

# Peripheral Humanitarianism: Ephemerality, Experimentation, and Effects of Refugee Provisioning in Paris

## Abstract

This article examines the place-based assemblages of humanitarian care that emerge at neighbourhood scales in response to politics of exclusion. We ground our discussion in the variegated humanitarian efforts and solidarities that took place in a working-class neighbourhood on the periphery of Paris, which brought in sharp relief the combination of precarity and provisioning in the wake of the 2015 'refugee crisis'. Drawing on ethnographic encounters, we recount the combination of reactive, emergency humanitarian logics (between 2016-2017) and experimental humanitarian strategies contesting wider exclusionary and deterrence-based asylum practices (2018 to the present). We show how modes of ephemeral and experimental humanitarianism operated across local spatiotemporal nodes — inside a welcome centre (the 'Bubble'), and on the surrounding streets. We argue that attention to the effects of the ephemeral and experimental solidarities and encounters that formed outside the formal infrastructure of humanitarian care in Paris were in part palliative, but profound in their re-imagining of a progressive politics of solidarity amidst protracted and overlapping precarities. We propose *peripheral humanitarianism* to describe these effects, a spatially and temporally contingent humanitarian assemblage engaging with both traditional and DIY humanitarian responses that challenges structural exclusions of racialised 'others'.

**Key Words:** ephemerality, experimentation, humanitarianism; refugees; periphery; solidarity

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## 1.0 Introduction

I walked through Porte de la Chapelle just the other day. I hadn't been there in a while, and I tell you it was so strange to see that everything was gone. You know, the Bubble is gone, the stadium, the warehouse where we did distributions for all that time... I mean we always knew that everything was temporary .... But you know what? I did see one man, symbolically, who looked like he might have been a migrant- he had his little backpack and a sleeping bag rolled up, and he was in the middle of Porte de la Chapelle, all alone, waiting... (Amelie<sup>1</sup>, Migrant Solidarité Wilson, April 3, 2021)

### **Figure 1: Sitting Solo. Source: Toby Smith, 02. 2018**

Since November 2015, the evolution and politicization of the refugee 'crisis' in Europe, marked by the arrival of over 1.3 million refugees<sup>2</sup>, has paralleled increased border securitization and fraught tensions between different 'welcome' strategies and corridors of arrival. Divergent humanitarian responses across Europe emerged – from sympathy to alarm to ambivalence - alongside dramatized media depictions of refugees *en route* or stuck in transient camps. As migrants crossed border zones, they made their way into European cities, moving through various humanitarian spaces ranging from camp-like centres in repurposed warehouses to street-based auto-constructed settlements. Throughout this period, asylum geographies enabled certain migrants to 'settle' and consigned others to 'permanent impermanence' (Brun 2015). European capitals became at different moments frontline, transient, or arrival cities (Thieme et al 2020), and within peripheralized urban spaces migrant struggles and activist-refugee solidarity networks emerged (Tazzioli 2020). Paris is one of the European cities where deterrence-based national and EU politics co-existed with grassroots humanitarian efforts.

Building on the opening quote and image (*see Figure 1*), this article 'sits with' the transformations that occurred in Porte de la Chapelle, a working-class neighbourhood in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, that served as the basecamp of a temporary 'welcome' centre set up in 2016 and closed in 2019. Over the summer of 2016, the Paris

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<sup>1</sup> While we have kept the names of organizations, we have anonymized all individual names.

<sup>2</sup> This figure is from the Pew Research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>)

Socialist Party Mayor had gathered a consortium of French NGOs and grassroots activist groups to discuss plans to set up an emergency humanitarian response to the rising numbers of migrants sleeping rough across the city. In November 2016, Paris' first official refugee shelter 'le Centre de Premier Accueil' (CPA) opened meters away from the Porte de la Chapelle metro station in a disused railway depot known as *La Halle*, intended for new migrant arrivals. Alongside La Halle, a yellow and white dome-like structure was built to serve as the main humanitarian centre. The 'Bubble', as it was informally known, became a temporary spatial manifestation of both municipal humanitarian infrastructure, and the city's inability to provide comprehensive humanitarian care for precarious migrants facing growing EU-wide bordering regimes. Thus, an assemblage of humanitarian actors engaged with refugees, some operating *within* the Bubble itself, others operating from the streets *outside* it. Porte de la Chapelle became at once a frontline, transit, and arrival zone, contending with the complicated matrix of state and EU asylum regulations determining who could stay.

We draw from our multi-sited research on the humanitarian responses to refugee arrivals across European cities, examining how humanitarian nodes within the city of Paris, beyond 'the camp' typology (Katz 2016; Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan, 2020), formed ephemeral and experimental provisioning lifelines for refugees. We examine how particular spaces and temporalities of humanitarian engagement on the urban periphery (dis)enable refugees to survive and in turn, (re)make the everyday city in the liminal time-space between arrival and home-making. We draw on Tazzioli's (2020: 138) provocation 'to account for struggle, solidarity networks, and collective movements that have been precarious and ephemeral,' and Caldeira's notion of 'peripheral urbanization' (2017) to conceptualise *peripheral humanitarianism* – an urban humanitarian assemblage that provided improvised and ephemeral geographies of migrant care to challenge migrant exclusions. Conceptualising peripheral humanitarianism offers a way of seeing emergent temporal and spatial practices at the intersection of DIY politics from below, marked by makeshift refugee shelters and distributions, and ambivalent politics from above where the municipality paradoxically provides infrastructures of care, while being complicit in the expulsion and exclusion of migrants. We shed light on shifting temporalities and spatialities of solidarity in the face of continued bordering and marginality (Giglioli et al 2016), from the emergency response at the height of the 'refugee crisis', to the grassroots humanitarian 'traces' and effects left behind, raising key questions about the extent to which the periphery both facilitates and stymies migrant 'arrival'. As non-traditional humanitarian actors encounter migrants at different stages of their journey to, through, and from elsewhere, the periphery is not just spatially on the margins of, or marginal to the city. It is also vital in city-making: a provisional space of ephemeral and experimental practices (Hall 2021; Simone 2018) where 'care' is reimagined and where differentiated performances of solidarity and welfare claims converge amongst vulnerable migrants, working urban poor and unhoused residents.

The article is structured as follows: section (2) provides contextual background and a theoretical framing, reviewing selected literatures on European border regimes, the emergence of camps in Europe, and the racialised urban politics in Paris' peripheralized neighbourhoods. Section (3) starts with a methodological reflection, then maps the peripheral humanitarian assemblages of Porte de la Chapelle that formed within the Bubble (3.1) and along surrounding streets (3.2). Section (4.0) concludes by reflecting on the 'traces' that remain after Porte de la Chapelle's humanitarian infrastructures were dismantled and dispersed, drawing on Tazzioli (2020) to consider the (after)effects of activist politics and the transversal alliances between activists and migrants; we also reflect on the temporal and spatial limits of ephemeral and experimental solidarity efforts, while arguing for greater attentiveness to the generative possibilities of peripheral humanitarianism in remaking the everyday city.

## **2.0 From European borders to racialised bordering within the city**

*There's always been a history of vagabondage in Europe. But today you see EU nation states sending each other migrants, especially to the cities' (Julien Damon, September 2017).*

The shifting legal geographies of asylum since 2015 highlight the convergence of wider uncertainties of EU and national migration policies in response to the 'refugee crisis'. In July 2017, the European Court of Justice upheld the Dublin Regulation despite the high influx of refugees in 2015. This gave EU member states the right to deport migrants to the first country of entry to the EU, even though refugees seeking asylum in Europe often came

through Greece or Italy without intending to stay there.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, cities across Europe became both 'transit hubs or final destinations' (Guardian, 2016), turning into logistical, administrative, and humanitarian hubs. Municipalities played an unprecedented role in the coordination of emergency responses and longer-term provision, and increasingly govern migrants' lives (Hall 2021) such that cities are simultaneously spaces of violence and displacement, but also of refuge and arrival. Refugees do not simply 'arrive' to settle; they are often forced to disperse, while carving out pockets of belonging in cities ambivalent in their welcome. In France, the controversial immigration laws introduced in early 2018 marked a growing move towards detention and deportation of migrants who were either denied asylum or 'Dublined'.<sup>4</sup> If 'it is the camp that haunts the city' (Darling 2016: 182), we were drawn to the everyday practices of tenuous arrival and solidarity that formed in the shadows of institutional camps. Indeed, makeshift camps emerged across European cities, or 'temporary and ephemeral sites generated by people 'on the move' ... reflecting the precarious character of their condition together with their need for temporary shelter' (Martin et al 2020: 745).

The 'institutional' camp – led by the UNHCR, the state, and/or municipal authorities – dominates mainstream understandings of refugee management.<sup>5</sup> The refugee 'camp' has been studied particularly in relation to technologies of containment, segregation, and integration in the face of protracted humanitarian crises. The 'camp' has been conceptualised as 'spaces of exception' that enable the classification of refugees into a 'biopolitical mass', restricting refugee mobility, and governing bodies through arbitrariness (ibid). But what of the relationships between 'institutional' camps and the informal camps that form in the near surrounds?

We make two points to foreground our empirical discussion: First, despite the dehumanizing processes within institutional camps, refugees find ways of forging solidarity and resistance, beyond 'bare life' politics (Agamben 1998). Second, while there is considerable literature on 'camps' in Europe and across the Global South (see Agier 2008; Brun 2015; Malkii 1995), we align with scholars pushing for greater engagement with refugees' experiences *within* cities, particularly when accessing food, shelter and the asylum process in ad-hoc ways. As Darling (2016) argues, illustrating how borders are experienced within cities reframes refugee exclusions beyond the 'nation-state'. While literature on 'hotspots' -- or the physical infrastructure and governance mechanisms established by European agencies in 'frontline' countries such as (the islands of) Greece to classify and process migrants – point to specific manifestations of care and control (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020) and migrant managerialism (Vradis et. al 2020), we focus on the humanitarian assemblage of grassroots volunteers and municipal actors to argue that contingency and ephemerality open avenues of subversion to top-down modes of governance. As the growing 'contemporary archipelago[s] of refugee camps in Europe' (Martin et al 2020: 746) are increasingly urbanised, Paris reflects the unique intersections of ephemeral refugee encampment, experimental humanitarianism, and city re-making on the periphery that underscore a temporal politics of solidarity and care.

The co-existence of formal and informal migrant accommodation is well-exemplified in the case of the Calais 'Jungle' – home to thousands of refugees prior to its official closure in 2016, including food stalls, barbershops, and places of worship alongside makeshift shelters. And yet, as Mould (2018: 399) shows, even amidst this 'richness' of place enhanced by refugee creativity, the violent policing of auto-construction furthered migrant precariousness. By banning volunteers from bringing durable materials, such as concrete, brick or cinder and only permitting tarpaulin and plastic, local officials ensured that the Jungle was kept in a 'state of perpetual temporariness'. Despite the differences between the informal Jungle and the adjacent formal container camp established by the state in Calais, Katz (2016: 10) notes that the distinction between 'top-down/formal' and 'informal/makeshift' camps becomes blurred, especially as these 'contrasting spatial typologies' co-exist and co-produce each other. At this nexus new humanitarian actors emerged, including thousands of volunteers across various migrant hubs, from the Greek islands, to the Calais camps, and across European capital cities. Recent literatures on 'volunteer humanitarianism' (Sandri 2017; Vandevordt 2019; Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan 2020; Jumbert and Pascucci 2021) argue that rather than solely replicating problematic power dynamics between traditional humanitarian actors and refugees – namely dehumanization and depoliticization

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the implications of this ruling from a grassroots solidarity perspective, see:

<https://areyouserious.medium.com/ays-daily-digest-26-7-17-european-court-of-justice-ruling-regarding-the-dublin-iii-regulation-8321b0bdf42a>

<sup>4</sup> The bill cut asylum processing times from 120 days to 90 days, accelerating potential deportation. See:

<https://www.france24.com/en/20180801-macrons-government-passes-controversial-asylum-immigration-law>

<sup>5</sup> The institutional camp traces its genealogy to other camp technologies, such as the concentration camp and military camp (Martin et al 2020).

(see Fassin, 2012 and Ticktin 2016) – volunteers imagined and enacted more humane forms of provisioning. Sandri (2018) demonstrates that the presence of volunteers in Calais developed alternative social spaces, built on ‘coexistence’ and community-building with refugees. Stavinocha and Ramakrishnan (2020: 79) link the improvisational spatiality of the ‘camp’ to volunteer practice, arguing that the ‘contours of a different modality of humanitarianism emerge ... a makeshift humanitarianism whose value lies in the foregrounding of dignified care’. With our focus on humanitarianism from below, we keep in tension the potential for ‘disobedient’ practices to emerge with the very real threat of co-optation (Stierl, 2018).

Important questions arise about infrastructures – from the peopled (Simone, 2004) to beyond – that allow for versions of ‘dignified care’ to be delivered. For instance, Kriechauf et. al (2020) conceptualise ‘infrastructures of conversion’ in migrant arrival cities to understand how infrastructures are developed and adapted with implications for refugee mobility and place-making; these infrastructures are not simply ‘backdrops’ (Nettelbladt and Boano, 2019), but are central to (re) making the city, albeit underscored by logics of ephemerality. In reference to the ‘hotspot’ approach, Papada et. al (2020) explore ‘pop-up governance’, or the temporary, mobile, and specific measures that seek to expedite already existing procedures through new spaces of governance (such as reception centres) and improvisation. This description maps on well to the municipal-led ‘welcome’ centre in Paris; however, ephemerality extends beyond this technique of border governance to signify distinct exclusions and subversions: from the capacity limits of the ‘welcome’ centre to the ephemeral tent settlements that mushroomed and faced eviction, protracted temporariness and peripherality manifested across both the institutional and makeshift spaces of refuge, which both reshaped the city and rendered migrant belonging and integration tenuous. And yet, it is possible to thread the themes of improvisation *and* reciprocity into our discussion of shifting humanitarian assemblages on the urban periphery, showing that they are not just comprised of pre-designed material structures, but also of actors operating both within and outside of particular humanitarian ‘logics’.

The periphery offers spaces where refugees alongside grassroots networks challenge the humanitarian status quo and make inroads towards an experimental urban politics. Tazzioli’s notion of ‘temporality of solidarity’ (2020: 139) referring to the ‘transience of collective subjects and of solidarity networks’ that have formed in Europe’s border zones, provides a useful conceptual lever as we consider the spatiotemporalities of solidarity that formed in peripheral spaces of Paris. At different times of the day, night, and year, these spaces became border zones, sites of temporary refuge, spaces of vulnerability at risk of eviction, nodes of reciprocity and distribution, forming ‘key spatial landmarks of migrants’ enacted geographies’ (ibid). We also draw on Caldeira’s notion of ‘peripheral urbanization’ (2017) describing the forms of auto-construction in the favelas of Brazil as vital modes of city-making. Given our intellectual and empirical reference points have emerged from the global South (XXXX 2014; XXXX 2017), we think relationally with Southern urbanisms (Robinson and Parnell 2012) to analyse city-making in European cities today. The auto-construction Caldeira observes takes place within cityscapes that are embedded in neoliberal logics of land and housing, but bypasses them and shapes a kind of ‘transversal logic’. As she notes “what makes this process peripheral is not its physical location, but rather the crucial role of residents in the production of space and how as a mode of urbanization it unfolds slowly, transversally in relation to official logics, and amidst political contestations” (2017: 4). Rather than describing the urban periphery in relation to a ‘centre’, we zoom into the multiple centralities (see Keil, 2018) – including new forms of distribution and care -- being created within the neighbourhood of Porte de la Chapelle that we describe later. In theorising peripheral humanitarianism, we engage with scholarships that interrogate the ‘official logics’ that undergird EU bordering regimes, that expand humanitarian inquiries beyond the ‘camp’ space and into the city, and that conceptualises the simultaneous precarities and possibilities that lie amidst urban peripherality.

European border regimes and their racialized formations that detain, deport, and cause harm (even death) to non-white migrants have punctured ideas of European-ness, raising questions of who counts as European and the limits to this inclusion (De Genova, 2016; Davies and Isakjee, 2019; El-Tayeb 2011). Within states and cities similar logics exist through infrastructures of reception and accommodation centres, often transforming into various modes of containment (Nettelbladt and Boano, 2020; Lumley-Sapanski, 2022). We focus on attempts at bordering *within* the city (Darling 2016) to consider the neighbourhood scale in Paris, where newly arrived migrants face a complicated web of multi-scalar levels of refugee governance, inadequate city-provisioning of shelter, and the threat of pre-existing state violence against Black, Arab, and Roma communities. As Beaman writes (2020: 519), the ‘spatial formation of banlieues and quartiers-populaires [...] undergird a racial logic’ despite the eschewing of identity-based differences in French Republicanism – a logic that codes difference and exists as a place of stigma. Such modes of racialization are

not unique to cities in France, speaking to how wider policing of European borders are ‘simultaneously entangled with a global (postcolonial) politics of race that redraws the proverbial colour line and refortifies European-ness as a racial formation of Whiteness’ (De Genova, 2017: 20).

Within France, the policing of migrant communities has a fraught history. Still resonant in popular consciousness, the infamous 2005 *émeute* riots in Paris were triggered by tensions between police and youth of North African and Arabic descent in Paris’ ‘other France’ (Keaton 2006). Fassin (2013) argues that rather than enforcing the law, police have institutionalized racism and violence against immigrant youth in particular, enforcing and reproducing logics of exclusion and stigma in the name of public order.<sup>6</sup> In November 2020, police raided a peaceful occupation by migrants and civil society activists in La Place de la République following the evacuation of a makeshift camp in St. Denis. The police response was disproportionately aggressive and violent, using tear gas and dispersal grenades to evacuate what they called an “illegal occupation of public space”<sup>7</sup>.

We draw a parallel between contemporary histories of police violence in low-income housing estates of Paris where settled migrants live, and the recent manifestations of police force directed towards newer migrants tenuously navigating the city since 2015. Certain popular neighbourhoods experiencing a cycle of (racialised) underinvestment have become sites of ‘slumification’ (Damon 2016) as emergency shelter is only available to those classified as most vulnerable (women, children, and minors), forcing hundreds of asylum seekers in waiting onto the streets. The inadequacy of housing facilities for predominantly male migrants in Paris<sup>8</sup> (Mbodj-Pouye, 2016) and the broader struggles of those without papers against bureaucratic exclusions (Ticktin, 2011) are not recent phenomena: rather, we point to peripheral spaces in the city that formed new ephemeral concentrated sites of migrant arrival, where a contradictory co-presence formed: of (incomplete) municipal investment in infrastructures of ‘arrival’, makeshift settlements, and the French National Police. As Bhagat (2019: 2) observes, ‘the ongoing displacement of refugees ... reflects the racialized dynamics of expulsion present in Paris’ history...’.

On the Paris metro map, Porte de la Chapelle is peripheral to the more central arrondissements of the city. It had acquired a reputation as an increasingly ‘difficult’ working class neighbourhood associated with overlapping vulnerabilities including a growing number of migrant residents, high rates of under-employment, and a rise in rough sleepers, Roma makeshift settlements, hard drugs, and sex workers (Bhagat, 2019). As we discuss in further detail, growing volunteer outreach drew long-standing residents from the neighbourhood who faced various forms of insecurity – which only increased during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Thus, we situate our intervention within the intersections of (il)legality, race/ethnic othering, policing, and place, where the past five years have seen a choreography of new grassroots humanitarian formations, alongside punctuated police-led evacuations and roundups of migrants in makeshift shelters. The following section starts with brief methodological reflections, before unpacking the ephemeral, experimental, and uncertain humanitarian assemblage where the politics and legal structures from above confronted vibrant DIY politics and mobilisation from below.

### 3.0 Mapping Spaces and Temporalities in Humanitarian Assemblages

This section examines how Porte de la Chapelle became a central node in a humanitarian assemblage, where a constellation of actors converged spatially and operationally between 2017-2019. First, we reflect on our ethnographic methods and relationships with interlocutors. Our wider research project focused on emergent infrastructures of care

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<sup>6</sup> Protests in June 2020 sought justice for Adama Traoré, a Black man who died while in police custody in 2016; in November 2020, Michel Zecler, a Black music producer, was severely assaulted by police officers outside his recording studio for ‘not wearing a face mask’. Captured on CCTV, the incident reanimated heated debates regarding unwarranted police violence in France.

<sup>7</sup> The Prefecture (@prefpolice) tweeted on November 23, 2020: “Ce jour, un campement a été installé illégalement à Paris, place de la #République. La @prefpolice a immédiatement procédé à l'évacuation de cette occupation illicite de l'espace. public. pic.twitter.com/RrV7Tvz1Dm. See InfoMigrants (Nov 23, 2020) “French police use tear gas to dismantle migrant camp.” <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/28695/french-police-use-tear-gas-to-dismantle-paris-migrant-camp>; and NYT (Nov 24, 2020) “Outcry in France After Police Clear Paris Migrant Camp”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/24/world/europe/police-paris-migrant-camp.html>;

<sup>8</sup> Mbodj-Pouye (2016) writes on the housing frustrations of long-standing migrants from West Africa who espouse an attachment to specific *foyers* (accommodation for male migrants established in the post-war period).

and their politics of contestation across four European cities: Athens, Berlin, Budapest and Paris. However, over the course of our Paris fieldwork<sup>9</sup>, we felt that developments in Porte de la Chapelle deserved their own narration.

As part of our ethical responsibility towards the sites and peoples we engaged with, we announced our identities as researchers upon first engaging with different volunteer collectives. However, we felt it was unethical to request time from our interlocutors without ourselves engaging in the labour of sorting clothes, distributing food, identifying vulnerable individuals, and helping migrants access information. Incorporating volunteering into our ethnographic methods (including deep 'hangouts' and participant observation) was integral to our ethical considerations, as it gave us an ability to see and experience the everyday spaces of humanitarian care and migrant-city encounters in such a way that rejected ethnographic tendencies to exoticise 'suffering' subjects (Robbins 2013); instead we sought to understand the affirmative and creative efforts amongst diverse actors in the face of adversity. Yet, we are acutely aware of the methodological and ethical concerns in research that involves 'violent and precarious geographies of migrant life' (Hagan 2021: 2); here, we have intentionally focused on public encounters and interactions, careful not to reveal intimate details or knowledges. Drawing on Navarro (2020)'s notion of a 'negative methodology' where researchers working in contexts of precarity and violence must not presume the 'availability of evidence', we felt it was important to share the space and embodied practices of volunteers (themselves a diverse group of settled migrants, university students, retirees, under-employed activists), migrants and local residents, without expectations that each volunteer experience would lead to 'data collection' (indeed, some days did not include any research interviews). But our approach did grant us a kind of permission to learn how to navigate the institutional 'boundaries' enacted when working in the Bubble, and when spending time in the 'informal hotspots' and tent settlements that tended to form, by 2018, in 'spatially disobedient' ways under bridges (Tazzioli 2018). We remain aware that asymmetries still exist, between researchers and volunteers, researchers and migrants, and volunteers and migrants.

Alongside participant observation at first inside the Bubble, and then on the street and under bridges nearby, we conducted semi-structured interviews with diverse actors.<sup>10</sup> We also attended four court hearings for asylum seekers (open to the public) to witness legal proceedings as we accompanied a legal aid worker dedicated to supporting refugees through the asylum bureaucracy. Alongside in-person field visits, fieldwork also took place in digital mediums: following Twitter feeds, partaking in Facebook group chats and posts, and exchanging text messages via WhatsApp with key interlocutors. We brought together our respective fieldnotes and fieldwork encounters, and for the purposes of collaborative authorship, the vignettes and quotes from the field are presented in the 'we'.

The following section explores the interconnections of place-making, temporariness and (im)mobility across two spatial typologies: ephemerality inside the Bubble and experimentation on the 'street'. We examine how these spatiotemporalities and (im)mobilities reshaped the periphery as one marked by humanitarian presence, concentrated precarity, and new alliances contesting migrant exclusions.

### 3.1 Ephemerality in the Bubble

From its inauguration in 2016 to dismantling in March 2018, the Bubble became an axis around which refugees, volunteers, grassroots collectives, NGOs and police converged. The ephemerality of the Bubble's very existence underscored the fragility of refugees' 'welcome' in Paris. While the politics and function of the Bubble's temporary humanitarian architecture is well-documented by Scott-Smith (2020), we highlight the role the ephemeral played in structuring how 'arrival' infrastructure was accessed and navigated, and how ephemerality generated alternative spaces of care and dwelling within *and* beyond the perimeter of the Bubble.

Ephemerality as a form of humanitarianism was embedded within the architectural and functional imaginings of the Bubble. As Hidalgo noted in an interview, 'Paris will not stand by and do nothing while the Mediterranean becomes a graveyard' (New Yorker, 2016). The architect who designed the Bubble, Julian Beller, expressed the idea

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<sup>9</sup> We each conducted fieldwork at different times, staggering monthly 3-5 day visits (plus two 14-day trips) over the course of 18 months, between winter of 2016 and March 2018, followed by 2 follow-up trips in September 2018 and March 2019. Over the course of these trips, we conducted over 30 semi-structured interviews.

<sup>10</sup> This included: the deputy to the Paris Mayor involved in municipal refugee support since 2015, Emmaüs workers manning the Bubble, the founders and volunteers of three civil society associations involved in daily distributions and ground support, neighbourhood collective and a local mosque collective providing evening meals or hot beverages during the winter months, twelve volunteers, solidarity activists, a legal aid worker, migrants, a sex-worker, a drug-user, and a security guard outside the Bubble.

of a generous welcome, within the albeit fleeting nature of a space intended to serve refugee needs in a temporary, yet innovative way: a 900 square metre bright white and yellow inflatable structure was erected alongside a converted hangar where 8 'villages' were set up for 50 people, with shared rooms including 4 beds<sup>11</sup>. Beller explained, 'Everything we are doing is movable and flexible ... My philosophy has always been about ephemerality. It's interesting to apply that mentality to the real needs of the city' (*ibid*). This in-built ephemerality of the Bubble stood in stark contrast with the protracted temporariness migrants experienced throughout their own asylum journeys. The architectural design accommodated singular short (up to seven day) periods of respite for some, but could not resolve the extended forms of waiting (Brun 2015) experienced by many refugees. As 25-year-old volunteer, Julien, working inside the Bubble explained, '(migrants) go from queuing for breakfast, to the prefecture or some administrative appointment to see about their papers.... there is so much waiting!' (September 2017).

Theoretically, the Bubble was a flagship example of unprecedented inner-city humanitarian municipal assistance aiming to provide 'a bed for a night' (Scott-Smith 2020) and emergency care for vulnerable migrants. But the temporary architectural design of the Bubble was also a reminder that this neighbourhood was earmarked for eventual new University of Paris-VIII buildings. In practice, the Bubble magnified the city's inability to provide sufficient humanitarian care (especially housing) for the number of migrants navigating an increasingly overwhelmed asylum system, and it eventually became 'entrenched in complex strategies of containment and control' (Scott-Smith 2020: 318).

Many refugees had to make difficult calculations: whether to seek accommodation in the 'Bubble' and be assigned at random, separated from journey companions, to state-managed refugee accommodation. This would impede the maintenance of social ties and survival networks. As Julien explained, 'after a while, some of them start small businesses, they're always managing somehow to survive, especially when they have a community, to help each other out.' An Afghan interlocutor named Rashid expressed his 'mixed feelings about the Bubble because people were sent to the borders of the country, and he complained about 'jungle living in buildings ... with poor food' (December 2016) in these rural resettlement centres. His statement underscored a difficult decision: choosing to sleep rough outside the Bubble and face evacuations, with the hope to continue the journey onto the UK, or take his chances by entering the Bubble and face dispersal outside of Paris. Conversations with staff managing migrant welcome centres confirmed the unknowns that refugees faced once housed in the French provinces. Adeline, a former staff member of one of these centres near Calais, noted that many of the men housed were bored, and these centres often failed to provide integration efforts – epitomizing in her words 'how the state treats asylum seekers' (November 2017). Facing an over-stretched asylum system and perverse EU Dublin Regulations meant migrants and to an extent, volunteers, were themselves operating within the temporal and spatial confines of ephemerality: migrants were waiting and uncertain about their future, and volunteers were unsure of what advice to provide.

The Paris Bubble's daily operations were run by a small number of established French humanitarian organisations, namely Emmaüs Solidarité and Médecins du Monde, tending to families with children in one space, and single men in another. The Bubble served as the administrative space where Emmaüs workers registered and welcomed new arrivals, providing information on the asylum process. As the head of Emmaüs Solidarité stated in September 2017, there were about 120 people employed at the site, with about 500 volunteers comprising most of the work force. La Halle contained accommodation for up to 400 people at one end, and at the other, a set of large washing machines operated loudly, alongside rows of cardboard boxes containing various donated items -- clothing, shoes, toiletries, and blankets – collected and sorted by another organisation – Utopia 56. Founded in January 2016, Utopia 56 had been invited by the Paris city mayor to discuss their experience working with migrants in Calais, and asked to collaborate with the new humanitarian centre. Utopia 56 were given a space with La Halle, serving as a kind of basecamp from which they would serve migrants temporarily accessing the centre's 'orientation' services and from where they could carry out their daily distributions and volunteer activities outside the compound.

Clément managed the inventory of donations at the warehouse when we first met. He explained that there was a good system in place between Emmaüs and Utopia 56. Emmaüs tended to migrants in the Bubble, especially families, while Utopia 56 spent most of their time outside the Bubble, tending to (young male) rough sleepers. Clément explained in May 2017, 'We barter (*On fait du troc*). We give them clothes, they give us blankets.' However, this

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<sup>11</sup> It was built at a cost of €16.4 million.

partnership began to grow thin with time – demonstrating the fragile solidarities between organizations with different missions and political stances.

Though the CPA took in an average of 50 new refugees daily, it was not set up as a ‘camp’ for long-term accommodation and was under-resourced to meet the shelter demands of refugees queuing each day. Between 2017 and 2018, 800-2000 migrants were sleeping rough in the neighbouring streets at any given time (*see figure 2*). On certain occasions, France Terre d’Asile (FTDA), who organised accommodation for asylum seekers, would move migrants sleeping rough, and offer them temporary shelter in near-by gymnasiums or schools. In May 2017, Clément explained why he hadn’t slept much the night before:

**Figure 2: Sleeping rough outside the Bubble. Source: Toby Smith, 02.2018**

1600 people were moved last night and they were housed. It went ok, Emmaüs helped, brought food, and they made sure they had staff who spoke the appropriate languages who could explain what was happening. The time before, it was the police who forced people onto buses, everything in French.

The presence of the special mobile French police force, *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS), became constant in Porte de la Chapelle, their vans and officers based outside the gates of the CPA compound. As many volunteers, activists and journalists have witnessed in Calais as in Paris, the CRS regularly displayed heavy-handed tactics, preventing migrants from setting up makeshift camps<sup>12</sup>. In Porte de la Chapelle, when the CRS led the evictions of mushrooming makeshift street settlements outside the CPA, these were rushed and violent, because (as Clément complained) the CRS didn’t take time to explain what was going on to migrants, or ensure they had translators who could speak Arabic or Farsi.

Evictions were a double-edged sword: it was unclear whether single men would get more than a few nights shelter as they weren’t given priority. Those unable to start their asylum process might be out on the streets again, sometimes of their own volition: it was better to sleep rough but be free than risk detention or deportation. From many volunteers’ perspective, evictions were impractical for delivering basic provisions of care. As Noé, another Utopia 56 volunteer explained,

Whenever there are evictions, it becomes even more difficult to help refugees who are living on the streets, because they are suddenly more dispersed across the city and more difficult to find (September 2017).

The inability of the CPA to tend to the diverse needs of migrants exacerbated the concentration of migrant rough sleepers in Porte de la Chapelle, but also triggered a constellation of non-traditional humanitarian efforts. In addition to Utopia 56, other grassroots organizations (colloquially called ‘*assos*’ in French) emerged, composed of diverse volunteers – either unemployed, retired or on ‘*service civique*’, or career breaks – committed to supplementing the insufficient provision of formal care.

Ephemerality paralleled multiple marginalisations at play within and just outside the CPA, such as the overwhelmed humanitarian NGOs within the Bubble and the power imbalance between the CRS and refugees in the nearby surrounds. Inside the Bubble, the structural temporariness led to a protracted state of limbo for both Emmaüs workers and refugees. At first, many had enthusiastically bought into Hidalgo’s aspiration that this experimental refugee hub could be well integrated into the wider asylum processes and build a flagship humanitarian collaboration between the municipality and civil society organisations responding to rising numbers of rough sleepers in 2015. But over the summer of 2017, several interlocutors volunteering for Utopia 56 and other *assos* expressed growing disaffections with the CPA, which they felt had gradually morphed into a zone of control, complicit in the regular evictions of vulnerable rough-sleepers in waiting. Thus, the Bubble became a mirage of welcome, increasingly regarded as a gathering point for deportation. Yet it served nevertheless as a vital node in the cartography of refugee arrival in Paris. Ephemerality

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<sup>12</sup> See “Paris, city of sanctuary, struggles to accommodate migrants”, presenting Paris as a ‘hostile territory’, with 53000 migrants evicted from makeshift street camps between 2015-2019: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/21250/paris-city-of-sanctuary-struggles-to-accommodate-migrants>



manifested in the ways that everyone knew the Bubble's closure was imminent, but no one knew exactly what the transition would look like, or what types of services would take its place. Scott-Smith (2020) has argued that the Bubble exemplified a kind of 'architectural intervention,' that came to 'shape humanitarian spaces themselves' (318). In our fieldwork, we found that this architectural form indeed shaped particular ephemeral humanitarian spaces within the CPA compound, but eventually the more vibrant experimental humanitarian practices of care deliberately took place outside it, though these practices were relationally tied to the Bubble's presence.

In September 2017, Utopia 56 left the CPA premises, citing growing concerns over the CPA's role in checking whether migrants coming into the Bubble were Dublined, thus facilitating their potential detention and deportation. During an interview with one of the Utopia 56 founders on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2018, he expressed frustration and explained that Utopia 56 was always about 'giv[ing] back power to teams on the ground', but that 'the state does not want to work with us, they want to push us aside. They don't want citizens to get involved...' For a few months, the Bubble had offered a potential reimagining of refugee accommodation and 'welcome' including alliances between well established and more ad-hoc humanitarian organisations; however, its temporary promise was hindered by the perceived logics of expulsion that undergirded the facilities echoing growing uncertainty in asylum procedures for Dublined migrants. This ultimately alienated grassroots assos like Utopia 56 – who felt that they could envision more radical forms of solidarity and provisioning, even if it meant losing access to ample warehouse space from which to operate. It is these forms we turn to next.

### 3.2. Experimentation on The Street

This section focuses on the streetscapes of experimentation that formed in opposition to the perceived state-sanctioned expulsion the Bubble had come to represent, made up of humanitarians, diverse precarious groups including migrants, other rough sleepers, sex workers and drug users, municipal actors, and local residents. While dynamics of carcerality, containment, and (false) illusions of humanitarianism in urban camp-like structures have been noted elsewhere (eg. Katz, 2016; Davies et al 2017), we examine how these logics and the transgressions that form in response to them remake the periphery in new and unpredictable ways.

Alongside the deterrence-based atmosphere outside the Bubble and the selective and temporary entry into it, a consortium of non-traditional humanitarian actors -- grassroots solidarity activists and 'assos' -- were continuously finding ways of circumventing the increasingly unwelcoming presence of the Bubble. They distributed meals, tea and coffee, essential information, and set up mobile phone hotpots. As shown in **Figure 3**, the streets were part of the city but unbounded, institutionally fluid and for all to occupy, where quotidian acts of solidarity and experimentation became the more messy, ad hoc proxy for urban humanitarian care that the Bubble could not provide.

Solidarithé, a group providing hot afternoon beverages to migrants along with handy information maps in the evenings, demonstrated how grassroots assos negotiated the carceral logics that surrounded the Bubble, particularly during street-distributions:

Our old station area had been cordoned off and the CRS were waiting there, forbidding us from setting up our volunteer-led tea and coffee stand – we actually circled the van around and carried our thermoses of tea and coffee to try to set up shop. The CRS told us that we wouldn't be able to set up in that location and one of the volunteers pushed them on the reason – they couldn't give one and actually phoned their boss. The verdict came back in our favour. This turned out to be a powerful moment: a group of Sudanese men who were standing behind us at a distance, waiting, breath abated, felt visibly vindicated by the situation and moved quickly to help us set up the tables. (Fieldnotes, June 2017)

#### **Figure 3: Distributions in the streets. Source: Author, 09.2017**

During the summer of 2017, distributions took place across the street from the CPA in an open space conducive to gathering large groups. When the police no longer let distributions take place there, by September 2017, distributions moved to other spots, 2each day requiring an inevitable negotiation with the police. There is undoubtedly a degree of relative privilege held by volunteers when it comes to confronting and negotiating with police, as opposed to recent

racialised migrant 'others'. Our point here is that distributions taking place outside the Bubble between 2016 and 2018 were in constant negotiation with, response to, and in anticipation of the CRS: moving around like nomadic humanitarian stations, affirming a kind of civil disobedience that was in part policed but also, importantly, accommodated by the municipality. This paradox was reflected in the comments made during an interview with Hidalgo's deputy director Simon, the very month that Utopia 56 left the CPA. He explained that when the CPA was conceived:

We had no choice but to work with citizens who were outraged and wanted to do something about so many people sleeping rough. We needed to give power to people, and it's the first time I have seen this. It's super messy, not organized, it involves temporary accommodation, accompanying minors, things that we, the municipality, the public sector, could not do. This is a big tradition in Paris, there is a history of social politics, a kind of strong autonomy of the people in the face of the state (September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

Simon revealed that the assos providing street-level humanitarian care were not only seen by the municipality, they were also quietly supported: assos were oppositional to the state, something the city of Paris could not explicitly be, but as we later understood, the city (at times) had its own way of quietly accommodating street-based humanitarian efforts.

During the winter months of 2017, the three main organisations dealing with different kinds of distribution and humanitarian care – Utopia 56, Migrants Wilson Solidarité (MSW), and Solidarithé – were allowed to set up a temporary basecamp on the ground floor space in a vacant building near the sports stadium 100 meters away from the Bubble. As Amelie from MSW explained with a smile one morning: “you know what? Guess who pays the electricity bills for this space, and lets us use it. It's the city of Paris.” This subsidised squatted basecamp would serve as a street-level space of welcome and care for another year: three small rooms where Solidarithé could share kitchen supplies and tea/coffee urns with MSW, where Utopia 56 and MSW could share a desktop station with a printer to make various kinds of information pamphlets written in different languages, and another room for stashing donated clothing, toiletries and blankets for night-time distributions.

Outside what became known as ‘the little green door with a red heart’, a space for setting up tables amenable to both queuing and hanging out became a temporary solution for overlapping functions: food distributions, mobile phone charging station, a meeting space for volunteers and migrants to look over documents needing translation. With time, several of the regular volunteers became known as ‘go to’ friendly faces amongst migrants who came daily. The breakfast distribution became more than a space for sustenance: it was a place to gather, have a conversation, exchange information, and hotspot on the network shared by one of the older MSW volunteers, Lenny, who became known as ‘wifi’ man. Twice a week, a Médecins du Monde van camped outside the premises to see migrants in need of medical help.

Alongside the place-based infrastructures of care where migrants or rough sleepers would come in situ, experimentation also manifested on the move amongst volunteer organizations through ‘maraudes’ practices. As an action verb, “marauder” has multiple meanings, from thieving to vagabonding; but in our context, the term indicates modes of street-based humanitarian response to vulnerable groups. A familiar practice for the Samu Social, a municipal service operating nightly to assist homeless and vulnerable individuals in the streets of Paris, ‘les maraudes’ have been incorporated into wider grassroots parlance and practice. Maraudes became a mode of humanitarian practice outside the designated timings of distributions, where volunteers identified those who were particularly precarious and dispersed – the infirm, injured, women and children. Marauding responded to the transience of migrants by finding them in different corners of the city, within the ephemeral window of the night-time hours when bodies were most at risk, but hidden from day-time police harassment (*see figure 4*). In a 2017 interview with one of the key members of Solidarithé, Star remarked that the logistics of distributing under the bridge where the Afghans primarily sought shelter, required careful thought given that distributions often had to take place at night in order to avoid police vans. Maraudes required an ability to read the ephemerality of street-based occupation and degrees of vulnerability — involving continuous shifts in activities depending on where refugees slept rough, harshness of weather conditions, threat of eviction, and which groups were least likely to come to the daytime distributions.

**Figure 4: Maraudes under the bridge. Source: Toby Smith, 02.2018**

Maraudes took into account tensions between Afghan and Sudanese migrants in the queues during the day. By night, these tensions often determined the spatial patterns of makeshift dwellings. Attuned to these tensions, volunteer groups ensured that both Afghan and Sudanese migrants were given similar access to information, clothes and food. In a December 2016 visit, we volunteered during night distributions with Paris Refugee Ground Support (PRGS), reaching out to Afghan and Sudanese migrants camping in a St. Denis square. Each group of men was asked to nominate a representative who would ensure that queues were orderly while key volunteers alternated between each group, giving out tents, sleeping bags, blankets, essential clothing and hygiene kits. While this raises questions of volunteers' roles in replicating problematic humanitarian logics of control (cf. Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan, 2020), the PRGS volunteers explained that this was the best way to pre-empt and manage potential conflict. The maraude involves understanding migrant dwellings and spatialities, distribution tactics, navigating police rhythms, and assessing vulnerabilities.

Maraudes brought together diverse precarious individuals beyond refugees, such that new humanitarian actors embedded themselves into, and contributed to, existing but often overwhelmed or finite infrastructures of support on the street. The three assos sharing the squatted basecamp started a division of labour to meet the humanitarian needs throughout the day and night for vulnerable migrants, extending to other precarious groups. As MSW and Solidarité operated as a food and warm drink bank, Utopia 56 took over the nocturnal shifts, including volunteers accompanying minors or families without shelter to nearby residents' apartments serving as refugee hosts for a night<sup>13</sup>.

As both an action (*'marauder'*) and an identity (*'les maraudes'*), maraudes redefined the sense of place, movement, and temporality of peripheral humanitarianism. Most established organizations, such as MSF, Médecins du Monde, and Emmaüs, would not participate in marauding: they had a clear base from which to operate and protocols. However, the smaller, more grassroots organizations including Utopia 56, MSW and Solidarité, combined stationary outreach and mobile marauding. A basecamp proved crucial for logistics and place-marking, but it was equally important to create spatially adaptable forms of care. To be both 'in a place' and 'on the move' gave these assos the unique capability to improvise with changing circumstances, during and beyond the lifespan of the Bubble.

The ephemeral and movable stations for distributions that kept getting pushed to various peripheral spaces away from the Bubble, and actions of marauding, shaped ever-changing experimental spatialities and temporalities of humanitarianism, for the squatted basecamp stood minutes away from the *colline du crack*, known as an infamous hub in Northern Paris of drug trafficking since the early 2000s. It was common, during breakfast distributions, for drug addicts, exhausted sex workers, and long-time unhoused residents (some were all three) queuing alongside migrants, to ask, "am I allowed?" Those morning hours outside the little green door were a manifestation of intersectional precarities and reflected the mission statement painted on the wall near the entrance: "Maison Solidaire éphémère" ("House of ephemeral solidarity"). Here the periphery, even as humanitarian action became increasingly restricted and policed, simultaneously expanded onto the streets through shifting choreographies of place-based distributions and maraudes, shaping a wider politics of care that encompassed but went beyond refugees.

#### **4.0 Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Peripheral Humanitarianism**

At the start of 2018, everyone involved in the infrastructures of care around Porte de la Chapelle knew the closure of the Bubble was imminent, though no one really knew exactly when it would happen or what would take its place. Some were surprised the Bubble had continued to stay open. When the Bubble finally closed in April 2018, a new kind of protracted ephemerality followed. During the 'emergency' years, those best equipped to support humanitarian provisions at street levels were clearly non-traditional humanitarian organisations. But the frustrations of volunteers highlighted the longer-term challenge: the distribution of clothing, food, and asylum information had served as a vital street-based humanitarian presence during the 'emergency' phase of the refugee 'crisis', but it was ultimately palliative and could not persist due to volunteer burn-out and under-remuneration, and the need for longer-term support for migrants. Furthermore, migrants who managed to get off the streets needed more legal aid assistance, and support in navigating asylum, housing and labour bureaucracies. This section considers 'what is left' from these solidarity

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<sup>13</sup> Across European cities hosting refugees has been an active form of civic activism in opposition to anti-immigrant policies. Some of these networks use Facebook groups to coordinate, while others use platforms like AirBnB.

formations, evaluating how ‘the memory of the struggle and of dispersed solidarity practices constitute shared political ground that can be potentially reactivated in different mobilisations’ (Tazzioli 2020: 157). We point to ‘traces’ that continued to reconfigure the spatiotemporality of Porte de la Chapelle’s peripheral humanitarianism as other crises – such as Covid-19 – emerged in the wake of the Bubble closure.

By 2018, as volunteers’ stamina and resources became depleted, volunteer groups faced a crossroads: some debated formalizing their organizational structures not least to remunerate regular volunteers. This would theoretically reduce turn-over but it could also risk reducing agility and the flexibility to call on last minute volunteer assistance. Another debated option was to convince the municipality to subsidize existing volunteer activities, recognising that these pro-bono groups had served as vital temporary humanitarian outsourcing of care at a time when the state was unable (or unwilling) to assume the role as ‘caregiver’. Some volunteer groups were so distrustful of the state’s motives that they feared stepping away in any form would mean dire consequences for refugees already facing police intimidation. For the three volunteer organizations discussed here, their future and how to transform their ephemeral and experimental operations played out in different ways. In March 2018, Amelie from SMW, noted that Porte de La Chapelle would still be the logical place where refugees would ‘arrive’, so the municipality might still support the use of the warehouse shared with Utopia 56 if they could negotiate to stay longer, since the real timeline depended on when the warehouse would itself be demolished. Solidarité was also experimenting with options for the next phase. Hugo, a Solidarité volunteer turned central coordinator up till March 2020, considered not only new storage space, but also getting the organization an ‘association’ status. However, similar to Amélie, he believed the Porte de la Chapelle location was key for recruiting valuable volunteer manpower. For Utopia 56, the closure of the Bubble and the eventual expiration of the license to operate from that squatted basecamp meant rethinking where to set up a new base, or considering a wider-serving system to reach more people, while acknowledging the limited capacity of already exhausted volunteers. Though several actors knew it was time to move on (or move out), the logics of the periphery persisted, as a space for experimentation that could accommodate ephemeral and shifting practices of care.

**Figure 5: Closure and Traces. Source: Author, 03.2019**

Once the Bubble finally closed, and the temporary squat was no longer available for the three assos (**see figure 5**), they each underwent organizational shifts, experiencing their share of volunteer burn-out and the need to find new spaces for operations. But the time for rethinking their model and base coincided with the emergence of new vulnerabilities and alliances. From 2019, the MSW breakfast distributions were picked up by the ‘Armé du Salut’ (Salvation Army). Amelie recounted,

This is proof that we did something meaningful – now the city was actually continuing our work, building on it, referring to it, and in some cases, even improving things. Like they now give the food first, then the hot drink so they don’t burn their hands trying to grab the food. It makes so much sense! I can’t believe we never thought of that (Interview, March 2019).

In the year that followed the closure of the Bubble, multiple precarious groups continued to populate the night-time streets, and nocturnal maraudes persisted and grew from March 2020 onwards with the start of Covid-19 and associated lockdowns. In an email to volunteers on March 28, 2020, Utopia 56 wrote, ‘we are seeing the emergence of a new audience in our maraudes: the working poor, the precarious who have lost their ... sources of income due to the coronavirus’. Marauding took on a renewed importance given the heightened precarity and invisibilisation of Covid-19, with new young volunteers stepping in. Leaving breakfast distributions to the Armé du Salut, MSW started doing evening maraudes too once they didn’t have a space from which to work. During the Covid pandemic, MSW started collaborating with a café near St Denis. Several restaurants and eateries have since continued to partner with the assos to creatively rethink how they could prevent food waste and keep their kitchens open in acts of solidarity. In the meantime, Amelie got a job with a Paris wide Food Help Programme, and explained in March 2021:

I do this soft power thing. I can provide information “du terrain”, I’m not a politician, so I have nothing to lose...  
... We never wanted to show off what we were doing, we wanted to show what the problem was. By giving

people a meal, in the streets, visible to all walking or driving by, we showed Paris how wrong it was to have so many people in the streets.

In the meantime, migrants in asylum and housing limbo continued to carve out temporary spaces for home and place-making in the peripheral spaces of Northern Paris. Some became humanitarians themselves, recognising that a 'politics of presence' (Darling 2016) also benefited from a kind of epistemic patience. As one of our key interlocutors, Mohammed, explained, accessing secure accommodation takes time and patience, something he tries to explain to the 'primo-arrivants' (first arrivals) who he sees daily in his own work with Emmaüs. He explained in January 2021:

You see in my case, as a Sudanese refugee (arriving in Paris in 2014), it took me three years to get social housing. And I had a job with Emmaüs! So I spent a while staying with friends here and there, moving around... Refugees have rights in France, and they can access support, the problem is if you don't have help to navigate the system, to understand it, you can get totally lost.

Thus, solidarity activists formed and adapted humanitarian techniques and created new alliances, spaces and mobilities. While fleeting, tentative and often fragile (cf. Tazzioli, 2020), these humanitarian spaces demonstrate that even amidst the violent policing of migrants within the city, solidarity efforts continued and their traces were reconfigured and picked up by other organizations – at times even the state. Porte de la Chapelle left traces of what was a vibrant and chaotic manifestation of the tensions between different civil society actors, the municipality, and the state.

This article illustrates the place-based humanitarian practices that emerge at neighbourhood scales in response to politics of exclusion. Within what we call peripheral humanitarian assemblages, the peopled infrastructures (Simone, 2004) of migrant care and migrant mobilities spill out of the conventional spaces and imaginaries of humanitarian assistance – 'the camp' and traditional humanitarian organisations – and come to inhabit and (re)make the everyday city. This longer-term perspective of grassroots humanitarian care, at a time when European cities contend with legacies of expulsion towards racialised migrant 'others' and overlapping migration, economic, housing and public health crises, demonstrates the mutability and potential of these spaces (Tazzioli, 2020) and their traces. While municipal infrastructures of 'arrival' were set up with expressed good will, the Bubble exemplified the contested politics of asylum and provision: exuding emergency, provisional humanitarianism at odds with both government immigration policies, and the rate of urban migration that was outpacing local capacities for adequate housing and legal assistance. Yet, the Bubble also produced peripheral spaces from where civil society efforts formed to support and work around the over-stretched institutional facilities. This emergence of non-traditional, volunteer-based humanitarian collectives and welfare providers rendered Paris a destination city in Europe where the refugee 'camp' and street level migrant mobilities converged and collapsed into one another, giving way to experimental humanitarian encounters and solidarities.

As El-Tayeb (2011) shows in her work on queering ethnicity, new openings form and flourish at the periphery. Thus, while we mustn't romanticise the precarity that lies in contexts of peripheral humanitarianism, (especially the exposure to violence and vulnerabilities), we argue that a hopeful register in these times remains vital, for *seeing* and harnessing the possibilities for progressive politics of solidarity at the urban periphery where European 'others' have always challenged, re-made, and been integral to, the city's becoming. We invite other scholars to pay closer attention to the ever-changing assemblages of peripheral humanitarianism that will continue to form outside normative institutional contexts but *within* cities, that will inevitably serve as frontlines, arrival nodes, transient spaces, and sites for new place-making. And as these cities continue to marginalize migrants and other precarious individuals (Hall 2021), overlooked peripheralized streetscapes will turn into spaces of ephemeral solidarity, affording 'new Europeans' the opportunity to 'make it' in, and re-make, Paris (or elsewhere).

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