



“IF SAVING LIVES IS A CRIME,
WE WANT TO BE CRIMINALS”
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Perceptions of neutrality of Search and Rescue NGOs
in the Mediterranean Sea

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Dante is outside of the entrance of Hell, together with his guide Virgil. Here he finds a group of people who are neither allowed to go into Hell nor into Heaven. Dante noticed a bunch of people completely naked, constantly being stung by hornets and swarms. Their faces were covered in blood which was dripping down due to the fusion with tears. Once the blood reaches their feet, it gets sucked by disgusting worms. After reading this passage in Eikeboom's (2009: 41) translation and interpretation of Canto 3 of Dantes Inferno, one can only wonder what was so horrible that those people deserved this fate. It was cowardice that drove these people to remain 'impartial' or 'neutral'. In Eikebooms (2009: 34) translation: 'Those that have been mixed with that coward group of angels that did not stand up, nor have been loyal to God, those who have chosen for themselves and to stand apart'.¹ According to this quote, it must be horrible to be neutral. I started the research for this thesis to see for myself which reasons there are to hold on to neutrality.

Writing this thesis has not been easy for me. It has been a year of spending a lot of my time and effort into this. And I'm absolutely sure that there would be no thesis lying in front of you if it wasn't for some of my close ones. I would especially like to thank my grandparents, who never lost hope that I could finish this, even if I had. I would also like to thank those who helped me intellectually or emotionally, and in all other ways in order to complete this thesis. And most importantly I would like to thank those who participated in the research process. I'm grateful to for those who made the time to talk to me, to fill in the survey, and to those who helped me find more participants, and those providing me with feedback, my thesis supervisor in particular.

¹ Own translation of 'zij zijn gemengd met dat laffe koor van de engelen die niet opstandig zijn geweest noch trouw zijn geweest aan God, maar voor zichzelf zijn geweest (Apart hebben gestaan)' (Eikeboom 2009:41).

Abstract

Humanitarian work is under threat. This is partly due to the recent developments and the association of NGOs with Western agendas. Some say that holding on to the humanitarian principles such as neutrality is the most effective way for emergency relief. Others claim that striving for neutrality is outdated and therefore less useful in contemporary societies.

This research uses method triangulation to view the topic of neutrality from several perspectives. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used to answer the question: to what extent is the level of neutrality of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) important for people who want to commit themselves to search and rescue (SAR) operations in the Mediterranean Sea? Ten in-depth interviews, a document analysis of twitter messages on the behavior of NGOs, as well as online surveys led to the following findings.

The academic literature on the debate addresses various issues, such as whether neutrality is possible at all, whether it is the most effective *modus operandi*, whether it can be seen as a new form of neo-colonialism and, finally, whether neutrality has become redundant. This research concludes there are several motivations for people to commit themselves to SAR. Also, a distinction can be made between two types of NGOs; the first type being a *migrant-centered NGO*, the second a *rescue-centered NGO*. The dichotomy relates to the debate between *New Humanitarians* and *Traditional Humanitarians*, respectively. This typology also strongly came forward in the surveys and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in the document analysis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Beginning in 2014, the largest movement of people since the Second World War has taken place. Each and every day numerous people are risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean, hoping for a better life in Europe. On the shores of the African continent many people board boats which are too fragile, realizing that they might not make it to Fortress Europe. The UN Migration Agency reported that 73.696 reached Europe by sea in 2018. 13.000 have been (forcefully) returned to Libya. And 1.565 people are either dead or still missing (IOM Press Release 11-09-2018). The number of casualties would probably have been higher, if it wasn't for the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) trying to help boat refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. Even for small NGOs it is possible to get involved in non-governmental migrant rescuing and be effective in doing so (Cusumano 2017b).

In 2016 the number of migrants² that managed to reach European shores decreased, yet at the same time the number of casualties rose. One of the reasons for this increase in casualties is the use of even riskier and more overcrowded boats. 2016 was 'the deadliest year in recent history of migration movements to Europe' (Cusumano 2017a:1). This humanitarian crisis taking place in the Mediterranean Sea, and the failure of European Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, motivated Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to try and fill this gap. According to Van Reekum (2016:338) both the European Union and individual states failed to prepare for 'the foreseeable increase in people seeking life in Europe'.

In 2014, Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) was the first NGO to become active in the Mediterranean as a SAR NGO with its ship *Phoenix*. Its presence was however short-lived. MOAS had to quit after two months because of financial difficulties. In May 2014 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was able to help MOAS with funding and staffing (Del Valle 2016). That same year Sea-Watch was founded. In 2015, those three NGOs combined saved between 20.063 and 152,343 refugees (Cuttritta 2017). Between 2015 and 2016 the number of SAR NGOs went up from three to thirteen. In 2014, Italy launched its own maritime operation, Mare Nostrum, and made saving lives at sea a matter of national policy. Mare Nostrum had a specific SAR mandate. Nevertheless, it was accused of causing more casualties, because it was said to attract more migrants. This claim was not entirely correct, however, since the number of migrants already grew before the mission started. When Mare

² In this research, the word 'migrant' is used, a generic term for asylum applicants, refugees, stateless people, and illegal immigrants (La Rocca 2017:228). It is not up to me to make a distinction between these various categories.

Nostrum ended, several NGOs filled the gap. In 2015 operation Triton was launched by Frontex, but this mission did not have a specific SAR mandate.

Over the last couple of years state actors have become more hostile towards SAR NGOs. The prosecution of NGO Cap Anamur was the first time rescuing lives became criminalized. This continued in 2017 with allegations from Frontex claiming that SAR NGOs form a pull-factor for refugees. According to Carmelo Zuccaro, local prosecutor in Catania, NGOs cooperated with human traffickers and NGOs had a secret aim of destabilizing Italy by increasing the influx of refugees. In 2016, a series of hostilities by Libyan authorities directed against SAR NGOs took place, including unauthorized searches of vessels, firing shots, forcibly entering a dinghy causing it to deflate and dozens of refugees drowning, and taking a NGO to Tripoli. The Libyan Coast Guard didn't like the presence of independent NGOs close to Libyan territorial waters; NGOs were actively discouraged (Cuttitta 2017:17).

In June 2017, the Ministry of Interior of Italy, with the approval of the Commission of the European Union (EU), formulated a Code of Conduct on migrant rescuing in the Mediterranean Sea. In this Code of Conduct NGOs are obliged to 'conduct a law enforcement role they are neither trained for nor equipped to conduct, encroaching upon the humanitarian principle of neutrality' (Cusumano 2017a:6). According to this Code, NGOs also have to acquiescence to searches of their ships by Italian authorities. Welcoming these authorities on their vessels harms their image of neutrality, however (Cusumano 2017a:6). NGOs are also required to list their personnel to the Italian authorities, share information about their donors and work together with the police. If these requirements are not met, NGOs can be denied access to Italian ports (Cuttitta 2017:18).

The European Union began training the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy in 2016 and cleared the Libyan waters for Frontex and EUNAVFOR MED vessels. As a consequence, the number of refugees found by the Libyan Coast Guard and forcibly escorted back to Libya increased (Cuttitta 2017a:17). Although according to international law vessels are granted free passage through international waters to conduct SAR operations, NGOs are getting more restricted in this respect (Cuttitta 2017:22).

Not being allowed to unload refugees on the European coasts, the increase of hostilities towards NGO personnel, the sometimes negative media coverage, the Code of Conduct and the training of the Libyan Coast Guard are all indications that the European Union and its member states actively try to control the stream of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea (Casumanu 2017a:8). Some NGOs have complied with the Code of Conduct and other European measures, while others opposed its core. Both categories of

NGOs have their own concerns. According to the first group, compliance leads to less solidarity for boat refugees. This means that refugees rescued at sea are sometimes escorted back to Libya, after which they face hardships in Libya. The second response, becoming more oppositional, leads to NGOs taking unpopular positions or even breaking the law. According to Scott-Smith (2016:19), it means ‘acknowledging that true human solidarity involves resistance and political action’.

Especially during the last couple of months some Search and Rescue (SAR) organizations that were active in the Mediterranean Sea have been denied access to the European coasts and were even prosecuted. One of my informants was on board of the *Iuventa*, a SAR NGO vessel that was confiscated by the Italian authorities and its personnel was prosecuted. According to him,

‘It’s still not sure whether the Italians want to prosecute us on a personal level as well. So, currently we have some crew members who are facing accusations that are quite severe. They would like to charge us with illegal immigration, organized crime and weapon possession. That is what the Italians are offering at the moment. We tried to defend ourselves because we still think that we did humanitarian work and nothing else. [...] Our lawyers are quite contented. Basically, their case will collapse. Because they don’t have any evidence. Because we didn’t do anything wrong. They do it to scare the other NGOs as well. It looks like the European politics is not really content of having some independent eyes down Libya at the moment. Because they would like to get all the deals stated. As long as NGOs are down there and keep reporting what is really happening, it is really hard for the European politicians to keep up the mirage they are playing at the moment.’ (Anton, interview 09/01/18).

As this quote illustrates, humanitarian space on land has already declined. There is an increasing threat NGO personnel faces in accessing crisis areas (Cusumano 2017a:4; Abiew 2012:203). Humanitarianism is ‘among other things, an ethos, a cluster of sentiments, a set of laws, a moral imperative to intervene, and a form of government’(Ticktin 2014:274). ‘In its dominant characterization, humanitarianism is one way to “do good” or to improve aspects of the human condition by focusing on suffering and saving lives in times of crisis or emergency’ (Ticktin 2014:274). The humanitarian space in international waters currently faces similar difficulties as the one on land. ‘It has become difficult for humanitarian agencies to remain aloof from Western governments’ agendas and present themselves as truly neutral, impartial and independent actors’ (Cusumano 2017a:4). In recent years, there has been a decline in organizations that believe neutrality is a necessity in their field. It has even become

a ‘dirty’ word for some. Neutrality has a connotation of being unprincipled and indifferent. Some even think that neutrality is an impossibility (Slim 1997:367). ‘The concept of neutrality stipulates that humanitarian organizations should refrain from taking sides in conflict or engaging in political or social controversies’ (Abiew 2012:205). Given these increased difficulties and risks regarding humanitarian aid, the question rises what role NGOs should (or could) play in other peoples’ conflicts?

1.1. Research aim and questions

The aim of this research is to contribute to the existing body of literature on SAR NGOs. Secondly, it tries to identify the limitations and benefits of the notion of neutrality in the academic literature. Thirdly, this research also tries to fill the gap between scientific knowledge and everyday experiences of NGO personnel on the Mediterranean Sea regarding this notion of neutrality. It will shine some light upon the difficulties of neutrality in the field of SAR. It will also be assessed whether there is a discrepancy between the NGOs and its volunteers. The main question of this research is therefore:

To what extent is the notion of neutrality important for, respectively, Search and Rescue NGOs and their volunteers who commit themselves to humanitarian operations in the Mediterranean Sea?

In order to answer this main question, some sub-questions need to be answered first.

1. *According to the literature, which tensions characterize the debate on neutrality of NGOs?*
2. *How do NGOs active in the Mediterranean Sea communicate on Twitter, regarding the issue of neutrality?*
3. *What are the main motivations of people working for SAR NGOs?*
4. *How do volunteers think about NGO neutrality, and to what extent is the notion of neutrality important to them?*

It is important to provide a theoretical framework in order to conceptualize the main concepts. The literature also enabled me to answer sub-question 1. Sub-question 2 will be answered based on a document analysis of Twitter messages. In-depth interviews were held to answer sub-question 3. Finally, for answering sub-question 4, an online survey was held.

1.2. Scientific relevance

This research contributes to the debate on the principle of neutrality. Based on the activities and experiences of SAR NGOs in the Mediterranean, it offers a case study on the applicability of this debate. This research also gives more insights into the opinions and perceptions of SAR personnel in the Mediterranean and, more specifically, into their ideas regarding neutrality. In this research, SAR NGOs fit within the larger field of humanitarian NGOs and how they tend to deal with the issue of neutrality.

Up till now, not much research has been done about the role and motivation of NGOs involved in – specifically – maritime rescue operations of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. This is in stark contrast with the volume of research regarding the activities of NGOs in conflict areas, or areas struck by natural disasters. Quite often the maritime humanitarian space is considered to be an equivalent to the land-based humanitarian space. However, this idea or presupposition is not based on scientific analysis or findings (Cusumano 2017a:2).

The debate surrounding neutrality is partly about the moral stance of NGOs in other peoples' conflicts. How can an NGO position itself in the neutrality debate, when this debate has been rather inconclusive? More knowledge is needed and therefore scientific research is necessary for NGOs to position themselves in this debate. The problem with positioning yourself as an NGO is not only important for the organization itself, but also for the individuals working for that NGO (Slim 1997:343). This research addresses the level of the organization as well the individual level.

According to Slim (1997), many humanitarian organizations have put a lot of effort into a conceptualization of the humanitarian principles and their positioning in a conflict context. However, these efforts have not yet resulted in a satisfactory conceptualization. Much is still unclear about the codes and principles. This scientific research can make a contribution in this conceptualization.

1.3. Societal relevance

It is important for humanitarian workers to know the stance of their NGO towards the principle of neutrality. The moral view on which to take a particular point of view (abandon neutrality, or remain neutral at all times) should be correspondingly, so as to have effective

cooperation. This research can offer further insights in whether or not there is a discrepancy between what NGO personnel feels (as seen in parts 1 and 3) and how an NGO thinks about neutrality (part 2).

Extensive research on NGOs' activities on land has already been done. Land-based NGO activities are regulated by codes of conduct and best practices. However, on the topic of NGO activities in maritime humanitarian operations little has been published so far: 'No guidance exists on the prerogatives of humanitarian actors at sea and how to ensure coordination and deconfliction between NGO, coast guards and navies' (Cusumano 2017a:2).

Currently the activities of NGOs in the Mediterranean Sea are numerous – and very relevant. NGOs save the lives of many people. Therefore it is important to see what motivates people in doing so. Compared to politicians, humanitarians are expected to be better able to help when it comes to suffering and injustice (Ticktin 2014:281). Because they can help with and are involved in emergency relief, it is very important to know what drives the individuals in such organizations.

The humanitarian space is getting smaller (Cusumano 2017a:4). Reasons for this are the increased risks attached to conducting these activities, given the criminalization of SAR activities and attacks on SAR vessels (Gordon & Donini 2015:98). For NGOs it becomes harder to work according to the humanitarian principles; some authors even wonder whether humanitarian principles are still relevant today. It is very important to conceptualize humanitarian principles in such a way that different organization understand the same thing when it comes to the notion of neutrality, so that underlying differences don't lead to misunderstandings (Minear & Weiss 1993:10).

At sea there seems to be more room to maneuver, since Art. 98 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 'obliges all seafarers to render assistance to those in distress at sea' (Cusumano 2017a:4). This law gives everyone the right to free passage, which makes it impossible for states to limit the freedom of NGO vessels in the Mediterranean Sea. There is no national, state jurisdiction in international waters, which should give NGOs the possibility to work without any form of political interference. Search and rescue missions are crucial for saving human lives and keeping up dignity at sea. This in itself makes it worthy of research as well.

It also is quite important to see what motivations and perceptions volunteers of SAR NGOs have. They contribute their time and expertise to help rescuing those in need. It is important to know their motivations, because then organizations might be able to keep volunteers committed to their NGO (Clary et al., 1998:1528).

1.4. Outline of the thesis

As mentioned, in order to answer the main question, ‘To what extent is the notion of neutrality important for, respectively, Search and Rescue NGOs and their volunteers who commit themselves to operations in the Mediterranean Sea?’, a couple of sub-questions has to be answered first. Every following chapter answers a specific sub-question.

Chapter 2 sets out a theoretical framework of the humanitarian principle of neutrality. This framework enables the reader to understand the notion of neutrality and identify the tensions humanitarians face with neutrality. Finally, this chapter answers sub-question 1: According to the literature, which tensions characterize the debate on neutrality for NGOs? This question will, obviously, be answered based on a literature review concerning the principle of neutrality.

Chapter 3 contains a methodological overview and explains which methods have been used and for what purpose. The chapter addresses the combination of methods that has been used for three partly independent studies/parts of the thesis: interviews (part 1), document analysis (part 2) and survey (part 3). Furthermore, this chapter debates the limitations and benefits of the interview techniques, survey techniques, and document analysis.

Next is Chapter 4, Part 1: interviews. This part answers the sub-question, What are the motivations of people working for SAR NGOs? Qualitative research methods have been used in order to get familiar with the field of SAR, as well as to find clues that are highly relevant for Parts 2 and 3. This chapter, like Chapter 5 and 6, contains five sections: selection procedure, participants, material, measures and method of analysis, results and conclusion.

Chapter 5, Part 2: document analysis, answers the sub-question: How do NGOs active in the Mediterranean Sea communicate on Twitter, regarding the issue of neutrality? This chapter more or less has the same structure as Chapter 4. For this part a document analysis was used: Twitter messages as a medium to see whether NGOs had neutral outings on social media.

Chapter 6, Part 3: survey, answers: How do volunteers think about NGO neutrality, and to what extent is the notion of neutrality important to them? This chapter once again has the same structure. This part is based on quantitative research techniques. I created surveys and analyzed them statistically.

Chapter 7: Conclusion. This chapter provides a brief overview of the earlier mentioned conclusions. This chapter aims to link the three parts.

This thesis ends with Chapter8: Discussion. This chapter revisits the research problem and aims to link the three parts. This chapter also presents the limitations of the research and contains recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature in order to answer the sub-question: According to the literature, which tensions characterize the debate on neutrality for NGOs? In particular the following topics will be addressed: humanitarian elements, historical context, and neutrality as such.

2.1. Humanitarianism

In times of crisis humanitarian agencies try to provide assistance and improve human conditions. They aim to provide aid during emergencies and crises. What is considered as an emergency or a humanitarian crisis is dependent on the contemporary discourse.

‘Humanitarianism is a dominant discourse that maintains the dominance of particular institutions and modalities as well as defining the content of purportedly universal values of charity and compassion in specific types of situations of crisis that are labelled “humanitarian crises”. Arguably, as a socially constructed and exclusive domain, this inevitably generates challenges from within and without. Simply because dominant modes of power reflect particular interests and preferences, they inevitably create the potential for challenge by contenders who question the dominance of those very legitimizing institutions, norms and practices.’ (Gordon & Donini 2015:81)

Not every situation of suffering is called a humanitarian crisis in which humanitarian actors have to take action. ‘In other words, the content of humanitarianism has always been determined both by the supply of human suffering and the willingness to set boundaries around those forms of suffering that are considered “appropriate” for responses by a particular group of institutions that define themselves as “humanitarian”.’ (Gordon & Donini 2015:81) It means that this community is able to create a paradigm based on shared ideas on, for instance, humanitarian principles and to what extent these principles should be followed.

2.2. Humanitarian principles

NGOs that are currently active on the Mediterranean Sea assume that, according to their humanitarian principles, everyone has the right to be helped. There are four humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Firstly, the principle of humanity entails protecting human lives and dignity wherever those are under threat. Secondly, neutrality is ‘the effort to refrain from taking part in hostilities and political controversies’ (Cusumano 2017a:3). Thirdly, impartiality is that aid should be given to those who are in need, in spite of any other classification. And finally, independence is the ability of ‘operating autonomously from political actors and refrain from supporting their economic and security agendas’ (Cusumano 2017a:3). If these four principles are taken into account, the humanitarian sphere is assumed to be separate from the political sphere. This separation of political and humanitarian spheres is, according to Abiew (2012:205), ‘a very important part of humanitarianism.’ Although these principles seem clear, various actors tend to interpret these principles differently (Leader 2000). And even the same actor can interpret them differently in different contexts (Minear 1999).

The principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence were developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). These principles have been created because the Red Cross came across some problems in its fieldwork and it was felt that a framework was needed to deal with these problems (Leader 2000:5). The ICRC, originally a Swiss organization, has been recognized by international law and individual states alike and has therefore always had a privileged role as a humanitarian organization. The ICRC believes that only through applying these principles it is able to restore human dignity (Forsythe 2013:62). The ICRC has been in the lead when it comes to the conceptualization of these principles and its example has been followed by and inspired many other actors in the humanitarian field (Forsythe 2013:63). The next section discusses the historical context of the principles.

2.3. Historical context of the humanitarian principles

The founder of the ICRC, Henry Dunant, was a witness to the Battle of Solferino (1859) and he was so shocked by its cruelty that he took the initiative to help victims on both sides. After the Crimean War he decided to found a neutral organization that would help the wounded during war. In this he was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and believed in making wars less inhumane (Leader 2000:11). Humanitarianism was born with the Geneva

Convention of 1864 when the ICRC was officially recognized as a humanitarian organization, constructed around ideas of the charitable giver versus the pitiful victim. During this time humanitarianism was in a sense still very paternalistic. It had a focus on symptom relief, rather than on social change (Gordon & Donini 2015).

During the late 19th and early 20th century the idea spread that it is a moral obligation to help the victims of war. In particular the experiences of the First and Second World War made people aware of the fact that more attention should be paid toward the rules of war and the possibility of helping victims of war. This was an important development, because from now on belligerent parties should grant humanitarians access under the premises that they are neutral and impartial (Hilhorst 2002:195). In the Geneva Conventions (1949), NGOs gained a Right of Initiative which means they can enter a state to provide emergency aid. The Red Cross was explicitly mentioned in these conventions and it counted on other humanitarian NGOs in support of their principles. The aim of humanitarian NGOs had been to alleviate suffering and hunger in times of crisis, but from the end of the 1940s on the major relief organizations also found it necessary to intervene in times of relative peace. The aim slightly shifted from short-term relief to more permanent aid in the so-called Third World, where people not only could become victims of their own government but also of poor living conditions. This resulted in an interventionist approach. It was believed, however, that it was highly important to separate humanitarian actions from political actions.

From the 1950s on the geopolitical context rapidly changed thanks to decolonization, better information management, institutionalization and resources provided by the United Nations. Shortly after the 1950s, a strong liberal discourse gained ground in the West. In response the number of NGOs aimed at fighting the root causes of suffering increased, such as NGOs dealing with violation of human rights and those with a right-based approach, working from an activist humanitarian perspective. Those that were being helped were no longer seen as just victims, but rather as agents of change. Characteristic of this period are the notions of development aid and human rights approach.

During the Cold War, the issue of neutrality was still considered to be very important. States were reluctant to interfere in other countries to help people in need, given the ideological and political conflicts and divisions. NGOs tried to bridge this gap. It was only during the 1970s that NGOs were able to operate in foreign countries, despite the huge amount of political pressure during this time (Hilhorst 2002:205).

The 1980s were characterized by interferences, strictly on the basis of need. A decision of where to offer help was made regardless of the approval of a Ministry of Defense,

the foreign policies of countries or other political considerations. A distinction between humanitarian NGOs on the one hand and partisan political activism on the other became clear; a distinction based on the question whether or not to follow the notions of non-discrimination and political neutrality (Hilhorst 2002:206).

Since the 1980s and the end of the Cold War, the nature of war has changed: intra-state war in which belligerents are often far less recognizable and the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, between soldiers and civilians has blurred. Other prominent features of these so-called new wars are a lack of state legitimacy and the explicit targeting of civilian populations by belligerents. Since it has become harder to recognize the belligerents, it is also harder to hold them accountable for respecting humanitarian laws. This lack of respect for humanitarian law has made the humanitarian community more diverse in their views on neutrality (Hilhorst 2002:196).

After the Cold War NGOs took on a more invasive approach. The consent of the local parties was considered to be less important. Within the humanitarian community the ICRC had always strongly influenced the discourse on neutrality. This was about to change in the 1990s. 'New humanitarianism' gained popularity among humanitarian NGOs, who became more critical towards governments, their policies and their influence on human suffering, but also towards their own behavior (Minear & Weiss 1993:69). The war in Rwanda in particular gave rise to discussions on the actions of humanitarians. It was thought that more lives could have been saved if humanitarian organizations had coordinated and behaved more professionally. Underperformance of humanitarian NGOs became highly visible (Gordon & Donini 2015:86). It resulted in discussions on what humanitarian action actually means and what role humanitarian principles should play, and whether it was still necessary and ethical to strive for neutrality (Hilhorst 2002:194; Gordon & Donini 2015:82). More and more NGOs felt it was wrong to keep quiet about human rights violations, just because of neutrality. Some humanitarians felt their presence was even enhancing the conflict, which made their presence more harmful. New humanitarians felt neutrality was outdated. For them, holding on to neutrality meant NGOs didn't have to make any hard choices. 'Overall, the principles were characterized as leading to politically blind acts of charity where the act of giving was more important than delivering positive impact' (Gordon & Donini 2015:87).

At the beginning of the 21st century, with 9/11 as a starting point, humanitarianism considerably changed. The United States pressured the rest of the world into accepting the view that terrorism was a serious threat, deserving the highest priority – even to the extent that existing legal practices had to be adapted, for instance the legally quite dubious incarceration

of people or the use of torture. Going against this viewpoint was, and still is, met with severe pressure by the US government. Supposedly it was immoral not to accept this point of view.

NGOs have by now entered into the era of coherence, or integrated approach. Governments began making NGOs part of their strategy, becoming crime-fighting partners against terrorism. Cooperation from different angles – such as development, defense and diplomacy – was thought to be the solution to underdevelopment and conflict. Some NGOs worked on issues as justice, democracy or sustainable development. New humanitarians considered this rather apolitical and neutral humanitarian relief as naïve and morally questionable (Hilhorst 2002:207).

The goal of a coherent approach or 3D approach undermines the neutrality of humanitarian NGOs. Striving for coherence by politicians in fighting ‘terrorism’ has resulted in the inclusion of humanitarian NGOs in political policies. This has undermined the notion of neutrality in three different ways. Firstly, NGOs became to be seen as allies and/or instruments of Western governments. Secondly, some groups received more help than others, solely based on their political usefulness instead of on the basis of need (Hilhorst 2002:208). Human suffering became less of a reason to intervene within this 3D approach, or so it seemed. Specific projects are rather chosen because of their political significance. For instance, choosing to build a road in Afghanistan, almost always serving Western military operational goals, while the same money could have been invested in the Democratic Republic of Congo where it would have alleviated more suffering. Thirdly, NGOs are more inclined to make decisions that are partisan or can at least easily appear to be partisan. Agencies that are unwilling to cooperate in this integrative approach, have a hard time finding donors, because large donors often have most trust in the decisions of the major states and the UN (Charny 2004).

According to De Torrenté (2004), the current discourse on humanitarian work and the coherence model are toxic for humanitarianism. There are three very worrying trends. Firstly, based on the coherence agenda humanitarian aid is either given as a reward or denied as a form of punishment. This means that this kind of humanitarian aid saves less people than it could have without the coherence frame. Secondly, through the coherence agenda immediate needs are compromised over more prioritized goals such as peace, security and development. This means that immediate needs are not met because of a focus on (hypothetical) improvements in the long run. Thirdly, humanitarian aid is covered selectively. Humanitarian aid is given based on a political discourse, only for the ones that deserve it. ‘The conditional and selective assistance implied by the coherence agenda results in ethically unjustifiable and

practically avoidable loss of life' (De Torrenté 2004:6-7). These considerations lead to the conclusion: if the coherence agenda undermines neutrality, the concept of neutrality might have to be reinvented.

2.4. The concept of neutrality

One of the difficulties with the notion of neutrality is that actors might mean different things by using that term. However, the following section tries to come up with a conceptualization of neutrality.

Neutrality is a contextual and contested concept based on many of different ideas (Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:893). First neutrality according to the Red Cross is discussed, followed by other ideas about neutrality. The concept of neutrality as defined by the ICRC has three pillars. The first pillar of neutrality is trying to be neutral in one's motivation, which means refraining from speaking out when it comes to political, racial or religious controversies. One is expected to keep silent about who the perpetrator or victim is, whether it was self-defense or illegitimate aggression (Fortsythe 2013:64). The second pillar refers trying to be neutral as far as impact and outcome are concerned. This entails that the ICRC wants to conduct the same activities and have the same goals regarding both parties. Problematic about this pillar is that it is rather intersubjective (Fortsythe 2013:64). The third pillar is avoiding public condemnation of fighting parties to keep a neutral image. In order to be seen as neutral, the ICRC should refrain from public condemnations. The ICRC tries to handle cases with discretion, and therefor often chooses to not make reports public. (Fortsythe 2013:64).

According to Krähenbühl (in Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:987) the ICRC sees neutrality as a tool to achieve a higher goal of helping those in need. Sometimes this is thought of seeing neutrality as a goal, but it is rather a process. Although the ICRC had a very important position in the conceptualization of neutrality, there are also others that have written on the issue of neutrality.

Scott-Smith (2016:8), defines neutrality as: 'Neutrality, at its heart, involves a distance from politics, a distaste for politics. It seeks to position humanitarians above the grubby, partial, and interest-driven world of ideological disputes, situating itself in a pure, impartial, and value-driven world of moral action.' Some organizations believe that 'as long as public messages are based on factual data and first-hand witnessing, and are addressed to relevant

actors in an even-handed manner, this type of advocacy cannot be seen as contradicting the principle of neutrality' (Van Mierop 2015:302). For organizations such as the ICRC that 'only' have a humanitarian imperative of helping those in immediate need, neutrality is a principle to work with. However, for multi-mandate organizations that both help those in immediate need but also work in order to transform society, neutrality is more contested (Van Mierop 2015:297-298). Organizations that try to reach justice have a hard time remaining neutral – or even find it impossible. The degree to which neutrality should be pursued or how strict it should be interpreted, differs by organization. Whether to condemn violations publicly or not depends on the organization. The same is true for whether an organization should have any complicity with militias in order to be able to help those in need (Gordon & Donini 2015:95).

As a result of the debate on neutrality, the so-called Core Humanitarian Standard includes an annex according to which some organizations 'do not consider that the principle of neutrality precludes undertaking advocacy on issues related to accountability and justice' (Van Mierop 2015:297).

According to Leader (2000:20-21) this diversity in the neutrality debate leads to three strategies NGOs might follow. The first approach is the principle-centered or neutrality-elevated approach. Organizations in this category feel that all humanitarian action should solely focus on saving lives. Any political engagement has to be avoided. Secondly, the solidarist or neutrality-abandoned approach. NGOs believe that saving lives is not enough, just as following humanitarian principles is not effective enough. For NGOs it is a moral obligation to address the root causes through political engagement. This viewpoint is also referred to as political humanitarianism. 'They argue that, as humanitarian action has such significant political consequences, humanitarians are obliged to articulate and contribute to good political objectives' (Leader 2000:20-21). The third approach is pragmatist or third-way humanitarianism. This category has not been well defined yet. It is referred to as new humanitarianism and takes a position in between the other two groups. It is believed that politics and humanitarianism are intertwined. Social change is necessary, so political involvement is needed. But, on the other hand, the idea of taking sides is rejected. This is in stark contrast with the second group, according to which the principles are more guidelines than absolutes.

The debate around humanitarianism has become polarized, leading to two main paradigms. The first one is traditional humanitarianism, the second new humanitarianism (Gordon & Donini 2015:89). Table 2.1 shows some of the differing views of classical

humanitarianism versus new humanitarians, based on Nascimento (2015) and Gordon and Donini (2015).

Table 2.1. *Traditional humanitarianism versus new humanitarianism*

Classical/Dunantist/traditional humanitarianism	New humanitarianism
Emphasis on humanitarian principles	Emphasis on development aid and human right protection
Symptomatic approach, palliative approach emergency relief	Transformative approach, more attention to root causes of conflicts
Emphasis on being unattached to political ideology	Closer to the Western liberal peace agenda, including peacebuilding initiatives Professionalization of the NGO standardization of actions, and politicization of NGOs
Short term saving of lives; aiming to limit violence and its effects	Focus on themes as: empowerment of minorities, human rights, state-building initiatives, reinforcement of local services and structures, and other broader security goals
Deontological ethics derived from the humanitarian principles; behavior based on the moral justness of the action itself	Teleontological/consequentialist ethics; behavior based on the consequences of the actions
Viewing the ones that are helped in terms of (helpless) victims	Actions aiming to give back the rights, or empower those that are entitled to it

2.5. Tensions of neutrality

The following section sets out the tensions visible when it comes to neutrality: Is neutrality possible at all? Is neutrality a form of neo-colonialism? Is neutrality redundant? And which method of operating is most effective?

2.5.1. Possibility

The first debate surrounding neutrality centers around the question whether complete neutrality is possible at all. A distinction is made between whether an action is political or whether the outcomes are political. According to some, neutrality doesn't exist because every action is in some way linked to politics and power struggles. The decision on where to allocate resources is already a political decision (O'Brien 2004:31). The question remains if there are fields where humanitarians can operate that are more or less neutral. It is, for instance, fiercely debated whether advocacy is an activity where NGOs can be neutral at all. Many think neutrality and advocacy are fundamentally incompatible, since advocating an issue by definition means that one is taking sides (Scott-Smith 2016:6). It is argued that humanitarianism and advocacy can go hand in hand, as long as it is speaking out on behalf of a victim (Van Mierop 2015:301-302). According to Scott-Smith (2016:6), some humanitarians believe that 'advocacy is perfectly consistent with neutrality, in the same way that a referee in a football game is neutral but upholds a set of rules by which all teams must abide. The act of speaking out, in other words, involves reminding the "players" of these "rules".' This means that the field of advocacy can be seen as neutral.

To some, outcomes are always political. Neutrality can't exist because the impact of actions always has political consequences (Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:891; Abiew 2012:212). According to Bartolini (2000:49), all humanitarian assistance actions have political consequences. Food aid to the starving may endure a conflict, or make a recipient country dependent, or give a dictator the opportunity to spend the saved resources on suppressing his people. Money that is allocated for rebuilding houses can be abused to gain popularity; the free distribution of products can do harm to local businesses. Even when an organization doesn't want to get involved in politics, it is still dependent on access, protection, and funding, which are all areas intertwined with politics (Fiori 2013,7). In short, actions that are meant to do good can be abused by local actors, these actions might have unwanted negative political consequences, and the decision to do something is already a political act in itself (Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:892).

For the ICRC the issue is not whether real neutrality exists or not. It is about the creation of a more or less neutral space for the organization to conduct its activities with as little as possible political consequences (Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:890). Although every outcome has political impact, that doesn't mean neutrality can't be kept in mind. The ICRC always tries to analyze beforehand what the impact is on the power relations (Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:896). Claiming that everything is political and that therefore neutrality cannot

exist, seems like a futile argument since there is a political element in each and every action. In other words, politics means everything and therefore nothing (Cuttitta 2017:3).

2.5.2. Neo-colonialism

Some say that neutrality can result in a new form of colonialism. Firstly, because NGOs enter foreign countries, sometimes even protected by Western military forces. Secondly, because of the presumption that Western values are morally superior. And thirdly, because knowledge is colonized. The principle of neutrality was developed during a time when sovereignty was considered of great importance. New humanitarians, however, attach less importance to the notion of sovereignty, resulting in NGOs easier interfering in states, sometimes accompanied by Western armies.

NGOs presume that they know how to solve some problems when it comes to issues like human rights. This can come across as Western supremacism. Those that agree to Western notions on human rights, for instance, get more aid. This means that humanitarian aid is not given to those most in need, but those who comply best with Western values. 'Viewed in this sense, conditional humanitarian aid then becomes yet another tool available to western governments to control developing societies. This move, from saving lives towards promoting particular political solutions carries the risk of NGOs providing a humanitarian mask for a new era of foreign interference' (Abiew 2012:211).

The knowledge that is used in the consideration to interfere is colonized. Through the discourse that science is the only way of producing knowledge, the West gained hegemony over all other parts of the world (Gordon & Donini 2015:102). Humanitarianism in itself is already a Western concept. It has been created and polished in Judeo-Christian traditions (Minear & Weiss 1993:9). The more integrative NGOs are, the more they follow a Western and liberal peace path. Political agendas and humanitarian agendas become more intertwined.

Assuming that humanitarian principles are neutral, seems ethnocentric. Research suggests that in other parts of the world other principles are given more importance over these humanitarian principles. For instance, in South-East Asia neutrality and impartiality are considered less important than non-interference. 'And in Latin America, support for those affected by conflict, extreme poverty and disaster has often been guided by a solidarity that precludes neutrality and impartiality.' (Fiori 2013:5)

Although neutrality might seem to be a form of neocolonialism, it doesn't necessarily mean it should be abandoned. According to Nascimento (2015), during a time where aid is given to those countries that are willing to follow Western values, it is even more important

for humanitarian NGOs to stick to neutrality. Aid should be given to those who are in biggest need. But according to De Torrenté (2004:12), the inclusion of Western political and military agendas results in the denial of help for those on the ‘wrong side’ of the conflict. This is against all humanitarian aid stands for.

2.5.3. Is neutrality redundant?

This section takes a closer look at whether neutrality is redundant. It starts with the question whether there are other approaches than remaining neutral? It continues to see the consequences for aid workers if this principle is abandoned. After that it addresses the relationship between access and neutrality while it ends with the question if pursuing neutrality is most effective in an operation.

Are there different solutions for helping people in need? The principles of helping those in need have been developed in a different geopolitical context, with mainly inter-state conflicts between sovereign states with inviolable borders; since then the nature of war has changed. In 2005 many states have adopted the idea of ‘Responsibility to Protect’. Until then there was a need to be neutral and impartial in order to gain access to the field, but since the adoption of the idea of the Responsibility to Protect, humanitarian intervention without the premise of neutrality can also be seen as legitimate. This means that foreign military forces can intervene in a country for advancing human dignity, without the permission of the state authority.

According to O’Brien (2004:32), it is an outdated idea to call for apolitical humanitarianism. The aim used to be to take care of those in immediate danger. Nowadays, humanitarianism is often multi-mandated. The aim is not just to provide emergency relief, but also to alleviate suffering in the long run. This change in mandate makes it impossible to stay apolitical. NGOs should move beyond the idea of apolitical help, ‘Rather, they need to understand and articulate how their political solidarity with the people they serve trumps any political obligations they may have to their donors or to the sovereign governments where they work’ (O’Brien 2004:33).

Nascimento (2015) acknowledges that there are some problems when it comes to the notion of neutrality. She thinks, however, that humanitarian aid is too often used to try to solve a political problem instead of a humanitarian problem. This mistake creates the misconception that neutral humanitarianism is inadequate. The abuse of the word humanitarian by those who have a geopolitical interest in the conflict makes it difficult for NGOs to be seen as neutral. For belligerents and local populations alike, it is difficult to

distinguish humanitarian action from those actions with a geo-strategical interest, and more humanitarian focused NGOs. This distinction makes it even more compelling for NGOs to commit to neutrality (Minear & Weiss 1993:25).

2.5.4. More risks for aid workers

Nowadays inviolability of aid workers in the field is under threat. Since 9/11 the number of humanitarian aid workers killed has increased. This is mainly because humanitarian NGOs are no longer seen as neutral, but rather as an extension of political powers. Nascimento (2015) states that when humanitarian action and political agendas are combined, this might have negative consequences and be counterproductive. When military force is used, it becomes rather vague as to who are humanitarian workers and who are part of the military. This blurring of roles can endanger NGO personnel.

According to Krähenbühl (2004), we live in a polarized world with on the one hand those that are part of the war against terrorism, and on the other ‘radical non-State entities determined to oppose them and prepared to resort to the use of non-conventional methods of warfare’ (Krähenbühl 2004:506). Part of this non-conventional method of warfare are the attacks on so-called soft targets. The risk of becoming a target increases when an NGO leaves the principle of neutrality behind. Although the killing of a non-combatant is considered a war crime, this obviously doesn’t completely prevent it from taking place.

According to O’Brien (2004:34), there is no evidence for the claim that to remain apolitical offers more humanitarian space to operate in. It is hard to prove whether attacks on humanitarians are caused by the political stance taken by the victims. It is more likely that humanitarians are attacked because of their association (origin, funds, personnel and values) with the West. Donini and Gordon (2015:100), however, don’t think it’s simply the association with Western geopolitical interests, but rather an error in the risk analysis and negotiation strategies in complex conflicts.

When humanitarian NGOs operate in countries that are considered to be part of the War on Terror, there is less use in striving for humanitarian principles. In countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan there is no space left for neutrality (Charny 2004). This means that in order to provide immediate help, NGOs have to work with political or military forces to be at least relatively safe. When there are rebel groups, very repressive governments, or other groups that don’t feel constrained by international humanitarian law, the notion of neutrality is less fertile (Forsythe 2012:67). So, in order to work in particular countries, there is no possibility to help people while strictly holding on to neutrality.

Charny (2004:18) believes the humanitarian community should not move away from neutrality, nor from the integrative approach. The integrative approach should, however, be slightly adjusted. It should be realized that humanitarians have distinct roles and should be doing different tasks, in line with their competences. They should be seen and behave as independent actors. In order to be seen as independent actors, the UN and influential countries should no longer use NGOs as a way to achieve political goals. Secondly, a distinction between humanitarian aims over the political-military ones should be visible.

2.5.5. Access to the field

As long as neutrality and impartiality are met, it is immoral and legally punishable to deny access for humanitarians (Anderson 2004:56). Not taking sides in political and/or ideological disputes is the solution to building trust and gaining access to the field of victims. Politicians and armies are more likely to let humanitarians operate if they do not see them as a threat to their own interests (Scott-Smith 2016:8).

One of the things ICRC does to remain neutral is to talk to several or all parties in a conflict. Having contacts with all parties increases the possibility of being accepted to operate in the area (Krähenbühl 2004:507). The example of Kandahar, Afghanistan, shows that only the Red Cross was able to reach Taliban-controlled areas, whereas other humanitarians had to stop their activities. Through neutrality and transparent dialogues with all parties the ICRC gained access to the field, where other NGOs moved away from neutrality (Terry 2011:4).

Abandoning neutrality will lead to less humanitarian space, that otherwise would be granted by belligerents to humanitarians (Abiew 2012:204). An organization also risks the otherwise potential access to all groups in the conflict. If an organization chooses to leave neutrality behind and instead commits itself to political parties and/or ideological or religious causes, it loses its humanitarian cover; it just becomes another actor interfering in the conflict (Minear & Weiss 1993:24-25).

2.5.6. What is most efficient?

Sometimes principles are seen as a goal in themselves, instead of means to an end. Some have argued that it is morally wrong to strive for neutrality, because neutrality might become the goal instead of helping those in need (Gordon & Donini 2015:93). However, the idea that the ICRC sees the principles in this way is incorrect. It views the principles as a guidance and tool to get access to the field (Leaning 2007; Minear 1999:68). According to Minear (1999:70),

remaining neutral in the way the ICRC does is the most effective methodology. However, data to support this judgement remain inadequate and other variables need to be assessed.

Having parties in a conflict as donors to an NGO can obviously lead to decreased neutrality and impartiality. However, not having these donors, in turn, has a negative impact on the quantity and quality of NGOs in conflict (O'Brien 2004:38). Some claim that working with military forces in itself is already not in line with the notion of neutrality, especially when the military force itself is a party to the conflict. However, in some cases the military has enough manpower and resources to contribute to the aims of a NGO. In this case, striving for neutrality could mean not saving as many people as one could have (Bartolini 2000:48).

'When circumstances demand it, aid agencies seem happy to quietly ditch neutrality, especially when there are many other ways to gain humanitarian access. Neutrality, therefore, is an instrumental rather than an intrinsic good, so the crucial question becomes one of performance: when should a humanitarian agency perform a neutral role?' (Scott-Smith 2016:8-9).

Conflicts inherently produce victims and perpetrators. Neutrality is sometimes seen as a form of complicity with the perpetrators (Gordon & Donini 2015:90). Not condemning perpetrators could be viewed as morally wrong (Scott-Smith 2016:8). Also, sometimes neutrality is used as a smoke curtain to masquerade unaccountability, to not need standardized procedures (Gordon & Donini 2015: 91).

On the other hand, organizations that remain true to neutrality, such as the ICRC, find following an integrative approach and fighting the root causes of conflict can be morally wrong. They consider it wrong to potentially save lives in the long run, while neglecting saving lives in the current situation (Charny 2004:14).

This should, however, always be seen in context. There are undoubtedly contexts in which neutrality remains extremely important, but that is not true for all cases (Rieffer-Flanagan 2009:892). Humanitarian aid and the issue of neutrality should be assessed on a case by case basis. An NGO should always analyze the possible benefits and the potential costs of staying neutral (Bartolini 2000:48).

Another solution according to Bartolini (2000:47) is making a clear distinction and division between those NGOs that remain neutral and those that abandon this notion. NGOs with a strong human rights perspective that are trying to change society have a right of existence and they can't be neutral. These NGOs have to be aware, however, that they have less access than other NGOs (Bartolini 2000:47).

Forsythe (2012) states that in conflicts where the parties try to limit collateral damage and casualties as much as possible, neutral humanitarianism is the solution for offering humanitarian aid. Neutral humanitarianism is the most efficient way for NGOs to conduct their activities. It might not solve root causes of the conflict, but ‘it does have its place while we wait, perhaps like Godot, for the coming of a more durable and dynamic liberal world order’ (Forsythe 2012:67).

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter addressed four sorts of tensions in the concept of neutrality: possibility, relation with neo-colonialism, superfluity, and effectiveness. Some authors think neutrality is impossible – for everything is political. Contrary, others believe that when everything is political, the notion loses its meaning. It might be there are some alternatives available for those organizations that are unwilling or unable to be neutral. However, for one of the main actors, the ICRC, this is not the case, since it is granted access for the sole reason it remains neutral. A third tension relates to the link with neo-colonialism, since NGOs enter foreign countries, often accompanied by Western military. Also, the NGOs themselves are more often than not Western organizations, based on Western values and experiences. The last tension centers around its effectiveness. Choosing sides in a particular matter can generate more funds, which in turn can lead to helping more people. On the other hand, NGOs risk the chance of being denied access to an area.

In conclusion, it might be best to acknowledge the strengths (and weaknesses) of the different approaches; as long as an organization openly discusses its position vis-à-vis the principle of neutrality (De Torrenté 2004:12).

Chapter 3: Methodological overview

This section provides a comprehensive description of how this research was conducted, starting from an interpretative point of view. I tried to examine the social world from within, in order to discover the various layers constructing our social reality. Mixed methods were used for collecting and analyzing data in order to answer the main question dealing with the importance of neutrality for Search and Rescue NGOs and their volunteers who operate in the Mediterranean Sea?

In answering the main question, I started with exploring the relevant literature. This literature review was used as a guidance to familiarize myself with the field of SAR, while still maintaining an open view (Boeije et al. 2009:266). The literature was not used for formulating hypotheses, but rather for gaining more knowledge and insight on Search and Rescue missions and the notion of neutrality. Interviews have been conducted to get acquainted with the field and to answer the first sub-question regarding the motivations of people working in the field of SAR. Subsequently, a document analysis has been conducted so as to deal with the sub-question on the Twitter communications. Finally, an online survey was used to answer the third sub-question relating to volunteers' perceptions about NGO neutrality.

The specific methods used for collecting the various data and for the analysis are more thoroughly described in Chapters 4 through 6. These chapters also debate the advantages and limitations of using interviews, document analysis and surveys.

3.1. Interviews

The interviews were conducted for familiarizing myself with the field and furthermore to answer the sub-question on the motivations of people working in the field of SAR. The aim of this particular research method of interviews is not to reach broadly generalizable conclusions, but rather to see the variations in answers amongst the informants (Boeije et al. 2009). Qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews are very useful in addressing 'what' questions, focusing on the perspectives of informants. Qualitative methods are also very useful in conducting explorative research, suitable for researching attitudes, personal motivations, and perceptions (Boeije et al. 2009).

The first benefit of doing interviews is that a researcher can follow an open research strategy. This is convenient, since during the interviews a researcher can respond in a flexible way to findings in the field. This is necessary, since at the start of the research project the field was not very well known (Boeije et al. 2009:262). The interviews provided more direction for the preliminary aims and questions posed at the start of the research, so they could be (re)formulated into more permanent ones. A second advantage of in-depth interviews is that a researcher leaves more room for informants bringing up specific topics, giving the researcher a better understanding of the relevant social phenomena. Through ‘thoughtful questioning, sensitive probing and reflective listening,’ the researcher can gain insight in perceptions and thoughts about the informants’ social world (Salmons 2016:177). Lastly, conducting interviews gives the researcher as well as the informants more flexibility and agency in deciding the topics during the interviews. This increases the internal validity of the research, as the distance between the social reality and data decreases (Boeije et al. 2009:281). Another factor in increasing the overall validity of this research is given by the fact that the interpretations and conclusions can be validated by using the surveys.

A limitation of conducting interviews is that its conclusions are not meant to be generalized to a larger research population. However, the conclusions might lead to insights that could be applicable to other groups of volunteers as well. This research focuses solely on SAR volunteers, but the analysis might contribute to theory development more generally (Boeije et al. 2009:287). A second limitation is that the data collection takes place in a less standardized manner. This can influence its reliability in a negative way, due to the way in which informants have been interviewed (Boeije et al. 2009:282). Informants might not be asked the same questions or might face a different order of questions. I tried to mitigate this potential disadvantage by using the same procedure for analyzing the data of every informant. Furthermore, since I used myself as a research instrument, I had to constantly keep in mind that I had to reflect upon my own biases and behavior as a researcher, since I tried to interpret other people’s interpretations of how they view the world (Geertz, 1973). I constantly reflected on my own thoughts, prejudices and behavior as a researcher – and how this might influence the research. Also, in order to strengthen the reliability, I paraphrased questions and answers during the interviews. This way, informants could check whether or not I understood them correctly.

To summarize, the sub-question ‘What are motives to work in the field of SAR?’, can best be addressed through qualitative research. Conducting in-depth interviews is part of an open research procedure that allows the researcher to be more flexible. Aside from the

flexibility, the researcher has the benefit of gaining a better understanding through in-depth interviews. A third benefit is that the validity is increased, because the gap between the data and social reality is smaller. Although the conclusions as such are not generalizable, they can be used for theory development. The second limitation, the reliability being decreased through a less standardized way of conducting interviews, is partly overcome through standardization of the analysis, paraphrasing during the interviews and the constant reflection on the part of the researcher.

3.2. Document analysis

For answering the sub-question: How do NGOs in the Mediterranean Sea communicate on Twitter, with regard to neutrality?, qualitative media research methods are very suitable. Analyzing Twitter accounts of NGOs allows to research a variety of topics, such as political participation, social movements, identities and everyday discourses. These topics are all highly relevant for research into the notion of neutrality (Fortsythe 2013). Another advantage is that for the collection of data there was no involvement from the researcher, as these Twitter messages have in no way been influenced by this research project (Boeije et al. 2009:302).

Social media research enables research questions that increase our understanding of social phenomena. Social phenomena such as involvement in social movements and political participation are highly relevant for researching the notion of neutrality, because both political participation and the involvement in social movements can be indicative of people's stances towards neutrality (Fortsythe 2013). Twitter is an obvious example of modern social media. Twitter is a widely used medium, by now part of everyday life, as well as a form of microblogging; 'It provides services that focus on short updates that are pushed out to everyone subscribed to receive the updates' (Grahl, in McCay-Peet 2016:18). Everyone, including a NGO involved in SAR, is able to create a Twitter account and through this account one can share one's voice (Siapera et al. 2018). Twitter gives the possibility to share stories and opinions, and is therefore able to speak out on (dominant) narratives (Siapera et al. 2018). Twitter 'has had a transformative effect on how information and news effuse throughout society'; therefore twitter is influential in the public discourse (McCay-Peet 2016). This makes this source highly relevant for researching neutrality, since an essential element of neutrality is to not take sides in political controversies.

A benefit of doing research based on tweets is that the reliability and validity are safeguarded. The research material is public and can be found on Twitter and is available to other researchers for verifying purposes. Another advantage of this research method is that the material contains no provocation or influence from the researcher (Boeije et al. 2009:302). There is no reactivity. The advantage is that there are no socially desirable answers to be avoided – although one can wonder whether social media outlets are not by definition socially desirable. For this research an extant data collection method was used. I collected posts of text and images from tweets by NGOs. The disadvantage of this particular method is the impossibility of asking questions regarding the data that have been found. I mitigated this disadvantage by using method triangulation, such as sending out surveys.

3.3. Survey

The aim of the online survey was to answer the sub-question: How do volunteers think about NGO neutrality, and to what extent is it important to them? This survey has been used to describe the population and to explain the variances found in Part 1: the interview.

Everyone received the same survey, which standardized the procedure. Data collection took place through an online survey program, Qualtrics, which enables participants to take the survey online. A benefit of using computer-assisted surveys is that the answers of participants are directly visible and ready for analysis (Boeije et al. 2009:225).

This particular survey method has a standardized procedure which makes it possible to replicate the research. This increases the reliability of the research project. Another advantage of the survey in relation to the reliability is that the survey makes it possible to compare answers between participants (Boeije et al. 2009:221).

The validity of this research was negatively influenced because of the non-response. The non-response rate was relatively high: both a general non-response and a partial non-response. I took some steps to avoid a high non-response rate, such as building relations with gatekeepers during the interviews, sending out multiple requests over a period of time, using different media to spread the survey link, and increasing the possibilities of answering the survey through different devices. Since the particular research population is away from home for a (longer) period of time, I made the surveys accessible through phones, laptops, desktops and tablets. Nevertheless, the response remained rather low. I asked one of my informants from the interviews why the response was so low. His explanation was that among the this

particular population there is a fear to express opinions for research reasons, because they have recently been portrayed poorly in the media. Despite the low response rate, this research method is still valuable. The conclusions cannot be generalized, but they can however give indications and ideas for further research in this area.

In sum, a standardization of surveys increases their reliability and another advantage is that the answers of surveys can be compared. A next advantage of survey methods is that quantitative research methods might lead to generalizable conclusions. However, in this case the number of participants was too low to reach generalizable conclusions. Nevertheless, the conclusions are still relevant for further research and theory development, as they provide insights in the attitudes towards neutrality in a quantified way.

3.4. Triangulation

Using different methods – such as a survey, interviews and a document analysis – gives a researcher the possibility to acquire data from different angles (Boeije et al. 2009:286). The validity of the research is increased through so-called method triangulation. Using different methods enables the researcher to cover the research topic more thoroughly.

Using different kinds of methods enabled me to further analyze the preliminary conclusions from the interviews. Furthermore, the interviews gave insights for the variables used in the surveys. The document analysis was used as an addition to the survey and interviews, because quite often there is a difference between what people say and what they actually do (Gobo, 2008) and because there might be a discrepancy between a NGO and its volunteers regarding their stance on neutrality.

I also used subject triangulation. The in-depth interviews and surveys were held amongst volunteers, while the document analysis focused on the organizations those volunteers work for. With this subject triangulation it was possible to see the stance on neutrality from both the perspective of the volunteers and the NGOs.

3.5. Ethical considerations

In conducting research there are always ethical considerations. Collecting and interpreting data needs to be treated with caution and respect, because you want your research not to cause

any harm for the research population. With regards to ethical considerations, I specifically looked at issues of anonymity, voluntary participation, and confidentiality regarding the data.

For the interviews I tried to maintain the anonymity of the informants by changing their names and not giving away information about their position within the NGO nor specific demographics, such as age, the NGO they work for, religion, etc. The names were changed in order to keep the informants' anonymity, but to keep the stories more vivid for the reader than just referring to respondent #1, #2, #3 etc.. After emailing several NGOs, I was given the contact information of the informants. Although perhaps difficult, it might be possible that the person who originally gave me the contact information could find out which volunteer was an informant, given the small research scale. For any other person than the gatekeeper it is nearly impossible to find out which informants have been interviewed. All informants voluntarily participated in this research. There was no financial incentive or reward for participating. Responding to my request on whether or not people wanted to be interviewed was the first possibility to not get involved in the research. After this mail, there was still plenty of time to cancel the interview, and also during the interview itself stepping out would be without any consequences. The confidentiality issue cannot be completely covered, but I tried to keep my informants as anonymous as possible. For the data analysis I needed voice recordings of the interviews. These were later transcribed. Voices are, unlike names, not easy to anonymize. The recordings of the interviews are destroyed once this research is finished.

There were some ethical considerations for the document analysis. Volunteers are completely anonymous. I used an unobtrusive observation method. For the document analysis I used an extant data collection method that allowed me to collect data without having to announce my presence in doing so. In this process, I did not collect personally identifiable information of individuals. The data I gathered has no sensitive information on individuals whatsoever. If there is in any case sensitive information, then it is only traceable to the organization, not to its volunteers.

With respect to the question of voluntary participation, there is another factor. I did not use informed consent for researching statements published in social media, '[s]ince these sites [such as Twitter] require no registration or login to view comments, researchers treated the data as public information' (Stewart 2016:190). However, 'the question of whether public tweets are by default public data is an ethical issue that [...] has yet to [be] resolve[d]' (Boyd & Crawford, in Stewart 2016:262). Although the tweets have been made public, a researcher should always consider whether it was intended to be used outside a relatively limited community. There are plenty of NGOs that have decided not to join Twitter, just as there were

NGOs that made their profile invisible for those not following them. Taking this into account, I expect that NGOs have made a deliberate choice to make their tweets visible for the public, and therefore also for researchers to see.

I tried to make a calculation regarding whether it would lead to any risks to the SAR community when I conducted this part of the research. It is impossible to keep the tweets in the same context when replicating these tweets in new venues such as this research. Mainstream media, such as daily newspapers and television channels, nowadays often use Twitter as a source in their items (McCay-Peet et al. 2016:14). This leads me to the conclusion that NGOs are well aware of the consequences when they publicly post tweets on Twitter; therefore they are likely to be cautious about what they post on Twitter. Therefore, doing research on public tweets is not likely to bring harm to the community.

There were also some ethical considerations concerning the surveys, with regard to anonymity of respondents, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of data. The surveys are completely anonymous. Furthermore, giving the voluntary participation, respondents were able to skip questions. Also, they could leave the survey page at any time they wanted, without facing any restrictions. This means they had a choice in what kind of information they wanted to give. In the e-mail I send, I already explained the aim of this student research, how much time the survey would approximately take and my contact information if there was anything not clear. This information was shared again, once participants clicked on the link for the survey in Qualtrics. The surveys contained an introduction that had to be read in order to continue with the survey. Having information about me as a researcher makes respondents aware of whom they give their information to, and what their information is being used for. This enables them to make a more deliberate decision.

Chapter 4: Part 1, The interviews

In this chapter I will present the results of Part 1, the interviews. I will clarify the process of the selection of the participants, followed by an introduction of these participants. I will continue with the methods and measures of analysis that have been used. Subsequently, the results of the analysis are presented, followed by a conclusion regarding Part 1, based on the outcomes of the entire interview process. The purpose of the interviews is to collect relevant data, providing insights that contribute, in combination with Parts 2 and 3, to the final answer of the main question: *‘To what extent is the notion of neutrality important for, respectively, Search and Rescue NGOs and their volunteers who commit themselves to humanitarian operations in the Mediterranean Sea?’* The particular aim of the interviews in this chapter is, however, also to familiarize the researcher (and reader) with the field of SAR, and especially to answer the sub-question ‘what are the motives to work in the field of Search and Rescue?’

4.1. Selection procedure

For the selection of the research participants, the method of so-called purposive sampling has been used. I specifically looked for informants with certain characteristics, such as being a volunteer for an NGO involved in SAR and having experience working in the Mediterranean Sea. Participants had to have the experience of being involved in at least one mission aimed at saving migrants from drowning. I conducted ten in-depth interviews over a one-month period, from December 11, 2017, until January 10, 2018.

Based on the research of Casumanu (2017), a list has been compiled of NGOs that are active in the Mediterranean Sea. His table on ‘Migrant rescuing NGOs on the central Mediterranean migratory route’ (Casumanu 2017:3), includes a list of nine member NGOs that are active in the central Mediterranean area. In addition, through a Google search (search: ‘NGO Mediterranean’) I found the website <http://international-maritime-rescue.org/>. This organization has listed all its active members in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, respectively. I added the list of active NGOs from the website to the one I found earlier, resulting in Figure 4.1.

Table 4.1. *List of NGOs that have been requested to participate in this research.*

Patrolling and Rescuing only	Patrolling, Rescuing and Transport to Italy
Sea-Watch	MOAS (Migrant Offshore Aid Station)
Cadus	MSF (Médicines Sans Frontières)
Jugend Rettet	SOS-Méditerranée
Pro-Activa Open Arms	Safe the children
Sea-Eye	
Boat refugee foundation	
Emergency Response Centre International	
Human Pilots Initiative	
Human Rights at sea	
Regional Voluntary Coast Guard	National Sea Rescue Organizations³
HRT (Hellenic Rescue Team)	NSSR (Norwegian Society for Sea Rescue)
	Swedish Sea Rescue Society
	RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution)
	KNRM (Royal Netherlands Sea Rescue Institution)
	DGzRS (German Maritime Search and Rescue Service)

I next searched the NGOs' websites for a way to contact them. All but two had email addresses on their websites. For these two I filled in an online contact form; unfortunately, I did not receive any answer. The other NGOs I contacted on November 8, 2017 (see Appendix 1), to bring me in contact with volunteers from their organization that were willing to have an in-depth interview. The initial response was not high enough, so I contacted them again on December 6 (the mode of communication through mail can be found in Appendix 3). I eventually had contact with volunteers from Cadus, HRT, Sea-Watch, and the KNRM.

4.2. Participants

³ These organizations helped regional organizations, such as the Hellenic Rescue Team, with training and equipment to provide aid in the Mediterranean Sea.

In total I conducted ten in-depth interviews. To start with, I had interviews with five members of the Hellenic Rescue Team: Alexander, Andres, Athan, Giannis and Hermes. They all had the experience of a prominent position in the team of volunteers on the Greek island where they lived. This means their volunteer work did not include longer missions at sea. Their job was not only to save people from drowning, they were also trained to conduct land-based evacuations, for instance in the mountains or in other emergencies taking place on their island. They all worked in the Aegean Sea and had to cooperate with Frontex, as well as with the Turkish and Greek coast guards. All five participants were male, Greek and had been active in the field of SAR for a longer period of time. In addition to being a volunteer of the Hellenic Rescue Team, all five had paid jobs. They spent between a just few hours a week, up to even 28 hours a week volunteering.

I also conducted an interview with Jan, who works for the Dutch KNRM. He is the only participant that was paid for his work. Together with colleagues from SAR NGOs from Sweden and Germany, Jan went to Greece to train the Hellenic Rescue Team.

I also interviewed three members of Sea-Watch, Anton, Herman and Maike. All three of them are volunteers and are (were) students. They worked in missions near the Libyan coast. During these missions, they were fulltime on board of a vessel in the Mediterranean Sea, for a period of one week up to even months. The tenth participant is Jacob, attached to Cadus. He is in his twenties and was a student.

4.3. Material

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews, structured along a topic list. This topic list is based on sensitizing concepts, those concepts that are, according to the literature on a particular issue, relevant (Boeije et al. 2009). Using a topic list gives guidance to the interview; based on the list all topics will be discussed. Although the topic list is meant to give guidance to the interview, it is not supposed to completely structure it. Based on the answers, there were follow-up questions so I could delve more in-depth in topics that were considered relevant. Semi-structured interviews give participants the opportunity to give more direction to the interview. In addition to the issues and topics based on the sensitizing concepts, more general aspects have been addressed as well, such as age, working experience in the field, and country of origin.

Some interviews I held through Skype/Facetime/Whatsapp. When the internet connection was bad, and Facebook or Skype turned out to be difficult, I used a mobile phone. An obvious disadvantage of using these electronic devices instead of direct person-to-person contact is that it is hard to distinguish facial expressions or notice any body language. This makes it harder to register emotional attachment, for instance. I assumed that it would be harder to keep focus if the meeting was not face to face. Therefore, I decided to limit the length of the interviews to 30 minutes to an hour. The interviews were all (after asking for permission) recorded and transcribed later on.

4.4. Measures and method of analysis

The interviews were transcribed to be able to code the transcripts in AtlasTi. Inductive analysis methods were used to allow room for meaning and interpretation. The categorizations made, were based on the raw data, rather than on the literature. I started the analysis with the raw data and worked bottom-up. I coded without having a specific research question in mind, in order to keep the research direction as open as possible. The three phases of coding as described by Gobo (2008:227) were used. First, I started with the deconstruction phase, with open coding, followed by, secondly, the construction phase, axial coding. The final phase is referred to as the confirmation phase, in which selective coding is used.

During the first phase I examined the transcripts and attached a specific code to each and every sentence. This process resulted in a myriad of codes. During the second phase I analyzed the raw data once more and selected the codes I wanted to analyze further. Based on axial coding I started to think of structures that could be explanatory for variances and similarities within the themes. In the analysis three overarching themes came forward: motivation, political involvement, and cooperation. Within these themes I looked for sub-categories, by doing a domain analysis and taxonomic analysis. These themes and sub-categories are visible below in Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, which illustrate the structure of the results of this study.

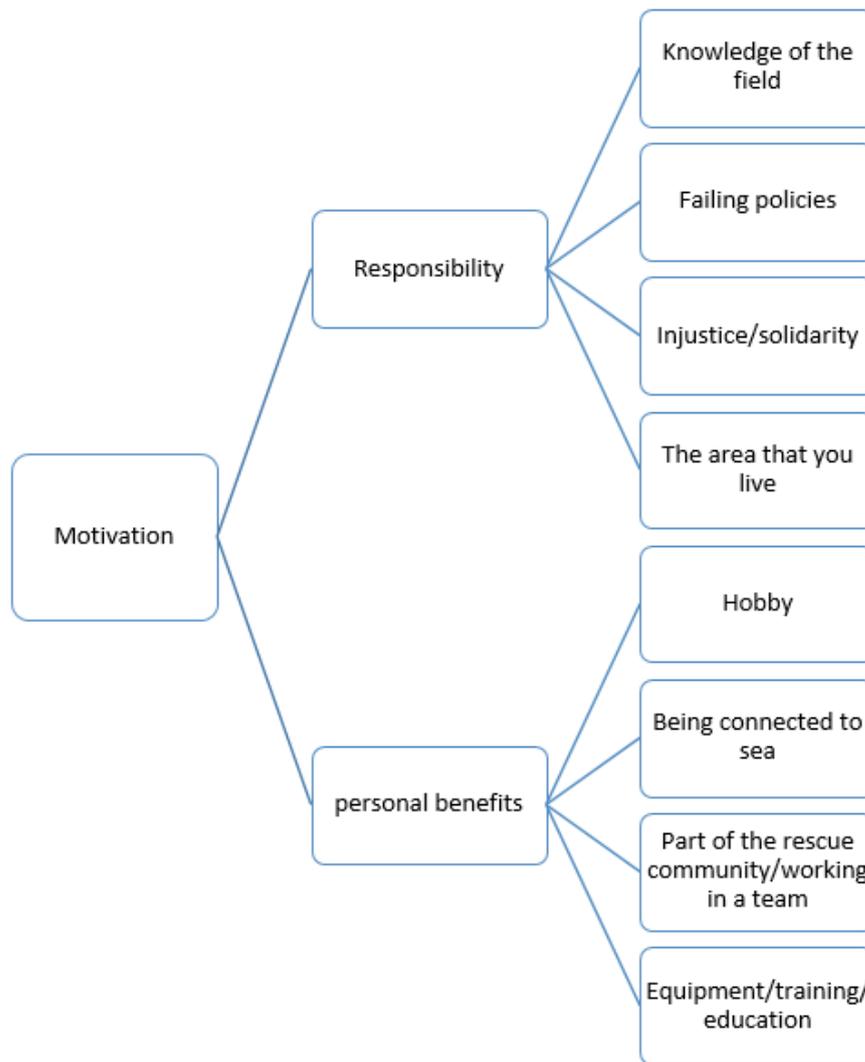


Figure 4.1. Theme 1: Motivation

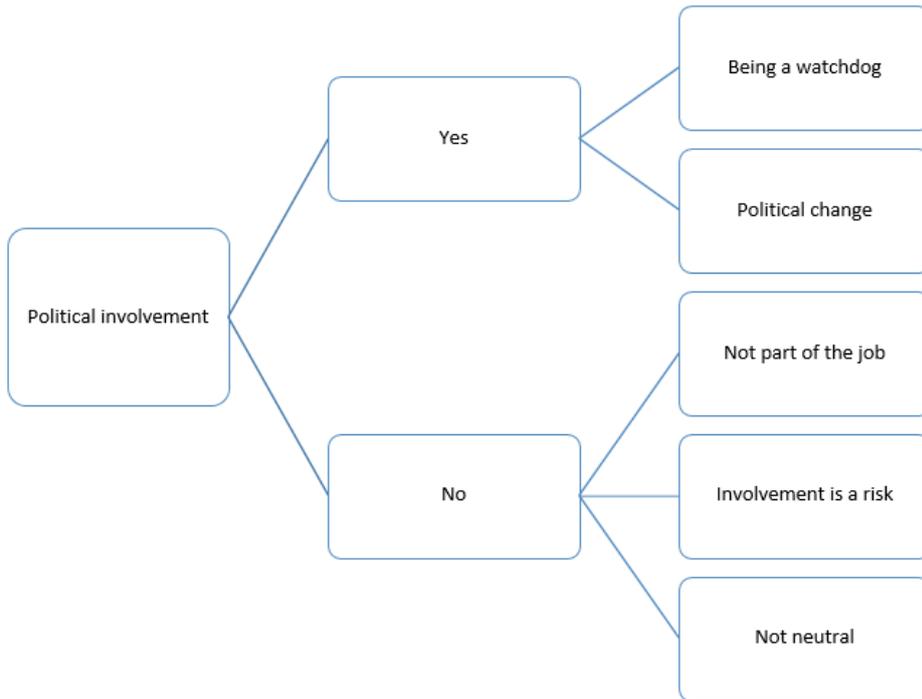


Figure 4.2. Theme 2: Political Involvement

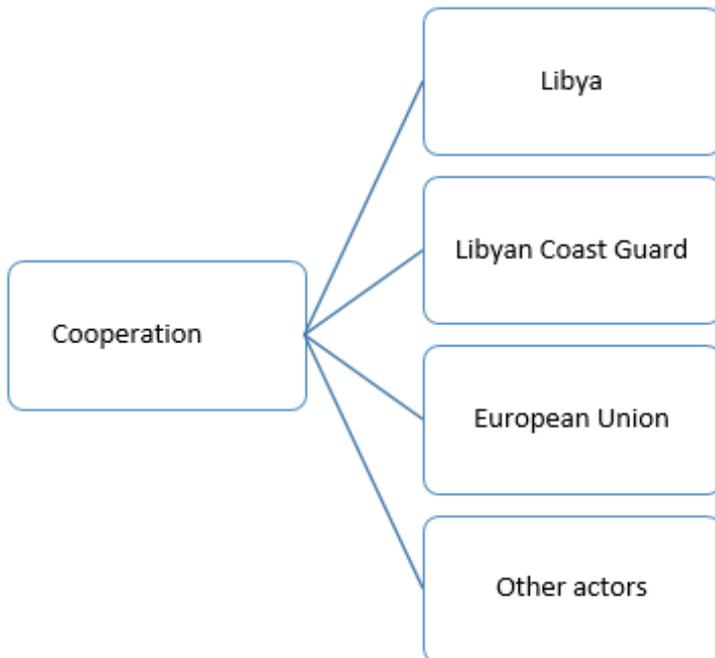


Figure 4.3. Theme 3: Cooperation

4.5. Results

The results of the interviews can be divided in three themes. Motivation, Political Involvement, and Cooperation. Each theme is divided into sub-categories. During all of the interviews there was at least one issue all participants agreed upon: each and everyone wants to save lives – everybody believes everyone deserves to be rescued at sea:

‘The one thing that everyone agrees on is that it is absolutely no option to let people die on the ocean. I think that really combined everything from all NGOs whether they say we do political work or not. That is basically the bottom line. That’s definitely something everyone out there is 100% behind.’ (Anton, interview 09/01/18)

4.5.1. Theme 1: Motivation

Responsibilities

Most of the participants found their motivation in a particular feeling of responsibility. They either have knowledge of the field and feel responsible to share that knowledge, they feel the need to do something about failing politics, feelings of inequality and injustice, or they want to be helpful in the area they live in. Some of the participants had quite a lot of previous experience on sea and mentioned that being aware of the dangers was relevant for them to join Search and Rescue missions. They all felt motivated to be involved in SAR because they know the dangers and therefore know how welcome help is in specific situations:

‘That huge [sea], it is very huge and it can be very beautiful, but there is also bad weather and if you need help it is very nice that there are organizations that can provide help.’ (Jan, interview 12/12/17)⁴

‘Especially at sea ... that is my area. If you ever find yourself in dangerous situations at sea – like a broken engine, or big waves at a long distance from the nearest harbor. Something very, very, very important is that there are people there to help you. So for me [it] is a priority to help people at sea.’ (Hermes, interview 13/12/17)

⁴ Own translation.

Another reason to join SAR missions was to share knowledge and experience about the sea, or a sense of responsibility that some of the participants felt they need to do something about ‘failing politics’:

‘I saw it on TV and in the newspapers: there are people dying at the borders of Europe. There is no effort from anybody, [not] from the government or someone else to do anything about it. So I thought, for me there is no other way than doing something about it.’ (Jakob, interview 19/12/17)

Jakob, Herman and Anton were all against the current European border policies. Jakob felt that everyone should have the right to move freely to wherever one wants to go. He tries his best not only to save them, but also to bring them to Europe. This discontentment was a motivating factor for them to join SAR. Some of the volunteers had clear feelings of inequality and injustice. For them these were reasons to join SAR missions. Before Anton came into the field of SAR, he had spent quite some time at sea for his own pleasure. For him it felt unfair that he was enjoying the same place where others were dying, trying to gain those rights he already had. He stated:

‘It was really hard to see people die in a place that I would go to enjoy myself. My whole leisure time I would spend, at sea so it was very hard to grasp that so many people were dying at sea. Trying to save lives is important and it is important that human beings are treated equally. And it is definitely something that I’ve learned [...]; these people are really not treated like I’m normally treated. And that is definitely a part of my motivation to go there as well.’ (Anton, interview 09/01/18)

Maike also had this sense of injustice. She felt that she, along all other people in Europe, is privileged. People should think more often about this inequality between the privileged Europeans and the underprivileged others. For her, sharing the idea that we are all responsible for each other, not just for one’s own direct family or friends, was another motive to join SAR.

Herman considers himself, as a European citizen, responsible for making up for the failing policies of the European Union:

‘Well, the fact is that I feel responsible for what the governments of the European Union do, because I’m a citizen of the European Union. You experience some clues that European politics is responsible for human disaster.’ (Herman, interview 08/01/18)

Another reason to join SAR is to be ‘the eyes on the sea’ that keep politicians in check. He believes that the European Union is not so content with having independent eyes at sea to monitor the developments. Anton refers to this monitoring as one of the most important tasks of his NGO:

‘I definitely think that it is very important part that we are playing down there. Of course we are saving lives as well, but that is something that comes with being down there. But the most important thing is to be some sort of [...] watchdog. Because they should do their job as promised.’ (Anton, interview 09/01/18)

Giannis, Alexander and Hermes live on a Greek island. They mentioned they feel responsible for the area they live in. Hermes feels responsible because he lives in a remote area. If anyone needs help, help is too far away if he couldn’t provide it. Alexander feels he gives something back to the community, while Giannis feels it is his responsibility to help those that live close to his him:

‘I’m doing what I am doing because it is something that happens next to my home and I feel responsible for the area around my home. If something happened on the other side of the world, I’m not able to help. So, if something is happening next to my house, I feel very, very bad if I cannot help.’ (Giannis, interview 10/01/18)

The above motivations have been characterized as feelings of responsibility. The participants felt responsible to share their knowledge, to speak and act out against the failing policies, to do something about the inequality in and/or the responsibility for the area they live in. Sharing knowledge and awareness of the dangers was mentioned by Jaap, Giannis, Hermes and Anton. The responsibility for the area they live in was only mentioned by informants of the Hellenic Rescue Team. They work in the area they live in. The feeling that one should do something about the political injustice, was something that was not mentioned by the HRT members nor by the member of the KNRM.

Personal benefits

Not all motivations were solely based on feelings of responsibility. There were also some motivating factors for personal benefits, for instance it is also one's hobby, or to keep a connection to the sea, or to be part of something, as well as for training, equipment and/or education.

The first personal benefit mentioned was that it is a hobby. Andres said that some people do sports, he does SAR. Both Andres and Athan used the specific word 'hobby':

'Because I like it and it's my hobby. It is something I started at a young age and I wanted to help people, so it went like that ... to be a rescuer.' (Athan, interview 11/01/18)

Jan mentioned that one of the things that motivated him to start with the KNRM was to stay connected to the sea. He had already been working at sea for many years and wanted to stay connected and share his knowledge and experiences. Another personal benefit experienced, was that one is working in a team with other volunteers and to be part of a community. Some of the participants mentioned that the equipment, trainings and the gaining of knowledge was seen as a personal benefit. Alexander, Jan, Athan, and Hermes mentioned this in particular:

'I enjoy it [SAR] very much and I like training. Other people do some athletics. I also like all this equipment, as well as, sharing my ideas with other people.' (Athan, interview 11/01/18)

Other participants referred to the personal benefits of volunteering in the field of SAR as well, and mentioned the same things, for instance because it is one's hobby, or to keep a connection to the sea, etc. These kinds of personal motivations are not shared by everyone, however. The only participants who mentioned these personal benefits were HRT volunteers and Jan.

4.5.2. Theme 2: Political involvement

The aim of political disengagement and can be related to the desire to remain neutral. There is a discrepancy among the participants in whether or not they want their NGO to be involved in the political spectrum. Those who consider political involvement as a part of their work do feel they are a watchdog at sea. Their aim is to achieve political change. Those who consider political involvement undesirable, feel that it is not part of their job, that it is a risk, and that it deprives them from being neutral.

Desire for political involvement

Anton believes that the NGO he is working for should be politically involved, and that his NGO should follow a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand it should send out its volunteers to rescue people from drowning at sea; on the other it should try to make policy changes as well. He wants the European Union to take responsibility for saving lives in the Mediterranean Sea. The goal of being at sea is to save people from drowning, but also to gather evidence to see if the European Union sticks to agreements. Being a watchdog means gathering evidence at sea to see if other players are not committing crimes and are keeping their promises:

‘I really like it when the organization I’m working for has people who are willing to do that, because my personal skill level really puts me out on the water. I’m not the one who can do a lot of political work because I get really frustrated in that, even though I know exactly how important that is. I’m really happy to be working together with the people who I can provide firsthand information, which they use for their political work. In my opinion it always needs both sides, so basically – especially if you’re active in this kind of environment – you need search and rescue work to validate your voice so that you have more weight politically.’
(Anton, interview 09/01/18)

Maike brought up the experience Sea-Watch had with the Libyan Coast Guard that led to fatalities. She found this highly unprofessional and horrible for the people who drowned. Sea-Watch had rescued over fifty people. Late on, they had a collision with the Libyan Coast Guard. This interference made the migrants panic and jump back in the water. As Sea-Watch states in a press release, this interference cost the lives of 54 migrants.

A press release is one way to deal with encountering crimes. The extent to which an organization wants to be a watchdog or the political risks they want to take, however differs:

‘In the end it is really a matter of which organization you work for; some organizations are way more careful than others. No not careful, that’s definitely not the right word because all of them are careful. But some are on a political level really, really cautious and don’t want to take any political risk, and stop at a level at which I would continue. I personally go more with the – let’s call them – more aggressive NGOs, who would like to address the problems that we are

facing instead of the ones that just keep quiet. For me it is also, always, a political question as well.’ (Anton, interview 09/01/18)

No Political involvement

Some of my informants explicitly said that political involvement is not desirable, nor part of their job:

‘Well, you know, a nice aspect of an organization like the KNRM, is that it is not very political. Everyone has their own ideas, and these are left at home while we are engaged in this type of work.’ (Jan, interview 12/12/17)

The KNRM operates in the Netherlands. Before it started to train the Hellenic Rescue Team, it made an impact analysis to investigate whether it would lead to people ending their donations. It was explicitly mentioned on their website that the regular funds are not being used to provide the training in Greece. It is aware of the sensitivities regarding refugees in the Netherlands; the KNRM feels however that it is still impartial and outside of the political spectrum because it follows their goals: to save people from drowning and to train colleagues in the field of SAR.⁵

Giannis believes that solving the issues in the world is not part of the aim of his NGO. It is not possible to change the complex problems anyway, so it is better to stick to the main job of the HRT, to save people:

‘We cannot change things with respect to the political background in Europe and certainly not in the Middle East or in Africa. Our work is to help the people [that] need help at sea or on the mountain on our island.’ (Giannis, interview 10/01/18)

Involvement in politics is a risk, according to the volunteers of the Hellenic Rescue Team, since it would create more problems for the HRT because it might destroy the cohesion within the team. Athan thinks that involvement in politics in itself is already problematic and that his personal political involvement would lead to disagreements and in the end to the destruction of his team: ‘Everything that has to do with politics can mess things up, so it’s better to not

⁵ <https://www.knrm.nl/redders-helpen-redders/meer-informatie/veelgestelde-vragen-over-hulp-op-chios>.

participate with politicians.’ (Athan, interview 11/01/18) A related problem with political involvement is given with the consequences one faces when opposing the government:

‘I don’t do that [speak out negatively about the government]. When I would do something like that, it could well lead to the end of the team. It is very difficult to go against the government. Although we receive very little help from the government, it is nevertheless essential for the continuation of our activities. If we would go against the government, it would probably get worse.’ (Athan, interview 21/12/17)

Another problem would be that political involvement is interconnected to corruption, according to Giannis: ‘we have huge problems with corruption and that makes it very hard to deal with that’. (Giannis, interview 10/01/18) Giannis mentioned that it would be detrimental to their work to choose sides in politics. They need the cooperation with different parties to be able to do their job. He mentions that the HRT needs to be in the middle; taking a position in a political issue is not neutral: ‘We avoid taking sides politically. If you want to be in the middle, you cannot take a position in these matters.’ (Giannis, interview 10/01/18)

In summary, the informants that volunteer for the HRT were opposed to political involvement of their NGO. They think it is not part of their job, it will destroy the unity within the team, it can lead to repercussions from the Greek government, and/or they fear to get involved in corruption. Also Jan thinks it is desirable to leave one’s own political ideas outside of the NGO.

4.5.3. Theme 3: Cooperation

Jakob, Maike, Herman and Anton all strongly believe that bringing migrants to Europe is the only option. Returning migrants to Libya is morally wrong. Athan, however, is willing to return migrants to Turkey, if requested:

‘They come to Greece, they stayed in Greece. If I have the order to bring them to Turkey, I’ll bring them to Turkey. It depends on the orders that they give to the coast guards.’ (Athan, interview 11/01/18)

Maike and Jonas both refer to the need to follow humanitarian law. Within this legal framework, migrants should not be brought back to a place where their safety is on the line. According to Maike, Anton and Jakob, Libya is a failed state and the political situation is so

fragile that it is irresponsible to return migrants. In their opinion, this legitimizes the idea that not a single migrant should be brought back to Libya:

‘For us, the Libyan coast is definitely not an option at all. Libya is so unsafe and under humanitarian law we are obliged to provide all these people to seek asylum in a place of safety. And the nearest place of safety actually would be Italy.’ (Maike, interview 19/12/17)

Jakob, Anton and Herman feel that people should be able to move freely. People should be able to go where they wish to go. If migrants want to go to Europe, Jakob feels that he needs to help them getting them there. Saving people from drowning is the first priority for Maike. But as soon as a migrant is rescued, the second priority is to get them to a safe place. Maike, Herman as well Jakob mention that bringing migrants back to Libya means that they are brought into a situation where they are imprisoned with little food, where men are being sold and women forced into prostitution, and where men and women alike are tortured. For Maike working with the Libyan Coast Guard is difficult. She describes the strained relationship with them:

‘They also really endanger people’s lives by interfering. They are not at all equipped to conduct rescues in a proper way, in a safe way. They have no idea how to conduct search and rescue. So yes, we have a problem. They endanger people’s lives, they bring them back to Libya. They bring them back to the camp. And they really are not a coast guard. They get money from the European Union and from all shady businesses in which they are engaged. They are really unprofessional, basically; the only reason that they can call themselves the ‘coast guard’ is the mere fact that they control the port.’ (Maike, interview 09/12/17)

On the other hand, she does experience the cooperation with the Libyan air traffic control as more pleasant. According to her, this is partly because they are not into ‘political bullshit’. They are neutral and just doing their job, without any political interest. Also Anton and Herman are very skeptical about the modus operandi of the Libyan Coast Guard. Herman is sure that the Libyan Coast Guard collaborates with human traffickers, and Anton argues that the appearance of the Coast Guard is shady.

The European Union is also being criticized. Herman thinks that human trafficking is a direct result of the policies of the European Union. He argues that there are no legal alternatives to get to Europe.

In the interview Anton mentioned that the European Union is financing the Libyan Coast Guard, but that there is no one who knows where the money is spent on. Anton wants to bring migrants to Europe. However, the Italian Navy and Coast Guard are cooperating with the Libyan Coast Guard. According to him, the Italian Coast Guard and Navy keep migrants in place until the Libyan Coast Guard comes to return them to Libya. This should be considered as a breach of humanitarian law, which makes Italy part of an illegal action. These assumptions of Anton indicate that he has no intention of being neutral when there are violations against humanity.

Later on in the interview he explains he understands the frustrations of Italy, that it feels as if it is in this alone; the frustration of being stuck with migrants locked in Italy, not being distributed amongst EU member states. Not just Italy should take responsibility, but the European Union as a whole. Voicing criticism of other players in the field can also suggest that there are other factors at play that are more important to strive for than neutrality.

Jan also finds it problematic that migrants are stuck in a physical space. He believes European policies fail in getting people to mainland. Also Hector acknowledges that the 'imprisonment' of migrants creates more problems. Athan puts the EU responsibility in perspective by stating that it was not possible to be prepared for this kind of crisis. There is more to taking care of refugees than just handing out money. He thus acknowledges that it was a mess everywhere. Athan emphasizes that they have built good relations with other actors. The HRT held a party and invited Frontex to invest in their network. Cooperation with the coast guard agents is also good. They like to work with the HRT, because they are aware of their professionalism and expertise.

Herman emphasizes that they have no contact with human traffickers at all. Also other informants refer to the rumor that NGOs collaborate with traffickers as 'bullshit'. However, Herman thinks that desperate times call for desperate measures, even if that means one has to cooperate with players that one normally would rather avoid:

'What we have seen is guys with small boats, they wait for us to take the people off the rubber boat and then take the engines of and bring them back to Libya and sell it to the traffickers. And they collaborate with the traffickers and we collaborated with them. And of course, you cannot collaborate with someone who in Libya sells the engine to a trafficker. But I think in such a bad situation you should work with everybody.' (Herman, interview 08/01/18)

Within the concept of neutrality it is very important to be able and more importantly, willing, to work together with other actors. Another factor in neutrality is the degree to which someone is willing to publicly speak out against it (Fortsythe 2016). Whereas the KNRM and the HRT are investing in building relations with other actors, the other volunteers (those of migrant-centered NGOs) are not particularly interested in cooperating with actors that violate human rights. Neutrality might be important, fighting humanitarian breaches has a higher priority.

4.6. Conclusions

Looking at the results of the interviews, it seems that there are two types of NGOs. The first type is the rescue-centered NGO. Both the HRT and KNRM fit in this category and both NGOs already existed before the huge increase in the number of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea after 2013. The second group of NGOs can be described as migrant-centered NGOs, which were specifically founded to save lives in the recent humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea (Casumanu 2017). Both Cadus and Sea-Watch would fit this category.

There are clear distinctions between the two groups. However, it is also very clear that there are a lot of similarities. For a start, everyone wants to save lives at sea, regardless of who needs this help. A second similarity is that everyone feels a particular responsibility, which motivates them to get involved in Search and Rescue missions. A third similarity is that both groups contain people that feel motivated to do Search and Rescue, because of their knowledge and skills they can share. A majority of informants also recalls the crew and community as part of the personal benefits.

Although there are many similarities, there are also some differences between the two groups. Rescue-centered NGOs have different motivations for joining SAR compared to migrant-centered NGOs. Motivations were: being aware of the dangers (3⁶), feelings of responsibility for the area they live in (3), considering SAR as a hobby (2), staying connected to the sea, and explicitly referring to the benefits of equipment/training/education (4).

For the migrant-centered NGOs, the motivations are different. They feel they need to do something about failing politics. They feel discontentment with border policies (3), want to

⁶ Number of participants.

make a direct/bigger impact (2), have a sense of injustice/inequality (2), or feel the obligation to take responsibility as an EU citizen for the European Union (2), or being a watchdog.

Assuming that helping migrants is the aim of the organization, additional benefits matter less in joining SAR. It might be that the equipment, training and education is only a means to an end; the voluntary rescue service in the field is not merely a means in itself, it is also part of the goal.

The volunteers of the migrant-centered NGOs are more politically driven, in the sense that for everyone it is a motivation to become involved SAR. The Voluntary Coast Guard stressed the personal benefits. It is likely that if one considers SAR a hobby, training, education and equipment matter more as motivating factors. If, on the other hand, one is more politically motivated, the equipment, training and education is more of a tool used to reach one's aim. Regarding the responsibility towards the area volunteers live in, one can state that the HRT volunteers live on the islands themselves and therefore have a different connection to the Mediterranean area. They volunteer where they live and are constantly related to the area they dedicate their time to. The volunteers of Cadus and Sea-Watch did obviously not live in the area where they volunteered.

The volunteers of the rescue-centered NGOs are unanimously opposed to any political involvement of their NGO. They feel it is not part of the job (2), it carries risks such as corruption, disputes within the team, and problems with the NGO finances (3). They are also less outspoken about who is responsible for dealing with problems. Only one informant, Jan, states that Europe is failing in its policies to distribute refugees. One other volunteer mentions how problematic the detainment of refugees on the Greek islands is. One informant brings up the importance for the HRT of their relationships with other actors.

For the migrant-centered NGOs political involvement is necessary (2). Volunteers believe that Europe is responsible for some of the problems in the Mediterranean. They all feel that bringing migrants to Europe is the only option for them, as returning them to Libya is wrong because of the dangers that migrants face there (4) and the incompetence of the Libyan Coast Guard. They feel that migrants have the right to go to Europe, because they deserve the same rights as Europeans; some volunteers desire a borderless world (3).

An explanation for the rescue-centered NGO personnel not wanting to be politically involved might be that the connotation of Greek people with politics is highly problematic. They see politics as not part of their job, and find involvement is only troubling. NGOs that have the aim of changing government policies, have a harder time to give humanitarian aid on their terms (Minear & Weiss 1993:67).

The volunteers of the rescue-centered NGOs are not working in the same geographical space as the Libyan Coast Guard, nor do they experience the problems migrants face in Libya. For the migrant-centered volunteers, it is plausible that they are more critical of European policies, Libya and the Libyan Coast Guard, because part of their motivation already came from political discontentment regarding migration policies. When rescuing refugees is the primary motive driving these volunteers, it is likely that they are more critical. If people need to be saved, there is something they need to be saved from and someone causing the need for saviors. NGOs that follow a human right discourse are likely to form categories, such as victims, perpetrators and saviors (Perkowski 2016:332). In this respect, the European Union, those making the border policies, and the Libyan Coast Guard are clearly the perpetrators.

Chapter 5: Part 2, Document Analysis

The aim of this chapter is to answer the sub-question: ‘How do NGOs active in the Mediterranean Sea communicate on Twitter, regarding the issue of neutrality?’ Therefore, this chapter focuses on a description of relevant NGOs, the selection procedure – which NGOs have been used and why? – and the methods for analyzing their behavior. This is followed by a section dealing with the results of the analysis, and the preliminary conclusions.

5.1. The relevant NGOs

The selection of NGOs for the document analysis was based on the list as established for the interviews (see Table 4.1). Through snowball sampling, additional NGOs that were active at the Mediterranean Sea were added to the list. Subsequently, NGOs that did not have a Twitter account were excluded. Inclusion criteria were that the tweets had to be visible and accessible for those not following them, and that the tweets are in English, German or Dutch.

Table 5.1 contains a list of the selected NGOs. The table includes general information about their Twitter activity: the number of tweets and number of followers, the start of their activities, their Twitter account, and whether or not they retweet other NGOs involved in SAR. This information was collected so the data can be seen in the wider context of the more general activity on Twitter.

Table 5.1. *Selected NGOs, their account names, number of tweets, following and followers, start of activities and organizations they retweet.*

NGO	Twitter account	Tweets ⁷	#Following	#Followers	Start of activities	Retweet of other SAR NGOs
MOAS	@Moas_eu	66,993	1,633	20.9k	Dec 2013	
MSF	@MSF_Sea	10.6k	1,703	56.8k	April 2015	SOS-Méditerranée, Camsoscar (founder of Pro Activa), ICRC
Safe the Children	@Safe_children	12.5k	364	34.3k	Oct 2009	
Sea-Watch	@seawatchcrew	2,366	524	13.4k	Feb 2015	MSF_Sea, SOS Méditerranée, Oscar Camps, Jugend Rettet, Sea-Eye
Sea-Eye	@seaeyeorg	2,314	429	2,399	Feb 2016	
Cadus	@cadus_org	336	107	486	Sep 2015	Sea-Watch, Pro Activa Open Arms, Jugend rettet
SOS-Méditerranée	@SOSMEDGermany	1,261	543	4,035	Sep 2015	MSF Sea
Jugend rettet	@Jugendrettet	1,906	257	4,582	Sep 2015	SOS Méditerranée, MSF, Cadus, Pro Activa, Sea-Watch
Pro Activa Open Arms	@openarms_Fund	9,605	1,635	85.5k	March 2011	SOS Méditerranée, Sea-Watch
Stichting bootvluchteling	@bootvlucht	1,278	1,109	1,427	May 2015	
HRT	@HellenicRescueTeam	2,001	202	1,496	Sep2009	
	@HRTrescue	740	365	697	Feb 2014	
Norwegian society for sea rescue	@NSSR	11.4k	1051	6k	April 2009	
Royal national lifeboat institution	@RNLI	53.8k	12k	131k	March 2009	
KNRM	@KNRM	18.4k	381	48.4k	Dec 2009	
Emergency response centre International	@ERCIntl	956	979	1,071	Dec 2017	MSF Sea,
United rescue aid	@UnitedRescueAid	3358	239	507	July 2016	Pro Activa Sea-eye, Sea-Watch, SOS-Méditerranée, MSF Sea, MOAS

⁷ Number of tweets, followers and following are based on the numbers on May 15, 2018.

5.2. Selection procedure concerning neutrality of NGOs' Twitter communication

For the selection procedure of how neutral NGOs behave on Twitter, I started with the list of NGOs from Table 5.1. This table shows all the analyzed NGOs including their website and Twitter account. Data was collected from Twitter. I chose Twitter because it is a very accessible medium, often specifically used to express opinions, as also becomes clear in the company's mission statement: 'We believe in free expression and think every voice has the power to impact the world' (Twitter Values accessible through https://about.twitter.com/en_us/values.html). Everybody that has signed in and created an account, can write messages with a maximum length of 280 characters (until November 2017, the limit was 140 characters).

Twitter is used by 16 relevant NGOs (see Table 5.1). Twitter tweets can be used for, among others, fundraising; raising awareness; updating donors, volunteers and other interested people; and keeping in touch with other NGOs involved in SAR. The Twitter activities vary: some NGOs use their account on a daily basis, resulting in hundreds or even thousands of tweets; some twitter weekly, resulting in dozens of tweets; while some NGOs hardly use Twitter.

Although Facebook is also a prominent modern social media platform, it has not been included in this research. This is primarily because Twitter and Facebook are often inter-linked accounts, which results in a lot of double messages. Therefore, I chose to use only one medium. Twitter was more accessible for research, because the messages are more compact. Twitter is a medium that can produce disruptions/interruptions of dominant narratives (Siapera et al. 2018). This makes it interesting to research the notion of neutrality through Twitter because neutrality implies not taking sides in a political controversy; Twitter is a medium highly suitable for doing this.

The selection of messages is based on a six months' timeframe. Based on a period of six months, trends and parallels can be distinguished. Furthermore, a six month period is, despite the large number of tweets, still comprehensive. The timeframe for the analysis was December 15, 2017, until May 15, 2018. If an NGO was not active during that timeframe, its website was accessed to find more information about its activities. In that case I looked at the last six months of the period in which this particular NGO was active in the Mediterranean.

I left out, as already mentioned, all tweets that were not in English, Dutch or German. For purposes of analysis, I read all tweets from this six month period. I specifically collected

those tweets that seemed to be in contradiction to the concept of neutrality. This means I did not save general posts on (daily) updates about the mission, trainings, tweets about raising funds or any other non-SAR related activities. A list of saved tweets can be found in Appendix 1: Transcript of Tweets. The collection and analysis were both qualitative in nature; this issue is further elaborated in the Chapter 8.

Another dimension of the analysis is whether or not NGOs retweeted messages from other NGOs involved in SAR, or any other tweets from political parties or third parties involved in the Mediterranean.

I also looked at the Twitter pages to see how NGOs describe their own activities, in other words to see how NGOs identify themselves. Analyzing personal profiles gives the possibility to research presentations of the self and reputation management (McCay-Peet et al. 2016:21). What words are used to describe one's own organization, what is the target group, and which terms are used to describe the activities?

This research method has a qualitative characters and no intention to produce generalizable outcomes. It is aimed to verify the data found in Part 1 and Part 3, to see if there are any discrepancies.

5.3. Method of analysis

On a Twitter profile anyone can explain in a rather limited number of words who they are and what they do. This is what I refer to as the introductions of the NGOs. These introductions were copied from their Twitter profile and for coding purposes put in the qualitative software program Atlas.ti. I coded these texts by analyzing how they describe themselves as an organization, their activities and their subjects or targets. Paragraph 3.4 shows table Table 5.2: 'assessed neutrality of verbs and subjects'. This table contains an exhaustive collection of verbs and subjects that the NGOs have used to describe themselves and/or their activities. I categorized these verbs and subjects into three categories: 'more or less neutral', 'less neutral' and 'clearly not neutral'. The verbs and subjects are included in Table 5.2. In order to assess the level of neutrality, the political connotations of verbs and subjects is taken into account. As there is an international political debate going on about refugees in the Mediterranean Sea, the word 'refugee' or 'migrant' in itself has a strong political connotation (Crawley & Skleparis 2017). However, there are also words for which this connotation is less clear. Therefore I have also taken into account the level of projected agency. 'Providing' has a

relatively more neutral connotation than ‘helping’. This is because there is more equality between the person who provides aid and the one who receives aid, than ‘helping’ in which there is a big power imbalance between the two. The more targets of NGOs are described as in need of help and saving or as victims, the less agency the subject has. The words ‘helping’, ‘rescuing’ and ‘saving’ give little agency to the subject. Which in turn contributes to the neo-colonial idea of the ‘good’ European vs. the ‘helpless’ victim (Cuttitta 2017:13-14). However, it can be argued that the categories are to an extent arbitrary and dependent on the researcher.

After assessing the neutrality of the introduction I tried to assess the level of neutrality of the tweet content. The next step was to save all tweets of NGOs that could suggest they were not neutral; later on these were transcribed. Images and news articles that were attached to the tweets were also transcribed. Atlas.ti was used to open code the tweets.

The tweets were analyzed according to the principles of neutrality as formulated by the Red Cross. It argues that one should refrain from expressing (political) opinions and that neutrality has to be visible in relation to politics. One should have no public political judgement in order to be seen and accepted as neutral, according to the ICRC (Van Mierop 2015). Being critical towards specific actors, countries or treaties can thus be seen as contradicting the principle of neutrality; therefore I first analyzed tweets that were critical regarding what sorts of critiques they entailed.

In addition to critical outings through Twitter, one can also examine other non-neutral responses of NGOs to political debates. First, exposing can be regarded as being non-neutral, since one should not publicly judge. However, ‘as long as public messages are based on factual data and first-hand witnessing, and are addressed to relevant actors in an even-handed manner, this type of advocacy cannot be seen as contradicting the principle of neutrality’ (Van Mierop 2015:302). Furthermore, participation in demonstrations can be seen as an expression of sympathy for a movement or cause and this is far from neutral (The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent 1996:9). Thirdly, the Red Cross argues that volunteers should be willing to talk to corrupt officials, even those who are responsible for breaking humanitarian law. Finally, the Red Cross argues that politics could be poisonous for the notion of neutrality, indicating that advocating for specific policies or changing policies is by definition not neutral (The Fundamental Principles 1996:9). Therefore, I have also analyzed tweets by NGOs on matters of (advocating for) demonstrations, breaking the law, exposure, and political change.

5.4. Results

The results of the analysis are divided into two sub-sections. The first section addresses the content analysis of how NGOs present themselves on Twitter. In the second section the results of the analysis of tweets are discussed.

5.4.1. The introduction to NGO accounts

Not all NGOs used their introduction on Twitter to specifically describe what they do and for whom; in general they describe what kind of organization they are. In the following section all the words and terms that are being used in the Twitter accounts are described. First, the verbs as used by the NGOs are being analyzed, followed by the term used for the subject.

Words are usually not neutral since they already contain a specific connotation and are part of a discourse (Agier 2010:32; Crawley & Skleparis 2018). However, some words and notions might seem more neutral than others. I will use the prevalence of certain words to assess the level of neutrality (See table 5.2: assessed neutrality of verbs and subjects). With the assessed words I will make an indication of the level of neutrality of the respective NGOs.

Table 5.2. *Assessed neutrality of verbs and subjects*

	Verbs	Subjects/targets
More or less neutral	Performing SAR To set sail	Lives Others Boats People Children
Less neutral	Sharing skills Providing emergency response Assisting	People fleeing (war) Hunger Persecution
Clearly not neutral	Saving Helping Rescue of lives Protecting the lives Providing help Help saving	Refugees and migrants Vulnerable people fleeing

Based on the categorization of verbs and subjects, I could categorize the way in which NGOs present themselves on Twitter. Interestingly, both HRT and NSSR did not describe themselves in terms of their actions and target population at the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, they are regarded as neutral. Both Jugend Rettet and DGzRS did use more or less

neutral wordings to describe themselves and their actions, whereas SOS-Méditerranée, United Rescue Aid, NLI, ERCI and KNRM are (slightly) more likely to describe themselves in words that are less neutral. There are only a few NGOs that clearly did not use neutral verbs and/or subjects to describe themselves: Pro Activa, Sea-Watch, MOAS, MSF and Stichting Bootvluchteling. These latter NGOs can all be described as migrant-centered NGOs, whereas the NGOs that were (more or very) neutral are a mix of both migrant-centered and rescue-centered NGOs.

Two other findings are worth mentioning. First, some NGOs have formulated a goal in their introduction on Twitter that goes beyond rescuing people in the water, such as #SafeAndLegalRoutes (Moas), #SafePassage (Sea-Watch), and ‘redefine global solidarity’ (Cadus). For those three NGOs the reason of existence is to save refugees (migrant-centered), but their aim goes beyond saving them at sea, since they also propagate policy changes.

5.4.2. An analysis of the tweets

NGOs that only tweeted about (daily) updates of the mission, trainings, fund raising or any other non-SAR related activities were the Hellenic Rescue Team, the Norwegian Society for Sea Rescue (NSSR), the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (NLI), the Royal Netherlands Sea Rescue Institution (KNRM) and Emergency Response Centre International. Emergency Response Centre International does post pictures of boats with migrants. These can all be classified as rescue-centered NGOs.

Amongst the NGOs that posted tweets with content that could be considered less neutral, it was clear that most NGOs share common critiques. There are critical tweets on the behavior of the European Union, and on the policies of various countries such as Libya, Italy, Germany and Turkey. Furthermore, the behavior of the Libyan Coast Guard ‘dirty’ deals are met with critique. These critiques can be followed by particular responses. Responses of the NGOs are categorized in demonstrations, breaking the law and exposing or accusing. These established critiques and responses are discussed below.

Criticism

In general, it was found that critical tweets are aimed in four directions, namely critical of the European Union, critical of individual countries (e.g. Libya, Germany, Italy and/or Turkey), critical of the Libyan Coast Guard, and critical of deals. Table 5.3 shows the prevalence of these four types of critical tweets per NGO. In the sections below, it will be explained what these types of critical tweets entail. As one can see, some NGOs refrain from stating critical

opinions via Twitter. It is noteworthy that none of the so-called rescue-centered NGOs (KNRM, DGzRS, NLI, HRT and NSSR) engage in critical tweets.

Table 5.3. *Prevalence of different types of critiques per NGO.*

NGO	Critical of the European Union	Critical of individual countries	Critical of the Libyan Coast Guard	Critical of deals
Cadus	x	x		
Pro-Activa	x	x	x	x
Jugend Rettet	x	x	x	x
Stichting Bootvluchteling	x			
Safe the Children	x			
Sea Eye	x		x	x
Sea-Watch	x	x	x	x
SOS-Mediterranée	x			
Rescue Aid United	x	x	x	x
MOAS				
MSF				
KNRM				
DGzRS				
NLI				
HRT				
NSSR				

Criticism of the European Union

In most of the tweets there is a lot of critique on the European Union. Most critique is about EU cooperation with the Libyan Coast Guard. For example, Jugend Rettet has posted the following tweet: ‘What does it take the EU political decision-makers to state their failure to protect refugees and migrants and rethink their cooperation with #LibyanCoastGuard? This is complicity of pull backs!’ (Jugend Rettet, Tweet 15/03/18). A second point of criticism is about the forced returns of migrants to Libya, in particular the involvement of the European Union in enforcing this return:

‘A Pull-back by PROXY. By strengthening the Libyan Coast Guards, the EU is outsmarting humanitarian law. The non-refoulement principal is violated, people are brought back to Libya. This is NO harbor of safety for people in need of protection! #RechtaufFlucht #SafePassage.’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet 18/04/18)

Another example is a tweet from Sea-Watch: ‘Survivors state unspeakable conditions in Libya after being intercepted and pulled back: Sea-Watch condemns the EU policy facilitating forcible returns to Libya’ (Sea-Watch 26/04/18).

More critiques are pointing at the negligence of the EU. According to NGOs, Europe is neglecting its duties towards humanity, but also its duty to ensure the necessary safety for NGOs involved in SAR to do their job. The hashtag *#NotaTarget* refers to NGOs who find themselves sometimes unsafe during their activities at sea. Some NGOs state that the European Union should take responsibility for its partners. Therefore, the mistakes of the Libyan Coast Guard are also considered the mistakes of the European Union. The following three tweets are questioning the responsibility the EU should take in the manner. There are however differences in the (assumed) tone of the tweet. In respective order they seem more critical. Sea Watch uses the words dirty deals and directly accuses the EU of violating human rights. ‘The #EU shares responsibility for its partners’ violations of human rights: No more dirty deals- #Libya is not a safe haven!’ (Sea-Watch, tweet 25/04/18). Jugend Rettet is emphasizing that the lack of responsibility from the EU has been forestalled by SAR NGOs. ‘This is a further step towards criminalization of NGOs which are daily substituting EUs responsibility of saving lives at the European external borders’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet19/03/18). MOAS is more reserved, they ‘only’ mention that there is a need for change. ‘Humanitarian rescue vessels in the Mediterranean are #NotaTarget, EU leaders should make sure they can carry out rescues safe’ (MOAS, tweet 19/08/17).

A fourth point of criticism is the complicity of the refugee policies of the EU, according to some tweets, such as ‘Such pull-backs by proxy are happening and it is known. Complicity of the EU? @EUparliament #LibyanCoastGuard #safepassagenow’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet 04/03/18).

Another point of criticism deals with a more general disagreement with the EU asylum and migration policies. Some even go so far as to call the European Union hypocritical, ‘The EU’s migration hypocrisy in Africa (Sea Eye 31/01/18) or indifferent ‘People are drowning in Europe’s indifference!’ (SOS-Mediterranée, tweet 28/01/18)

A final point of criticism is that Europe is spreading a different (read: wrong) messages among its citizens, the general public. Jugend Rettet accuses the EU of not properly keeping track of the number of casualties or people fleeing from Libya. According to Jugend Rettet the EU is trying to keep it silent that people are trying to escape from human rights violations in Libya.

Criticizing individual countries

Not only the European Union as such is a topic of critique, the policies of individual countries like Italy and Germany, as well as non-EU members Turkey and Libya, are also being criticized. Libya is referred to as a regime where people are tortured: ‘Actions by Libyan coast guard is once again endangering people. Who does EU want to collaborate with the regime’ (United Rescue Aid, tweet 15/03/18). Another example of such a tweet is:

‘Retweet Oscar Camps. SOS 40 miles off Libyan coast by 150 people adrift. While our rescue boats assist them, a Libyan patrol paid and supported by Italy, approaches to push them back again to torture in Libya. Europe funds pushbacks and puts all of us in danger.’ (Sea-Watch, tweet 11/03/18)

In addition to Libya, specific European countries are also being criticized. According to a tweet from Rescue Aid United (15/12/17), Germany is bribing its way out of a tricky situation. That Germany is bribing its way out seems speculative and is therefore considered not neutral.

Italy is also the subject of critical tweets:

‘Does Italy accuse us of avoiding a push back when Italy is condemned by European Court of Human Rights for returning Libya migrants of a boat by Libyans coast guard? If we had done so, it would’ve been another conviction for Italy. They thank us with a punishment!’ (Pro Activa, tweet 21/03/18)

Criticizing the Libyan Coast Guard

The Libyan Coast Guard is often referred to in quotation marks, as ‘Libyan Coast Guard’ or with ‘so called’ attached to it. It shows the author of the tweet is probably questioning the authority, legitimacy and professionalism of the Libyan Coast Guard. The first critique deals with the way in which it operates, which is dangerous for NGOs involved in SAR as well as for migrants. For example:

‘This statement by the so-called #LibyanCoastGuard isn’t surprising. Italy and EU are cooperating with them to close the central Mediterranean route. Now we see how: Repressive measures. Less rescue ships, more deaths at sea!’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet 22/03/18).

A second point of critique is that the Libyan Coast Guard disobeys the MRCC (Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre) and international law. The tweet that accused the Libyan Coast Guard of disobedience came from SOS-Méditerranée (tweet 27/01/18). According to this tweet SOS-Méditerranée personally witnessed an interception and heard the screams and calls from the dinghy. They were sent away and denied to provide assistance. The principle of neutrality is not necessary violated if the information comes first hand.

A third, and related point of criticism is that the Libyan Coast Guard breaks the law and is thought to be involved in criminal activities. This seems, however maybe likely, speculative, and can therefore be seen as less neutral:

‘What we wonder nowadays is, are the European policymakers really as blind as they seem, or like we suspect if... (The intercept.com: Europe’s plan to close its Sea borders relies on Libya’s coast guard. European governments are financing, training and coordinating with a force that is involved in smuggling and human rights abuses).’ (Rescue Aid United, tweet 27/11/17)

Criticizing deals

Words and hashtags such as ‘dirty’, ‘toxic’ or ‘schmutzige’ are used to describe various agreements and treaties. The word ‘deal’ in itself already holds a different connotation than the word ‘treaty’. Two agreements are specifically criticized. The first is the Turkey deal, the second the deal with Libya. According to some, both Turkey and Libya are not countries that one should make deals with. Some NGOs believe that people should have the right to cross the border. This right should not be restricted by any deals: ‘We say No to all dirty deals of the EU with other countries in order to stop human mobility! #’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet 17/03/18). Some of the NGOs refer to the Turkey deal. They still tweet about it two years after the deal has been made, perhaps to show that they haven’t forgotten about it:

‘We will repeat our demands to the political decision-makers, we won’t be silent: against dirty EU deals on border control and migration ‘management’- for the right to seek protection and asylum! #rechtaufFlucht. (as a respond to: ‘RSA @rspagean. 2 years since the announcement of the EU-Turkey ‘deal’, @ProAsyl and @rspagean Campaign highlight how the concept of ‘safe third country’ was manipulated so that asylum-seekers would be returned to Turkey under this toxic ‘deal’ #StopTheToxicDeal #Refugees....’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet 18/03/18)

Other examples of tweets addressing the Turkey deal are: ‘Europe has deemed Turkey safe but it is purely motivated by politics and not facts. #dirtydeal. (Amnesty press)’ (Rescue Aid United 18/11/17) and ‘Turkey is a safe country only on paper- if that #turkey #dirtydeal’ (Rescue Aid United, tweet 02/12/17).

In various tweets, the agreement between the European Union and Libya is also described in negative terms. This deal is often mentioned as the ‘pullbacks’. In quite a lot of tweets NGOs speak of ‘illegal’ and ‘inhuman’ pull backs. These pullbacks are part of a deal between Italy and Libya. The deal entails that migrant boats have to be stopped and the people on them have to be brought back to Libya, against their will. This deal was endorsed by European leaders. In return for the efforts of the Libyan Coast Guard of bringing the migrant boats back to Libya, they are being trained, equipped and financed. According to Jugend Rettet (tweet 08/05/18) the EU is outsmarting International Humanitarian Law with this deal. With their tweets they mentioned that they want to change the discourse on refugees and their rights.

Responses

In addition to critical tweets, some NGOs also use Twitter to respond to political challenges. I have categorized four types of responses (see Table 5.4). In the sections below, I will elaborate on these types and what they entail. Similarly to the usage of critical tweets, none of the rescue-centered NGOs (KNRM, DGzRS, NLI, HRT and NSSR) use Twitter to respond to political challenges.

Table 5.4. *Prevalence of different type responses per NGO.*

NGO	Demonstration	Breaking the law	Exposing/accusing	Political change
Cadus	x			
Pro-Activa		x	x	
Jugend Rettet	x		x	x
Stichting Bootvluchteling				
Safe the Children				
Sea Eye	x		x	x
Sea-Watch	x		x	
SOS-Mediterranée	x		x	
Rescue Aid United	x	x	x	x
MOAS				
MSF				
KNRM				

Demonstrations

Sometimes tweets are used for demonstrations. Jugend Rettet used twitter to inform followers of certain demonstrations in which they can take part. Another usage of twitter is to inform their followers that the NGO themselves have been active in a demonstration, as done by Sea Eye (tweet, 03/03/18). The demonstration doesn't necessarily have to be in public life, but can also be a virtual reality. Cadus participated in a social media action day to speak out against the cooperation between the European Union and the Libyan Coast Guard. Cadus worked to raise awareness together with other NGOs such as Sea-Watch, Alarmphone, SOS-Méditerranée, Solidarity at Sea, Jugend Rettet, Borderline Europ, and Resqship.

Breaking the law

In the introduction of this thesis it has been addressed that some NGOs do not always live up to the law. One prominent reason for NGOs to break the law is that they refuse to hand over people to the authorities, if they suspect migrants are going to be in danger:

‘Good morning, the #OpenArms heading North waiting for instructions. As we refused to hand over rescued people to the Libyans, as the European Protocol states, currently we haven't got assigned a European port yet. @hrtsea’ (Pro Activa, tweet 16/03/18).

Jugend Rettet lost its vessel *Iuventa*, because it refused to sign the Code of Conduct as formulated by the Italian authorities. Not signing this Code, automatically led to breaking humanitarian law. After the confiscation of *Iuventa*, quite a number of other SAR NGOs shared their support for Jugend Rettet.

Exposing / accusation

NGOs also use Twitter to expose particular behavior of other parties whose conduct they consider inhumane. In plenty of tweets one can see the condemnation of actions by the Libyan Coast Guard and the European Union. Sea-Watch is one of the NGOs who use twitter with the

aim of exposing human rights violations. They explicitly mention that they will monitor the situation on Sea and will work with journalists to speak out about the ‘human atrocities’ happening at Europe’s borders (Sea-Watch, tweet 14/04/18). Sometimes NGOs expose problems they face real time at sea, perhaps in order to find a quicker solution:

‘#breaking Libyan coastguards, 73 miles off Libyan coast, are threatening our ship, a ship, an European-flag one, to target us unless we transfer them the women and children we have already rescued’ (Pro Activa, tweet 15/03/18).

Political change

Some NGOs also use Twitter as a medium to express their political views and ideology, and to change policies. These are clear examples of abandoning neutrality. The following tweet is a typical example regarding political views:

‘For us as JUGEND RETTET it is clear that an inhumane migration policy, right wing populism and racism are no options. But it is precisely these positions that we are seeing increasing in strength in Europe’s society’. (Jugend Rettet, tweet 24/04/18)

Some tweets are aimed at changing policies, or to bring certain problems to the political table. Jugend Rettet (tweet 27/02/18) used Twitter to point attention towards the EU. They requested the EU to change policies. They came forward with a joint statement of SAR NGOs active in the Mediterranean, in order to establish a voluntary Code of Conduct for Search and Rescue NGOs in the European Parliament. Other explicit examples of tweets that are aimed at changing policies are:

‘We will repeat our demands to the political decision-makers, we won’t be silent: against dirty EU deals on border control and migration ‘management’ - for the right to seek protection and asylum!’ (Jugend Rettet 18/03/18) and ‘rechtaufFlucht (Right to flee and seek protection) must be at center of our political debate. Forced migration is not voluntarily, think twice before you build walls. No fortress Europe, but humanitarian corridors!’ (Jugend Rettet, tweet 28/01/18)

Twitter is also used by NGOs to express an ideology, particularly the idea of a borderless world without nation states. This is arguable quite a contested ideal, not necessarily connected to the work of SAR. Contesting the notion of ownership is controversial too. Jugend Rettet tweeted a picture saying: ‘No borders, freedom of movement refugees welcome no nations’

with the caption of “Mare liberum” and the text ‘We say to all dirty deals of the EU with other countries or stop human mobility #rechtaufflucht #17m18actionday’. (Jugend Rettet, tweet 17/03/18)

What is remarkable is that the tweet below on ownership has very little to do with SAR and the area it is involved with, but Rescue Aid United advocates its position through Twitter. Another example of such a tweet that aims to change policy is the following:

‘Occupying property often divides- since so many people view ownership as something, that shouldn’t be challenged. We disagree with ownership, since that denies the fact that people aren’t on equal footing to begin with. One of the groups with least possibilities to own property, are displaced people. In Greece- as well in many other places around our planet- thousands of newly arrived people, are living in qualor you can’t possibly imagine, unless you have been there yourself. The reason for this situation lies always on the people in power- which is why occupying offices of political parties, is extremely befitting. United supports the aim of the protest and stand in #Solidarity with the occupants. Change is ours if we make it happen.’ (Rescue Aid United, tweet 28/11/17)

Some tweets are far from neutral and highly controversial, for example by comparing a refugee camp to Guantanamo Bay:

‘30 nov 2017 Concentrationcamp, Guantanamo Bay of Europe and hell. Just a few words used to try to describe #Moria. All. (imga Greece’s lesbos’ Guantanamo Bay of Europe for refugees)’ (Rescue Aid United, tweet 31/11/17)

5.5. Conclusions

Sixteen of the SAR NGOs use Twitter as a medium to introduce themselves and to send a message to the wider public. The first part of the analysis shows that most NGOs use somewhat neutral wordings to describe their activities and their targets in the Mediterranean Sea. In their introduction on Twitter, most NGOs do not want to portray themselves as politically engaged. However, some NGOs use words with a clear political connotation that project less agency to their targets. Three NGOs openly state in their introduction that they want to contribute to policy changes. NGOs that are clearly less neutral in their wording, all are migrant-centered NGOs. The NGOs that are (semi-)neutral are rescue-centered as well as migrant-centered NGOs.

With regard to the analysis of the tweets, some of the messages are very neutral and not all NGOs engage in critical tweets or political responses. In that case tweets are mainly updates on operations, technicalities, and practice-related topics. However, other messages suggest that the principle of neutrality is abandoned. This is especially the case for some migrant-centered NGOs. Most migrant-centered NGOs occasionally tend to communicate critique or political responses via Twitter. There are only a few (migrant-centered) NGOs that regularly post clearly non-neutral messages.

Against the background of the guidelines as formulated by the ICRC, there are clear examples of violations of the principle of neutrality. This does not apply to all NGOs, however. Although most migrant-centered NGOs occasionally engage in critical statements or other non-neutral responses, it does not look like a strategic and conscious decision to come across as not being neutral. However, a few migrant-centered NGOs continuously use Twitter to advocate for the position of refugees, criticize the Libyan Coast Guard, as well as individual countries, treaties and the European Union. Furthermore, they post about demonstrations, breaking the law, exposing and accusing actors and advocating political change. These NGOs consciously express a non-neutral political stance.

The NGOs that are rescue-centered have not expressed critique or other political non-neutral responses through Twitter. A possible explanation for the differences in behavior on Twitter for the various NGOs might have to do with their *raison d'être*. On the one hand rescue-centered NGOs have not specifically been founded to rescue migrants at sea. Therefore, their cash flows and public support might be endangered if they openly engage in political debates on migrants/refugees. For migrant-centered NGOs this is more complex, and within this group more variance is visible. Where some NGOs strongly engage in political debates, others tend to be more neutral. This might depend on their constituents, donors, other funding or the goals they formulated when they were founded.

Another possible explanation for some migrant-centered NGOs to be clearly less neutral than other NGOs, might be that if they act neutral they are seen by others as condoning inhumane policies and behavior towards refugees. By speaking out about violations of humanitarian law or human rights, they are forced to move away from neutrality in order to make a difference.

A third possible explanation might be that they want to change the public discourse. Whereas the mainstream media are rather negative in regard to the refugee crisis (Siapera et al. 2018), migrant-centered NGOs are more involved in changing the dominant narrative by offering a different view on the matter.

Chapter 6: Part 3, Survey

This there starts with a section on the methods, followed by the results of the analysis and a conclusion. The overall aim of this chapter is to answer the sub-question: What do volunteers of NGOs think of neutrality and what importance do they give to it?

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants of the survey

Participants were people that work for or volunteer in the field of Search and Rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea. They have been active in this field during periods of one up to 23 years. They are volunteers of various NGOs (see Table 6.1). In total 60 people have participated in the survey, 29 of which have completed the survey. Those participants who dropped out before answering the questions regarding neutrality, have been excluded from further analysis. Of the remaining participants, two people did not finish the survey, although they did answer questions on neutrality. Therefore, they have been used for the analysis, but their demographic characteristics were not available.

Table 6.1. *Proportion of respondents per NGO (N=29)*⁸

NGOs	Proportion respondents
HRT	28%
Sea-Watch	31%
Jugend Rettet	17%
KNRM	7%
Humanitarian Pilot Initiative	3%
Norwegian Rescue Society	3%
Save the children	3%
Mission Life Line & Sea-Watch	3%
Jugend Rettet & Mare Liberum	3%

Table 6.2 shows the demographic variables of the participants, excluding those two participants that did not finish the survey. The average age is 35 years, the proportion of females is relatively small (26%), only a small proportion has a religious background (Christian, Catholic, Church of England, orthodox) and the sample is predominantly highly educated, although for three participants the education level is missing.

⁸ Please note: The percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounded numbers.

With regards to nationality, the sample is predominantly German (see Table 6.3). The second largest proportion was Greek. Other nationalities are Dutch, Swiss, Australian, Italian, Norwegian and Portuguese.

Table 6.2 *Demographic characteristics (N=27)*

Demographic variables	Mean / proportion
Age	35.4 (<i>sd</i> = 11.553)
Proportion female	26%
Proportion religious affiliated	33%
Education (<i>N</i> =24)	
Proportion completed high school	16%
Proportion some college education	21%
Proportion completed college	63%

** As for two participants, the demographic characteristics were not available, they were not taken into account for the means or proportions.*

Table 6.3 *Nationality (N=27)*

Nationality	Proportion of respondents
German	44%
Greek	22%
Dutch	7%
Swiss	7%
Australian	4%
Italian	4%
Norwegian	4%
Portuguese	4%
British	4%

** As for two participants, the demographic characteristics were not available, they were not taken into account for the means or proportions.*

6.1.2. Selection procedure of respondents

The selection of NGOs for the survey was based on the list as established for the interviews (see Table 4.1). Through snowball sampling, additional NGOs that were active at the Mediterranean Sea were added to the list. For the final list of all organization, see Table 4.1.

I e-mailed these organizations (see Appendix 3) to ask if they would be willing to participate in this research by filling out the survey. I informed them that it would only take five to ten minutes of their time and asked if they could spread it among their personnel. Furthermore, I e-mailed my informants, those I interviewed earlier (see Part 1) separately. Two weeks after putting my survey online, the response rate was still very low (14 people); therefore I

contacted the e-mail list again. I also contacted my informants that added me on Facebook or Skype (in order to do the interviews) and asked them if they could help me to increase the response rate. One of the informants posted my message on the Facebook and WhatsApp group of colleagues he used to work with. He also informed me that it was posted in the online newsletter of Sea-Watch. After another three weeks the response had increased to 60 people.

At the end of the survey people were sent an email to thank them for their cooperation, but also to ask them if they would be willing to send my survey to colleagues or other people they knew of that worked in the field of SAR in the Mediterranean. The effect of this snowball sampling is not measurable.

Despite all the various initiatives on my part, the final response rate is still relatively low. One of the informants explained that currently neutrality is a very sensitive topic for volunteers, given some cases in court involving some NGOs, such as the one mentioned in the introduction. Therefore, in the end this part is more explorative in character. The results cannot be generalized, but they do map how volunteers think about neutrality and in that way might show discrepancies and similarities compared to how NGOs behave on Twitter (see Part 2).

6.1.3. The survey

The survey, created with Qualtrics, consists of four parts: background in SAR, attitudes towards neutrality, possible exceedance of neutrality, and demographic characteristics. (Appendix 3 contains the full survey) The first part of the survey (background in SAR) was used to establish for which NGO a participant works and how many years he/she has been active in the field of Search and Rescue.

For the second part, dealing with attitudes towards neutrality, 12 items have been constructed. These items are based on the results of the document analysis and the theoretical framework. Participants had to indicate to what extent they agreed with particular statements on a 7-point Likert-scale (from 1=strongly agree, to 7=strongly disagree). Examples of such statements are 'NGOs should treat the people who suffer equally' and 'NGOs should make an effort to be seen as neutral'. Some items (in particular 2, 7, 8 and 9) were reverse-coded, to avoid response set.

In the third part of the questionnaire, participants were presented with more specific statements on NGO actions and activities related to neutrality. The goal of this part was to examine the attitudes towards the possible exceedance of neutrality from the perspective of

participants; what is (not) acceptable for their NGO in light of neutral behavior. These cases of possible exceedance of neutrality were based on interviews and the document analysis. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with those twelve statements on the 7-point Likert-scale as described above. Examples are, ‘My NGO should not be cooperating with the Libyan Coast Guards’ and ‘My NGO should use the media when they encounter human right violations’.

Finally, demographic characteristics were asked, such as gender (female, male, other), age, nationality, level of education⁹, religious affiliation and political preference. Participants were asked to indicate their political preferences on a slide from left to right (the more left, the more left wing; the more right, the more right wing).

6.1.4. Measures and method of analysis

‘Neutrality’ has been measured by the items for attitudes towards neutrality.¹⁰ The first step was to mirror the reverse coded items. In this way, all items were in the same direction. Subsequently, a reliability analysis has been conducted. The inter-item correlation was relatively low ($\alpha=.687$). The analysis showed that deleting item 7 (‘My NGO should engage in public shaming when they encounter human right violations’) would improve the inter-item correlation. Therefore, item 7 was deleted from further analysis ($\alpha=.749$). The inter-item correlation now indicates that the items measure the same underlying construct. To quantify neutrality, a mean score of 11 items for each participant was calculated. Then the mean score was reverse coded to obtain values where a higher score represents more support of the notion of neutrality.

‘Type of affiliation’ is based on the information for which NGO a participant works. As shown in Part 1, a distinction can be made between types of NGOs, namely those merely focusing on rescue operations of drowning people in general (rescue-centered) and those that focus specifically on rescue operations and aiding of refugees (migrant-centered). In this light it is interesting to examine differences between these two groups regarding the endorsement of neutrality. An independent sample t-test has been used to examine whether there are differences between these two groups. One respondent worked for Humanitarian Pilot Initiative. It was impossible to establish the type of affiliation of this NGO, therefore this person has been not included in the analysis.

⁹ Answer options: none, some elementary, elementary, some high school, high school, high school grad, some college, college, other.

¹⁰ Common practice is to treat a variable based on Likert-scale items as interval.

‘Political orientation’ (on a scale of 1 to 100) is used as a predictor of neutrality. The correlation (Pearson) between political orientation and neutrality has been examined. Three participants were excluded from this part of the analysis, as they did not answer this question.

‘Attitudes towards possible exceedance of neutrality’ were measured by the responses to the various statements as described earlier. It was examined to what extent support of neutrality would predict support of practical examples of the limits of neutrality for an NGO. To do so, the items were reverse coded so as to ensure that a higher score would indicate more support of that particular statement. As both these items and the items for neutrality were measured on a 7-point scale, the Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between the twelve items and neutrality. Furthermore, an independent sample t-test was used to determine whether support of these statements differed for the types of affiliation (pro-refugee vs refugee-neutral). As three participants refrained from answering these items, they had to be excluded from this analysis.

6.2. Results

Due to the relatively small sample size, it is important to note that the results have to be interpreted with caution. One of the main findings is that, on average, participants are slightly more supportive of neutrality ($m=4.47$, $sd=0.892$, $N=29$), than the neutral midpoint 4 ($t(28)=2.840$, $p=.008$). The refugee-neutral and pro-refugee groups differ significantly in their stance towards neutrality ($t(26)=3.825$, $p=.001$). Participants affiliated with NGOs that are refugee-neutral are more supportive of neutrality ($m=5.10$, $sd=0.552$, $N=11$), than participants that are associated with NGOs that are pro-refugee ($m=4.02$, $sd=0.821$, $N=17$). This seems to indicate that, on average, participants that are associated with NGOs that are pro-refugee are not in favor, nor against neutrality.

On average the respondents are (more) politically left-wing oriented ($m=26.19$, $sd=23.041$, $N=26$). The Pearson correlation between political orientation (1=left, 100=right) and neutrality is $.452$ ($p=.021$), indicating that participants who are more right-wing oriented are more supportive of neutrality than those who are more left-wing oriented.

With regards to the items measuring attitudes towards possible exceedance of neutrality, almost all items show an association with neutrality (see Table 6.4). All significant correlations are in the expected direction; the more neutrality is supported, the more one wants one’s ‘own’ NGO to behave neutral. Three items did not, however, correlate with neutrality: ‘My NGO should be able to communicate with human traffickers’, ‘My NGO

should stay in the mission area even if our presence leads to more refugees crossing the Mediterranean’, and ‘My NGO should use the information gathered at sea to use in the political debate on refugees’. This seems to indicate that rather than neutrality, another factor predicts how NGO personnel supports such actions.

Table 6.4. Means, standard deviations of attitudes towards possible exceedance of neutrality and correlations with neutrality

Statement	m	sd	r neutrality	N
1. My NGO should allow me to participate in a demonstration concerning migration policies	6.15	1.515	-.533 (<i>p</i> =.005)	26
2. My NGO should not influence refugee policies	2.85	2.148	.468 (<i>p</i> =.016)	26
3. My NGO should, when asked, return people to a country considered inhumane	2.12	1.796	.513 (<i>p</i> =.007)	26
4. My NGO should not interfere with European politics concerning refugees	2.60	2.198	.634 (<i>p</i> =.001)	25
5. My NGO should stay in the mission area even if our presence leads to more refugees crossing the mediterranean	4.92	1.623	-.035 (<i>p</i> =.866)	26
6. My NGO should be able to communicate with human traffickers	2.65	1.672	-.018 (<i>p</i> =.929)	26
7. My NGO should bring migrants to Europe only	4.58	2.043	-.405 (<i>p</i> =.040)	26
8. My NGO should not be cooperating with the Libyan Coast Guards	4.77	1.818	-.444 (<i>p</i> =.023)	26
9. My NGO should speak out if they believe that Libya/Turkey is a failed state	5.31	2.093	-.609 (<i>p</i> =.001)	26
10. My NGO should not use the media when they encounter human right violations	2.04	1.755	.492 (<i>p</i> =.011)	26
11. My NGO should use the information gathered at sea to use in the political debate on refugees	6.12	1.532	-.172 (<i>p</i> =.401)	26
12. My NGO should not refrain from judging nation states, whether it is about politics or their legitimacy	5.19	1.877	-.394 (<i>p</i> =.046)	26

Respondents are, on average, rather neutral about items 5, 7 and 8, while they are, on average, more supportive about items 1, 9, 11 and 12. Respondents are, finally, on average, rather unsupportive of items 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10.

To gain a better understanding why some of the statements were endorsed in more extreme form than others, I analysed whether the means differed for the different types of affiliation (see Table 6.5), as previous studies showed that there are differences between volunteers from refugee-centered NGOs and migrant-centered NGOs. Migrant-centered respondents are on average more extreme than rescue-centered ones (Table 6.5). For most items, the migrant-centered participants on average either strongly agree or strongly disagree with the statement, whereas the rescue-centered respondents tend to be less extreme and more neutral.

Table 6.5. Means, standard deviations of attitudes towards possible exceedance of neutrality per type of affiliation (rescue-centered or migrant-centered))

Statement	<u>Rescue-centered</u>			<u>Migrant-centered</u>		
	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>N</i>
1. My NGO should allow me to participate in a demonstration concerning migration policies	4.78	1.922	9	6.94	0.250	16
2. My NGO should not influence refugee policies	4.67	1.658	9	1.69	1.580	16
3. My NGO should, when asked, return people to a country considered inhumane	4.00	1.871	9	1.13	0.500	16
4. My NGO should not interfere with European politics concerning refugees	4.88	1.959	8	1.25	0.683	16
5. My NGO should stay in the mission area even if our presence leads to more refugees crossing the mediterranean	4.67	1.581	9	5.25	1.528	16
6. My NGO should be able to communicate with human traffickers	3.22	1.641	9	2.44	1.672	16
7. My NGO should bring migrants to Europe only	2.67	1.732	9	5.69	1.352	16
8. My NGO should not be cooperating with the Libyan Coast Guards	3.11	1.364	9	5.63	1.408	16
9. My NGO should speak out if they believe that Libya/Turkey is a failed state	2.89	1.537	9	6.56	0.814	16
10. My NGO should not use the media when they encounter human right violations	3.89	1.900	9	1.06	0.250	16
11. My NGO should use the information gathered at sea to use in the political debate on refugees	4.78	1.922	9	6.81	0.544	16
12. My NGO should not refrain from judging nation states, whether it is about politics or their legitimacy	3.78	1.394	9	5.87	1.708	16

6.3. Conclusions

As seen in the results, leftwing oriented NGO personnel are less supportive of neutrality. One explanation could be that people who consider themselves on the extremes of the political spectrum (leftwing leaning or rightwing leaning) are more inclined to think that the result justifies the means.

There is a correlation between the type of affiliation of a NGO and the importance attached to neutrality. Respondents from NGOs that are migrant-centered are less supportive of neutrality than respondents from NGOs that are rescue-centered. If an organization's aim is solely to help refugees, their volunteers are more likely to 'pick side' with the migrants, and consequently 'against' those who are considered harming refugees (governments, coast guards, etc.). For respondents from NGOs who are not primarily focused on helping refugees, but whose prime aim is to provide maritime rescue services, asserting neutrality is preferable. This might be because of the necessity for these organizations to work closely together with other organizations, often part of a state apparatus, in order to conduct their work effectively. This cooperation is likely advanced with a perceived level of neutrality of the respective NGOs.

Three items did not correlate with neutrality. An explanation for the first item ('My NGO should be able to communicate with human traffickers') is that this statement is so extreme that individual core values (e.g. 'Human traffickers are wrong') are chosen over neutrality. The responses to the second statement ('My NGO should stay in the mission area even if our presence leads to more refugees crossing the Mediterranean') can be explained by the ambiguity of the statement. It can be interpreted as, my job is even more necessary, even though I dislike that it is a consequence of my earlier action. The third statement, 'My NGO should use the information gathered at sea to use in the political debate on refugees', might be ambiguous as well. Although engaging in a political debate can definitely be seen as not being neutral, using factual information gathered at sea might be seen as very neutral.

On average, those who volunteer at a migrant-centered NGO agree to a higher extent with the statements on possible exceedance of neutrality than those who volunteer at rescue-centered NGOs. Those are more moderate in their answers. A possible explanation could be found in the interviews. Rescue-centered volunteers stated that it was better to leave one's political opinions at home. A second possible explanation could be that migrant-centered NGOs have advocacy as one of their aims; while a third possible explanation could be that

migrant-centered NGOs have shown (see Parts 1 and 2) to be more involved in changing the political discourse.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Conclusions

This chapter answers the main question: ‘To what extent is the notion of neutrality important for, respectively, Search and Rescue NGOs and their volunteers who commit themselves to humanitarian operations in the Mediterranean Sea?’ For answering this question, multiple sub-questions have been formulated and investigated, using various methodologies. Based on the research, the following answers can be given.

The existing body of literature addresses several tensions regarding the debate on neutrality. Various authors give different answers to the question whether or not neutrality is possible at all. Furthermore, some question whether neutrality is like a new form of colonialism. Thirdly, is striving for neutrality redundant? Finally, is neutrality the most effective method in humanitarian crises? In the end, there are important benefits in remaining neutral, while there are also limitations and reasons to abandon the principle of neutrality.

Based on in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, I found that the motivations of people working for NGOs involved in Search and Rescue missions varied. Two types of NGOs can be distinguished: the rescued-centered NGO vs. the migrant-centered NGO; a distinction which relates to the notion of traditional humanitarians vs. new humanitarians. Rescue-centered NGOs look more like classical humanitarians, with a focus on neutrality, working in a palliative way, directed only at emergency relief without addressing root causes, while not being attached to any political ideology, not speaking out publicly about abuses, nor being involved in advocacy (Nascimento 2015). Migrant-centered NGOs, on the other hand, are more leaning towards new humanitarianism. Their volunteers feel that everyone should have the same rights as they themselves have. This is in line with ‘aiming for the rights of an empowered beneficiary seeking to realize rights to which s/he was entitled’ (Gordon & Donini 2015:88). Furthermore, their volunteers are motivated by political inaction, by a sense of injustice/inequality. One of the prime aims is advocacy for migrants; attracting attention to violations and to root causes. They are having a watchdog position at sea, also willing to take human right violations up to the media, if necessary.

Through research of Twitter messages – the document analysis – I found an answer to the sub-question: How do NGOs active in the Mediterranean Sea communicate on Twitter,

regarding the issue of neutrality? On Twitter the tension related to the topic of neo-colonialism becomes visible. The use of photographs of saved refugees, refugees in dinghies, close-ups of the sick and pictures of floating lifejackets add to idea of the ‘good’ European helping the ‘victimized’ and needy other from ‘bad’ human traffickers. These migrants are portrayed as those who need savior without any agency, instead of agents of change. As humans who are fighting EU border politics (Cuttitta 2017:13-14).

Those NGOs that (sometimes) abandon the principle of neutrality in their tweets, are all migrant-centered NGOs. They engage in critical tweets and give political responses. Those that are (semi-)neutral include of both types of NGOs. They mostly give updates on their operations. The comparison to new humanitarians vs. classical humanitarians seems again valid; migrant-centered NGOs have a human rights approach, visible in particular in advocating for the rights of migrants, while rescue-centered NGOs focus on what they consider to be their job: emergency relief, saving lives at sea. There is, however, a variance in the group of migrant-centered NGOs: they are not all covered by this dichotomy – an issue I will debate later on.

Finally, based on the surveys, sub-question 4 – How do volunteers think about NGO neutrality, and to what extent is the notion of neutrality important to them? – is addressed. Those who volunteer for a migrant-centered NGO agree to a larger degree with the statements concerning possible exceedance of neutrality than those who volunteer for rescue-centered NGOs. This indicates that (volunteers of) migrant-centered NGOs are less supportive of neutrality than rescue-centered NGOs.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that neutrality is a principle valued by NGOs as well as their employees. At the same time, this research shows, however, that the importance attached to neutrality is not equally shared by everyone. A clear pattern is discernible, depending on the type of NGO, to the importance given to neutrality. NGOs that are rescue-centered tend to express themselves very neutral through Twitter and employees of these NGOs tend to value neutrality highly. Although most migrant-centered NGOs also express themselves neutrally via Twitter, some tend to be far more critical. Their employees tend to value neutrality as well, but not to the same extent as rescue-centered employees. Whenever human rights are at stake, migrant-centered employees tend to value advocating them (publicly) more than neutrality as such.

7.2. Interpretation of results

In general, it can be argued that neutrality is seen as important –by the rescue-centered NGOs and the migrant-centered NGOs and their personnel alike. Neutrality is seen as important, mainly because it increases the chances of getting access to the field (Krähenbühl 2004; Abiew 2012; Minear & Weiss 1993). Although, in general neutrality is highly valued among both NGOs and NGO personnel, in some cases other principles or values are more important and therefore a reason to abandon neutrality (Hilhorst & Jansen 2010:1121).

In shaping the norms and values of NGO personnel, it should be taken into account that they are part of a larger paradigm. Currently, two paradigms are visible: new humanitarians and classical humanitarians. The first group finds neutrality very important, while the latter is having less trouble with (completely) abandoning neutrality, at least in specific cases. These respective paradigms effect the prioritization of NGO personnel in what their tasks are conceived to be (Gordon & Donini 2015:89). These two paradigms were also visible in this research. This research clearly shows the dichotomy between these types of NGOs: migrant-centered vs. rescue-centered, or classical humanitarianism vs. new humanitarianism.

There is, however, a certain variance amongst the migrant-centered NGOs. There might some explanations for this. The first one relates to the goal a NGO is trying to pursue. It can be argued that different agencies have different goals and visions. Is the goal of saving lives at sea the most important, or is changing policies and a human rights perspective and advocacy equally important? NGOs that ‘only’ have saving migrants at sea as their goal, find it easier to pursue, while aiming for policy change is mostly for the ‘radical’ NGOs (Minear & Weiss 1993:67). This is once again in line with the old vs. new humanitarian debate.

Furthermore, the differences in *raison d’être* of NGOs can be part of the explanation. According to Weiss and Minear (1993:10), humanitarian activity becomes more politicized when the suffering is caused by conflict. This could partly explain the dichotomy between the two types of NGOs and the two streams of thought regarding humanitarianism. When the drowning of migrants is seen in the bigger picture of root causes that underlie these tragedies, a NGO might be more inclined to take politicized action. This is the case for migrant-centered NGOs. Rescue-centered NGOs rather focus on emergency relief and on short term saving of lives (Nascimento 2015). This focus determines the aim of the NGO. A volunteer can choose whether he/she finds the aim worth volunteering for or rather feels to belong to another NGO that is (more) neutral.

NGOs are not only dependent on whether their aim attracts volunteers, but also whether it attracts supporters and financial donors. The media can become an ally in

generating funds and putting pressure on governments to take action (Minear & Weiss 1993:78). According to the volunteers of migrant-centered NGOs their task includes taking on a watchdog role and making violations of human rights public. This means they most likely have different constituents that also expect different actions. Twitter can be used for achieving these goals.

In reaching their goals, NGOs are sometimes accused of breaking the law. According to Scott-Smith (2016:10), contemporary border policies might call for advocacy, in some cases even resulting in breaking the law. Recent developments in the criminalization of SAR NGOs (Scott-Smith 2016:19) can be seen in this light. NGOs have two options: either complying with new rules and only providing emergency aid, or taking an unpopular stance and sometimes even breaking the law. According to the more ‘political active’ NGOs in this research, ‘The more law and political discourse constrains what humanitarians do, the more they need to consider the second route: acknowledging that true human solidarity involves resistance and political action’ (Scott-Smith 2016:19).

Rescue-centered NGOs find neutrality highly important and are inclined to comply with new rules as dictated by other (state) authorities. They have no intention of becoming politically engaged. The second group of NGOs, the migrant-centered ones, is more diverse regarding the issue of neutrality, so the document analysis showed. Some share some critique, outing abuses at sea or advocating a policy shift, while others don’t share anything that is (or can be) considered a breach of neutrality.

Cuttitta (2017) has done extensive research on the politicization on SAR NGOs and she found three separate approaches. These approaches might be an explanation for the variance found in the document analysis. The first approach is saving lives, but not challenging the structures. This approach entails that the mission area is just a space for rescue interventions. This approach would most fit the rescue-centered NGOs in my research. The second approach is putting pressure on nation states to respond appropriately. This approach tries to change policies on migration and asylum. These NGOs want to make their voices heard and play a watchdog role. This is also the case for some of the migrant-centered NGOs in my study. The third approach then acknowledges that they are humanitarian as well as political actors at the same time. This is also what one of the informants of Sea-Watch told during the interview. These NGOs also try to make their voices heard and play a watchdog role, but go even further by publicly confronting nation states with their lacking responsibility in the Mediterranean Sea.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8.1. Limitations

Although this research does provide an image of the field of SAR, there are some limitations worth noting. By using a combination of different research methodologies, the validity of this research has been increased. However, there are still some limitations to this research, and the various parts is based on, that need to be addressed.

Regarding part 1: Interviews. This research started from an explorative perspective with little focus on a specific theme. The interviews could have been more in-depth if I had had a more specific focus from the onset of the research. Another limitation is that the interviews were hardly standardized.

Regarding part 2: The document analysis. Firstly, it was hard to research, as it was not possible to ask the NGO with which motives they posted a thread, and how that fitted their view on neutrality. Secondly, the categories made to assess the level of neutrality can be seen as rather arbitrary. Future research could play a role in making these categories less arbitrarily. Another limitation of using Twitter in the content analysis is that Twitter and its users can change their profile and Wall anytime without notification (Stewart 2016:262).

Regarding part 3: The survey. The first, and foremost limitation is that it was only a small sample. This makes it hard to come up with generalizable conclusions.

Overall, neutrality is a difficult concept to research. In the academic literature as well as in the field itself, neutrality is a contested concept with different meanings for different actors. All people in this research might have been in favor of neutrality, but the question still remains what they exactly consider neutrality to be.

Finally, although there are some limitations to this research, both the method triangulation and subject triangulation have positively contributed to the validity and reliability. All three parts of this research point in the same direction, which at least indicates that this research could be a good starting point for further research.

8.2. Recommendations for future research

This research could very well serve as a starting point for further research. Further research in this field is needed – for the practitioners in the field as well as for theory development. Further research could use the survey of this thesis, but enlarge the sample, both for the purpose of validation and making the results more generalizable. The same goes for the document analysis. I have used a large sample, without a quantitative analysis, however. Further research could produce a framework, which in turn can be used in the collection and analysis, ultimately resulting in more quantifiable generalizable findings.

Also, it would be relevant for society to research what the public discourse is on neutrality; more specifically, what constituents and donors think of NGO neutrality. For instance, does voicing critique, or other non-neutral behavior, have negative or rather positive consequences for their funding?

Further research could also play a role in the conceptualization of neutrality as a principle. What is understood by neutrality within scientific discourse(s) or the public debate, by NGOs or other actors in the humanitarian sector? It could furthermore contribute to finding which factors play a role in remaining or abandoning neutrality.

In conclusion: this research gives a good indication to what extent neutrality is important for NGOs and people who (want to) commit themselves to Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Although motives and principles need to be further examined, it shows that there might be individual and organizational differences in support of neutrality in cases when human rights are at stake, the notion of neutrality in itself is highly valued.

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Appendix 1: Transcript of tweets

Cadus

28/01/18. Cadus ist solidarisch mit @Seawatchcrew und allen beteiligten organizationen, die heute gemeinsam auf das Sterben im mittelmeer aufmerksam machen wollen und forder, dass die EU die Zusammenarbeit mit der "libyschen Küstenwache" einstellt. #RechtaufFlucht

27/01/18. Tomorrow- @Cadus participates in Social Media Action Day #rechtaufFlucht, alongside @seawatchcrew@TheMed- @Alarmphone @Seenotrettung SOS @ sosmediteranee @solidarityatsea @borderlineEurop @jugendrettet @ Resqship. Our press release (german): cadus.org/de/blow/artike...

16/04/16. Der papst besucht Lesbos – und die Sea-Watch/Cadus Crew demonstriert für Bewegungsfreiheit.

10/02/16. We share the opinion that the current government of Turkey can not be a reliable partner in the Syria crisis n

08/02/16. At the end of this article you'll find a transcript and the reason why Erdogan can't be a partner. Not for the...

Emergency centre international

22/09/17. #Greece : Court decisions pave way for first forcible returns of asylum-seekers under EU-Turkey deal amnesty.org/en/lastest/news... #EUTurkeydeal

21/07/17. Retweet Amnesty NSW. Activists in Greece calling on EU Leaders to protect refugees and asylum seekers who are trapped here #actionlesvos Europe open you heart! (photo displays EU-TURKEY DEAL TRAPPING PEOPLE SINCE 2016

Pro-active Open Arms

21/3/2018. Retweet Oscar Camps (Founder) 21 March. Does Italy accuse us of avoiding a push back when Italy is condemned by European Court of Human Rights for returning Libya migrants of a boat by Libyans coast guard? If we had done so, it would've been another conviction for Italy. They thank us with a punishment!

16/3/2018. Retweet Oscar camps 16 March. Good morning, the #OpenArms heading North waiting for instructions. As we refused to hand over rescued people to the Libyans, as the European Protocol states, currently we haven't got assigned a European port yet. @hratsea.

15/03/2018. #breaking Libyan coastguards, 73 miles off Libyan coast, are threatening our ship, a ship, aa European-flag one, to target us unless we transfer them the women and children we have already rescued.

Human rights at sea

27/04/18: HRAS concerned on the detention of SAR IUVENTA.

19/04/18: Why do the EU institutions not listen? UNHCR chief of mission: 'Libya is not safe for refugees' f24.my/2dR8.T via @hratsea @fericaMog@ecre @eu_eas @FCOHumanRights

19/04/18: Pushing migrants back to Libya, persecuting rescue NGOs: The end of the humanitarian Turn (part 2). Law.ox.ac.uk/resceach-subje via @hratsea @campsoscar

12/04/2018: Retweet Judith Sunderland. Sounds like another example of Italys collaboration with Libyan coast guard forces without regard to disastrous consequences for people intercepted & taken back to horrible detention in Libya.

27/03/2018: How Italy's NGO Boat seizure exposes Europe's dangerous policy at sea @Refugeesdeeply newsdeeply.com/refugees/commu...via @hratsea @federicaMog @eu_eas @FCOHumanRights

21/03/2018: European trained Libyan coastguards have allegedly threatened to kill NGOs rescuing migrants maritime-executive.com/article/Libyan..@hratsea @eu_eas @EUNAVFORMED_OHQ @eu_commission @Europarl_EN @eurorights @NATO @NATO_MARCOM @hrw (there is a link to an article 'libyan coast guard threatens to kill migrant rescuer')

21/03/2018: Europe's new anti-migrant strategy? Blame the rescuers. Prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/europ... via @hratsea @fericaMog @eu_eas @hrw @amnesty @eurorights @Europarl_EN @BBCWorld. (attached is an article)

21/03/2018: Human rights watch: libya 'incapable' of holding elections- BBC News. Bbc.com/news/world-afr... via @hratsea @eu_eas @federicaMog @FCOHuman Rights @ openarms_fund @ Campsoscar.

16/03/2018: ONGOING NOW. RT. European Union continuing failure to allow for safe fports of disembarkation of vulnerable migrants rescued offshore Libya from #OpenArms vessel via @hratsea @campsoscar @hrw @federicamog @ALDEgroup, @EU_UNGeneva @BBCWorld @bristolunihric.

7/03/18: Retweet @JFCrisp. In case you missed it. A devastating critique of the EU's shambolic dealings with the Libyan coastguard. Will anyone be held accountable for this unethical fiasco?

20/02/18 Retweet Frontex '#frontex has just published its annual Risk Analysis for 2018. See the latest migratory trends affecting the #EU. Bit.ly/fx_ra2018 #MigrationEU

09/02/18: Human smugglers in Libya have links to security services: U.N. report reut.rs/2gwnwc0 via @hratsea (article reuters.com)

08/12/17: Retweet Oscar Camps. Another pushback carried out by 'Libyan Coastguards' supervised ad approved by Italy. Once again our intervention is not allowed. International humanitarian laws are not fulfilled. We will denounce this practice to @UN @hrw & @hratsea

Jugend Rettet

8/05/18: Pull-back by proxy. The EU does outsmart intl. humanitarian law, and nobody cares. We have to change the discourse: Refugee Rights have to be protected, and not knowingly violated. #HumanRights #RefugeeRights #safepassage #Mediterranean. (reaction to) MSF SEA: Did you know that one in every three migrants and refugees departing by boat from Libya this year has been intercepted by the Libyan coastguard and returned to Libya? See latest update from UN Migration Agency reliefweb.int/ /Italy/m... via@reliefweb

05/05/18: Retweet sea watch report. Yesterday morning, Sea-Watch witnessed a pullback of refugees by Lybian Coast Guard-backed by EU. Libya means horrible conditions for refugees. What does @EU_Commission say about human rights at our external frontier? Background: sea-watch.org/en/people-dyin... #ThisIsTheEU #EuropeDay

29/04/18: Retweet Mittendrin. The words of @jugendrettet say it best: 'this is not just about Sea Rescue. This concerns the question of which world we want to live in... inhumane migration policy, right-wing populism and racism are no options. #WIRSINDALLEMITTENDRIN#Menschenrechte#JugendRETTET

24/04/18: For us as JUGEND RETTET it is clear that an inhumane migration policy, rightwing populism and racism are no options. But it is precisely these positions that we are seeing increasing in strength in Europe's society.

24/04/18: We need civil rescue vessels on the ground, otherwise nobody is bearing witness to human rights violations in the #Mediterranean. Nobody would save lives and count the number of deaths. Europe keeps a blind eye on the humanitarian imperative! #freeIUVENTA #FortressEurope

18/04/18: A Pull-back by PROXY. By strengthening the Libyan Coast Guards, the EU is outsmarting humanitarian law. The non-refoulement principal is violated, people are brought back to Libya. This is NO harbor of safety for people in need of protection! #RechtaufFlucht #SafePassage.

22/03/19: This statement by the so-called #LibyanCoastGuard isn't surprising. Italy and EU are cooperating with them to close the central Mediterranean route. Now we see how: Repressive measures. Less rescue ships, more deaths at sea! # FreeOpenArms #FreeIUVENTA. (Added a article from libyaobeserver.ly 'libya welcomes seizure of Spain's Proactiva Open Arms vessel')

19/03/18: This is a further step towards criminalization of NGOs which are daily substituting EUs responsibility of saving lives at the European external borders. #FreeIUVENTA #FreeOpenArms #proactivaopenarms. (Picture that says: 'saving lives is not a crime. #FREEIUVENTA #FREEOPENARMS

18/03/18: We will repeat our demands to the political decision-makers, we won't be silent: against dirty EU deals on border control and migration 'management'- for the right to seek protection and asylum! #rechtaufFlucht. (as a respond to: 'RSA @rspagean. 2 years since the announcement of the EU-Turkey 'deal', @ProAsyl and @rspagean Campaign highlight how the concept of 'safe third country' was manipulated so that asylum-seekers would be returned to Turkey under this toxic 'deal' #StopTheToxicDeal #Refugees...

17/03/18: The Memorandum of Understanding between Libya and Italy is one of the most dangerous deals to strengthen methods of securitization and deterrence. Stop any support of the Libyan Coast Guard! @Fericamog #17m18actionday #RechtaufFlucht. (reaction to Matteo de Bellis @Matteodebellis 'the Libyan Coast Guard ship apparently used to threaten @openarms_fund yesterday seems to be the same (648-Rad Jadir) used in the 6 November 2017 incident- you can see it in this video youtube.com/watch?v=XEjh7D... twitter.com/camposcar/sta...

17/03/18: We say No to all dirty deals of the EU with other countries in order to stop human mobility! #RechtaufFlucht #17m18ActionDay. (With a picture names 'Mare Liberum' With the text Gegen schmutzige eu-deals- fur das #rechtaufFlucht. No borders, freedom of movement refugees welcome no nations

15/03/18: What does it take the EU political decision-makers to state their failure to protect refugees and migrants and rething their cooperation with #LibyanCoastGuard? This is complicity of pull backs! @EP_Justice @RegSprecher. (reaction to Oscar Camps @Campsoscar: 'ALERT NOW!Libyan coastguards 73 miles off Libyan coast threaten European-flag ship to shoot them unless we transfer them the women and children rescued'.

13/03/18: While people are still drowning in the #Mediterranean Sea, @Frontex mandate focuses on border crimes and border control. When is the @EUparliament deploying rescue vessels to safe lives, not building a #fortressEurope? #RechtaufFlucht. (Reaction of post by @Frontex: 'Frontex helps EU states battle cross-border crime with operations covering specific areas of the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. The agency has assisted in seizing massing amounts of drugs in recent years...

13/03/18: People have been pulled back by so-called #Libyancoastguard. They are still stuck withing #Libya, a place of human rights violations. Europe may pretend nobody tries to escape, but it is just more far away from our backyards. People still need safe and regular pathways to Safety.

4/03/18: Such pull-backs by proxy are happening and it is known. Complicity of the EU? @EUparliament #LibyanCoastGuard #safepassagenow. (reaction to MSF Sea: 'UPDATE:Under the eyes of an #EU aircraft, the #Aquarius has witnessed the Libyan coast guard intercept a boat in distress in international waters, 48 nautical miles off the coast of #Libya. These vulnerable men, women &...'

27/02/18: We urge the EU institutions to pursue an asylum and migration policy based on humanity and solidarity. End the criminalization of escape! Please read our joint NGO statement here. @EUparliament

#freeiuenta #rechtaufflucht #safepassage. (added is a document of the conference on the criminalization of

BRUSSELS, 27TH OF FEBRUARY The today's conference on the criminalisation of civil search and rescue activities, thus solidarity, along the Central Mediterranean route, concludes with the following demands. Thereby it is necessary to highlight significant policy-decisions that have had a precarious impact on migrants and refugees during their journey to Europe whilst seeking for safety. We urge the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the EU leaders to choose a rights-based system to respond to migration, based on a viable human and just long-term strategic vision, rather than pursuing the inhumane objective of externalising border control as its top priority. The mortality rate in the Mediterranean is maintaining despite deterrence policies, thus, the human security needs to be prioritised.

Therefore, we call on the EU institutions and the European leaders to:

1. Stop the financing and support of the Libyan Coast Guard immediately.
2. Stop any readmissions of people by the EU to a third country, that violates fundamental rights and rule of law, including the principle of non-refoulement. We urge the EU to stop any policy that aims to circumvent International Humanitarian Law and the Geneva Refugee Convention by outsourcing sea rescue operations to the LCG, that do not respect international refugee and maritime law.
3. Establish a European Search and Rescue operation with larger capacities and resources as the Mare nostrum program had - even under Mare Nostrum, thousands of people died at sea.
4. Reject the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) and the European Agenda on Migration and develop a sustainable long-term, evidence-based strategy, based on human rights in consultation with civil society and experts.
5. Ensure legal pathways to EU territory through the EU wide introduction of humanitarian visas, resettlement and family reunification.
6. Exclude any conditionality based on migration control indicators in the allocation of development aid to third countries. Development aid is a tool to fight poverty and inequality, not to manage migration.
7. Reject any policies and programs with the target to criminalise refuge and migration.
8. Stop the process of defamation and criminalisation of the civil search and rescue flotilla.
9. Ensure real solidarity between the member states of the European Union to guarantee that states at the external borders of the union are not left alone with people arriving at their borders - the externalisation of EU borders is not an adequate response.
10. Commit to a foreign, trade and agricultural policy focused on preventing and

SAR NGOs.

14/02/18: 'Rise in italy'@frontex when do you realize fighting smugglers and now terrorist cannot be priority compared to saving lives at sea? People need regular and safe pathways, strengthening the EU borders is no solution to remaining mortality #Mediterranean #rechtaufflucht.

28/01/18: come to alexanderplatz and stand up for human rights! #RechtaufFlucht. (picture of a spandoek with: 'Wie kann ein Mensch illegal sein? #RechtaufFlucht.

28/01/18: #rechtaufFlucht (Right to flee and seek protection) must be at center of our political debate. Forced migration is not voluntarily, think twice before you build walls. No fortress Europe, but humanitarian corridors! (Reaction to IOM-UN Migration @UNmigration hundreds of thousands of #migrants are caught in crisis around the globe'

Stichting bootvluchteling

Retweet Sjoerd Wiemer Sjoerdsma. Een schandvlek voor de EU! (nav krantenartikel vluchtelingen lesbos in de kou.

MOAS

Safe the children

19/08/17: Humanitarian rescue vessels in the Mediterranean are #NotaTarger. EU leaders should make sure they can carry out rescues safely #WHD2017

25 /11/16: 'death of #child in #moria fire a disgrace for both #EU & Greek Government.

Pro activa open arms

10/04/18: Retweet GUE/NGL in de EP @guengl. #fortressEurope does not want witnesses of what is happening in the Mediterranean, that is why they prosecute NGOs that save lives @MiguelUrban #FreeOpenArms

29/03/18: If saving lives is a crime, we want to be criminals @FreeOpenArms

Oscar Camps @Camposcar Good morning, the #OpenArms heading North waiting for instructions. As we refused to hand over rescued people to the Libyans, as the European Protocol states, currently we haven't got assigned a European port yet. @hratsea

Sea-Eye

8/05/18: Dieser geleakte EU-Bericht zeigt, dass sich Europa nicht auf die Libysche Küstenwache verlassen kann. (dieser geleakte bericht zeigt, dass sich Europa nicht auf die Libysche... Erstmals hat die EU einen Bericht erstellt, wie zuverlässig Libyen arbeitet. Das Urteil fällt vernichtend aus. BussFeed News veröffentlicht den komp...

16/04/18: Wir haben Claudia Roth, Vizepräsidentin des Deutschen Bundestags und Abgeordnete der Grünen gefragt: Warum unterstützt du Sea-Eye? (Heart) Mach's wie Claudia, denn wir brauchen deine Unterstützung. Bitte helfe auch du.

12/04/18: Deal mit Libyen: Für Flüchtlinge die hölle- für die EU ein Partner – SPIEGEL ONLINE- Politik (article Deal mit libyen....)

3/03/18: Aktion PAINT the PAIN: 120 Aktivistinnen und Aktivisten von #SeaEye malen 13.428 Kreidemännchen auf Regenburgen.

31/01/18: The EU's migration find in Africa.

2/01/18: Making money from EU's migration policies in Libya. (Article: making money from EU's migration policies in Libya. EU's outsourced 'migration control' to Libya has yielded a humanitarian disasters and billions in profit'.

2/12/17: The Case for Italy's complicity in Libya Push Backs. (Article attached)

Sea watch

7/05/18: A sad and exhausted #Moonbird crew returns to Malta today, after again witnessing two dangerous illegal pullbacks and threats against civilian rescue ships by the EU-funded so-called 'Libyan Coast Guard'. this coast does not need guards- this coast needs #right2rescue!

7/05/18: 'tomorrow in Rome, the @Stampa_Estera association will present the @ForensicArchi file and the appeal presented to the European Court of Human Rights against Italy for the coordination of the Libyan Coast Guard during rejections at sea.

6/05/18: Our #Moonbird just arrived back on Malta, after witnessing a chaotic day in the Search&Rescue-Zone, including two rubber boats being illegally pulled back by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Civilian rescuers were told to stand down. We demand #Right2Rescue.

5/05/18: Yesterday morning, Sea-Watch witnessed a pullback of refugees by Lybian Coast Guard- backed by EU. Libya means horrible conditions for refugees. What does @EU_Commission say about human rights at our external frontier? Background: Sea-watch.org/en/people-dyin... #ThisIsTheEU #EuropeDay

5/05/18: Replying to @EU_Commission. You forgot to mention that you deny those rights to those without European passport. Just yesterday we've witnessed another pullback to Libya under your supervision. Those people likely face unlawful detention or torture #ThisIsTheEU #EuropeDay

26/04/18: Survivors state unspeakable conditions in Libya after being intercepted and pulled back: Sea-Watch condemns the EU policy facilitating forcible returns to Libya.

25/04/18: The #EU shares responsibility for its partners' violations of human rights: No more dirty deals- #Libya is not a safe haven! Full @Amnesty report: Amnesty.org/en/countries/m... #SafePassage

19/04/18: #SeaWatch was in the Italian Senate to participate to the launch of the European Citizens Initiative (ECI) aimed at decriminalizing solidarity, create safe passages, and protect from abuse and is happy to support the petition: [sign for a #Welcoming Europe! Wearewelcomingeurope.eu](http://signfora#WelcomingEurope!Wearewelcomingeurope.eu).

14/04/18: Opposing the deterrent policy of the EU: From June on, @teammareliberum will monitor the situation of human rights in the Aegean with its own ship! Check mare-liberum.org

10/04/18: While the media in the EU are increasingly silent about the human atrocities that are taking place at Europe's borders, we are working together with journalists from all over the world, here Korea, who report about us and the #Moonbird-mission. @KBSnews

05/04/18: As long as the EU lets people die at Europe's maritime border, we keep going: Despite all headwind, we left the port today to save people from drowning! Help us save lives: sea-watch.org/spenden #FreeOpenArms #Freeluenta #Right2Rescue.

16/03/18: Retweet Oscar Camps @Camposcar Good morning the #OpenArms heading North waiting for instructions. As we refused to hand over rescued people to the Libyans, as the European Protocol states, currently we haven't got assigned a European port yet. @hratsea

11/03/18: Retweet Oscar Camps. SOS 40 miles off Libyan coast by 150 people adrift. While our rescue boats assist them, a Libyan patrol paid and supported by Italy, approaches to push them back again to torture in Libya. Europe funds pushbacks and puts all of us in danger.

08/03/18: Even at the #UNHCR, our demand is being heard! Our clear statement to the Federal Government and the EU: no support for Push Backs which violate international law. #humanrights #OHCHR's whole statement: bit.ly/2FwkMnB

27/12/17: Retweet Just Humans. We have something for you: the 'Just Humans' assembly at 34c3 is ready to welcome you! Say hello to our activists from @alarm_phone, @cadus_org, @SEENOTRETTUNG,HPI, @msf_de, @solidarityatsea, @seawatchcrew, @srchwng ..

SOS mediterranee

6/05/18: BREAKING. Aquarius witnessed the interception of a rubber boat by the Libyan coast guard. Our calls to assist were repeatedly ignored.

28/01/18: People are drowning in Europe's indifference!- press release on yesterday's operations: bit.ly/2dvf9dk #TogetherForRescue

28/01/18: Retweet Neues Deutschland. #RechtAufFlucht: Zivile Seenotretter zeigen das Schicksal Fluchtender im #Mittelmeer fordern das Ende der EU-Finanzierung für die Libysche Küstenwache @seawatchcrew @SOSMedGermany @SeENOTRETTUNG.

27/01/18: #Aquarius witnessed another interception by Libyan Coast Guard in intern'al wat.. while following instructions of MRCC Rome to search x a rubber boat in distress. Screams & calls could be heard from the dinghy but #LCG ordered #Aquarius to move away, strongly denying assistance.

Transcript tweets Rescue Aid United

15/03/18: Actions by Libyan coast guard is once again endangering people. Who does EU want to collaborate with the regime...

31/01/18: On Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th of February, people in many countries across Europe will be protesting the ... (picture 17-18 Feb 2018 one weekend of European protest. Add your city via. www.dontsendafghansback.eu)

15/12/17: Germany is either bribing its way out of a tricky situation, or as the Merkel government asserts, helping tired... (BBC News, should Germany pay its migrants to leave? Berlin is offering asylum seekers thousands of euros to retrace their steps, but is it ethical? '

30/11/17: Concentrationcamp, Guantanamo Bay of Europe and hell. Just a few words used to try to describe #Moria. All. (imga Greece's lesbos'Guantanamo Bay of Europe for refugees)

18/11/17: Europe has deemed Turkey safe but it is purely motivated by politics and not facts. #dirtydeal. (Amnesty press)

28/11/17: Occupying property often divides- since so many people view ownership as something, that shouldn't be challenged. We disagree with ownership, since that denies the fact that people aren't on equal footing to begin with. One of the groups with least possibilities to own property, are displaced people. In Greece- aswell in many other places around our planet- thousands of newly arrived people, are living in qualor you can't pocssibly imagine, unless you have been there yourself. The reason for this situation lies always on the people in power- which is why occupying offices of political parties, is extremely befitting. United supports the aim of the protest and stand in #Solidarity with the occupants. Change is ours if we make it happen. #opentheislands#lamhuman#Wearewaching#Unitedwestand#Unitedrescueaid

27/11/17: What we wonder nowadays is, are the European policymakers really as blind as they seem, or like we suspect if... (The intercept.com: Europe's plan to close its Sea boarders relies on Libya's coast guard. European governments are financing, training and coordinating with a force that is involved in smuggling and human rights abuses).

21/12/17: A politician making some sense is a rarity these days. Davis Miliband actually does this time #Ted#Refugees (attached youtube)

2/12/17: Turkey is a safe country only on paper- if that #turkey #dirtydeal

Appendix 2: Survey outline Qualtrics

Hello I'm Jeannine, masterstudent on the Radboud University Nijmegen.

I am conducting a study for my master Conflicts, Territories and Identities on the ideas on NGO neutrality. This study is conducted amongst people that work with NGOs in the field of search and rescue. The goal is to get an image on the ideas that people have of neutrality. I am very grateful that you are willing to fill in this survey. It would take around 10 minutes to fill in. There are no right or wrong answers, please indicate your honest opinion. The answers will be processed anonymously.

Block 1: introduction

1. Which NGO do you work for:
2. Are you a volunteer (Yes/No):
3. How many years have you been active in the field of SAR:

Block 2: Neutrality in general

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements 1=Strongly disagree, 2=disagree 3= undecided, 4= agree. 5= strongly agree

4. NGOs should treat the people who suffer equally
5. NGOs should not refrain from taking sides
6. NGOs should have neutrality as a core value
7. NGOs should not make an effort to be seen as neutral
8. NGOs should not speak out about political situations
9. NGOs should follow the law
10. NGOs should engage in public shaming when they encounter human right violations
11. NGOs should not leave the mission area if they feel like they are aiding conflict
12. NGOs should be working with all actors in the field if needed
13. NGOs should not combine humanitarian action with political action
14. NGOs should express sympathies towards movements, political figures or ideological causes.
15. Humanitarian action should be more explicitly political

Block 3: Waar ligt de grens

16. My NGO should allow me to participate in a demonstration concerning migration policies
17. My NGO should not influence refugee policies
18. My NGO should, when asked, return people even to a country considered inhumane
19. My NGO should not interfere with European politics concerning refugees
20. My NGO should stay in the mission area even if our presence leads to more refugees crossing the Mediterranean
21. My NGO should be able to cooperate with Human Traffickers
22. My NGO should bring migrants to Europe only
23. My NGO should not be able cooperate with the Libyan Coast guard
24. My NGO should speak out if they think that Libya is a failed state
25. My NGO should not use the media when they encounter human right violations
26. My NGO should use the information gathered at sea to use in the political debate on refugees

Block 4 Demographics:

27. What is your gender (F/M/O):
28. What is your age

29. What is your nationality (open):
30. What is the last grade you completed?: None, some elementary, elementary, some high school, high school grad, some college, college grad, graduate or professional degree
31. Religion:
32. What is your political preference (scale 1 up to 10): How would you place yourself on the following scale of political preference [ranging from 1 to 5 (or 10)] from left to right

Thank you for filling out this survey! I would be really helped if you want to send this survey to others working in the field of SAR. If you are interested in the results of this research project, please leave your email address. Also, if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me on j.langendonk@live.nl

Email:

Appendix 3: Standardized letter to respondents

Example 1: Email 11/11/17

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am currently enrolled as a master student in the academic program on 'Conflicts, Territories and Identities' of Radboud University (Nijmegen, The Netherlands). My research project and master thesis deal with identifying and understanding the motives NGO personnel have for participating in SAR missions. This mail is meant to ask for your support in expanding and validating the research. In order to be able to provide relevant answers in light of the research goals, I have already analyzed the existing scientific research on this topic. However, for an even more nuanced understanding regarding those involved, I in the process of conducting interviews, later on followed by an online survey.

My research will be based on qualitative as well as quantitative methods. To gain a deeper understanding of what motivates humanitarian personnel and the images they have of refugees, I would like to conduct several in-depth interviews. I do of course realize that people working for [NAAM] are very busy and that I can't take up too much of your time. For that reason an interview will last no longer than 45 minutes. Interviews can take place via Skype or telephone, depending on your preference. Please note that you will remain anonymous and you can withdraw your participation at any time. I hope that someone from the organization that has been involved on sea is willing to participate in this interview.

After analyzing the in-depth interview(s), I would like to contact respondents with an online survey. This survey consists of only a limited number of questions and will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes of your time. I would very much appreciate if people working for [NAAM] could find the time to fill these out.

Of course I am available to answer any questions you might have.

Looking forward to hear from you and thanking you in advance for your consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Jeannine Langendonk

Example 2: Email 06/12/17

Dear Sir/Madam,

Last month I have sent you an email. This mail has possibly never been received, overlooked or no time to respond yet. I would however like to ask you to consider of taking my request into account. In order to collect data for my research on the image of NGO personnel on boatrefugees i would be very pleased if you could reconsider helping me.

Yours sincerely,

Jeannine Langendonk

Example 3: 21/03/18

Dear Sir/Madame

For my masterthesis I'm researching the ideas on NGO neutrality in the field of Search and Rescue. This mail is meant to ask for your support in expanding and validating the research. In order to be able to provide relevant answers in light of the research goals, I have already analyzed the existing scientific research on this topic and conducted some qualitative interviews. However, for an even more nuanced understanding regarding those involved, I have made an online survey. This online survey takes around 5 to10 minutes and can be accessed through laptops, phones and tablets. The survey is accessible through the following link: http://fmru.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0CCMloptx7OPPi

This research is in particular important because with the identification of the importance of neutrality it is possible to see if that drives volunteers to the field of SAR towards a specific NGO. It is possible to strategically use the information to promote their organization. Furthermore, if the research aim is met, the data could also be used to keep volunteers motivated in doing volunteer work.

It would be very much appreciated if the following link could be shared amongst (former) NGO volunteers in the field of SAR.

Of course I am available to answer any questions you might have.

Looking forward to hear from you and thanking you in advance for your consideration,

Yours sincerely,
Jeannine Langendonk