacts women in their daily lives, one should not write about the events but narrate how it entangles itself in the daily life.

> *"Rather, it narrates the lives of particular persons and communities who were deeply embedded in these events, and it describes the way that the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary. My attention is captured in this book by both the larger possibilities of phenomena and the singularity of lives" (Das, 2007, p.2)*

One might wonder how this can be applicable to volunteering experiences in Grande-Synthe since it seems to be an extraordinary situation apart from the volunteers' daily reality back at home. I would not suggest blueprinting Das' methods, rather use bits and pieces to understand and narrate on the RWC volunteering experiences. Indeed one could say that what happened to the camp of La Linière was an emergency situation (*tumultus*) and led to a *state of exception* (Agamben, 2005). As my colleagues and I have written in a seminar blog on the dismantling of the Calais Jungle, the actions which were undertaken by the government did not actually change anything on the level of laws and policies to prevent Jungle

situations or enhance the institutional care for refugees (Cancedda et al., 2016). When I undertook my fieldwork, 6 months after this enormous dismantlement, I was regularly involved in the Calais situation. I realized that what we had observed in the blog still held true, even worse. Calais had become a nightmare of small Jungles, hundreds of unaccompanied minors on the streets and no access to drinking water nor showers. This led to an immense pressure on the volunteers trying to manage the situation. The Grande-Synthe camp and later the Jungle, always stood in close relation to what was happening in Calais. What we argued then on the Calais Jungle, applies to the Grande-Synthe situation today: "when the moment of emergency ceases there are consequences, to face and to resolve […] we have to think in terms of laws and policies as well, in order to think beyond the state of emergency, beyond feelings of pity for the innocent (Ticktin, 2006)" (Cancedda et al., 2016).

It is in this sense that Das' views on everyday violence and suffering are interesting to this research: when the camp burnt down, after the first two weeks of *tumultus*, the state of exception became daily life for the refugees and volunteers. The always exceptional, for those who look at the situation from a distance or through media coverage, becomes ordinary life for those who live it. Indeed the *tentacles* of daily violence and suffering creep into the lives of those living and working in the Jungle. Day in day out volunteers deal with this suffering, come into contact with situations of violence directly and indirectly. They keep focusing on their routines to try to alleviate the suffering, but often in vain. The violence becomes part of their lives too. It feels like entering a dreadful parallel reality, often close to your own home country or in your own country. The longer you are involved as a volunteer the more it becomes your daily life. For those whose hometown is Grande Synthe and regularly volunteer in the Jungle, it becomes an inherent part of their lives. This is where Das came to inspire me in my approach of this thesis: to lay bare, in a subtle way, how the complexity of this reality affects the volunteers on a day to day basis and how they mediate their actions in the Jungle situation.

3.3 Positions of Insecurities and Limitations

"In the Jungle, a sense of responsibility is created, it was beyond my imagination. People are busy busy busy. They take on more and more tasks, you don't say "no" enough and it makes you feel important. Although, you try to remain humble and act as if everything you do is effortless and normal. The importance you feel seems like a part of self-growth in an endless forest of complete chaos. Nevertheless, you find yourself in extreme situations where often your common sense is not sufficient to make the right decisions. Being as close to the refugees as I feel now, makes my vision blurred and my decisions biased. The multitude of organizations with little trained individuals creates a hub of people who 'react in their own ways', depending on their organization, their own background, their emotional commitment, and their views on migration" (De Cloet, Logbook, May 15, 2017)

3.3.1 Researcher or Volunteer?

I had the position of volunteer-researcher within the RWC. Everybody involved knew what I studied and what my purpose was. I also informed every new volunteer about my research and asked their consent multiple times. Since informed consent is a dynamic process it was important to renegotiate my participant's stance vis-à-vis my research on a regular basis (American Anthropological Association, 2009). Explaining my position to participants was very different from the fieldwork experience in my first year of anthropology - when I volunteered with unaccompanied minors in Leuven once a week (De Cloet, 2016). For that research, a language barrier prevented me from clearly explaining my purpose and my position as an anthropology student. This time, however, explaining my situation to RWC volunteers was more self-evident.

Almost all my research participants came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, being young white middle-class women, and were fluent in English or Dutch. On top of that, many volunteers at the RWC had human science studies backgrounds and were aware of

the existence of anthropology and its research methods. The RWC had already welcomed various students and the week I left the field an anthropology student from the UCL replaced me, so to speak. The combination of sharing similar socio-economic as well as academic backgrounds with most of my participants made it easier than I expected to explain my research and clarify my overall intentions. I expected that as a would-be anthropologist, I would attain a different level of self-consciousness and reflexivity (Anderson, 2006). I should admit that I underestimated my participants before going to the field. The RWC was an evolving and constantly self-questioning organization when I arrived there. My own reflexivity and doubts about the fieldwork often coincided with my co-volunteers' doubts and they had no difficulty reflecting with me on my position as a researcher. The ability to easily identify with my participants allowed me to establish strong bonds of trust.

These strong bonds, nevertheless, had their setbacks. Due to the intensity of my fieldwork situation, I often had the feeling that my participants forgot about my research position and mainly started perceiving me as a co-volunteer and friend. This enforced a stronger relationship with my co-volunteers but at the same time made me feel insecure about possibly not being transparent enough. Sometimes it felt awkward to remember them about my position since it seemed to be so futile in the hectic context of the Jungle and I felt more important things were at play. Many instances this left me feeling insecure and reluctant to bother people with my research since it did not feel like a priority in the Jungle situation, especially when meeting volunteers from other organizations.

3.3.2 Activist Researcher/Volunteer?

The deep emotional connection I felt towards my fieldwork definitely influences my positionality and limits me in some ways to be fully analytically distanced. These limitations can be linked to the fact that as much as I was a researcher and a volunteer, I also gradually became an activist. Due to my deep emotional involvement and activist stance, it is very hard to write as a neutral researcher, and

it would be wrong to pretend that I am. I have to admit that, in ways, this will certainly limit my thesis. However, the struggle of being so closely involved during my fieldwork and as a volunteer is exactly what this thesis revolves around. As another anthropologist who did fieldwork in the Calais Jungle explains, this kind of research comes close to engaged and activist anthropology which has its consequences on ethics, morals, and power (Sandri, 2017). The activist anthropologist Daniel M. Goldstein (2014) explains that doing activist anthropology blurs the dichotomies theory/action and research/activism. He demonstrates "how ideas -in this case, about immigration, protest, and the nature of solidarity - orient action yet are also transformed and lived through active, embodied engagement" (p.839). A combination of performing autoethnography and activist anthropology emerged during my fieldwork, which complicated my positionality frequently.

One of my co-volunteers had a tattoo which said "Sans Frontières", which means *no borders*. It was in that moment that I realized that although many of the grassroots organization are apolitical, by being there the volunteers take a political stance towards France's migration politics and policies. The *being there* of the volunteers is in itself a form of activism: standing alongside these volunteers for two months, taking a strong stance against the police violence and the overall inhumane treatment, inevitably made me an activist volunteer as well as an activist anthropologist (McGee & Pelham, 2017; Papataxiarchis, 2016; Rygiel, 2011). As Grubiša (2017) explains, conflicts and insecurities can be created due to the fact that as a researcher you become involved in different roles and relations: "whereby the researcher, in addition to his/her professional role, may also have the role of a friend, advisor, advocate, activist and many others" (p.153). Grubiša puts that these roles can intertwine but that we should be aware of the ethical dilemmas, complications, and expectations that come along with them. As Malkki (2015) noted in her research on humanitarian aid workers, there exists an uncanny similarity between performing fieldwork and volunteering when it comes to proximity, the political/ethical stance

you take, and the ethical dilemmas you face. As a result, I aim to provide an honest reflection on these kind of ambiguities throughout this masters' thesis and will more deeply address them in the last chapter.

4. The RWC and the Ethics of proximity

Today, I am here for a week and it was the first time that I really identified with the refugees whom I have been seeing every day. Everything that has been happening until now in the gyms and in the woods - I was somehow able to block it off, to not really 'feel' what was going on, to not make a connection with the refugees or empathize with the emotions of the volunteers. I felt guilty about this and wondered how I could be so indifferent. Maybe it all felt like I was just watching the news until now: feeling touched, enraged but not necessarily identifying with the portrayed reality - almost like their humanity was not part of my humanity *yet*.

What's wrong with me?

Today I helped in the warehouse - sorting out the bags of stuff which were retrieved after the fire from the camp's remaining shelters. We were ten people and were asked to sort out clothes and other things from documents, phones, and more vital stuff; in order to give back the essentials to people before the gyms closed. There were two big piles of black bags with the shelter numbers written on them. When we opened the bags, an intense burnt smell hit us.

I realized, I truly realized, at this moment what had happened.

The more bags were sorted out the more silent we grew. With each bag I started to 'feel' the reality, I connected. I was holding clothes, children's drawings, teddy bears, paintings, books, Qurans, pictures, people's identity cards, notebooks, … The mass of people that had initially overwhelmed me started to take shape and individualize in front of me. I started to fully understand the rage and sadness of the volunteers who had been active in the camp. These were their friends, whom they got to know closely over time. Ironically, for me, it took this material interaction to finally identify and feel the shock that I had expected to feel way earlier.

Finally.

I wondered if other volunteers had experienced a similar moment of identification after feeling numb for a while. I always thought: these are my fellow human beings, but it remained too vague until today, I couldn't really grasp what had happened. Now, all of a sudden, I felt that these were my fellow human beings - no longer locked up in an abstraction - these are my fellow human beings intertwined with their books, their pictures, and their children's paintings hanging on their shelter walls. These are my fellow human beings who deserve to be treated with respect, with dignity, who should be given information, good shelter, and who should feel safe.

No longer locked up in an abstraction.

Now, I understand the volunteers' frustrations and why some are staying here so long: "how can you turn your back on them?". At this moment my wall crumbled down and it broke me. I still did not really 'know' what it is like to be stuck here, but I felt angry, so angry. Volunteers often felt like the situation here, and in Calais, was not taken seriously by the general public. I understand now that people do not fully grasp the severity of the situation when they see it from a distance. I think it is very similar to fieldwork, you go from an observer to a more closely involved person. It is the beauty of participant observation as well as its pain. You open up. And I think the closeness between the volunteers and the refugees here is what fuels the volunteers' drive to continue. The feeling of connectedness goes along with the feeling of responsibility.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks into the ethics of proximity, which the RWC volunteers maintained and cultivated throughout their daily practices. I perceive this ethics of proximity as a form of virtue ethics, which is central to a feeling of moral responsibility experienced by the volunteers. Next to this, I highlight how this ethics of proximity figured as a means to differentiate oneself from the more hierarchical organisations who pertain to strong protocol and emotional neutrality.

The ethics, and almost etiquette of, proximity manifested itself in different ways, such as in the importance of horizontality, informality, and not adhering to conventional professional ethics or strong protocol – this allowed volunteers to experiment with a more deeply involved kind of humanitarianism. Firstly I will explain how this relational proximity seemed to be an important of part of adhering to different practices than the more hierarchical and big humanitarian organizations; and I will elaborate on how the ethics of proximity manifested itself within the practical approach of the RWC. Secondly I will address how there seemed to be a spectrum among the Nord-Pas-de-Calais organizations to what was considered being *too close* or being *too distanced* in the various approaches. In the RWC it was not only important to negotiate the kind of approach as an organization, it was also constantly renegotiated depending on certain events and on the stance of new incoming volunteers. I argue that the volunteers' adherence to a certain ethics of proximity forms an important part of their moral reasoning when mediating what *the right thing is to do* in specific situations. Finally, I will address how a certain ethics of proximity is an important factor in differentiating oneself from the approaches of more hierarchical organisations.

4.2 Rehumanizing Humanitarian Aid

The year before I conducted my fieldwork, I focused on humanitarian aid and its drawbacks in various papers and assignments. What I had learned throughout the seminar on Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities (IMMRC) and other classes, was that big humanitarian organizations risked dehumanizing the people they aim to help. As I pointed out in a paper on the use of humanitarian language, drawing on Kleinman (2000) & Kleinman (1996), Ticktin (2016), and Fassin (2005), this can have various consequences for the people it addresses and causes actual suffering (De Cloet, 2017). Some major issues can be drawn back to the centrality of innocence in humanitarian language and the focus on the typical women-children-elderly cluster: “Ticktin [2016] explains that the focus on innocence entails a sense of exclusion. Who will "pass the test of innocence" (p.257)? Who is worthy of our empathy and who not?” (De Cloet, 2017). This leads to a prevailing sense of compassion, where feelings and empathy are prioritized over rights (Fassin 2005; Ticktin, 2016). Next to that, as I explained earlier, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais situation is often referred to as a crisis. Nevertheless, the situation has been a reality for refugees and citizens for more than 20 years. This crisis approach, as Ticktin (2016) observes, diverts the attention from a constructive view on the future and how to actually change the situation humanely and legally. A quote which I used elsewhere, skillfully brings the core of these issues together: “the suffering body has become greater than the threatened body, and the right to life is being displaced from the political sphere to that of compassion (Fassin, 2005)” (Cancedda et al., 2016).

As the abovementioned scholars point out, the humanitarian rhetoric has consequences when it comes to the refugees’ life, their self-perception, and their treatment. Essentially, with providing humanitarian aid as well as with the language which is involved, one risks reproducing western knowledge and expertise on refugees’ lives (Rajaram, 2002). Thus, before leaving to the field, I was aware

of the moral ambiguities at play in providing humanitarian aid. It became clear that the humanitarian aid world is a troubled one, Barbara Harrel-Bond (2002) even questions: "Can humanitarian work with refugees be humane?" (p.51). She observes how certain actions by aid workers might seem reasonable to them but do not transfer agency and dignity to the refugees. She explains that this can be analyzed from a gift-giving framework and shows how the fact that *helpers* are *givers* inherently implies moral transactions as well as power imbalances. This, she argues, *symbolically disempowers* refugees and puts them in a position where others *decide what is best for them* and that they *should be happy with what they get.*

I observed that this is the kind of stance from which the more hierarchical organisation often provided aid. I discussed this issue multiple times with an older individual Belgian volunteer, Agatha. She helped in the Jungle with an almost mother-like attitude towards the refugees. Agatha kept repeating how unpractical and emotionally involved the RWC volunteers often were and that refugees should not be spoiled: "when they get to the UK it will not be easy for them, they have to learn to be happy with what they get and are not in a position to be picky about the clothes or the food they get!" (Logbook fragment, May 17, 2017). I became very close to Agatha and had many discussions with her about the fundamental differences in approach. I often explained to her that by taking a bigger interest and taking more time for the people they help, the RWC is trying to understand when refugees are in need of something specific or when they are in danger. At the end of the day, of course, you might have distributed fewer clothes but maybe you came to understand that it was important to get this one woman out of the Jungle because her husband is abusing her; or you talked a bit longer to a troubled young man and found out that he actually does not want to be in the Jungle and wants to claim asylum in France.

The observations I made above, mainly focus on classic humanitarianism, which often aims to be apolitical, purely focus on relieving need and suffering, and where *basic humanity* and compassion are central concepts (Malkki, 2015). Malkki

interestingly puts that "such humanitarian approaches to, for example, "refugees," as ahistorical subjects – merely "human," merely "victims" – depoliticizes and hinders our understanding of their actual circumstances, yielding the perverse result of humanitarianism that dehumanizes […] into nakedly human objects of compassion" (p.199).

The point I aim to make, by focusing on the issue of dehumanization in humanitarian aid, is the fact that many of the RWC volunteers and volunteers from other grassroots organizations on the ground seemed to be very aware of these moral ambiguities - and the often direct and indirect dehumanizing practices of big aid organizations. Their overall knowledge and reflexivity on these issues are what made my conversations with other volunteers so interesting and illuminating. They seemed to really focus on a humane treatment of refugees through small mechanisms and were very critical of organizations who did not. They made a big point out of putting the agency, resilience, and dignity of refugees central. A more humane approach seemed to imply deeper involvement and relational proximity, and vice versa. It seemed to be a goal of many grassroots to become an alternative to the "humanitarian machine" (Sandri, 2017, p.68) and move away from a humanitarian discourse that embodies the refugee as the "radical *other*" through its practices (Grubiša, 2017, p.159). I will subsequently work out a few examples of how this aim of deeper involvement, as well as differentiation from the humanitarian discourse, manifests itself in the RWC's approach and how it makes up their unique ethics of proximity.

4.2.1 "French" vs. "British" organizations

Although the RWC officially is a French charity, the volunteer pool is mainly British as well as is the majority of its founding members. What became clear on the ground, in Grande-Synthe as well as in Calais, is the perceived overall difference in approach between, what the volunteers describe as, "French" vs. "British" organizations. As a result, there was a lot of critique going around among the organizations. This also happened between the like-

minded British grassroots organizations, however, to a lesser extent. On the one hand, when it came to critiquing the French organizations, a perceived difference in what is considered a *humane* approach stood central. On the other hand, the French organizations considered the British grassroots way too closely involved, reckless, and too indulgent with refugees. The French organizations active on the ground were those distributing food, clothes, and blankets (Emaus, Salaam, Adras, etc.), and providing healthcare for women and children younger than 3 years old (GSF). Their approach was mainly very functional and fast while adhering to a more hierarchical organizational structure. However, as one of my co-volunteers explains, who was also active in a Paris refugee camp, one should be careful with critiquing local French volunteers and organizations since the geographical proximity is an important factor to consider.

"The French approach is very top-down and they rarely become very close with the refugees, and are all about equal distribution and the same for everyone; while organizations like RWC, Kesha Niya have a more mixed volunteer pool and focus on cooperation and communication with refugees. But when you provide help and position yourself above the refugees, you create a distance and you can never really understand specific needs. […] I think that French and English organizations tend to disagree over a lot of things, and cultural differences is often pointed to as the reason for struggles in communication, but I think volunteers who come from other countries or regions in France don't appreciate the tensions (and questions of proximity) that local volunteers get. Locals can't 'just go home' and might not really see the situation in the same way (in part because it's been existing for over 10 years in Dunkirk and over 20 in Calais). So I think it makes the question of space and relationship between the volunteers and refugees a lot more artificial in a way. It's something that has to be constructed by both sides. When we go to the Puythouck Jungle [Grande-Synthe], especially when we go deep into the forest, it feels like we might be breaching onto personal territory. This is a family's bubble, a place of intimacy. But might we view it the same way, had we grown up in

Grande-Synthe and gone to play in that forest as a child ? I think these tensions, to me, are made much more visible when compared to other camps. In Paris, for example, is where I grew up. So for me, the dynamic is very different. I don't feel like an outsider coming to a territory to help people who happen to be on that territory. I feel like an insider who is coming out of my home and out of my private spheres to welcome outsiders onto that territory and to try to make it welcoming. 'Come, there's enough space for all of us', is the message. Which in Grande Synthe isn't really the case because none of us at the Women's Centre is from there (and also, none of the refugees in Grande Synthe have any wish to stay there, which they do in Paris)" (Reflexive Facebook Conversation with Alise, RWC volunteer, July 31, 2017).

Alise addresses some poignant issues when it comes to proximity. Might it be the case that many of the RWC grassroots volunteers can become closer to refugees exactly because this is not their reality and they go home after their volunteering period ends? Critiquing the approach of other organizations always seemed to be an important part for RWC volunteers in justifying their subject positioning and approach. Nevertheless, this definitely was not just based on empty arguments of distinction but as much on the perceived dehumanizing approach of the French organizations. This, however, does not imply that the volunteers active at these organizations did not have the best interest of the refugees at heart, but that their actions were seen as distant and inhumane by the volunteers active at the horizontal grassroots organisations.

On the other hand, through a conversation I had with the two active aid workers of the UNHCR department in Calais, it became clear that they as well had a similar mechanism of justifying the approach of the French organizations in opposition with the more horizontal British ones. They quite frankly put that the British grassroots organizations were too 'idealistic' in their approach and were only contributing to the glorification of the UK by being so friendly and so involved. Next to that, they were of the opinion that the volunteers were too lenient with the refugees and were not really

of value for the situation in Calais and Grande-Synthe. Through this approach, they argued, they had observed volunteers totally effacing themselves and becoming completely burnt out. In the concluding part of this chapter, I will more deeply address this dualising mechanism and its implications.

4.2.2 "Fuck Vests, Vests are so Dehumanizing"

"I was talking to Allan from the Adult Learning Centre, he told me that many grassroots organizations in the old camp aimed to be very horizontal in their approach. Some were even sleeping in the camps. People have a double view on it, he said, some are of the opinion that you need protocol, rules, leaders, and vests which distinguish you from the ones you help. But many of the organizations of the camp go out from a very 'we-are-all-brothers- and –sisters' stance and do not adhere to strong protocol since it allows you to become really close to the refugees, understand their needs and make clear that they are more than just 'refugees'. Hearing his thoughts on it, I definitely adhere more to the horizontal approach but also understand that it seems to have its complications as well. You are so close and feel so responsible for people who become your friends. Hiding behind the "white saviour" attitude in a fluorescent vest might just be a comforting way of doing things, clearly dividing your reality from theirs and trusting on what you decide is the best for 'them'. It seems easier and very protective to adhere to a set of rules, a list of things to do, and leave once you have completed your tasks. Apparently, the more vertical French organizations critiqued the horizontal organizations in the camp for being too chaotic and too emotionally involved. It seems that this chaos is inherently linked to a constant self-questioning and self-doubt, and an urge to really get to know the people you are helping. A positive chaos because you really put yourself "out there". You put yourself in a more vulnerable position which is open to more mistakes, but at the same time encourages growth, reflexivity, and reinvention as a person and as an organization" (De Cloet, Logbook fragment, April 12, 2017).

A big critique from the RWC volunteers, and other grassroots organization, is the wearing of fluorescent vests which clearly distinguishes the volunteers from the refugees. The overall opinion was that by wearing them you position yourself *above* the refugees and create a sense of authority. Of course, this might not be the intention of volunteers wearing such vests. Nevertheless, personally, I could not have imagined myself going in the Jungle - in the refugees' space - wearing such a vest. It is indeed hard to avoid the inherent dualism of helper vs. beneficiary, yet, the RWC strongly aimed to avoid an explicit emphasis on this positionality. The vests would create an avoidable distance in the Jungle and even at times a false sense of authority, as was the case with GSF[6]. The RWC had, in general, always been critical of GSF for various reasons. One reason was the white doctor-like vests they were wearing, it made many of the refugees think that they were doctors while they actually were midwives and general volunteers. Even the translator was wearing such a white vest, while he had no knowledge of medicine whatsoever. By wearing these white vests and transferring an authority which doctors should only have, refugees were often misguided in thinking that they were actual doctors - while in reality, they provided only non-prescription medicine, rides to the hospital, and shelter for women and children under the age of three.

The cultural anthropologist Grubiša (2017) looks at the issue of wearing vests in providing humanitarian aid for refugees from the framework of a securitarian discourse. In this discourse, refugees are perceived as a threat to the national security of a country, which enhances the idea of the refugee as the *other* who is "radically different than *us"*(p.156). This separation between *us* and *them* is reiterated and embodied through certain practices, such as wearing vests, in humanitarian aid (Grubiša, 2017). Paraphrasing Malkki, Grubiša remarks that when volunteers wear fluorescent vests in order to be visible from the "mass of bodies", it is an "illustration of the

[6] **G**ynécologie **S**ans **F**rontières is a local French NGO

embodied practice of symbolic separation" (p.156). It seems that a big part of the volunteers in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region was aware and critical of this kind of symbolical separation. The issue of the vests shows that the aim of minimizing distance and a hierarchical difference between the volunteers and the refugees becomes something internalized and embodied, and is central to the ethics of proximity.

4.2.3 "For the love of god, let them choose their own milk!"

"*It was the most dreadful thing. All of a sudden GSF came to the Women Centre in the old camp to help us out and we had to cooperate with them. They started to change a lot of things and decided which milk the mothers had to give to their babies and how they had to do it. I found it so humiliating, these stuck up girls coming in and telling grown mothers in an authoritative way how to handle their babies!*" (Elizabeth, RWC volunteers, April 29, 2017).

GSF was the only other organization around Grande-Synthe which focused on the wellbeing of the women. Already since the old camp, there seemed to be some kind of rivalry going on between GSF and the RWC. Some RWC volunteers were of the opinion that the GSF volunteers were not considerate enough and did not invest enough time in getting to know the women and understanding their needs, while GSF made it clear that they considered the RWC's approach too chaotic and not constructive enough – there is something to be said for both sides.

On the ground, the strict protocols of GSF were sometimes hard to manage considering the reality of things. They had rules which only allowed them to provide shelter for women with children younger than 3 years old and to only drive women to the hospital in their large van. These policies lead to frustration for RWC volunteers on a regular basis. After an eviction of the Jungle, for example, it happened that we were looking for shelter for a family with a highly pregnant woman, her husband and two young girls. The mother was due in only two weeks and under a lot of stress. GSF informed us

that they would take in the mother and not her 5 and 6 year-old daughters since they were older than 3 years. Of course, the mother did not want to be separated from her family who would have to sleep in the woods. Such instances, in which the reality of things was complicated through strict protocol, led to frustrations and was also the reason for the RWC's aversion of protocol. Next to this, it often happened that the RWC had to drive separately to the hospital with the men while there were numerous spaces left in the GSF van.

Nevertheless, these mutual frustrations did luckily not prevent the cooperation between GSF and the RWC in the Grande-Synthe Jungle - when there are so few organizations it is simply no option to spend time on holding grudges. The RWC realized that it was impossible to only focus on the women and children while there were no organizations focusing on the men's needs. As Grubiša (2017) explains, "volunteers in the field would frequently approach the people going through the refugee experience with pity, directed particularly at the women and children, who 'fit' the described concept of a helpless victim, thus contributing to, consciously or not, the further perpetuation of the delimitation between 'Us who are helping' and 'Them who need the help' in order to survive" (p.158). Although the infrastructure of the RWC was mainly directed towards women and children due to the organization of the old camp, listening to the men's worries in the Grande-Synthe Jungle, bringing them to the hospital, or helping them with asylum claims was an important aspect of the routine. It was an attempt to avoid a prevailing sense of empathy, innocence, and compassion only to a restricted part of people in the Grande-Synthe Jungle (Ticktin, 2016).

4.2.4 Distributions with Dignity

Another aspect in which a certain ethics of proximity was central, is the way RWC did distributions of material goods and clothes. Taking notes of what people needed as well as the distributions were moments in which conversation and interaction with the refugees stood central. They were moments in which the volunteers and refugees often established their first contacts and

from this interaction closer bonds of trust started to develop. The distribution was not something solely practical but also a moment of sociality and understanding. Volunteers were explained that it is important to listen to what people really need as well as understanding which things they considered beautiful. For example, if women did not like the shoes or clothes we brought, it was important to switch them and find something more agreeable. Neither were the distributions done from the back from a van as some other organizations did. We would walk through the Jungle and talk with people and make lists of the things they would like to have. The next day we brought personalized bags to the Jungle and checked if everything was nice and properly fitted. This always took up a lot of time, but was always considered to be a more respectful and humane method. As Anka said, “sometimes people make the mistake of assuming that the refugees living in the woods don’t care about what they wear, while it is so important for their dignity and self-worth to feel beautiful and clean. That’s why if, for example, women ask for makeup, we will always try to provide it. It’s just really important and it’s arrogant to assume that they should be happy with what they get. It’s not because they are in this horrible situation that they should have to walk around dressed like clowns” (RWC volunteer, May 9, 2017).

This approach can be linked to what Rozakou (2016b) calls the “collapse of the gift taboo” (p.196) throughout the attempts of providing more egalitarian aid during the refugee crisis in Greece. She observes that an egalitarian way of providing aid and distributing goods can be placed within the framework of new socialities of solidarity in which horizontal relationships between helpers and receivers are encouraged and aim to diminish a sense of hierarchy when distributing (Rozakou, 2016b). Harrel-Bond’s (2002) analysis of distributions to refugees, in which she stresses the power relationship at play between “the person who distributes the "handouts" (as they are often disparagingly described) with the refugee who must passively receive” (p.55), does hardly make sense within the context of the RWC.

Indeed, as an individual volunteer named Agatha critiqued, the RWC distribution method was not the most functional: "You have to stick to a schedule, distribute fast, and only afterwards you talk. First follow a practical plan, and then if you have time left, you can socialize. There needs to be more structure! Often volunteers are sitting drinking tea and talking to people" (Post-fieldwork conversation, January 26, 2018). On the other hand, this less 'functional' way of distribution was the only way fitting the RWC's aim to avoid hierarchical relationships and to create an open space of sociality. Eventually, it was argued to pay off when it comes to the moral support provided and the relational proximity which is established. As Rozakou (2016b) puts, the understanding of distributions as a gift entails the risk of positioning the refugees as inferior and hinders the creation of horizontal relationships. As she observed for the Greek grassroots context, through a more egalitarian approach the gift is been viewed in a less essentialising way which otherwise renders it "by definition [a] source of hierarchies and inequality" (p.197). I argue, that something similar happens throughout the distributions of the RWC. A sense of reflexivity on the issue of the *gift* and the power hierarchies it entails, creates a space of experimentation with systems of distribution which aim to minimize the creation of such power imbalances. I do not argue that this goal is always satisfactorily met, but rather want to show the underlying moral reasoning of why this was considered *the right way* to proceed by the volunteers.

4.2.5 "Let's drive to Paris, NOW!"

"Human relations are never devoid of ambiguities and contradictions and the people involved are, most of the time, not only aware of them but also self-reflexive, even before the anthropologist appears on the scene" (Rozakou, 2016b, p.186).

The centrality of proximity and the focus on forming egalitarian relationships with refugees instilled the modus operandi of the RWC, it is only a logical consequence that volunteers form stronger relationships with some refugees than others. However, this

brings up the question of favouring people and helping some more than others. It was a pitfall which volunteers were aware of and it was almost perceived as an unavoidable side-effect of the more horizontal approach of the grassroots organizations. An awareness of this pitfall was important but it had no use to feel guilty about this by-product of simply trying to act humanely. In the following fragment, Kim, a RWC volunteer, critically reflects on this issue:

"People volunteer for months or even one year, and you become so involved. If you give people loathes of your personal time when you are here, that is fine, but when you focus too much on one person and you leave – you are actually a point of dependency that falls away. And it is hard not to start giving them more help than others. When you leave they ask where you went. You are in this position of power and they are stuck here with no papers. [..] *In the camp, Kesha Niya [very horizontal grassroots organization] said: 'these are all human beings, we will cook with and for them. With and for refugees, not patronizing them by just handing out stuff'. Which is very nice, but there were these two French girls, they were telling me they had people* [refugees] *from the camp sleeping over here sometimes* [volunteer building]. *Different people had their boyfriends* [refugees] *stay over or people who were sick. And they would tell me. And I was like, dude why are you telling me? That puts me in a weird position, should I tell? Because it was not allowed? But I chose not to. Because it would create more tension. But I think it was just such a naivety. 'But it's my friend' they would say. And I think: you are using the word friend, but they also have been through really fucked up stuff and they actually genuinely need real support. And that's why we are all here, to give emotional support, like friendly emotional support and be human and be a gateway if they need to be connected to deeper psychological support. It's like the intimate one to one care, what bigger organizations have a harder time providing. And some of these people had serious anger issues. And using the word friend almost implies that never anything bad will happen and that's not true. And that in a way the attitude that all refugees are our friends and good people, is not considering their individuality.*

They worked with 15 Kurdish men in the kitchen, actually a really elite group and they were really handsome and charismatic. But I knew from the women centre that some of these men were very threatening towards the refugee women and already had quite some power within the camp. It even went as far as working together with men who were involved in smuggling. And it was really confusing to me, and things escalated and they had to leave [Kesha Niya] the camp eventually" (Kim, RWC volunteer, April 16, 2017).

As Kim shows, organizations as a whole, as well as volunteers individually, mediate what kind of relationships between volunteers and refugees are considered ethical. It is not my place to make a decision on what is too distanced and what is too close, but rather to show how volunteers decide this for themselves. In her research on the Calais Jungle, Sandri (2017) shows that "volunteer humanitarianism" within this particular context of informality creates a space of sociality between volunteers as well as between volunteers and refugees. This kind of connection with the refugees, she argues, "strengthened the volunteer's sense of purpose, as they felt they had a responsibility towards their friends living in the camp" (p.76). Needless to say, it happened that tensions arose among RWC volunteers during situations in which the favouring of one refugee became too excessive, luckily such moments were rare.

For example, Anka had since she had volunteered in the old camp been very close to one woman and had always been particularly fond of her. One day she got a very worrying message that this lady was locked up in a detention centre in Paris and that they had taken her baby away. Anka was extremely worried and impulsively we decided to drive to Paris, while no longer being able to reach the woman and while not knowing in which detention centre she resided. Another volunteer and I realized, once we had arrived, that this decision had been an all too hasty and improvident one. There was not much we could do but contact a local refugee rights protection organisation, talk with the woman for 20 minutes, and drive home again. This of course caused some tensions, but in

retrospect, we talked about the incident and decided that indeed this felt like an emergency situation, involving a close friend - and what we did *felt like the right thing to do* in that specific moment. These situations were the ones through which we learnt a lot as a team. They were moments of experimentation almost, in which we realized when our relational proximity was getting the best of us and it helped us to recognize how we could better balance our decisions in the future. As the following conversation shows, such actions which in retrospect were considered *out of line* by other volunteers, lead to a sense of reflexivity on the underlying importance of the *self* in volunteering.

Alise: *"Nina, since you are interested in limits when it comes to volunteering. There is this volunteer I know 'Jamie Jansen' who used to volunteer at the La Linière camp. Guess what he is doing now: fighting with the armed Kurdish forces!"*

Nina*: [Disbelief] "Waaw, well that's taking it quite far".*

Alise: *"You know what the interesting thing is, knowing him it seems to come from a very deep internal logic. Any other person, I would think they have gone mental. But with him not. He used to sneak into the camp every night to sleep there, over the highway, over a small river, and over the fence. I did not consider fighting with the Kurdish forces to even be in the spectrum of how deep you can go as a volunteer. Sleeping in the camp, I could understand but fighting with the PK?"*

Nina: *"talking about a deep internal logic. It seems that there is this split between personal neediness and idealism. And it is all about finding a balance, because both are always at play. But sometimes it seems that one gains the upper hand when it comes to motivation"*

Alise: *"Yeah and with him, there is a logic I can follow when it comes to idealism and solidarity. With some other peoples who now*

sleep in the Jungle, it does not seem to come from something logical, but really from a neediness. Like with Gerard and Liana, that seems to come from personal issues, when they stay in the Jungle".

[third volunteer at the table interrupts] Norah: *"Can I ask, what is helpful about sleeping in the camp or in the Jungle?"*

Alise: *"Well it is not as much about being helpful or useful, it does not necessarily come from "use". But often more like solidarity or not being able to cope with the contrast of volunteering in the camp or Jungle and then going to sleep in a fancy flat. It can also be a form of protest, but for it to be a protest, it has to be known. Not like Gerard and Liana are doing, that really seems to come from personal issues they have, from their own need".*

Nina *"When I was here we also had these moments where I thought we were acting upon our emotions to impulsively, trying to be heroic. There was one time that we jumped in the car to Paris to help a woman out of a detention situation. In the end, it seemed that we did not really know where she was, that we could not contact her. And that it was kind of a silly action and kind of seemed to come from a personal need to be important. I had a lot of tension with Anka then".*

Alise: *"yes that was definitely a mistake. But we always have to remember that we are not an emergency team. And that if you do that, it wears you out emotionally to be constantly on standby".*

Nina: *"yes and then you focus on one person for a long time but at the same time there are a lot of other people who count on you"*

Alise: *"Especially when volunteers come with their own cars, some still jump in their car in the middle of the night. And we try to*

manage that and reason with them, but it the end it is their own decision".

Nina: *"yes and then you find yourself in all these slippery slopes. Giving out power banks to people you know better, because you cannot really say no. And you see a lot of things as emergencies and it becomes really hard to discern the necessary from the unnecessary. Because when you think things through, everything becomes crucial from your own point of view - having tents, sleeping bags, power banks, and so on"* (RWC volunteer, personal communication, January 28, 2018)

Interestingly, Alise makes a divide between making decisions from an internal *logic of idealism and solidarity* in opposition to decision-making which comes from a *personal neediness or personal issues*. The *self* is always an important factor in providing aid, and it seems that Alise sees it as something which should be balanced and linked to an internal logic. As the conversation makes clear, the informal organisational structure of the RWC makes it possible for volunteers to act upon situations from their individual assessment, resulting in moments in which volunteers considered others *as going too far*. The centrality of the self in providing aid raises the question of personal need. Why do volunteers decide to come to this area and stay so long? It often came down to the fact that the experiences and the responsibilities made volunteers feel like "*being part of something bigger than yourself"* (Malkki, 2015), which, however, does not imply that it was an easy reality to be involved in.

Malkki looks at the centrality of the *self* when it comes to humanitarianism and moves away from the typical focus on self-sacrifice. She looks more at "self-escape, self-loss, dehumanization, self-humanization, self-transformation, the care of the self, the relation of self to others, and the relation of self to the world" (p.10). As I observed throughout my research, it seems that moments in which volunteers were perceived to make *wrong* decisions, they were

considered to let their own neediness gain the upper hand. This was often referred to as being too *heroic* or too *emotionally* involved in a way which was no longer justifiable. This, however, depended on volunteers' personal evaluation on how grassroots aid should be provided and is linked to a spectrum of approaches which I will discuss subsequently.

4.3 Balancing the Ethics of Proximity

Nina: *"I find it so interesting how grassroots organizations organize themselves around here. The RWC is really open and creates a lot of room for volunteers to go deep and use their own assets, which is useful but sometimes people go too far. There seems to be this spectrum of experimentation going on when it comes to grassroots organizations. On the one hand, you have organizations like Kesha Niya who have no limits, they literally lived and slept in the camp. Then you have the RWC and The Adult Learning centre, who allow a lot but are in a continuous balancing act trying to figure out how to prevent volunteers from going too deep. On the other hand, you have organizations like GSF, Help Refugees and the Youth Service who really adhere to strict protocol and rules. For example, they do not allow volunteers to exchange contact information with refugees. It all seems to come down to how your organization limits or does not limit you in terms of the spectrum of involvement"*

Alise: *"Yes indeed. Kesha Niya really comes from the stance that 'we are all human, you are all my brothers and sisters' and for the volunteers this literally was their life. They were all younger people, and the camp was their reality. We at the RWC all have our lives outside and generally are bit older. But this is where Kesha Niya in a way was very admirable and mature for their age but, on the other hand, they had a lot of struggles and disagreements among one another. And then there's also volunteers who had huge burn outs like Kyla and Evan. They did sooo many things and took up sooo many responsibilities, also because there are huge gaps in the aid that is provided for men. And the RWC could simply not fill that*

gap alone. Luckily, we are now building a network for men's distribution with other organizations. But when it comes to medical aid there is only GSF and they are all midwives, not even doctors" (Alise, RWC volunteer, Post-fieldwork conversation, January 28, 2018).

4.3.1 The Ethics of Proximity on an Experimental Spectrum

Figuring out *what the right thing is to do* as a volunteer, as well as an organisation which defends certain values, is a demanding balancing act. It is interesting to look at this constant reflection on *how to do things better* and *how to make good decisions* within the Aristotelian virtue ethics, and more specifically, tackle it through the concept of phronesis. Volunteers, embedded in this experimental social reality, find themselves in a situation in which they continuously challenge and transform a certain set of cultivated dispositions through a heightened sense of reflexivity. These dispositions and the affective perceptions of what *the right thing is to do* are shaped through active moral reasoning or phronesis (Jouili, 2015).

Volunteers face dilemmas and uncertainties on a day to day basis in a context of various, and often conflicting, sets of moral values. As the fragment above shows, the RWC finds itself in an environment where certain organisations adhere to an even stronger ethics of proximity (such as Kesha Niya whose volunteers were sleeping in the camp) and where other organisations maintain a strong affective neutrality and adhere to a more distanced approach. On top of that, these organisations as well as individual volunteers, such as Agatha, critique one another in terms of what they consider the *right* approach is. It is often hard for volunteers to find their place and balance in this spectrum of differentiating sets of moral values and practices. As I showed through the examples in this chapter, the deliberation processes behind *doing the right thing* are based on concepts such as solidarity, friendship, gut feeling, proximity, dignity, horizontalness, equality, rights, etc. The RWC volunteers, as ethical agents, go through a process of moral reasoning in their daily

decision-making as well as during conflicting situations. As I stressed through Jouili's (2015) observations, this does not mean that the *right thing will always be done at the right moment*, but through phronesis volunteers "aspire to order the goods in a reasonable way" (p.151), even when there are no strict rules to adhere to.

As Lambek (2002) puts, phronesis "affirms dignity and self-respect as central aspects of human practice" (p.16) and situates "judgment within a tradition of values whose aim is human flourishing and dignity" (p.191); in which dispositions are cultivated towards doing good. It is this kind of "emergent reflexivity" (p.260), which I hope I have shown throughout this chapter. Volunteers mediate their decisions individually as well as intersubjectively and aim *to do the right thing* while putting the dignity of those they help central. As became clear, certain situations lead to tensions and self-doubt, nevertheless, these are powerful moments of reflexivity through which the RWC aspires to develop an emergent set of moral values and grow as an organization. As I have argued before, the RWC volunteers constitute a vague, and often individually nuanced, set of values (solidarity, equality, etc.) to make their decisions and do not have a fixed moral framework to which they can always refer. Respectively, their mediation and deliberation processes take place against the background of a spectrum of experimentation among various grassroots organisations, through which the volunteers aim to find out how to best approach certain situations. Thus, the ethics of proximity can be considered part of a highly reflexive and collaborative way of practical knowledge creation when it comes to providing aid to the refugees. As a result, taking in mind the importance of phronesis, volunteers are "shaping action to structure in increasingly more sophisticated ways and with increasingly more consequential results" (Goodale, 2012, p.471)

4.3.2 Distinction and Professional Ethics

"NGO and INGO employees embrace a professional rhetoric, whereas solidarians, rather than defining their activities in terms of

'service' to 'beneficiaries', abide by the principles of egalitarian and empowering relatedness"(Rozakou, 2016b, p.194).

Another important aspect in the moral reasoning of the RWC and its volunteers seemed to be a conscious distinction from the humanitarian discourse and its professional ethics. As Malkii (2015) shows, the Red Cross aid workers she interviewed are trained to be affectively neutral in order to maintain a certain distance and being able to handle emotionally demanding situations. As noted for a refugee grassroots organisation in Budapest, the distinction with big NGO's was an important marker for the construction of their identity as well as pride as an organisation (Agocs, 2016). I argue that a similar distinction-making process is at play for many of the grassroots volunteers in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. It constitutes an important part of justifying their approach and relational proximity with the refugees – as a more just, honest, humane and authentic way of doing things. On top of that, the absence and silence of big humanitarian aid organisations and NGOs in this region contributes to this process of distinction-making – for in the eyes of many volunteers they have gravely failed the refugees.

"Objective or agent-neutral reasons 'must express values that are independent of the particular perspective and system of preferences of the agent' [Nagel, 1986]. An ethics of proximity, however, objects agent neutrality as the ultimate and autocratic perspective from which moral reasons are legitimised. Instead it implies that proximity to the sufferer gives rise to moral reasons" (Nortveldt & Nordhaug, 2016, p.3)

As this quote clarifies, a move away from professional ethics, in which affective neutrality is an important aspect, entails the fact that the RWC volunteers embrace that they are a non-neutral actor. As Rozakou (2016a) has noted, for various organisations in the Greek context, this entails the construction of "a field of fluid and open sociality that contravenes the professionalization of volunteerism" (p.97). It seemed that volunteers conceptualised the way they provided aid within this distinction and that it almost

provided them with more authority and authenticity on the understanding of the refugees' reality. Throughout many conversations, the grassroots volunteers questioned the "authentic motives" (Papataxiarchis, 2016, p.6) of the 9 to 5 o'clock vest-wearing-aid workers, who would perceivably position themselves above the refugees. Ironically, the subject position which the grassroots volunteers take is based on a strong dualising mechanism between *they* who depend on hierarchy, professionalism, and protocol and *we* who reject these methods – while in se the grassroots volunteers strongly strive to minimize an *us* vs. *them* rhetoric when it comes to providing aid to refugees. Thus, at the basis of the moral reasoning behind *doing the right thing* also lays a mechanism of distinction and contrast, which contributes to shaping the practices and the moral stance of the RWC.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

The Paris event, as well as the other examples in this chapter concerning the ethics of proximity, bring us to an important reflection: it was understood among the RWC volunteers that they were not neutral actors and that it is only *normal* and *human* that finding out what the *right thing is to do* is not always self-evident. And most importantly, that the other option of hard protocol and professional neutrality would not be a solution honest to the organisation's ideals. As became clear, a certain mechanism of opposition towards a more hierarchical approach to humanitarian aid was definitely at play and internalized in the decision-making process and subject positioning of volunteers. At the heart of the approach of many of the grassroots organisations in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, was the understanding that relational proximity and identifying with the people you help is the right way to go. It seems to be a way to counter the perceived dehumanisation perpetrated by police violence and the often more distanced approach of hierarchical organisations and bigger NGOs. Interestingly, the way the RWC deals with moral ambiguities, negotiates horizontalness and relational proximity on a day to day basis is also part of a

balancing act on a spectrum of various grassroots organizations' approaches in the region.

5. We are not Professionals

It was the most gruesome experience of my fieldwork, probably in my life as well. When I think about it, I just shut it out. I am an intense dreamer. Normally, I relive things in my dreams, I walk, I scream, go through everything again and wake up shaking. What happened there in that hotel room, in that cold parking lot, in that hospital, I never dreamt about it. I hardly talk about it, I feel like I have really put it aside. When I talk about it my voice breaks. It was at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was only there for about 3 weeks, working together with two founding members of the RWC; Anka and Elizabeth. I realize now, that I had no other option than to shut it out in order to continue my fieldwork.

We had no other option than to move on…

We saw a woman with her two children at the Calais train station, they were sitting on the floor. The mother was falling asleep, weeping, completely exhausted. The children looked terrified. We called 115, the social emergency housing: no space. We called GSF: no space, 'No, the children are older than 3 years" – "Yes, but it really seems like an emergency, they are exhausted" – "No sorry, only children under 3 years old". Someone from another organization called the urgencies. The paramedics could not take them because it wasn't *urgent* enough. We explained that we could provide emergency housing in a hotel for one night. Well, that's a good idea, the paramedic casually explained that the social services and police were looking for the lady since she ran away from social housing and was underfeeding her kids. I told the man that we could just provide housing for a night and that we were not professionals and not in any way responsible for the lady's mental health. My telephone number was given to the social services.

You are responsible, you care.

Now I wonder why we were taking on this kind of responsibility, while not being professionals, especially when they were looking for

her. Anyways, it was late at night and it was apparently not so urgent for the police, could she be that dangerous? We could fill in the gap of the system or choose to leave them in the train station for the night. We brought the family to a hotel where they seemed to be relaxed and were eating together. Somebody from social services called us and thanked us for the emergency solution. We would meet with a social worker at 11 am the next morning to take care of the situation - nobody showed up - we booked a second night. The children seemed happy, they were eating and the mother talked to us for the first time. We felt relieved. I called social services: "We actually cannot help with the situation because the woman ran away from her accommodation" – "We are not professionals, they need help, you told me she was potentially harming the children" – "Ok what is the hotel room number and entry code, we will meet tomorrow morning. We will find a solution. Bye".

Big mistake.

We decided to bring dinner that same day to check up on them. When we arrived, a police van was outside. The door of the room was open: four policemen, two policemen in civilian, two social workers. "Who are you? Who speaks French?" – "I, I am Nina from the RWC, we pay for the hotel" - "we have a court order, we are taking the children away, do you understand?" The mother was screaming, she was terrified, hysterical. The children were crying. "I understand, where will the mother go, who takes care of her?" She was completely distressed and needed support. "Elle n'est pas notre responsabilité/she is not our responsibility".

We are not professionals, we are not professionals.

They were sneaking behind our back, taking away the children and dumping the mother there? "Vous êtes fous!", I was overwhelmed, I started crying. Anka and Elizabeth were too, they did not speak French but they understood. It was horrific. Had they gone crazy? They lied to us. They dragged the children out, the police violently pushed the woman in and closed the door. I went in and they were

leaving me there with her. I shouted “I am not trained for this! She needs help. Don’t leave me here with her!”. She was pulling her hair, crying, screaming, praying, looking under the bed for her children. I held her hands and looked her in the eyes, crying, it was wrong, it was so wrong.

I am not trained for this.

We were kicked out of the hotel - too noisy. Elizabeth and Anka were comforting the woman in the cold parking lot. We tried to get her in the car, she was hysterical, she didn’t want to. She threw herself on the ground, tried to walk on to the road. We called the grassroots legal team, someone who spoke Arabic came. What they had done was unlawful. They left no papers for the mother to inform her where her children went and there was no translator present. We brought her to the emergencies. Nobody cared, refugees have to wait until the end. No one listened. She was walking out of the hospital in front of our eyes. “Listen, she needs to be confined in a safe space, she will look for her children on the street. It’s dangerous” – “yes, yes. Well, let’s have a look at the *refugees* now”.

Why were they so inhumane?

We were broken. What happens to people when volunteers are not there to witness it? What if we had not accidentally been there with the food? What could have happened to the mother, left alone, running, searching for her children on the street? We wrote down a report for the legal team, they made cases of refugees’ rights violations in order to make a database and sue the state for their neglect. What happens when the volunteers are not there? We went home at four in the night. We barely talked about it again. Lots of other things to do, lots of plans for the next day. We have to stay focussed.

What would have happened if we were not there?

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to sketch the complexity of the volunteering reality and the intense issues the volunteers often faced. By focussing on affect and the volunteers as witnesses of violence I try to lay bare how emotionally challenging the moral reasoning behind *trying to do the right thing* could be. Often, situations were so intense or unanticipated that the volunteers saw no way forward, which often created a sense of *failing* those they aim to help. As the introductory scene shows, the grassroots volunteers are confronted with different forms of violence on a day to day basis. This goes from police intimidation, harassment and attacks on warehouses by rightist gangs, to incidents with refugees. Next to this, they also witness the violence of police forces towards the refugees as well as violence and conflicts between refugees. Not only is violence central to the day to day experiences of the volunteers, next to that, the complex issues they face in this specific social reality often take a high emotional toll. I argue that these experiences can be seen as forms of "social suffering and social violence" (Kleinman, 2000, p.283) experienced on an everyday basis and which are embedded in the "local moral world" (p.283) the volunteers temporarily inhabit.

Firstly I will show how volunteers are impacted by being witnesses of violence and how they practically deal with this position. Next, I will address the tensions and doubts which come along with trying *to do the right thing* in situations like the one described above. Consequently, I will address the "management of affect" (Malkki, 2015, p.54) and how volunteers are affectively impacted by the conflicting situations they face. I consider *affect* as not simply describable emotions, but as Kathleen Stewart (2007) describes it to be "*experienced as a pleasure and a shock, as an empty pause or dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation. They can be funny, perturbing, or traumatic. Rooted not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a something coming together calls to mind and sets in motion, they can be seen as both the pressure points*

of events or banalities suffered and the trajectories that forces might take if they were to go unchecked" (p.4).

5.2 Volunteers as Witnesses

When we witnessed the unlawful separation of the children from their mother, we understood that horrible things happen to refugees while often nobody is around. It was always a central responsibility of volunteers in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region to witness, denounce, and report unlawful actions. We had small trainings on how to film police violence, what we had to do when police tried to block us or take our phones away, and how we had to interview refugees and file reports. We always carried report files as useful guidelines on how to interview refugees after an incident or how we could bundle evidence (videos, pictures, recordings, etc.) through an online app[7]. However, during the many chaotic situations, it was hard to always take the time to set up report files.

The CRS riot forces acted up when volunteers were not present in the Jungle. At night in the Jungle, they would come and pepper spray those sleeping there. The next day we would go to the hospital with children whose eyes were infected. When one of the almost weekly evictions took place, all volunteers were not-so-kindly requested to leave, only to come back to see everything battered to the ground, personal belongings taken away, and families put on a bus without knowing where they would go. What we could directly witness was how the police searched our car, asked us to show our phones and identity cards in an intimidating way - they would make sure to let us know what our place was.

[7] https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/applications/kobotoolbox The Kobo app is a way through which volunteers place evidence directly on an online database, as a result, when their phones are taken by the police the data does not get lost. During my fieldwork this app was still in its developmental phase but it is steadily becoming a more important tool for volunteers.

In this case, the social services had trapped us into meeting them the next morning while planning their action to take the children away when we were not there. I often felt guilty for giving the hotel room number to the social services, the images of what could have happened to the mother if we had not accidentally been there kept spinning through my head. Regardless of the authorities' efforts of hiding violence and unlawful actions, volunteers would often witnessed such events and offer support to the refugees afterwards.

The decisions which were made throughout this ordeal show the political capacity of RWC volunteers and the importance of the rhetoric of *rights*. Although many grassroots movements who work around the Calais and Grande-Synthe Jungle claim to be apolitical, their actions and presence in itself often entail a political critique towards the government's failure in providing sufficient humanitarian support as well as denouncing the violence perpetrated by state authorities (Sandri ,2017). Inevitably volunteers come to take a political stance or redefine it through their experiences, this is something which a horizontal organization such as the RWC only facilitates and applauds. The fact that volunteers were sent away by the authorities once cruel evictions of the Jungle would take place, only confirmed that the authorities are aware of the volunteers' political and activist capacity. By putting rights central, the RWC strives to make refugees aware that they do indeed have rights.

What Rigby and Schlembach (2013) make clear in their paper on the Noborder activism in Calais, is that humanitarianism and politics do not necessarily have to be opposites. An interesting side note which Sandri (2017) makes on the fact that grassroots organizations provide humanitarian aid in the Jungle, is that we can see this as a part of the neoliberal project. Paraphrasing Burchell, she puts that outsourcing public services to grassroots organizations implies that " the state maximizes its powers by withdrawing from social responsibilities such as welfare, while minimizing economic costs" (p.71). Nevertheless, she argues, that the case of Nord-Pas-de-Calais grassroots organisations is more complex and that this kind of

governmentality does not fully fit the situation. It seems, she adds, that "volunteer humanitarianism turned against that government by creating strong activist networks as a reaction to the void left by institutions" (p.71).

As I argued before, especially for long-term volunteers, this specific reality which they temporarily inhabit becomes part of the everyday, in which the violence they experiences embeds itself in the ordinary day to day routines (Das, 2007). For example, the routinely dismantlements of the camp, are met with less shock the more the volunteers experience them. The first time a volunteer experienced a dismantlement was met with very different emotions than a volunteer who had been on the ground for quite a while. As Kleinman argues (2000) violence "is crucial to cultural processes of routinization, legitimation, essentialism, normalization, and simplification through which the social world orders flow of experience within and between body-selves" (p.283). As I paraphrased Kleinman elsewhere, "*violence is always inherently a social experience and he argues that it provokes social suffering. This suffering is collective as well as individual and the collective and the individual constantly shape and inform each other. Thus, Kleinman explains that the way people deal with this violence, and consequently the suffering, is informed by the context in which they reside; and not only their individual but also collective reaction to it*" (De Cloet, 2017, p.5). It is hard to grasp how these experiences, which are shaped individually as well as collectively, affectively touch the volunteers. Nevertheless, it is important to sketch the affects that constitute these experiences through ethnographic scenes, interviews and the overall atmosphere I aim to convey throughout this work.

5.2 Did we make the Right Choice?

The situation of the mother and her children brings together various tensions central to the grassroots volunteering. It shows how volunteers find themselves in complex situations, in which decision-making based on *at the moment improvisation* brings along

insecurities to whether the *right choices are being made.* In such moments, there is often not a lot of time to mediate and discuss the options among volunteers. Frequently, this led to questioning our decisions only after we had made them. We had to depend on our gut-feeling, evaluating whether the mother would really pose a danger to her children and whether we could take the risk of assuming that she would not.

Did we make the right choice, is something we asked ourselves repeatedly? Should we leave them by themselves in the hotel? Should we have brought them to the hospital instantly? Should one of us sleep here too? Should I have given the hotel room number to the social services? Not having protocol made it hard in certain situations to feel confident about our choices, on the other hand, it allowed us to improvise, follow up on the woman afterwards and file a complaint against the unlawful separation of this mother from her children. After going back and forth to the hotel for two days, we were happy to see that the kids were playing and were eating the food. The mother seemed relaxed, they were altogether in a completely different state then we had found them in the train station.

What were the mediation processes and the moral reasoning behind trying to make the *right decision* as a team in this particular case? The moment Anka, Elizabeth and I saw the desperate woman in the train station, it was crucial for us that this woman would not sleep outdoors with her two young children. It was paramount to provide dignity for the woman and her children but also dignity for ourselves in not making the decision to leave her there, since the social services and GSF were not an option. This situation was particularly complex as the paramedic had confined to us that the woman could possibly harm her children, regardless of this fact, we deliberated that she deserved a roof for the night and a calm and safe environment.

The moral reasoning central throughout this ordeal was to put the dignity of the women and her children first. Next to this, our

intuition and gut-feeling were important factors in deciding whether it was safe to leave the woman with her children in the hotel. Moreover, when the children were taken away and we were left with the mother in complete despair, we again had to figure out what the best thing to do would be. We tried to reach Médecins Sans Frontières' mental health department, but to no avail. In the end, the only person who could help us a little was a British nurse who was volunteering for another grassroots organization in Calais. We decided to bring the woman to the urgencies since we assessed that she would possibly harm herself. An important factor to the moral reasoning behind the decisions we made, was to trust that even without strong protocol we had enough common knowledge to handle the situation practically and humanely.

This event shows the usefulness of approaching it through phronesis since it transcends the simple objective-subjective dichotomy and enables us to understand how volunteers create "ethical know-how" (Jouili, 2015, p.18) against the background of fluid and open-ended framework. Phronesis goes beyond subject-centred agency and mediates between discursive powers and the agent (Jouili, 2015), this allows us to grasp how volunteers aim to be morally good in the conflicting situations they face. However, more importantly, I aim to lay bare how volunteers are 'affected' before situations and actions are made reflexive. Through affect I aim to grasp the overwhelming feelings of the "capacities to act and to be acted upon" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p.1) in this particular lived reality. As Skoggard and Waterston (2015) explain, affect is something interior which also manifests itself outwardly and can help us to "tease out the elements, to dissect feelings, desires, inclinations, intentions, and their effects on the level of the individual and on the level of the collective" (p.12). The following part will more deeply address the importance of affect.

5.4 Management of Affect

Since volunteers often were first-hand witnesses of violence it is important to understand how this affectively impacted them. As Malkki (2015) explains, humanitarian aid is often linked to the inherent aim to be selfless and research tends to focus on its moral high ground and how central ethics and reason are. As she points out, the constant personal neediness, ambiguities and struggles which volunteers encounter are very important aspects which deserve our attention. An important part of her research is to understand the management of affect within a situation which is ordinary as well as extraordinary. This was also the case for the RWC, there were things which became *the ordinary* after a while; a certain routine, small daily habits, and tasks to complete; and there were things which interrupted the ordinary and comprised *the extraordinary*; violent evictions of the Jungle, police violence, emergency situations concerning refugees and moments such as the introductory scene demonstrates.

As Malkki observed extraordinary and ordinary affects are produced and intertwine the reality, leading to "impossible situations that the aid workers found hard to deal with in the moment and to get past in the aftermath" (p.55). For the Red Cross workers, such affects were known and attention was given to dealing with intense moments and moving beyond them. Paraphrasing Mazzarella, Malkki explains that affect management is an important mediation process in order to create an efficient and practical way of work. When quoting one of her participants - "You must allow yourself distance. A responsibility for the team leader is to create that distance. Otherwise, they [the aid workers] kill themselves with too much identification with patients" (p.56) - it becomes clear how different providing aid is conceptualized by her interlocutors. It is a very central emphasis by the RWC to identify with the people you help and it was inevitable to strongly feel for them, especially for those who some volunteers had built strong personal bonds with. The volunteers regularly discussed the issue of *being practical* and

concluded that aiming to be very *practical* all the time stood in the way of the *humane* approach they want to set forth.

The Red Cross aid workers Malkki interviewed were trained and guided to manage these affects; on the one hand, to avoid "compassion fatigue and secondary traumatization", on the other hand, to avoid "indifference and emotional coldness" (p.56). Sometimes the impact of a situation was so intense that aid workers had learned how to suspend their emotions. By suspending affect, however, Malkki explains how aid workers go too far, work too long, and stop taking care of themselves. It seems that the management of affect is tricky and that it can go to an extreme in both ways: on the one hand, the complete suspension of emotions, and on the other hand, the impossibility of suspending emotions. In such events, the emotional neutrality of aid workers was breached (Malkki, 2015), this was often linked to moments in which aid workers felt that they had not made the right choices.

The point which Malkki makes through focusing on affect management is that aid work can be very impactful and that it "can be transformative life experiences that engage affects, the senses, and the imagination — the whole person — for better and for worse" (p.12). She points at the importance of Foucault's and others conceptualization of *limit experiences*, adding that in the case of the Red Cross aid workers there was no *way forward* from limit experiences, creating impasses and impossible situations. Such situations, Malkki argues, are transformative but not in a way of self-growth, rather self-loss, exactly because of the fact that in such situations there seemed to be no right decisions to be made.

For my participants, however, emotional neutrality was not expected and this was something central to the decision-making: what *felt* like the right thing to do? It seemed that another -less delineated- individual as well as collective way of managing affects was created among the RWC volunteers which can be linked to phronesis –finding out what the *right thing to do is* was often accompanied by a process of intense passions, withdrawing oneself,

a lump in the throat, and feeling overwhelmed by sensations, situations and unexplainable gut-feelings. Malkki's (2015) understanding of *limit experiences* and *impossible situations* is especially interesting when connected to the observations I made during my fieldwork. The introductory fragment was a limit experience for the volunteers involved; there was a conflict which we tried to resolve, but it ended in an impasse, in which we stood powerless against how the social services had proceeded. What happened had happened. And there was no way we could find a solution, it shocked us deeply and as Elizabeth said: "this is probably the most gruesome thing that I have ever witnessed in my life" (De Cloet, Logbook fragment, May 2, 2017). For me it had completely wrenched the little trust I had left in the French system. Anka who had been in the old camp for five months told me, "Nina, what happened shocks me, it disgusts me, but it does not surprise me in the way it surprises you, I already found out a long time ago how horrible the things which happen to refugees around here can be" (De Cloet, Logbook fragment, May 2, 2017).

It was an impossible situation which was very hard to ethically and affectively grasp. When we returned back in the night it felt like we had all reached our limit of what we could take on a day. Affectively, the only way to continue from this events was to suspend our emotions, enragement, and disgust. We focused on the practicalities of it, filling out the report form and placing the case in the hands of the grassroots legal team. We had a lot of work to do that week, it felt as if we became numb, we did not deeply discuss how we felt about it any longer. It seemed that this suspension of our affect was partly caused by deep feelings of powerlessness, disappointment and the impossibility of changing what had happened. Similar impasses took place after ruthless dismantlements of the Jungle. For volunteers it was very hard to cope with these moments, seeing the people they got close to suffer every time again and not being able to help them affected them deeply. These are two volunteers reactions after a big dismantlement of the Grande-Synthe Jungle.

"*I was here, and I saw more and more police coming in and we had to leave. Me and Karen went round the back of the woods to see what was happening. And we went into the Jungle, there were CRS police everywhere and they all had their identification badges taken off, holding tear gas cans towards us and telling us to fuck off and shouting at us. They were clearing people's stuff and like gagging and spiting on people's things. And it was like really really horrible [her voice breaks], they chased everyone away, they arrested Lakina's husband for no reason, and other men for no apparent reason. A women was beaten up, apparently, someone got it on film. We tried to take some stuff for people and they literally like ran us off* " (Lisa, RWC volunteer, May 16, 2017)

"*There was a young women with 3 children, she had no sleeping bags, she had no tents, she had nothing. So we tried, we gave them everything we got in our car. And the men were all asking for stuff, there was nothing left, there was a man who told me: 'I was with my feet in the water, and the police came and they took my shoes'. He had nothing. I had to give him women shoes. A size 38, hah! No sleeping bags anymore, no bags, no papers, no clothes, nothing! [sighs]. It was so strange when I left, the situation. I was really like , pfff… I don't know, I don't know [in despair]. And then I walked out of the woods and saw this oblivious French lady on her bike, just cycling in shorts and she was like 'ladidadida'. It was kind of funny in a strange way. I thought, 'lady, you don't know where you are going' - hahaha. It was so strange. All these worried people in the middle of chaos and then this lighthearted French lady on her bike accidentally passing through*" (Celine, may 16, 2017).

Every new dismantlement felt like a new impasse for the team. All the effort into distributing things and helping people to settle and rest for a while was just annihilated in a few hours. Those moments really numbed us. People were constantly asking for help while there

was little the volunteers could do during these moments. In the case of the mother, as well as the dismantlements, the volunteers were truly shocked by how humans (police officers, social workers, etc.) could treat other human beings like animals. The impasses volunteers faced in these moments were based on a strong sense of social injustice and often deeply physically as well as emotionally affected them. In this chapter I aimed to sketch the difficult situations which volunteers often faced and how hard it was to ethically and affectively phantom what happened. As Rozakou puts (2016a) "*Solidarity resonates with potent moral ideals of how society should be, and how people should relate with one another"* (p.186), I argue that moments when these moral ideals - which volunteers individually and/or collectively adhered to - were brutally shaken, lead to strong affective impasses.

Figure10 . What only hours before was a vibrant family space in the Jungle, has been literally beaten to the ground during one of the many dismantlements. Image: Nina De Cloet

Figures11. & 12. People are desperately trying to find back some of their personal belongings in the garbage trucks. It happened that refugees' identification documents were thrown on these piles by the CRS officers. Images: RWC website

6. Conclusion and Final Reflections

This work, then, is of a specific nature, both active and committed. Anthropology exists both as a field of knowledge (a disciplinary field) and as a field of action (a force field). Anthropological writing can be a site of resistance. (Scheper-Hughes, 1993, p.24).

This master thesis has aimed to lay bare the tensions of proximity which the Refugee Women Centre volunteers face in the complex and conflicting reality of the Grande-Synthe Jungle. Nancy Scheper-Hughes' words seem to perfectly echo what has been at the heart of this turbulent research project. I have provided a look into the lived reality of the Refugee Women Centre's grassroots volunteers and showed how they challenge the conventional humanitarian discourse – by resisting strong protocol, emotional neutrality, and the ethics of professionalism. However, I hope that I have shown that not only a differentiating mechanism lays at the basis of their subject positioning, but that an inherent aim *to do the right thing* was central to the volunteers' day to day mediation processes. Throughout this work, I used ethnographic story-telling in order to sketch how volunteers affectively and ethically managed the various complex issues.

Through the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, I intended to understand the moral reasoning of the volunteers behind the endeavour of *doing the right thing* and *making the right decisions.* Through this focus, it became clear that it was important for the volunteers to do what is morally good, not only as an obligation to the self but as a commitment to the overall improvement of the lives of those they are helping. It was not my goal, however, to pass a moral judgment on whether the *right things were done*, but rather to understand which concepts lay at the basis of the volunteer's decision-making processes. It became clear that concepts such as solidarity, friendship, relational proximity, gut-feeling, improvisation, dignity, horizontalness, equality, etc. were crucial to the way in which aid is provided by the grassroots' volunteers as

well as to mediating what the *right thing to do is* in the complex situations they faced. This, however, remains a vague framework in which volunteers had the freedom to individually position themselves while putting more or less emphasis on certain ideals and values, and being driven by a varying set of personal motivations. The creation of ethical know-how, against the background of relational proximity with the refugees, was done through a practical way of knowledge creation which goes beyond the strict application of rules. As a result, volunteers faced various ethical dilemmas, conflicting situations, and numerous moments of self-doubt. Nevertheless, due to the inherent reflexive category of this kind of knowledge creation the volunteers, as well as the RWC as a whole, were able to learn from past conflicts and grow continuously.

The RWC, as well as other grassroots organizations in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, are part of exciting new developments within the world of humanitarian aid, which uphold an almost utopian undertone. They have been critiqued for being unprofessional, too closely involvement, and too chaotic in their way of managing things by bigger NGOs and more hierarchical organizations. Nevertheless, I argue that we should take them seriously as a growing alternative to the way humanitarian aid is provided. And hopefully, in the future, a middle ground can be found in which various organizations with differentiating approaches can work together through a more constructive dialogue.

Throughout this thesis, I pointed out the importance of creating egalitarian relationships with the people the volunteers are helping, as well as on a more personal level, with the people participating in my research. This ambition inherently creates a certain relational proximity which inevitably brings along various ethical dilemmas. Nevertheless, being aware of those dilemmas and aiming to resolve them in the best way possible only is admirable. Interestingly, there exist various similarities between the issues which the grassroots volunteers face and those which ethnographers encounter during and after their fieldwork. Therefore, I will conclude

this thesis with a meta-reflection on the tensions of proximity when it comes to ethnographic research itself and will argue that volunteers and ethnographers face very similar tensions concerning the close bonds which are established. I will touch upon conflicts linked to responsibilities, relationships, and leaving the field/volunteering ground. The position I had as an insider in the RWC provided me with deep insights in the lived reality of the volunteers while sharing a strong sense of moral reflexivity throughout our daily deliberation processes. In retrospect, *doing the right thing* as an ethnographer and as a volunteer was not based on completely opposing sets of moral values, but rather morphed constantly since there were some striking resemblances. Furthermore, I will conclude by addressing the relevance of phronesis for both realities. This last part of my thesis will serve as a reflexive epilogue which aims to widen the scope of research possibilities on grassroots humanitarianism.

6.1 A Meta-reflection on Two Enmeshing Paradigms

The ethnographic reality I have touched upon throughout this thesis is not just a set of extractions taken from daily participation as a 'neutral' actor, but are part of a reality of intersubjectivity which has impacted me as much as I have impacted it. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) has beautifully put: "*We cannot (nor would we want to, I think) deceive ourselves into believing that our presence leaves no trace, no impact on those on whose lives we dare to intrude. We are, after all, human, and we can hardly help becoming involved in the lives of the people we have chosen to be our teachers*" (p.24). Through my participant observation at RWC, I became deeply involved in the growing aid network of Grande-Synthe and learned a lot from my participants and other people I came across during my fieldwork. I became friends with my participants and remain in contact with many of them until this day. Next to that, I performed my research during an intense period of development for the RWC and subsequently represented the workings of their organization together with my co-volunteers during the time I was there. It would

be dishonest to pretend that I have been wallflower observer who left the RWC unaffected.

Something similar happens to RWC volunteers when they make the conscious decision to operate in a horizontal way and develop a certain relational proximity with the people they help. When you decide, as an organization, to not only help from the sidelines (as most of the hierarchical organizations did[8]) but to actually enter the physical space of the Jungle, you impact that space and become part of it little by little. As a volunteer you enter a temporary settlement where you are offered tea, talk about hardships and share parts of your life with the people who stay there. You make the conscious decisions to become closely involved in this particular reality, as do ethnographers when they decide to become part of - and participate in - a certain reality. As a result, similar tensions arise when it comes to ethics, relationships, responsibilities and going away. How closely related can you become as a volunteer with the people you help? How closely related can you become as an ethnographer with the people who are your participants? When do you ethically cross a line? Or when do you create expectations which you cannot fulfil? The fact that these doubts and insecurities were so overlapping resulted in an unexpected intertwining reflexivity with my co-volunteers.

This is something which Liisa Malkki (2015) also observed during her fieldwork, she notes that there is a striking similarity between anthropological fieldwork and aid work, they are both, as I quoted elsewhere, "transformative life experiences that engage affects, the senses, and the imagination — the whole person — for better and for worse" (p.12). Especially when it comes to *limit*

[8] By this I mean that most of the more hierarchical organizations active at the Grande-Synthe Jungle never really entered the Jungle but remained physically close to their vans, the refugees had to come to them and not the other way around. This implies that people with a less assertive character would often not get what they needed while refugees who attained more power within the Jungle would be the first to ask for things.

experiences, which I have discussed in the previous chapter, fieldwork and aid work inevitably bring moments during which one does simply not know *what the right thing to do is* or *if the right decisions were made* (Malkki, 2015). These moments bring along insecurities and ethical dilemmas for volunteers as well as for ethnographers. In short, the level of engagement which the RWC volunteers assert is reminiscent of the tensions which are faced during deeply engaged ethnographic fieldwork.

Next to that, the similarity between overall humanitarian aid and anthropology also lays in another quite complex issue. Both domains have the tendency to focus, on the one hand, on the suffering subject, and on the other hand on those who are perceived as the *other*. This tendency entails the risk of depoliticizing or enhancing the *otherness* of those it aims to help or conduct research on (Malkki, 2015). Through a heightened sense of reflexivity, the RWC volunteers as well as I, in the position of the researcher and volunteer, were aware of this risk. Nevertheless, as a volunteer and as a researcher you face moments in which you have the feeling of unwillingly contributing to this *otherisation.* In such moments, volunteers faced a moral conflict which made them question if they could live up to what they had set as a goal and were not just falling into established power imbalances. As Rozakou (2016b) observed with grassroots organizations in Greece, there is a focus on understating the refugees' "needs" through a creation of horizontal relationships. Strikingly, as she explains, this rhetoric risks to take part in the "essentialisation of multiple 'crises' (refugee/migrant, economic, humanitarian etc.)" (p.194) and it might contribute the figure of the "needy refugee" (p.194). Similarly, being in the position of researcher, I encountered moments in which I questioned whether I was sufficiently involving my participants in the research process and if I was not making them feel like mere research 'objects' whom I came to analyze. Thus, correspondingly to anthropological endeavours humanitarianism entails a spectrum of "both positive and negative poles of moral possibility" (Redfield, 2012, p.452), being aware and reflexive of this spectrum can only be applauded - at the

same time, it raises challenges and conflicts which are not always easy to resolve.

6.1.1 When does my Responsibility End?

As a volunteer as well as an ethnographer you find yourself in a position in which you are confronted with what Veena Das (2007) calls an "ethic of responsibility": *"I try to defend a picture of anthropological knowledge in relation to suffering as that which is wakeful to violence wherever it occurs in the weave of life, and the body of the anthropological text as that which refuses complicity with violence by opening itself to the pain of the other"* (p.211). As an ethnographer, especially in engaged activist research, your participants become your colleagues since you are involved in a similar goal and share certain values (Calhoun, 2008), in this case, treating refugees with dignity and respect while actively denouncing violence perpetrated by state authorities. However, as Calhoun explains, with this kind of positionality often comes a stronger sense of responsibility since it is assumed that you have chosen the specific research site out of a strong personal conviction and that, consequently, your involvement does not stop once you have finished your research.

Being a volunteer similarly comes with a sense of responsibility towards the people you help, especially when a strong relational proximity is established. Next to that, I observed how volunteers felt responsible for actively denouncing and reporting the violence taking place in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. By doing this, the RWC is actively committed in trying to change the situation in this area as well as contributing to a new more actively engaged kind of humanitarianism (Kitching et al. 2016). This being quite an ambitious goal inevitably makes volunteers realize that it is often out of their hands, which creates feelings of disappointment an self-doubt. It raises painful questions, such as Malkki (2015) described in her research: "Can you really (really) make yourself useful? Are you strong enough or even *worthy* of offering your help to others? *Seeing the urge to help as proceeding simply form compassion assumes that*

compassion is yours to give, that you are working from a position of relative strength" (Malkki, 2015, p.164). It seems that there existed a constant struggle between, on the one hand, feeling useful and being a real contribution to others, and on the other hand, questioning your position as a volunteer and whether you have the capacities and insight to make the right decisions – while questioning if you are actually succeeding in avoiding certain power imbalances. Similarly, ethnographers are confronted with doubts to whether you are in a position to actually add something valuable to a body of research and whether you are not producing knowledge from a position of power relative to your research participants (Hale, 2008).

As the RWC volunteers try to promote horizontal relationships with refugees while providing aid, ethnographers try to "to eliminate the power imbalance that typifies the relationship between researcher and research subject and to instead promote a relationship of equality that promotes dialogue between the two actors" (Nabudere, 2008, p.81). Needless to say, in reality it is hard for ethnographers as well as for volunteers to completely circumvent a discourse which, on the one hand, has been marked by the production of academic knowledge entangled in positions of power vis-a-vis research participants (Hale, 2008); and on the other hand, a discourse of humanitarian aid which has been enmeshed in a history of asymmetrical power relationships (Harrel-Bond, 2002; Fassin, 2007; Feldman &Ticktin, 2010). Being aware of these ethical dilemmas has an impact on volunteers and on ethnographers, which is often transformative but at the same time makes them face *impossible situations* in which it is hard to do the right thing.

After leaving my fieldwork site I was confronted with two senses of responsibility, one came from my position as a researcher, another came from my position as a volunteer. Since I have finished my actual research I have been asked to write an article for the RWC fundraising page[9]; I was asked to help with the purchase of a van; I

[9] https://www.dunkirkrefugeewomenscentre.com/single-post/2017/11/21/Doris-the-Amazing-Sock-Washing-System

have stayed in contact and visited my closest co-volunteers; I have visited a refugee couple close to the Belgian border a few times; I helped a Kurdish refugee with his complicated asylum claim; I stayed in touch with numerous refugees which often entailed providing moral support; and I have been asked to return for some days to the Jungle to help out. I have done all this with great pleasure but have to admit that it also came from a certain sense of reciprocity towards the RWC. Especially, returning to the Jungle was a challenge, I excused myself a couple times before I went since the perspective of returning brought up feelings of anxiety and stress. However, in retrospect, it was a soothing experience and especially interesting to see how the RWC had evolved and had grown as an organization since I had left.

"Sometimes it is really hard to cope with being a volunteer, even when you have left. Because you feel responsible and you are in contact with people through Facebook and so on. So when you want to get away from everything, it is really hard to block people out when they are asking for help. It is like the responsibility never stops" (Anka, RWC volunteer, April 28, 2017).

As this fragment shows, volunteers experience a very similar sense of responsibility once they have left the ground. Other more hierarchical organizations such as *Help Refugees* forbade their volunteers to exchange contacts with the refugees in order to avoid this. As a result, it comes as no surprise that ethnographers face ethical dilemmas when it comes to positionality. As I mentioned elsewhere, "the researcher, in addition to his/her professional role, may also have the role of a friend, advisor, advocate, activist and many others" (Grubiša, 2017, p.153). I argue that RWC volunteers faced similar shifting identities while providing aid, especially being a volunteer/helper as well as a close friend to some of the refugees could create conflicting situations and expectations. Next to that, volunteers would find themselves more in the position of activists on certain days, being intertwined in challenging situations while, for example, recording police violence.

Because of the centrality of egalitarian relationships, it happened that through friendship refugees expected certain things from the volunteers which could not be fulfilled. The fact that I have used the words *friendship* and *volunteer* together in the previous sentence exactly points out which tension arises. Although I do not want to imply that true friendship between the volunteers and refugees does not exist, this mixed positionality brings along tensions especially because you are known to be someone who wants to help. After a while, it happened that volunteers untruly said that they were married or had a boyfriend when male refugees made an enquiry on their relationship status. This was done simply because of the fact that some men hoped to claim asylum through, for example, marrying a British volunteer. Pretending to have a boyfriend would simply make it easier for female volunteers to navigate the Jungle, and as I personally experienced, made amiable relations with the men easier and more straightforward. It is something which I have experienced as an ethnographer during a small research with male unaccompanied minors (De Cloet, 2016). Stressing my relationship status simply made interaction less complicated. Nevertheless, such shifting positionality and highlighting a certain aspect of one's identity can make volunteers, as well as ethnographers, feel ambivalent when it comes to upholding their values since it does not feel morally right to lie about your relationship status (Huisman, 2008).

Huisman's (2008) experiences in the field are enlightening when it comes to the abovementioned issues: *"While I was striving to eliminate hierarchies in the field, I could not escape the reality that I was structurally positioned within a hierarchical institution and one of the motivations for doing this research was to advance my position within the academic hierarchy"*(p.381). Similarly, for volunteers it is hard to escape the position of being the provider of aid as well as being a friend while trying not to create false hope, such as for example, being able to provide a faster asylum procedure. Next to that, as Anka's fragment showed, volunteers would often get messages from refugees once they arrived in the UK. Other than

offering moral support and guidance from a distance volunteers felt guilty for not finding enough time in their busy reality to actually visit the newly arrived refugees. I do not want to pass a judgment on whether friendships which are established between refugees and volunteers are honest and true, however, an interesting resemblance exists with was has been called the "friendly façade" (p.387) when it comes to qualitative research (Huisman, 2008). As Huisman paraphrases Patai (1991) ethnographers risk creating "disingenuous friendships" (p.387) during the research which fade away once the data is collected. This entails a striking resemblance to volunteers being contacted by refugees once they are back home and whether they live up to what is expected from the relationship they established during the volunteering period. It would exceed the scope of this research to investigate this issue more deeply, although, it provides an interesting framework for future research endeavours.

6.1.2 Doing the Right Thing: A Final Reflection on Phronesis

A central evocative to anthropologic research is *to do no harm* (Fluehr-Lobban, 2012), which in this particular field of study is not always as straightforward. I argue that moral reasoning is central to ethnographic research when it comes to *doing the right thing*, in a way which is not completely different from how volunteers mediate the reality of the Grande-Synthe Jungle and the ethical dilemmas they face. As the anthropologist Karen Sykes (2012) argues "*one might hope that anthropology was a form of moral reasoning. Through engaging in a study of moral reasoning, anthropologists learn just how the subjects of their research have negotiated the complex terrain of intercultural exchange, where multiple and changing standards of value are commonplace*" (p.183). I have aimed to show through the concept of phronesis how volunteers mediate their decisions on a day to day basis and aim to do what is *good* and *right* throughout the situations they encounter. I have argued that concepts such as solidarity, friendship, gut feeling, proximity, dignity, horizontalness, equality, human rights, etc. were central to the volunteers' moral reasoning.

To support the claim that there exists a similarity between the volunteers' process of moral reasoning and what I have experienced as an activist researcher, I will draw on Davydd Greenwood's (2012) application of phronesis to activist research. Greenwood explains how the historical domestication of social sciences has lead to an exclusion of activist research from the *conventional* sciences due to its perceived lack of *objective* writing. This domestication has created dualisms such applied vs. theoretical science, pure vs. engaged social science, etc. Greenwood argues that as a result *engagement* has been rendered an inferior mode of research and has over time been perceived as "unscientific, personal, and unprofessional, even if engagement is considered to be a meaningful ethical and human response to life in the company of our fellow humans" (Greenwood, 2012, p.325). I cannot help but note a similarity with the importance of affective and emotional neutrality in the humanitarian discourse, in which establishing bonds of relational proximity are considered breaches of this presupposed emotional neutrality (Malkki, 2015).

In order to break up these dualisms Greenwood (2012) introduces Aristotle's notions of knowledge production: *episteme, tekhne* and *phronesis*, of which *episteme, tekhne* are considered the only relevant ones to the conventional sciences. Greenwood argues that phronesis is a basis for engaged activist modes of research since it "*involves the creation of a new space for collaborative reflection, the contrast and integration of many kinds of knowledge systems, the linking of the general and the particular through action and analysis, and the collaborative design of both the goals and the actions aimed at achieving them*" (p.327) in which a sense of moral goodness stands central. This, in a way, beautifully captures how I have collaborated with the RWC throughout my research. Similarly, the volunteers of the RWC pursue their goal of creating an organization in which horizontality and the creation of egalitarian relationships between refugees and volunteers stand central. They are reflexive and aware of the conventional humanitarian discourse and renegotiate their ethics of proximity through daily deliberation

processes, in order to find the best way as an organization and as individual volunteers *to do the right thing*. Of course, on the one hand, for the ethnographer the outcome of this process of phronesis is the creation of academically relevant insights, and on the other hand, in the case of the volunteers the outcome is to gather practical knowledge on how to *do the right thing* throughout day to day decision-making in the complex context of the Jungle. Nevertheless, at the core of both of these endeavours lays the goal to strive for something which is morally good, and which does not only arise from a moral obligation to the self but as much from a commitment to the overall human flourishing (Jouili, 2015; Lambek, 2002).

To conclude this last chapter, I will address how the way conventional academia has ostracized activist engaged research due to its perceived *unscientific* and *unprofessional* way of knowledge creation (Greenwood, 2012) is reminiscent of how the horizontal grassroots volunteers in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region have been criticized for being unprofessional, too emotionally involved and too chaotic. However, as I have mentioned, it is not my place to pass a judgment on who is providing aid in the *correct* way, nevertheless, these grassroots organization should be taken seriously as an asset to overall humanitarian aid considering their growing importance.

The critique which two UNHCR aid workers gave on the grassroots organizations in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region lays bare how they are challenging the conventional humanitarian discourse. It should be noted that their statements were not all on behalf of the UNHCR[10] but rather from their personal experiences as aid workers. I take the liberty, with permission, of quoting a co-volunteer's diary entry on this day, which captures the frustration and ambivalent feelings with which we were left after the meeting.

"This UN meeting was something else. One of the RWC volunteers and I met with two women who have been working in Calais for over

[10] Before the interview, I asked the two UNHCR workers if I was allowed to use the notes we made during the meeting for my anthropological research.

a year. […] My impression of both women within a few moments of talking to them was that they had no empathy for the refugees and didn't' think much of the volunteers. Jaded is the word I used (and introduced my Belgian friend). I have a lot of critiques of the non-profits operating here and the volunteers but they are all doing the best they can and are working hard as hell. If they had some support (like from the government of the UN!) they could learn to do things better. I take huge issue with the UN scoffing at the inexperience and mistakes of volunteers who are caring for refugees. Why are volunteers doing this at all?! Why isn't the UN or the government doing this work?! The more I think about that UN meeting the more frustrated I get. They were talking about how the volunteers are so pretty and clean when they arrive but after a few months they look homeless. As if deciding that there are more important things than being pretty is a character flaw. Also, these volunteers are living on basically nothing for months at a time, staying with 6 in a trailer, and working 12 hour days. The UN staff have a good salary, nice homes, and work 8 hour days, five days a week in an office. I wouldn't live the way the other volunteers do but I don't feel that I'm in a position to be critical of their appearance.[…] Utopia 56, one of the volunteer organizations, was running the camp in Grande-Synthe for a while. Despite the incredible amount of work of the volunteers, the UN staff found fault with them. They complained that Utopia 56 volunteers did too much for the refugees, saying 'they had washing machines!' They were indignant that the volunteers were working in the camp. It was as if they felt the refugees' quality of life shouldn't rise above a certain level—a very low level. Fixing things around the camp, not making them work, and providing a modern way to wash their clothes was more than these women felt refugees were entitled to"(Claire, short term RWC volunteer, May 16, 2016).

This fragment demonstrates the tensions of a discourse which is becoming increasingly challenged, in this particular region, in terms of how aid should be provided to refugees. The grassroots organizations in this area are becoming increasingly inventive when it comes to reconceptualizing humanitarian aid: from driving school

bus projects for everyone who wants to learn; to cheerful innovative warehouse systems; to night 'maraude' teams who look for minors on the streets in order to provide safe shelter; to refugee based community kitchens; and so on. Could we call them, then, radical volunteers? Who shake the foundations of the humanitarian discourse? And should we, adequately, investigate these explosive initiatives through radical theory (Graeber, 2004) and take them seriously as viable alternatives to how humanitarian aid can be conceptualized? If so, "*such a project would actually have to have two aspects, or moments if you like: one ethnographic, one utopian, suspended in a constant dialogue"* (David Graeber, 2004, p.12). As Graeber explains: ethnographic, in the sense that on tries to understand the "moral, or pragmatic logics" (p.12) which underlie people's actions; and utopian, in the sense that we take seriously micro-utopias which set forth the moral imperative of creating a "radically better world" (p.10). In the end, as Graeber remarks, "even if we're wrong, we might well get a lot closer" (p.10). I argue that indeed we should take these grassroots organizations, such as the RWC, seriously and closely observe how they unfold themselves as viable ways in which humanitarian aid is currently being provided and reconceptualized.

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